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On the Frontline
In the Struggle Against
War and Racism

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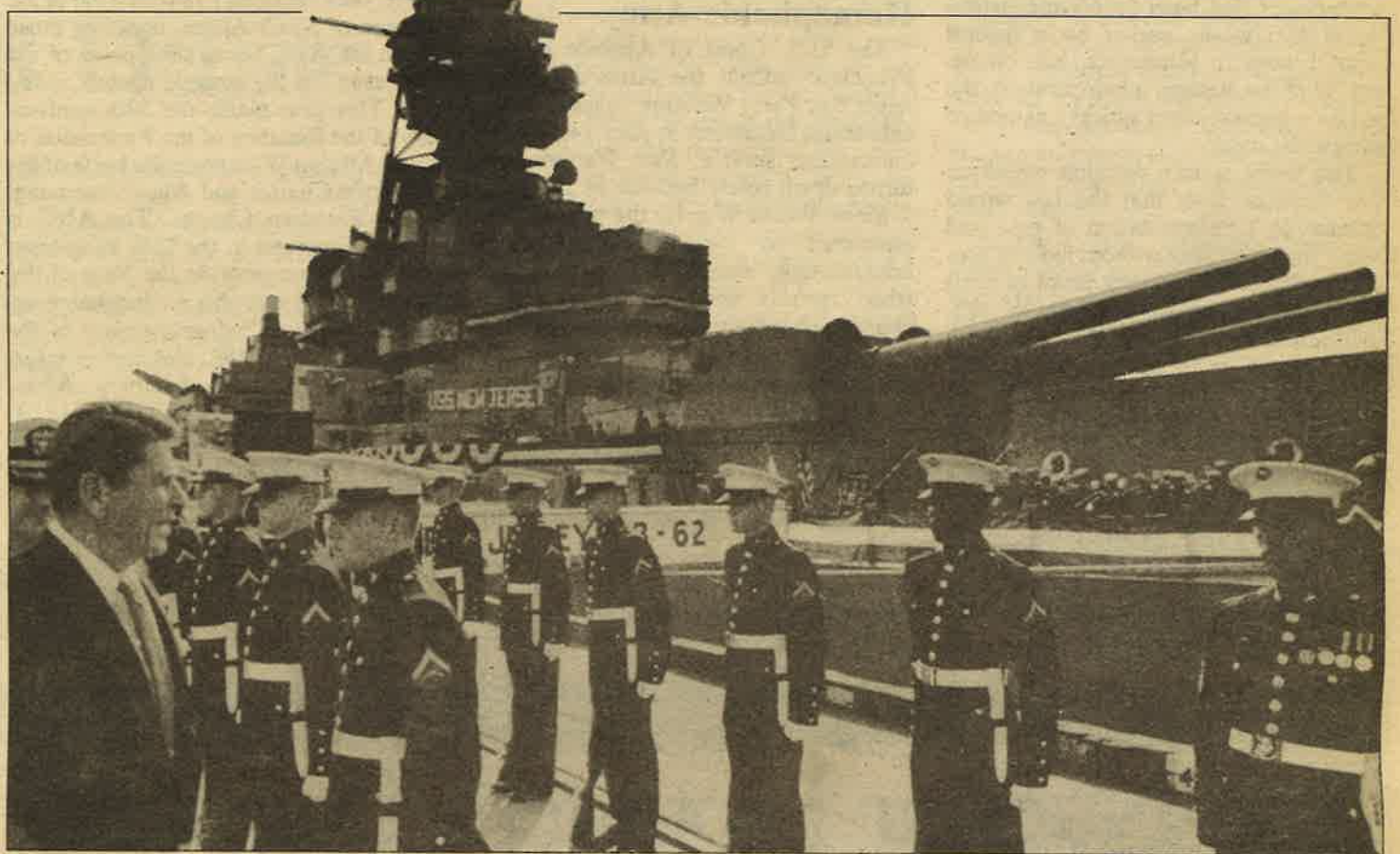
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President Reagan at the recommissioning of the battleship USS New Jersey, which is now shelling Druze positions inside Lebanon.

Washington's Offensive: Out of the Talking Stage

By Irwin Silber and Victor Uno

The broad counter-offensive launched by Washington three years ago to reverse the imperialist system's political decline is out of the talking stage.

