

***A SINE QUA NON* OF WAR AND PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST:  
SYRIA**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCINECES  
OF  
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY**

**BY**

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**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR  
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE  
IN  
THE DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**SEPTEMBER 2004**

Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **A SINE QUA NON OF WAR AND PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST: SYRIA**

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September 2004, 199 pages

The objective of this thesis is to analyze the place of Syria in the Arab-Israeli conflict and in the Middle East peace process in the period between the 1948 war and 2000. In this context, the aim is to find out an answer to the question of how Syria acquired its central place in the conflict and a critical role in the peace process. Accordingly, the thesis consists of three main parts. In the first part of the study, the central place of Syria in the wars against Israel is examined. In the second part of the study, the challenges Syria faced during the 1980s and 1990s, and how these challenges affected the Syrian position in its relations with Israel are discussed. In the third part, the critical role of Syria in the bilateral negotiations between Syria and Israel is scrutinized. Finally, this thesis is concluded in with the developments occurred in the Middle East in the period between 2000 and today.

Key words: Arab-Israeli Conflict, Middle East Peace Process, Bilateral Negotiations between Syria and Israel, Hafız Asad

## **ÖZ**

### **ORTADOĞU’DA SAVAŞIN VE BARIŞIN OLMAZSA OLMAZI: SURIYE**

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Eylül 2004, 199 sayfa

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Arap-İsrail çatışmasında ve Ortadoğu Barış sürecinde Suriye’nin yerini 1948 ile 2000 yılları arasındaki zaman diliminde incelemektir. Bu bağlamda, amaç Suriye’nin Arab-İsrail çatışmasındaki merkezi yerini ve Ortadoğu Barış sürecindeki kritik rolünü nasıl kazandığı sorusuna cevap bulmaktır. Tez üç ana bölümden oluşmaktadır. İlk bölümde, Suriye’nin Arab-İsrail çatışmasındaki yeri irdelenecektir. İkinci kısımda, Suriye’nin 1980’lerde ve 1990’larda karşılaşmış olduğu problemler ve bu problemlerin Suriye’nin İsrail’e karşı duruşunu nasıl etkilediği tartışılacaktır. Üçüncü bölümde, Suriye’nin İsrail ile olan ikili görüşmelerinde oynadığı kritik rol mercek altına alınacaktır. Bu çalışma, 2000’den günümüze kadar geçen süreçte Ortadoğu’da yaşanan olaylar çerçevesinde, Suriye’nin bölge barışı için rolünün değerlendirilmesi ile sonuçlanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Arap-İsrail Çatışması, Ortadoğu Barış Süreci, Suriye-İsrail İkili Görüşmeleri, Hafız Esad.

*To My Dear Husband, Sancar Süer*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank those who helped me in this study. Firstly, I would like to sincerely thank my supervisor, Prof. Dr. İhsan D. Dağı for his guidance, advice, criticism, and insight throughout this study. Also I would like to mention my appreciation to my thesis committee, Assoc. Prof. Meliha Altunışık and Assist. Prof. Recep Boztemur, for their advice and comments.

Thanks also go to all my colleagues at the Department of International Relations, who always stand by me with their friendships and encouragement.

I owe the most to my husband, Sancar Süer, for his patience and encouragement. Special thanks go to my parents, Ayfer and Nihat, and my brother, Mehmet Yaman Özen, for their faith in me.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

The main aim of this thesis is to explain the place of Syria in the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Middle East peace process in the period between the 1948 war and 2000. By exploring the role of Syria in the wars against and peace with Israel, the thesis will assess whether Syria is *a sine qua non* of war and peace in the Middle East. In so doing, Syrian military, political and diplomatic strategy towards Israel in the framework of Arab-Israeli conflict and the Middle East peace process will be analyzed in a comparative way and from a historical perspective.

The military and political strategy of Syria -the beating heart of the Arab nationalism- towards Israel -an artificial, imperial and expansionist state from perspective of Syria- led to “conflict” be the most salient feature of the relationship between the two states from the 1948 war to the late 1980s. Syria struggled to achieve strategic parity with Israel by building regional alliances and strengthening its military forces. Syria’s ultimate goals were the containment of an expanding Israel or “peace of the strong”, peace from a position of strength, which will give back dignity, lost in the 1967 war by Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights. However from the late 1980s, Syria developed a new diplomatic strategy towards Israel due to some domestic, regional, and international reasons. This change in the strategy led Syria to take “strategic decision” to join the peace negotiations with Israel, which was initiated by the Madrid peace conference in October 1991. So an environment emerged to put the statement of Henry Kissinger “No Arab-Israeli war is possible without Egypt, and no Arab-Israeli peace is possible without Syria” to test.

The centrality of Syria in the Middle East politics can be traced back to the formative years of modern Middle Eastern politics; the decade from 1914 to 1924, during which the Ottoman Empire fell; the European powers moved in; boundaries were

delineated and new states came into existence. The historic Syrian territory, including current Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine, had been promised to three different parties. First, in the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence (July 1915 – March 1916)<sup>1</sup>, the British government promised portions of Syria to the Ottoman governor of Mecca, the Sharif al-Hussein. Second, in the Sykes-Picot Agreement of May 1916, Syria was divided between Britain and France into southern and northern parts, Britain taking the former and France the latter. Third, the Balfour Declaration of November 1917 endorsed the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people. At the end of the First World War, in accordance with the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the agreement of September 1919, which was based on the former and formalized at San Remo, France, was awarded mandatory authority over the territory of Syria and Lebanon. The French army entered Syria in July 1920. The League of Nations formally ratified the mandate on July 24, 1922.

France was trying to administer this strategic region in the face of a growing Arab nationalist movement and calls for Syrian unity.<sup>2</sup> France promptly subdivided the territory into regions that carried clear religious connotations: Lebanon, the state of Damascus, the government of Aleppo, the autonomous district of Latakia, the autonomous district of Cabal Druze, and the region of Alexanderatta. France then disconnected Lebanon by giving independence to it and Alexanderatta as a price to Turkey for a non-aggression pact with France just before the outbreak of the Second World War. The other four units were joined together to form the modern state of Syria. France formally proclaimed the independence of Syria on September 27, 1941. The constitutional government was restored in July 1943 and the elections took place, and Syria actually gained its independence after the withdrawal of French troops on April 15, 1946.

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<sup>1</sup> Cemal Paşa, Hatıralar, İttihat ve Terakki, I. Dünya Savaşı Anıları, (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, Mayıs 2001), pp. 278-280

<sup>2</sup> See Peter A. Shambrook, French Imperialism in Syria 1927-1936, (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1998), Daniel Pipes, Greater Syria: The History of an Ambition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), Salma Mardam Bey, Syria's Quest for Independence 1939-1945, (Berkshire: Ithaca Press, 1997)

In short, today's Syria is a remnant; something that emerged after the great powers delineated the boundaries in the region. This fragmented piece of territory came into existence neither for geographic or cultural reasons, nor because of actions taken by its residents, but as a result of European maneuvering, namely, artificially.<sup>3</sup> The external imposition of state boundaries which fragmented historic Syria combined with the creation of Israel on a part of this territory, generated powerful supra-state ideologies like pan-Arabism, pan-Syrianism based on Greater Syria<sup>4</sup> and the domestic instability after independence. Such facts explain many key characteristics of Syria: its weak national identity, weak government legitimacy, frequent changes of government, military rule, communal tensions, the success of radical ideologies, and irredentism.<sup>5</sup>

Beside these, after the withdrawal of the French forces, Syria found itself at the conjunction of three circles of conflict. The first, the competition between the Hashemite dynasty (Faysal's Iraq with the aim of Fertile Crescent and Abdullah's Jordan with the aim of Greater Syria) and their Arab rivals (Egypt and Saudi Arabia), had been in progress since the end of the WWI. Second, the Arab-Zionist control of Palestine entered a new stage with the establishment of the state of Israel on May 14, 1948. Third, the rivalry between the Great Powers changed its nature with the beginning of the Cold War.<sup>6</sup>

