

EDITORIAL

Peace, not war, is the goal

The success of The Reverend Jesse Jackson in achieving the release of Navy Lt. Robert Goodman from prisoner-of-war status in Syria is cause for us all to rejoice. At the same time, we must assess the message implicit in the action of Syria's dictator, President Hafez Assad, and determine what price must eventually be paid in return for Goodman's freedom.

Should we assume Jackson made promises based on the possibility he may some day achieve his own goal—election to the Presidency of the United States? Remote as that eventuality may appear to be, at this moment, the possibility must always be recognized. Don't think for one moment that Jackson thinks it is unlikely. And, obviously, Jackson is now indebted to Assad.

Should we assume Assad has a number of goals? That's safe, and all of them are based on strengthening the Syrian position with either the Soviets or the western powers, or with both. Syria's loyalty to either side is rooted only in expediency, of course. Nor can we rule out that the Syrian position with regard to Russia may be changing. Egypt's changed in the 1970s, after a brief honeymoon with the communists. History tends to repeat itself.

Jackson's mission to obtain Goodman's release may have been an opportunity Syria seized with enthusiasm, a much-desired chance to send the United States a peace offering and, at the same time, to create a face-saving climate for all concerned. Should such be the case, we could do worse than accept that peace offering at face value. We could do worse than meet Assad halfway.

Over the past several months we have witnessed ample evidence of the futility of using our military forces for peace-keeping purposes in this troubled part of the world. Diplomacy, in dealing with the countries of the Middle East, is a far more effective tool than military might or military threat.

Jackson may have taken the necessary first step in demonstrating the effectiveness of diplomacy. Let's hope our government has the grace to recognize the wisdom of following that path and the humility to continue on that course.

Peace, not war, after all, is our goal, and if there is any part of the world where achieving the goal of peace is of utmost importance to our own best interests, that place is the Middle East.