In a swift series of actions from the Caribbean to the Middle East to Western Europe, the Reagan administration has shown that U.S. foreign policy is now characterized by a newly re-established readiness and willingness to use military force in order to achieve a wide range of political objectives.

As *New York Times* political analyst Hedrick Smith put it: "For nearly three years, [President Reagan's] policy has found expression in strident talk about Moscow's 'evil empire,' an ambitious military buildup, and the show of American power on military maneuver in Central America. Now... the President's tactics have escalated. His policy is now embodied not just in words and arms, but in combat and casualties."

The events marking this development include:

- *The blitzkrieg-style invasion of Grenada.* The quick strike against the island republic, followed by the arrest and imprisonment of officials of the revolutionary government and the appointment of puppet authorities, has led to U.S. military occupation of the island. Especially significant is that the U.S. acted on the flimsiest of pretexts and made no bones of the fact that the invasion was intended to accomplish two goals; remove a government not to Washington's liking and signal a readiness to use military force elsewhere in the world.

- *The undisguised campaign of terror unleashed against Nicaragua.* The U.S. is openly guiding, supplying and financing a counter-revolutionary war against Nicaragua being waged by 10,000 mercenaries. Washington no longer attempts to disguise its role in Nicaragua; if anything, the U.S. is openly boasting of it. The original pretext for supporting the contras—in order to interdict a supposed

flow of arms from Nicaragua to revolutionary forces in El Salvador—has long since been forgotten.

- *An open commitment to use military force in order to prevent a rebel victory in El Salvador.* There can be little doubt that the U.S. has already decided on the military option should it become necessary. The entire logic of Reagan's politics inexorably points to the conclusion that he is not prepared to be tagged with the responsibility for "losing" El Salvador.

The reversal of the post-Vietnam antiwar consensus has set the conditions for the U.S. to enjoy a greater flexibility as to when and where it will use military force than it had just five years ago.

- *Establishment of Honduras as a new U.S. military base in Central America.* This strategic objective is now pretty much complete. Honduras has become little more than a garrison state—except that the garrison has been supplied by Washington. In addition to being "headquarters for the CIA-sponsored guerrillas seeking to overthrow" the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, writes *Los Angeles Times* correspondent William D. Montalbano, Honduras is also "the site of a U.S.-run regional training center that schools Salvadoran soldiers for their nation's civil war. It is the largely uncom-

plaining home to a huge U.S. military and civilian presence that ranges from aid specialists to artillery men, from Peace Corps members to what one former CIA officer calls 'every once-retired spook who ever hatched a dirty trick'."

- *A new direct U.S. military presence and role in the Middle East.* Here there are two points worth noting. The contingent of U.S. Marines stationed in Beirut for more than a year has been transformed from a "peacekeeping force" (which it never really was in any event) into a military force whose aim is to secure the rule of a particular political force—the Christian Phalangists of Amin Gemayel—over all of Lebanon. Now a major naval flotilla has been stationed in Lebanese waters in order to back up the ground troops. U.S. bombing raids and shelling from battleships have become a daily occurrence in the area surrounding Beirut. In effect, the U.S. is already fighting a small war in Lebanon. And the recent new military agreement worked out with Israel sets the basis for the U.S. being involved in a much larger war in that region of the world.

- *Deployment of the first batch of cruise and Pershing missiles in Western Europe.* This action, bringing Soviet territory directly and quickly under Washington's nuclear gun, is the cornerstone of any serious attempt by U.S. imperialism to roll back the historical clock. Any hope the U.S. has for reactivating its long-standing strategy of nuclear blackmail on a global scale must ultimately be based on upping the nuclear ante and regaining a first-strike edge over the Soviet Union. The hope is that the new intermediate-range missiles being stationed in Europe will provide this edge.

MAJOR SHIFT

Taken as a whole, these developments represent a major shift in U.S. foreign policy. Not only has the Reagan admini-

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stration demonstrated its willingness and capacity to use military force in pursuit of imperialism's political objectives; it has abandoned—or reduced in emphasis—previous policies which aimed to achieve these political goals by diplomatic means.