Domestically, the parliamentary democracy envisioned by the leaders of the independence movement had not been materialized. After two short periods of parliamentary politics (1946-1949 and 1954-1958), which were interrupted by military dictatorships (1949-1954), and a brief period of unification with Egypt in the United Arab Republic (1958-1961), Syria drifted into the left when the Ba'thists seized power

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<sup>3</sup> Pipes, op.cit., p. 96

<sup>4</sup> Raymond A. Hinnebusch, Syria: Revolution from Above, (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 3

<sup>5</sup> Pipes, op.cit., p. 151

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Rathmell, Secret War in the Middle East: the Covert Struggle for Syria 1949-1961, (London and New York: I.B. Tauris Academic Studies, 1995), p. 11-21

in 1963 through a military coup.<sup>7</sup> This period between the end of French Mandate and the Ba'thi revolution was dominated by the Sunnis, the ruling elite of Syria. The Ba'th coup d'état of March 1963 opened the way for minorities. Next two coups in February 1966 and in November 1970 consolidated the power of minorities, especially the Alawis. Since the coup of February 1963 is called as the Alawi coup and the one of November 1970 is called as a "Corrective Movement" by Hafiz al-Asad.<sup>8</sup>

According to Raymond Hinnebusch, the Ba'th coup of February 1966 by Salah Jedid marked the transformation of the Ba'th against the wishes of its founding leaders of Michel Aflaq and Salah ad-Din al-Bitar, who remained faithful to pan-Arabism. Salah Jedid and his supporters, mainly Alawi Ba'thist officers, made Syria their primary field of action and chose radical social transformation as a political vehicle. They used socialist transformation and party organization to mobilize popular support, and maintain the stabilization of the regime.<sup>9</sup> However, it was a fragile balance which was corrupted easily.<sup>10</sup> Two Alawi leaders, Salah Jedid and Hafiz Asad fought each other for supremacy, a rivalry that ended only when Asad prevailed in November 1970. While Jadid wanted to deepen the revolution domestically and while refusing any political settlement with Israel and continuing support for the Palestinian guerilla challenge to it; Asad, more realist, called for suspension of the revolution in the interest of national unity aimed at recovery of the lost territories.<sup>11</sup> Asad's rise marked the victory of the military over the radical intelligentsia.

Asad's aim was to consolidate the unstable Ba'th state and mobilize Syria for a war to recover the lost territories. In the process, he turned the Ba'th state from an

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<sup>7</sup> Mansoor Moaddel, Jordanian Exceptionalism: a Comparative Analysis of State-Religion relationships in Egypt, Iran, Jordan, and Syria, (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 59-60

<sup>8</sup> Pipes, op.cit., pp. 170-171

<sup>9</sup> Hinnebusch, op.cit., p. 52

<sup>10</sup> See Martha Neff Kessler, Syria: Fragile Mosaic of Power, (Honolulu, Hawaii: University of the Pacific, 2002)

<sup>11</sup> Hinnebusch, op.cit., p. 59

instrument of class revolution into a machinery of power in the service of *raison d'état*.<sup>12</sup> According to Hinnebusch, the regime established may perhaps be best conceptualized as “authoritarian populist”: authoritarian in its concentration and unrestricted use of political power, populist in many of the basic purposes to which this power has been put.<sup>13</sup>

However, the Sunnis had many grievances against Alawi domination of power. So to attract the Sunni majority, the state needed something to involve the bulk of its populace. Nationalism offered an obvious vehicle, but allegiance to Syria in its present borders had little appeal to Sunnis. Daniel Pipes argued that if Asad regime was to appeal to its people and inspire loyalty on a nationalist basis, it had to look outward.<sup>14</sup> The objective taken up was the liberation of the occupied territories. Determined, intelligent and dedicated to his mission, Asad proved extremely stubborn in pursuit of nationalist principle in the conflict with Israel. A tough Machiavellian, he seemed willing to use any means in the regional power struggle against Israel.<sup>15</sup> So Syria always took place in the wars against Israel directly or indirectly (for example through Lebanon) as the bearer of the Arab nationalism.

It cannot be ignored that the Palestinian predicament has been at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict. However the Palestinians constituted only a political challenge to Israel, not a military threat.<sup>16</sup> Israel's conflict with Syria is a classical political-military conflict between two established states, while the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is focused on issues of national identity, and the search for creative formulas of national coexistence than on military questions.<sup>17</sup> According to Moshe Ma'oz, Syria has

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 65

<sup>13</sup> Raymond A. Hinnebusch, “Syria: The Role of Ideology and Party Organization in Local Development” in Louis J. Cantori and Ilya Harik (ed.), Local Politics and Development in the Middle East, (Westview Special Studies on the Middle East, 1984), p. 123

<sup>14</sup> Pipes, op.cit., pp. 186-188

<sup>15</sup> Hinnebusch (2001), op.cit., p. 68

<sup>16</sup> Moshe Ma'oz, Syria and Israel From War to Peacemaking, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. vii

<sup>17</sup> Helena Cobban, The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks 1991-1996 and Beyond, (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1999), p. 12

manifested a consistent political and ideological hostility to the Jewish entity since the 1920s, and a military threat to Israel's security since 1948. Especially after Egypt made peace with Israel in 1979, the Arab-Israeli conflict became, in many respects, a Syrian-Israeli conflict. Until October 1994, Jordan and Israel had already maintained de facto peaceful relations; Iraq has in practical terms departed from its conflict with Israeli since 1980, when it became involved in two successive wars in the Gulf leaving Syria alone in the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>18</sup>

As mentioned before, the Syrian disdain for Israel predates the 1948 war and is part of the general resentment of the Anglo-French portioning of geographic Syria. As early as the 1930s, when Syria was under the French mandatory, Syrian society never accepted the presence of Jewish settlers in Palestine. They believed that land sales and immigration threatened not only Palestine, but the whole region.<sup>19</sup> Even before the first Arab-Israeli war started in 1948, Syria was used as a place for the infiltration of fighters into Palestine.<sup>20</sup> During the mid-1940s, the newly emerging Syrian Republic became the most anti-Zionist Arab state. And the failure of the irregular army and the establishment of Israeli state on May 14, 1948 led to five Arab states declare war on Israel. The result was a disaster for Arabs, while it was the war of the independence for Israel. After the war, an Armistice Agreement was signed between Syria and Israel in 1949. Despite peace initiatives by Syria, a peace agreement could not be signed; and the armistice agreement, being ambiguous in many respects, remained the legal basis of the relations between Syria and Israel. This ambiguity led to many grievances along the border; and they were culminated in the 1967 war. While Israel launched military operations against Syrian positions, Syria responded by using the Golan Heights and jeopardized Israel's water resources. Between Syria's extremism and Israel's excessiveness, a cycle of raids and retaliations pushed the region toward the brink. The 1967 war, which was a total disaster for Arabs, resulted in the zero-sum conflict between Syria and Israel. The UN

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<sup>18</sup> Ma'oz, *op.cit.*, p. vii

<sup>19</sup> Erik L. Knudsen, "The Syrian-Israeli Political Impasse: A Study in Conflict, War and Mistrust", *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (March 2001), p. 214

<sup>20</sup> Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate* (Princeton: Princeton Uni. Press, 1987), pp. 555-6



Security Council Resolution 242 (UNSCR 242), adopted after the war, was sufficiently ambiguous to allow the Arab states and Israel to read in it what they wanted. The resolution's ambivalence provided room for the parties to change their attitudes in response to conditions while still agreeing on the resolution as a basis to enter into negotiations. So the resolution remained the only basis for the peace talks until today.

Hafiz Asad, coming to power in 1970 after the 1967 war, marked the beginning of the realpolitik with regard to Israeli-Syrian conflict. Asad affirmed Syria's rejection of the UNSCR 242 and began preparing for battle with Israel. Due to overconfidence to its strategic and military superiority over the Arab states, the 1973 war was a surprise for Israel. Henry Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy resulted in a disengagement agreement in May 1974. After this disengagement agreement until 1978, the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt, which was resulted in the peace treaty between the two in 1979, Asad suggested for a political settlement in exchange of territories occupied by Israel and the Palestinian rights. These offers were rejected by Israel, who formally annexed the Golan Heights in 1981. Furthermore Syria and Israel continued to test the each other's intentions in Lebanon. This period of wars and some peace initiatives between Syria and Israel will be examined from a historical perspective in Chapter 2. It is assumed that Syria followed mainly a military strategy towards Israel in this period; however this strategy was failed by more determined military strategy of Israel.

After the Camp David Accord between Egypt and Israel in August 1978, Hafiz al-Asad, with massive Soviet military help, promoted his doctrine of strategic balance, aiming at confronting Israel and deter it from attacking Syria. However, the 1980s were the devastating years for Syria due to the domestic economic crisis. Moreover, sudden and radical changes were taking place in the regional and international balance of power, and foreign policy of Syria responded immediately to these external threats and opportunities, more than to the internal changes. These changes were the Soviet collapse and so the end of the Cold war at the international level and then the Gulf Crisis and the war at the regional level. How much these internal and external challenges played a role in Syria's involvement in the Middle East Peace process, initiated by the Madrid peace conference on October, 1991? This short period, which led to a transition from military strategy to diplomatic strategy, will be focused in Chapter 3.

On the eve of the Madrid peace conference, Syria agreed to conduct direct negotiations with Israel even in the absence of previous Israeli commitments to withdraw from the occupied territories and agree to Palestinian statehood. It also accepted that the peace conference would be a regional conference rather than an international one, and that it would be convened under American and Soviet sponsorship rather than under the auspices of the UN Security Council. Along these procedural issues, the main topics of the peace negotiations, namely, the nature and the content of the peace, water, withdrawal from the Golan Heights and the scope of the withdrawal, what kind of security arrangements should be implemented in case of withdrawal, will be examined in Chapter 4.

The most challenging question to be answered is how much a peace in the Middle East can be achieved without Syria, in other words, whether Syria is really *a sine qua non* of peace in the Middle East. Some politicians and many scholars studying on Syria like Moshe Ma'oz, Raymound Hinnebusch, Alasdair Drysdale widely repeat the statement of Henry Kissinger "No Arab-Israeli war is possible without Egypt, and no Arab-Israeli peace is possible without Syria." In an interview to Patrick Seale, Ehud Barak, Prime Minister of Israel between 1999 and 2001, stated that "The only way to build a stable comprehensive peace in the Middle East is through an agreement with Syria. That is the keystone of the peace." According to Hinnebusch and Drysdale, as long as the Golan Heights are in dispute, there will be no peace between Syria and Israel.

From another perspective, Syria is located at the very heart of the Middle East, bordering Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq and the situated at the crossroads between Mediterranean and Persian Gulf and between Eurasia and Africa; it enjoys exceptional strategic importance within the region. Therefore, Syria cannot be ignored in any effort to bring peace to the Middle East. Hinnebusch and Drysdale assert that Syria does not have the political stature of Egypt, the former military strength of Iraq and the wealth of Saudi Arabia, but it is a key frontline state, mainly due to the efforts of Asad. Because Syria considers itself the beating heart of Arab nationalism, it claims to act for

all Arabs. So it feels interfering with the Palestinians and Lebanon.<sup>21</sup> Also Helena Cobban, a reporter on the Middle East, answers the question of what might the Middle East look like if Syria and Israel could reach a stable peace. Her answer is that such a transformation would radically improve the strategic situation of both these countries, but most importantly the conclusion of a peace treaty could have much broader positive ramifications throughout the region. Since Egypt and Jordan have already made their peace with Israel, this step would complete the circle of peace in the region. Since it is quite possible that a Syrian-Israeli peace agreement would be followed by a Lebanese-Israeli peace agreement. According to Cobban, Israel's conflict with the Palestinians might continue, but this conflict poses no military threat to Israel. And the completion of peace circle will make easier to find constructive solutions to this core conflict.<sup>22</sup>

Being *a sine qua non* of the peace in the Middle East, Syrian-Israeli successive peace negotiations will be explored in Chapter 5 under the titles of the head of Israeli government of the time. In the negotiations just after the Madrid peace conference, the opening positions of both sides led to an impasse. While Syria initiated "land for peace" formula, Israel under Likud government headed by Yitzhak Shamir insisted on "peace for peace" formula and refused to give up the Golan Heights. Under Israel's two Labor Party Prime ministers, Yitzhak Rabin, creating a window of opportunity by "full peace for full withdrawal formula" and Shimon Peres, demanding a new vision for the Middle East, the two sides managed a new ground for a lasting peace between them. They reached explicit agreement on the aims and principles of a security arrangement between them. Along this issue, they agreed on the content of the peace agreement in the territorial sphere, in the normalization of relations, on the linkages among these issues and the phasing of the successive implementation stages.

However, in March 1996, Peres suspended Israelis participation in the negotiations and moved up the elections. The winner of the elections in May 1996 was Benjamin Netanyahu, who refused to resume the talks at the point where Peres

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<sup>21</sup> Alasdair Drysdale, Raymond Hinnebusch, Syria and Middle East Peace Process, (New York: Council of Foreign Relations Press, 1991), pp. 2-3

<sup>22</sup> Cobban, op.cit., p. 3

suspended them. This was a setback from the “land for peace” formula to the “peace for peace” formula. The defeat of Netanyahu in May 1999 elections by Ehud Barak, whose political mentor was Rabin, signaled the resumption of the talks. Since Barak had stated that the only way to build a stable comprehensive peace in the Middle East was through an agreement with Syria, so he had opened a wide door to a comprehensive peace in the Middle East, which could not be kept opened for long.

The twenty-first century began with many challenges for the region and in particular for Syria. Just coming to power after his father’s death in June 2000, Bashar Asad faced the domestic and foreign policy challenges. At the front of Bashar, there were a stalled peace process together with his father’s legacy, rising pressure from Lebanon for Syrian forces to pull out of that country, and the *intifada* in Palestine beginning in September 2000, followed by the renewed activities of Hezbollah against Israel’s northern border, and the war on terrorism declared by the US in the wake of the attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001, and the war in Iraq. Alongside all these challenges, Bashar called for resuming the negotiations, but the Israeli administration headed by Ariel Sharon, coming to power in February 2001 following the *intifada*, was not willing to engage in the negotiations with Syria.