Reagan's veto of a congressional measure calling for a "human rights" determination as a condition for continued U.S. aid to El Salvador is an example of the new single-mindedness now dominating foreign policy. This is also true of the new agreement with Israel, which is a clear slap in the face to the Arab regimes and an abandonment of an earlier policy that tried to maintain a pretense of "even-handedness" in the Middle East. The very arrogance of these new policies is itself an indication that the Reagan administration feels that it has now regained use of the military option.

All this stands in sharp contrast to the situation that prevailed prior to Reagan's election during the terms of Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter. During Ford's term in office (1974-76), the U.S. was forced to stand helplessly by while Saigon and all of South Vietnam was liberated and while the MPLA, with the assistance of Cuban troops, was able to take and hold state power in Angola. The Carter administration (1976-80) faced similar frustrations in the face of Vietnam's intervention to oust the Pol Pot regime in Kampuchea, the overthrow of the Shah of Iran and the victory of the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua.

Neither Ford nor Carter was any less the dutiful servant of U.S. imperialism than Ronald Reagan. But their options to respond to these developments were severely restricted. In particular, neither Ford nor Carter was able to shape either a popular or a bipartisan consensus on behalf of military action in any of those situations. A combination of military defeat in Vietnam, the Watergate scandal and major objective difficulties in being able to bring U.S. military power to bear effectively in specific crisis conditions tied the hands of both administrations.

BREAKING THE PARALYSIS

Reagan's bid for office—and the wide backing he won from the ruling class—was based on a pledge to break this policy paralysis. The first step was ideological. The terrain on which political questions were debated had to be shifted. It was an undertaking for which Reagan and his New Right supporters were admirably equipped.

In the period leading up to the 1980 elections and throughout the campaign, Reagan hammered away at two themes: the setbacks suffered by the U.S. were due principally to a Soviet master plan of world conquest made possible by Soviet military superiority; and previous administrations had been unable to impede the Soviet advance due to a lack of will and an inferior military posture.

Today, almost three years after assuming the presidency, it can be said that Reagan has more than redeemed his pledge to the U.S. bourgeoisie. U.S. military power has become a qualitatively reactivated element in the world balance of forces as these are brought to bear on the attempts of particular peoples to wrench themselves out of the imperialist orbit.

"When we came into office," a senior administration official told the *New York Times* (Sept. 25, 1983), "one of our primary missions was to get Americans out of the 'Vietnam syndrome' and get them accustomed again to the idea [of] projecting power overseas . . . Well, it's worked."

Verification of this estimate came a month later when the invasion of Grenada won wide public support. By December

15, according to pollster George Gallup, "Reagan's job performance rating reached its highest level in two years."

LIBERAL OPPOSITION COLLAPSES

An important indication of Reagan's success has been the virtual collapse of the liberal opposition. On every issue—missile deployment, Central America, Grenada and Lebanon—the congressional liberals have turned tail and run.