The Syrian policy towards Israel did not follow a straight line; rather it had the ups and downs. The identification of the position of Syria in these ups and downs, which will be explored in this thesis, are essential to understand the Arab-Israeli conflict and the subsequent peace process and in general the Middle Eastern politics.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE PERIOD OF WARS IN THE SYRIAN-ISRAELI RELATIONS

#### 2. 1. The 1948 War: *Al-Nakba* (Disaster) or the War of Independence

The Syrian disdain for Israel predates the 1948 war and is part of the general resentment against the Anglo-French portioning of geographic Syria, including today's Jordan, Israel, Lebanon and the Turkish province of Hatay, after the first World War. As early as the 1930s, when Syria was under the mandatory government of France, most elements of Syrian society never accepted the presence of Jewish settlers in Palestine. They believed that under the British mandate of Palestine, land sales and immigration threatened not only Palestine, but the whole region.<sup>1</sup> Because of this opposition to the British policy, even before the first Arab-Israeli war started, Syria had been the place for the infiltration of fighters into Palestine, fund-raising to undermine the British mandate and arms purchases.<sup>2</sup>

By the mid-1940s the positions of both Syria and the Zionist movement began to be crystallized and were highly antagonistic. Unlike the mandatory period, during the mid-1940s, the newly emerging Syrian Republic became the most anti-Zionist Arab state. There was a wide consensus to fight the Zionist entity in Palestine. Syria assumed a leading role in a fierce opposition to any plan by the UN and the others to divide Palestine between Jews and Arabs. Syria was also the first Arab state to implement the Arab League's anti-Zionist policies, in addition to initiating its own militant measures

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<sup>1</sup> Erik L. Knudsen, "The Syrian-Israeli Political Impasse: A Study in Conflict, War and Mistrust", *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (March 2001), p. 214

<sup>2</sup> Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate* (Princeton: Princeton Uni. Press, 1987), pp. 555-6

against the Jewish Yishuv.<sup>3</sup> Syria's involvement in the activities of the Arab League was symptomatic of that country's insecurities, as well as of its inability to bypass public sentiment on behalf of the Palestinians. Syria contributed to the struggle in two ways: by participating with its formal army and by coordinating the volunteers.<sup>4</sup> First of all, to prevent the creation of the Jewish state in Palestine recommended by the UN Partition Resolution of November 29, 1947<sup>5</sup>, the Liberation Army (irregular) under the leadership of Fawzi al-Qawuqji was formed. There is an irony that this irregular army was not organized only to fight the Jews but at the same time to prevent Transjordan's strong regular army.<sup>6</sup> Many new historians<sup>7</sup> suspected that King Abdullah of Transjordan had no interest in the Liberation of Palestine but was intent on seizing the Arab areas of the country.<sup>8</sup> Another aim of the Liberation Army was to prevent Palestinian forces from occupying parts of Palestine without coordination with the military committee controlled by Syria.<sup>9</sup>

The failure of the Syrian-sponsored irregular Liberation Army in Palestine paved the way for invasion of Palestine by five regular armies of Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, on May 15, 1948, after Israeli state was declared on May 14, 1948. The invasion resulted in the occupation of parts of Arab Palestine by the Transjordanian Arab Legion. This represented a setback to Syria's war efforts and its political prestige. The Syrian army was able to occupy strategic border area north of the Sea of Galilee,

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<sup>3</sup> Moshe Ma'oz, Syria and Israel From War to Peace Making (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 16-17

<sup>4</sup> Ghada Hashem Talhami, Syria and the Palestinians the Clash of Nationalism (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), pp. 26-27

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>6</sup> Ma'oz (1995), op. cit., p. 18

<sup>7</sup> In late 1980s, a series of books written by mostly Israeli scholars challenged the common Israeli historiographical interpretation of the 1948 war. The works of historians such as Benny Morris, Avi Shlaim and Ilan Pappé triggered a public debate in Israel. The revisionist historians became known as the new historians – a term which is synonymous with a critical non-Zionist evaluation of past and present realities in the land of Israel and Palestine.

<sup>8</sup> T. G. Fraser, The Arab-Israeli Conflict (London : Macmillan Press, 1995), p. 46, Avi Shlaim, 'The Debate About 1948' in Ilan Pappé (ed.), The Israel/Palestine Question (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p.186

<sup>9</sup> Ma'oz (1995), op. cit., p. 18

which is named also as Lake Tiberias, Lake Kinneret, and repel Israeli counterattacks, although the Jewish defenders repulsed the major Syrian offensive against a Jewish border area south of the lake. It also assumed control over a strip of land east of the Lake, which had been allocated to Israel by the UN Resolution of 1947.<sup>10</sup> While all the Arab forces occupied areas outside Palestine's territory awarded to Israel by the UN Resolution of 1947, only Syria had succeeded in capturing three small areas west of its international boundary<sup>11</sup> with Palestine, falling within the Palestine territory awarded to Israel by the UN. These areas would be the focus of the conflict between the two countries.<sup>12</sup>

There were many reasons behind the static posture of the Syrian army during the war. Firstly, the army was not well prepared for the war, partly because of bad organization and intelligence, and partly owing to deficiencies in both the quantity and quality of its weapons. Secondly, government feared that further Syrian attacks could provoke Israeli retaliation against Damascus and undermine the regime.<sup>13</sup>

When we look at the results of the war, the traumatic experience of the 1948 war led among both Israelis and Syrians mutual fear and distrust. Especially after 1954, Syria's attitudes towards Israel became more militant, owing to significant domestic political changes, as well as to regional and global factors.<sup>14</sup> One of the reasons behind Syria's unusual record of instability and the political ascendancy of the military were undoubtedly the 1948 War. The war had exposed all the weakness of the young Syrian

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 19

<sup>11</sup> During the mandate period, the mandatory powers had reached an agreement in March 1923 over the international boundary between Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. According to this agreement, in the northeast and the north, the Banias River and its springs and the Hasbani River, both sources of the Jordan River, remained in Syrian territory. While Jordan River, the Dan River (the main source of the Jordan River), Lake Huleh and Lake Tiberias remained in Palestine territory, agreement gave the Syrians certain fishing and navigation rights in Lake Huleh and Lake Tiberias, and in the section of the Jordan River between the two lakes. The boundary along the entire eastern side of Huleh valley was agreed to be 100 meters above the water level of Lake Huleh. From Lake Huleh down to Lake Tiberias, the boundary line ran 50-400 meters to the east of the Jordan River. The boundary from Lake Tiberias ran 10 meters to its northeastern part, widening further to the east while moving south.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Rabil, Embattled Neighbors Syria, Israel, and Lebanon (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), p. 6

<sup>13</sup> Ma'oz (1995), op. cit., p. 19

<sup>14</sup> Ma'oz (1995), op. cit., p. 37

democracy. It was clear that the Arab disaster of 1948 facilitated the unusual military dominance of civilian politics. The resultant mutual loss of trust encouraged one military faction after the other to attempt restructuring Syrian politics.<sup>15</sup> Syria's greatest weakness, at this stage, was its unprotected boundaries, which exposed it to Arab and Israeli threats alike. The territorial ambitions of the Iraqi and Jordanian Hashimites had revealed the disintegration of the old pan-Arab dream.<sup>16</sup>

At the end, it should be mentioned that according to Avi Shlaim, each side subscribes to a different version of events. The Arabs regard Israelis as the conquerors and themselves as the victims of the first Arab-Israeli war, which they call **al-Nakba (disaster)**. The Israelis, whether the conquerors or not, were the indisputable victors in the war, which they call **the War of Independence**.<sup>17</sup>

## 2. 2. Syria's Peace Offers to Israel

Despite its military passivity, the Syrian government demonstrated a tough diplomatic position towards Israel. It refused to sign an armistice agreement for a long time. It was declared on December 27, 1948 that Syria would continue to give priority to the liberation of Palestine and would refuse to recognize the 1947 partition resolution as well as the Jewish state. However, after awhile the Syrian leaders realized that the new Jewish state was militarily powerful and thus could endanger Syrian security as well as their own rule. In order to contain this potential danger and consolidate their control while tackling their severe domestic problems exacerbated by years of French colonial rule, they had to reach at least an armistice agreement.<sup>18</sup> However, Syria was in a

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<sup>15</sup> Talhami, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-46, Andrew Rathmell, Secret War in the Middle East: the Covert Struggle for Syria 1949-1961, (London; New York: I.B. Tauris Academic Studies, 1995), p. 22

<sup>16</sup> Talhami, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-46, First, the Hashemite dynasty (Faysal's Iraq with the aim of Fertile Crescent and Abdullah's Jordan with the aim of Greater Syria) and their Arab rivalries – Egypt and Saudi Arabia – for the domination over Syria had been in progress since the end of the First World War. Second, the Arab-Zionist control of Palestine entered a new stage with the establishment of the state of Israel.