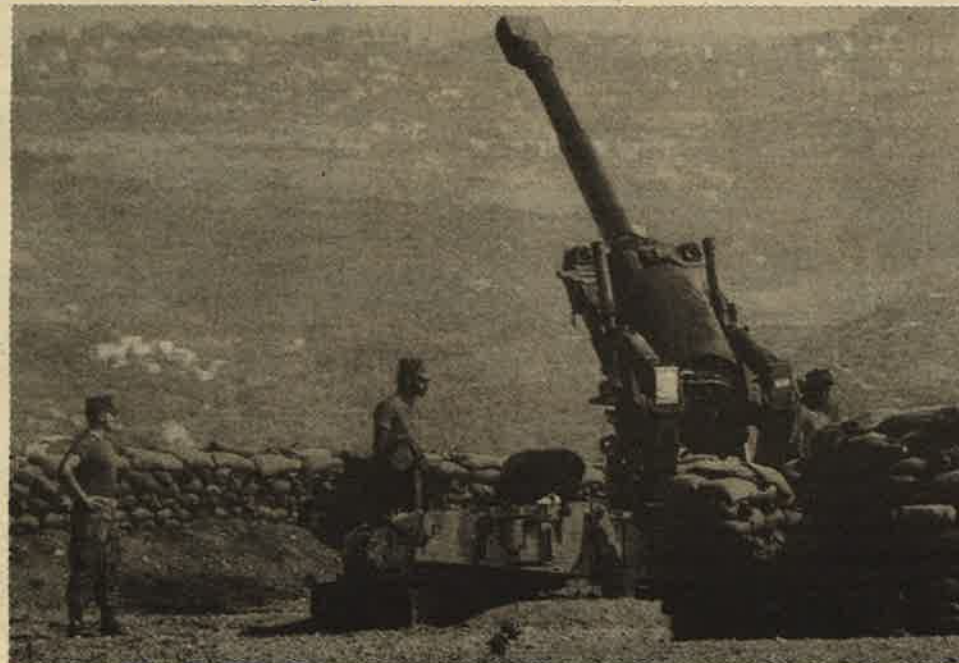
In Grenada— Armed Intervention



In Central America— Support for Counter-revolution



In Lebanon— Major Military Show of Force



In West Germany— First-Strike Nuclear Deployment



Dire warnings against "another Vietnam" in Central America have been replaced by congressional authorizations (with a few grumbles about "human rights") for aid to the fascist regime in El Salvador and the counter-revolutionaries in Nicaragua. The initial outrage at the invasion of Grenada was quickly replaced by support for the aggression as soon as the public opinion polls registered their jingoistic response. While expressing concern over the role of U.S. troops in

Lebanon, congressional liberals caved in and voted Reagan an 18-month authorization for U.S. troops there. And even such bellwethers of Reagan's liberal opposition as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* registered satisfaction as the first Euromissiles went into Germany and England.

As the liberals have retreated, the more aggressive sectors of the bourgeoisie have gotten bolder. In an editorial headlined, "Why Not Victory?," the *Wall Street Journal* asks (Nov. 30): "Was Grenada a flash in the pan or the end of defeatism in U.S. foreign policy?" The particular point of the question was whether or not the U.S. was ready to extend its new military policy to Angola as the next step in "stopping the Soviet-Cuban romp through the Third World." For the *Wall Street Journal*, the central conclusion to be drawn from the conquest of Grenada was that "the American people are ready to start winning again."

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

It is important to understand what this new development means—and what it does not. Clearly the reversal of the post-Vietnam antiwar consensus is a significant victory for the U.S. bourgeoisie. It has set the conditions for bipartisan political support for major new arms expenditures, an expansion of the strategic weapons program and a more aggressive stance in foreign policy generally. As a result, U.S. imperialism enjoys a greater flexibility as to when and where it will use military force than it did just five years ago.

On the other hand, the popular antiwar consensus in the U.S. has always been the least stable element in the world front against imperialism, the element most subject to being undermined ideologically and overridden politically. Today, the domestic consensus has given Washington, if not a green light, at least an amber for the use of military force. But the U.S. must still confront the other elements which provide the foundation for the world front against imperialism, in particular the socialist camp and the national liberation movements, as well as a growing peace movement in the other capitalist countries.

These elements will not so easily be reversed. The economic, political, military and ideological cohesion of the socialist camp is a profound material force which, unlike the strained relations between the imperialist powers, continues to grow and be reinforced by the very nature of the socialist system itself. By the same token, the struggles of peoples and nations to free themselves of imperialist exploitation and oppression are endemic to the imperialist system. Whether this effort is defeated on one battlefield or another, it is bound to reappear again and again until the imperialist system is defeated. It is on these two elements that the fundamental stability of the international front against imperialism rests.

In addition, even though the stance of the Reagan administration is to dismiss its setbacks on the diplomatic front, it cannot indefinitely ignore the concerns of its imperial partners or pro-U.S. regimes in Latin America and in the Middle East. For all of these have their own problems of political consensus to deal with. It can hardly be doubted, for instance, that a U.S. invasion of Nicaragua would trigger a wave of anti-Yankeeism throughout Latin America which could, under certain circumstances, threaten the political viability of pro-U.S. governments there. Similarly, should Washington consistently ignore the concerns of its imperialist allies, it could soon confront an unwelcome wave of neutralism developing in the bourgeoisies of the other major capitalist powers.

In short, Reagan's success in reversing the U.S. domestic consensus has given Washington a somewhat greater tactical initiative in the international class struggle. But it has not, in any qualitative sense, shifted the historic world balance of forces which continues to develop in a way that is unfavorable to imperialism and favorable to the forces of peace, liberation and socialism. □