<sup>17</sup> Shlaim, *op. cit.*, p. 172

<sup>18</sup> Ma'oz (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 19-25



disadvantageous position while negotiating with Israel, since all the other Arab states had already signed their armistice agreements.<sup>19</sup>

By January 1949 the UN had established a framework for promoting a peaceful resolution of the conflict. This framework based on the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 62 of November 16, 1948<sup>20</sup>, called upon the parties to seek agreement forthwith, negotiations conducted either directly or through the acting mediator, with a view to the immediate establishment of an armistice.<sup>21</sup>

On January 13, 1949, the parties to the conflict began their official armistice talks on the island of Rhodes under the chairmanship of UN acting mediator Ralph Bunche. The negotiations involved direct formal and informal Arab-Israeli meetings. The Rhodes negotiations resulted in armistice agreements between Israel and each of Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan, signed respectively on February 24, March 23, and April 3, 1949. Because of the coup on March 30, 1949 by Colonel Husni Zaim, Syria's scheduled armistice talks were postponed until April. During the Lausanne Conference of late April to early May 1949, meant to complement the Rhodes armistice agreements, Zaim conveyed to Israel, through informal channels, his willingness to meet with Ben Gurion, Prime Minister of Israel, to enter into peace negotiations with Israel.<sup>22</sup> Zaim surprisingly suggested that instead of an armistice agreement, Syria preferred to sign a full peace treaty with Israel which would include open borders and an immediate exchange of ambassadors, as well as economic and military cooperation. He also offered to settle 250,000 or 300,000 of total 700,000 Palestinian refugees in northeastern Syria.

What were the circumstances which led Za'im to adopt pragmatic attitudes towards Israel and sought to conclude a political agreement with the new Jewish state rather than to fight it? Ma'oz asserted that Za'im aimed at establishing his personal rule in Damascus, while turning Syria into a cohesive nation-state and playing an independent role in Middle East politics. Za'im perceived his relations with Israel not in

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<sup>19</sup> Rabil, *op. cit.*, p. 8

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix A.

<sup>21</sup> Rabil, *op. cit.*, p. 6

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11

ideological terms but within the sphere of regional power politics. Za'im aimed at neutralizing Israeli threat, gaining strategic assets along the Syrian-Israeli border, and perhaps also using Israel to counterbalance Iraqi threat. By the way, his aspiration was to win American political, military, and economic help in his attempts to consolidate his control in Syria and reform its socio-economic conditions. American diplomats had made it clear that such aid could be granted only after the Israeli-Syrian conflict had been settled. Finally, it was argued that he was apparently motivated by personal desire.<sup>23</sup>

It is noteworthy that even those Syrian politicians who toppled Za'im did not condemn him for his readiness to sign a peace agreement with Israel or for his approval of the armistice agreement with the Jewish state. This was so because the Syrian leaders, in the period after the 1948 war, realized that the new Jewish state was militarily powerful and thus could endanger Syrian security as well as their own rule. In order to contain this potential danger and consolidate their control, they had to reach at least an armistice agreement, which was positively accepted by the Syrian public as an Arab achievement.<sup>24</sup>

However, peace offers of Za'im were rejected by Ben-Gurion. According to Ma'oz, the reasons for the rejection were that Ben-Gurion was possibly aware of Za'im's reputation as an adventurer; more crucially, the concessions that Za'im requested from Israel were presumably too high a price to pay for a dubious agreement: Za'im had demanded that Israel give up important strategic areas in Lake Tiberias and the Huleh valley as well as in al-Hamma, all of which had assigned to Israel by the 1947 UN partition plan. Ben-Gurion insisted that firstly, Syria had to sign an armistice agreement on the basis of the existing international border and withdraw from the areas it had occupied, only then would he agree to meet Za'im personally and discuss a peace agreement. Another argument of Ma'oz was that it might have reflected Ben-Gurion's long-term strategic thinking and his deep convictions concerning Israeli-Syrian

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<sup>23</sup> Jerome Slater, "Lost Opportunities for Peace in the Arab-Israeli Conflict Israel and Syria, 1948-2001", International Security, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Summer 2002), p. 86

<sup>24</sup> Ma'oz (1995), op. cit., pp. 21-25

relations.<sup>25</sup> He could be satisfied with the armistice agreement with Syria and did not consider peace as a high priority. Israel might not have viewed peaceful relations with Syria as a vehicle for integration in the region.<sup>26</sup>

The conventional Zionist account of the 1948 war said that the reason behind unattainable peace lied in the notion of Arab intransigence since Israel strove toward a peaceful settlement of the conflict but there was no result. The new historians believed that the postwar Israel was more intransigent than the Arab states and that she consequently beared a larger share of the responsibility for the political deadlock that followed the formal ending of hostilities.<sup>27</sup> Ben Gurion's rejection of Za'im's offer led some Israeli new historians to conclude that in 1949, Israel missed a chance for peace with Syria. Avi Shlaim noted that Ben Gurion considered that the armistice agreements with the neighboring Arab states met Israel's essential needs for recognition, security and stability. Benny Morris agreeing with Shlaim argued that Israeli leaders were satisfied with the armistice agreements and were far from eager to pursue a peace process that would entail substantial Israeli concessions.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, no peace treaty was concluded between Syria and Israel, but only an armistice agreement was signed on July 20, 1949<sup>29</sup>.

During the negotiations, Israel faced a tough policy of Syria. While the agreements with Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon drew armistice lines largely conformity with the military situation on the ground, reflecting Israel's gain of territory in the war, Israel faced the reverse situation in negotiations with Syria. During the war, Syria had occupied three areas awarded to Israel by the UN Partition Resolution of 1947.<sup>30</sup> Syria had argued that the armistice line had to conform to the war's outcome and as such to

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Shlaim, op. cit., p. 188

<sup>28</sup> Rabil, op. cit., pp. 11-12

<sup>29</sup> For the whole text of the agreement see <http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/History/issyarm.html>

<sup>30</sup> See Appendix B.

the cease-fire line, while Israel adamantly had insisted that the armistice line had to correspond to the international boundary of 1923.<sup>31</sup> Because Israel saw these areas crucial for its exclusive control of the Sea of Galilee. To avert further conflict, the UN proposed that Syrian forces be evacuated and that the disputed areas be demilitarized under the supervision of the UN Mixed Armistice Commission (MAC). Both parties accepted this proposal and these areas were called as Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).<sup>32</sup> Problems in the DMZ were caused by three underlying but connected factors: the legal status of the DMZ, border between two parties, and water resources. The most important point was that no agreement was reached over “sovereignty” in the DMZ. Israel contended that the armistice agreement dealt with military matters only, and that Israel had political and legal rights over the DMZ. Syria, on the other hand, which had occupied these zones during the 1948 war and evacuated them under the 1949 Armistice Agreement, contended that neither Israel nor Syria had sovereignty over the DMZ, and that the MAC had broad jurisdiction over the DMZ. Syria demanded a veto power on Israeli civilian activities in these areas, which were likely to make the local strategic balance in Israel’s favor.<sup>33</sup>

Concerning the border, the agreement calls that the armistice demarcation line shall follow a line midway between the existing truce lines. Where the existing truce lines run along the international boundary between Syria and Palestine, the Armistice Demarcation Line (ADL) shall follow that boundary line. Where the ADL does not correspond to the international boundary between Syria and Palestine, the area between the ADL and the boundary, pending final territorial settlements between the parties, shall be established as a DMZ from which the armed forces of both parties shall be

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<sup>31</sup> Rabil, op. cit., p. 6

<sup>32</sup> Alasdair Drysdale, Raymond Hinnebusch, Syria and Middle East Peace Process, (New York: Council of Foreign Relations Press, 1991), p. 99, See Appendix C.

The DMZ comprises three areas: one in the north, next to Tel Dan, the second south of Lake Huleh lying on both banks of the Jordan River, the third running from the northeastern bank of Lake Tiberias to its southeastern bank, extending to the boundary line. Importantly, the Syrians controlled the ten-meter strip of beach and the east bank of the Jordan River, as well as Arab villages east of Lake Tiberias, such as Al-Hamma and Khirbet al-Tawafiq. So the Syrians exercised effective control over the northern shore of Lake Tiberias.

<sup>33</sup> Ma’oz (1995), op. cit., p. 27, Knudsen, op. cit., p. 216

totally excluded, and in which no activities by military or paramilitary forces shall be permitted. Despite of the call for non-aggressive action, the impasse over the question of sovereignty in the DMZ gradually heightened the tension between the two countries. This was the point that the decades of direct conflict began.<sup>34</sup>

At the end of armed conflicts in the early 1950s, the Sea of Galilee demilitarized zone was partitioned, with Israel establishing control over the western sector to the west bank of the Jordan river, and Syria retaining control over the northeast corner of the lake and the east bank of the river. This partition created a de facto border that remained in place until the 1967 war. It is this border, which is known as **the line of June 4, 1967**, that Syria insists to be re-created in a final settlement.<sup>35</sup> Although the line of June 4 does not exist on any map; yet everybody knows where the line lies.<sup>36</sup> However, Israel eventually decided to act unilaterally, establishing paramilitary agriculture kibbutzim in several parts of the DMZ. When this drew Syrian fire, Israeli forces launched retaliatory raids. Tension also arose when Syria sought fishing rights in the lake. By the mid-1960s, Israel controlled most of the disputed areas.

Another related dispute in the border area arose over Israeli plans to tap waters from the Jordan River for irrigation. In 1951, Israel raised the stakes when it went ahead with a development project to drain Lake Huleh in order to arrange the land for cultivation and to eliminate malaria from the region. Although Lake Huleh was outside the DMZ, Syria opposed the project on the grounds that it affected a topographical change giving Israel a military advantage, and that it involved work on Arab-owned lands. Israel adopted a tough stance, and armed clashes erupted.<sup>37</sup> In 1961, the Arabs approved a plan to divert the Jordan's headwaters to thwart Israel's ambitions. After Syria began work on the diversion scheme, the Israeli air force attacked Syrian

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<sup>34</sup> Rabil, op. cit., p. 9

<sup>35</sup> Slater, op. cit., p. 88

<sup>36</sup> Patrick Seale, Uri Lubrani, Raghida Dergham, and Daniel Pipes, "The Middle East in 2000: A Year of Critical Decision: Roundtable Discussion", The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Soref Symposium, (May 18-19, 2000), p. 8

<sup>37</sup> Rabil, op. cit., p. 10

equipment. When Syria responded with artillery fire and guerilla raids, Israel retaliated with more air strikes.<sup>38</sup> According to Ma'oz, Syria had a large share in such anti-Israeli activities, becoming the headquarters of the Arab boycott against Israel, threatening Israeli projects, and killing Israeli soldiers in border incidents, as well as potentially being part of a larger Arab unity aimed at fighting Israel. So, Syria had been regarded by most Israeli Jews since 1948 as the most hostile and dangerous.<sup>39</sup>

Three years later another Syrian leader, Adib Shishakli, who ruled Syria from 1949 to 1954, made a peace offer to Israel in May 1952 similar in content to Za'im's proposal. Rabil asserted that this offer aimed more at improving relations with the US than with Israel. Shishakli's main concern had been to consolidate his regime with US help. The US in turn believed that the consolidation of Syrian regime would sanction some sort of an agreement with Israel, thereby enhancing stability in the region. Shishakli had also realized a serious constraint: a Tripartite Declaration issued by Britain, France, and the US in May 1950, opposing the use of force between any of the states in the area and making the supply of arms conditional on an undertaking of non-aggression. In such circumstances, the idea of neutralizing Israel through peace negotiations gained priority over the domestic issues. In fact, Shishakli's offer was no more than a non-belligerency agreement that did not entail normalization, but provided for the absorption of half a million Palestinian refugees, on the condition that Syria would receive \$200 million for economic development.<sup>40</sup> Formal and informal talks took place between the representatives of Israel and Syria to the MAC. However, Israel rejected the Syrian proposal to divide the DMZ along the Jordan River and the eastern shores of Lake Tiberias.<sup>41</sup> Because it involved giving up lands west of the international boundary which were formally under Israel's sovereignty and vital to its national irrigation and development projects. Instead, Israel offered to expand the negotiations

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<sup>38</sup> Drysdale and Hinnebusch, op. cit.

<sup>39</sup> Ma'oz (1995), op. cit., p. 34, Rabil, op. cit., pp. 13-14

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 13

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

beyond the proposed changes in the ADL, and discuss a peace treaty which would include economic and political issues as well.<sup>42</sup> Rabil pointed out that the failure of these negotiations could to a certain extent be attributed to the inability of the US and Syria to conclude an agreement.<sup>43</sup>

As Israel and Syria could not reach a settlement at that time, the 1949 armistice agreement remained the legal basis for Syrian-Israeli relations. But as this agreement was ambiguous in certain aspects, it could not prevent the violent disputes which erupted periodically along the armistice lines from the early 1950s, becoming a zero-sum struggle in 1953-54 and culminating in the June 1967 war.<sup>44</sup>

### **2. 3. The 1967 War – Six-Day War: A Watershed in the Regional Politics**

Patrick Seale remarked that the Six-Day War grew out of something small and local: a low-level, long-running border dispute between Syria and Israel, which became entangled mainly with the control of water.<sup>45</sup> The terms of the July 1949 ceasefire left two states each holding strategically important but vulnerable territories along the northern shore of Lake Tiberias, and attempts by either one to enhance its military position within its respective domain constituted a clear and direct threat to the security of the other – a classic security dilemma.<sup>46</sup> So the clash was inevitable, sooner or later, but the timing was merely incidental.<sup>47</sup>

According to Ze'ev Schiff, Syria beared great responsibility for dragging the Arab states into Six-Day War of 1967. Nasser, to be sure, caused the situation to deteriorate in the prelude to the war when he closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli navigation and ejected the UN force from the Sinai while concentrating his own forces

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<sup>42</sup> Ma'oz (1995), op. cit., p. 29

<sup>43</sup> Rabil, op. cit., pp. 13-14

<sup>44</sup> Ma'oz (1995), op. cit., p. 21

<sup>45</sup> Gideon Gera, 'Israel and the June 1967 War: 25 Years Later', Middle East Journal, Vol. 46, No.2, Spring 1992 p. 230

<sup>46</sup> Fred H. Lawson, Why Syria Goes to War Thirty Years of Confrontation (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 20

<sup>47</sup> Richard B. Parker, 'The June 1967 War: Some Mysteries Explored', Middle East Journal, Vol. 46, No. 2, Spring 1992, p. 178

there. But, Schiff asserted that it was Syria that had to take the responsibility for the war.<sup>48</sup> The chief landmark on the road to war was Syria's attempt to divert the sources of the Jordan River. This decision had been taken at an Arab summit meeting in Cairo in January 1964, where it was also decided to establish a joint Arab command. However, neither Lebanon nor Jordan intended to implement the decision, knowing that Israel could not ignore such a move, and view it as a *casus belli*.<sup>49</sup> The Syrians, on the other hand, went to work immediately. But such a stubbornness of Syria caused many border clashes between Syria and Israel<sup>50</sup>. The situation was explosive; with the added ingredient of Soviet encouragement of the Syrians, deepening confrontation was almost inevitable.<sup>51</sup> Throughout the spring of 1967, Syria adopted a more belligerent stance in its interaction with Israel. Many observers reported that Syria followed an adventuresome policy on the border that risked a violent Israeli response. In the wake of the war, Syria stepped up its support for guerilla operations on the part of Palestinian commandos.<sup>52</sup>

Beside mutual threats between Syria and Israel, it was obvious that the rule of neo-Ba'th party (1966-1970) was, also, an important factor. Because neo-Ba'th leaders believed that a popular liberation war could lead to Israel's collapse. This regime obviously adopted a more militant line towards Israel than that of the previous.<sup>53</sup> According to them, Israel was the place of imperialism in the heart of the Arab nation and the principle obstacle to its nationalist aspirations. Inspired by the examples of Algeria and Vietnam, and by Maoist theory, the Ba'thi radicals argued that, while Israel might have been militarily superior, the Arabs could prevail in a **“war of popular**

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<sup>48</sup> Ze'ev Schiff, Peace with Security: Israel's Minimal Security Requirements in Negotiations with Syria Policy Papers, No. 34 (Washington, D.C.: the Washington Institute For Near East Policy, 1993), p. 13

<sup>49</sup> Schiff, op. cit., p. 13

<sup>50</sup> Senior Syrian leaders reportedly initiated 177 border incidents and 75 Palestine guerilla actions inside Israel (mostly via Jordan) between 23 February 1966 and 15 May 1967.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 15

<sup>52</sup> Lawson, op. cit., pp. 20-21

<sup>53</sup> Ma'oz (1995), op. cit., p. 95



**liberation”** in which the numerically superior Arab masses, the Arab armies, and Arab oil would be fully mobilized.<sup>54</sup> The neo-Ba’th leaders were possibly influenced by the other factors. Ma’oz asserted that it was possible that in an attempt to strengthen the regime’s legitimacy, the Syrian leadership stepped up its anti-Israeli declarations. Because this new regime had the narrowest socio-political base. Also, Syrian leaders interpreted unemployment, industrial strikes, and the absorption problems of the new immigrants as major weakness of Israel at the time. They possibly believed that these difficulties were likely to cause Israel to collapse under the Arab armies.<sup>55</sup>

When we consider the Egyptian involvement, we know that Egypt since 1963 had prevented Syrian attempts to drag it into a full scale war against Israel over the diversion of the Jordan headwaters. Because Nasser thought he had more important things to do than to make war on Israel. He had said that the liberation of Palestine had to wait for the unification of the Arab states, for the spread of the socialist revolution, for the preparation of the Arab armies, for the isolation of Israel from the US. For him, 1967 was not the year for the war.<sup>56</sup> However, at the end, Nasser said “the battle with Israel is a decisive one”. Because, he found that his strategy had damaged his prestige and pan-Arab leadership.<sup>57</sup> Nasser’s primary aim was to make a political demonstration of his military potential so as to strengthen his pan-Arab legitimacy by means of a political victory.<sup>58</sup> In an attempt to deter an Israeli attack, he ordered the withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) from the Sinai and deployed Egyptian troops there. To shore up his prestige within the Arab world, he also closed the Strait of Tiran to Israeli shipping.

When we look at Israel, first of all, Nasser’s actions seemed to challenge Israel to choose between fighting and risking its existence or facing blockade, guerilla warfare,

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<sup>54</sup> Drysdale and Hinnebusch, op. cit. , p.100

<sup>55</sup> Ma’oz (1995), op. cit., pp. 88-95

<sup>56</sup> Lawson, op. cit., pp. 21-22

<sup>57</sup> Ma’oz (1995), op. cit., pp. 97-98

<sup>58</sup> Bassam Tibi, Conflict and War in the Middle East: From Interstate War to New Security (New York : St. Martin's Press, 1998), p. 73

and eventual collapse.<sup>59</sup> This challenge and the growing Syrian militancy led to the rise of hardliners in Israel. The hardliners had no doubts about the Israeli army's ability to defeat the Arab forces. They saw the crisis as an opportunity to smash Nasser and Arab nationalism and annihilate Arab military power before it could become a real danger.<sup>60</sup>

For Israeli reactions to Syrian verbal and military attacks, Israel filed numerous complaints at the UN against Syrian actions. These mutual clashes prompted the UN to settle the DMZ cultivation disputes through the MAC, which had not convened since 1960. However, the gap between the Syrian and Israeli positions in the MAC continued and the talks had reached a deadlock by early February 1967. Israel, initially, attacked Jordan; Israel chose to attack Jordan rather than Syria not only in order to put pressure on Amman to check Palestinian raids against Israel, but apparently with the intention to deter Jordan from joining the newly signed Egyptian-Syrian Joint Defense Pact of November 7, 1966 as well as to test this new Arab agreement.<sup>61</sup>

Although the Syrians did all they could to encourage war, they did not carry their assigned weight in the Arab military plan. As the Syrians saw the collapse of the Egyptian and Jordanian armies during the first days of the war, they tried to get rid of this situation by carrying out small attacks, which were easily repulsed.<sup>62</sup> This was due to the systemic political purges that had deprived the army much of its best talent<sup>63</sup> and the lack of professionalism.<sup>64</sup>

Israel decided to attack the Golan Heights only after much hesitation. Israeli concern was that if it attacked on the Golan Heights, Damascus's Soviet patron could react strongly. These considerations in mind, Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan prevented the army from moving on the Golan Heights. In the meantime, a strong lobby

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<sup>59</sup> Gera, *op. cit.*, p. 232

<sup>60</sup> Drysdale and Hinnebusch, *op. cit.*,

<sup>61</sup> Ma'oz (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 90-93

<sup>62</sup> Schiff, *op. cit.*, p. 15

<sup>63</sup> Abd-Allah, *op. cit.*, p. 59

<sup>64</sup> Tibi, *op. cit.*, p. 75

was organized to persuade the government not to end the war without removing the Syrian threat from the Golan Heights.<sup>65</sup>

On the morning of June 9, Israeli forces were ordered to start moving. The breakthrough battle was fierce and thanks to Israel's control of the air, moved at great speed. The next day the Syrian front completely collapsed and the town of Quneitra, capital city of the Golan Heights, was taken without a fight. The new status quo established in the aftermath of June 10 marked the start of a new chapter in the history of the region.<sup>66</sup>

In short, between Syria's extremism and Israel's excessiveness, a cycle of raids pushed the region toward the brink. Within the span of few days, Israel defeated the Arab armies and occupied the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip from Egypt, the West Bank including East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria. Significantly enough, by June 10, 1967 (the Israeli-Syrian ceasefire), the line of June 4 which conceptually reflected the disposition of the Israeli and Syrian forces confronting each other in the DMZ, was well to the rear of Israeli forces.<sup>67</sup>

In August 1967 Israel formally adopted a resolution that it would return the captured territories on the basis of the international boundary, however, Syria refused to negotiate with Israel. It even boycotted the Khartoum summit in September 1967, at which the Arab states agreed on uniting their political efforts to ensure the withdrawal of Israeli forces from occupied Arab lands, and insisted on three no's: no negotiation, no peace, and no recognition.<sup>68</sup> The summit contained an important aspect legitimizing the efforts of Arab leaders who sought a diplomatic solution. In the mean time, the members of the UN Security Council diplomatically discussed over the formulation of a resolution that would serve as a basis for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. The council finally

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<sup>65</sup> Schiff, *op. cit.*, p. 16

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-16

<sup>67</sup> Rabil, *op. cit.*, p. 19

<sup>68</sup> Ma'oz (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 103

agreed on the UN Security Council Resolution 242 (UNSCR 242)<sup>69</sup>, adopted on November 22, 1967.

However, UNSCR 242 was sufficiently ambiguous to allow the Arab states and Israel to read it as what they wanted. While Egypt and Jordan accepted the resolution, Syria initially rejected it, formally accepted it only in 1968. Israel's UN representative endorsed it but reserved the right to interpret it within the framework of a comprehensive peace treaty with secure and recognized boundaries. It's also emphasized that Israel's withdrawal would be from "territories occupied in the recent conflict", and not from "the territories" meaning that Israel expected an adjustment in the international boundary. Arabs interpreted the resolution as calling for Israel's withdrawal from all "the occupied territories", prior to any political settlement. Conversely, the resolution's ambivalence provided room for the parties to change their attitudes in response to conditions while still agreeing on the resolution as a basis to enter into negotiations.<sup>70</sup> This resolution, with its famous package deal of withdrawal for peace and no withdrawal without a binding peace, continues to be the focus of the Arab-Israeli peace process.<sup>71</sup>

Israel's position regarding the return of the Golan, albeit demilitarized, to Syria as part of a peace treaty, was eroded towards the end of 1967. This change, which was reflected by the government's decision in October 1968 to abolish its decision of August 1967 and subsequently to establish on the Golan, occurred owing to three major factors: the continuing Syrian highly belligerent position, the sympathetic American attitude towards Israel, and the Israeli domestic pressure to keep the Golan.<sup>72</sup>

Consequently, in the aftermath of the June 1967 war, the historic dispute between Damascus and Jerusalem reached its highest point since 1948. The war was a watershed in Syrian-Israeli relations, locking the two countries into permanent hostility. In addition to its ideological antagonism, for its commitment to the Palestinian plight, and its search

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<sup>69</sup> See Appendix D.

<sup>70</sup> Rabil, *op. cit.*, p. 20

<sup>71</sup> Gera, *op. cit.*, pp. 234-235

<sup>72</sup> Ma'oz (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 103-104

for domestic legitimacy, the Syrian regime now had other crucial motives for its conflict with Israel: the painful defeat of the army, the loss of the Golan Heights, and the deployment of Israeli troops 40 miles from the Syrian capital. Syria was now facing a powerful army and state backed by the US and determined to sign a peace treaty – the anathema of Damascus.<sup>73</sup>

In Israel, the decisive victory fostered overconfidence. Also the war brought Israelis in touch with some cradles of Judaism; after years of consistent secularism, Israeli youth seek faith and the soul of its culture. So the war became an ideological watershed in Israeli thinking and politics.<sup>74</sup>

Gideon Gera asserted that Israel realized that despite of its victory, the confrontational situation vis-à-vis the Arabs had not basically changed; Israel could not impose a settlement on unwilling neighbors. Israel faced major problems: control of a territory three times its prewar size; responsibility for more than 1 million Arabs living in the captured areas; and the prospect of the confrontation with the Arab states. Although defeat demonstrated to the Arabs the limits of their military and political capabilities, they could not accept it as decisive.<sup>75</sup>

In Syria, the war resulted in born of frustration and despair. Although their provocative policies helped bring on the defeat, the Ba'thi radicals were determined to maintain their militant course, continue their sponsorship of the Palestinian guerillas, and make Syria a firm obstacle to any political settlement. But the loss of Syrian territory in the war led radicals vulnerable to challenge by the realist faction in the regime led by Hafiz al-Asad, who argued that Syria could not sustain an ineffective guerilla war for the liberation of Palestine.<sup>76</sup> From another point of view, 1967 war enabled the Ba'thi regime in Damascus to reinforce its domestic political position by removing attention away from Syria's domestic political tensions, by allowing state

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Amnon Rubinstein, The Zionist Dream Revisited: From Herzl to Gush Eminent and Back (Shoken Books, 1984), pp. 76-78

<sup>75</sup> Gera, op. cit., p. 234

<sup>76</sup> Drysdale and Hinnebusch, op. cit., pp. 102-102

officials to impose greater control because of mobilized economy for the war effort, and providing the government with legitimate grounds for demanding greater levels of economic and military assistance from the Communist Bloc.<sup>77</sup>

According to Bassam Tibi, the war had mainly three repercussions; first, the war changed the Middle East irrevocably, even shifting its boundaries. Israel expanded, triggering another wave of refugees like that of 1948. So the demography of the region took on new dimensions. Second, Egypt, the leader of the pan-Arabism, was in a state of collapse. Its political system lost its legitimacy after the Six-Day War. Third, the war heralded a decline in Soviet influence in the region that went hand in hand with an expansion of the American presence.<sup>78</sup>

#### **2. 4. The 1973 War – October War: A Surprise for Israel**

Shortly after the 1967 defeat, two schools of thought within the Ba'athi Syrian state crystallized and provoked an intra-Ba'athi power struggle and paved the way for Asad's coming to power. The radicals wanted to commit Syria to the people's liberation war against Israel and so allowing Palestinian guerillas to fight. Asad and his realist faction also rejected the legitimacy of Israel, but, for them, the 1967 defeat forced the realization that Syria could do little to reverse the establishment of the Zionist state. And they advocated a nationalist policy that gives priority to strengthening the Syrian defense establishment and had some reservations about the role of guerillas in the struggle. This marked the beginning of "realpolitik of limited goals" in Syria.<sup>79</sup> Moreover the rift was obvious regarding the Jordanian civil war. As Defense Minister, Asad had decided against sending the air force to protect the Syrian army units in the civil war. This decision was a highly calculated strategic move on the part of Asad, who knew that if Syria went far enough, Israel would intervene and defeat Syria. Upon his assumption of power, Asad reaffirmed Syria's rejection of UNSCR 242 and began preparing for battle

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<sup>77</sup> Lawson, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-51

<sup>78</sup> Tibi, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-104

<sup>79</sup> Drysdale and Hinnebusch, *op. cit.*, p. 103, Rabil, *op. cit.*, p. 21

with Israel. He improved Syria's relations with the Soviet Union and looked at Egypt as the only credible ally.<sup>80</sup>

After the September 1970 disaster (Black September), when the bases of the Palestinian guerilla organizations were liquidated in Jordan, they considered Syria as strategic base and established their networks there. During 1971-1973, numerous fedayeen operations were undertaken against Israeli targets. Many of them were coordinated by Damascus. As a response, many Israeli attacks were launched against fedayeen bases involving the shooting down of Syrian combat planes.<sup>81</sup> It would appear that Israel's policy of military escalation was essentially aimed at forcing Damascus to stop the Palestinian fedayeen actions – and this policy indeed proved effective by early 1973 when Asad ordered Palestinian commandos to halt their raids. But it was also possible that Israel, being aware of the Soviet-aided military build-up in Syria, escalated military operations against Syria in order to teach Damascus a lesson, and deterred it from waging a new war against Israel.

At the same time, Israeli military leaders trusting in Israel's strategic and military superiority – thanks to newly arrived American weapons – calculated during 1972 and 1973 that neither Syria nor Egypt would be capable of fighting Israel. However, Moshe Dayan, the Minister of Defense, assessed that Egypt and Syria would never resign themselves to Israel's occupation of Sinai and the Golan, and sooner or later they would renew the war against Israel. And their strategy for preventing such a war was to reach an agreement with Egypt, in order to diminish its motivation to fight (not in order to reach peace), and also to isolate Syria, evaluating that Syria would not go to war without Egypt.<sup>82</sup>

On the other hand, Egypt and Syria stepped up their war preparations from the autumn of 1972. Following Asad's talk in Moscow, Soviet military aid to both Egypt and Syria rose to unprecedented levels. When we look at the speeches of the leaders of the Arab world, it is obvious that the war was at the door. For example, in mid-

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22

<sup>81</sup> Ma'oz (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 123

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125

December 1972, Asad told an Indian journalist that, if a political settlement was not achieved within six months, a war with Israel would be imminent.<sup>83</sup>

While both Asad and Sadat had designed a grand plan of deception to lead Israel into believing that their military deployment was not aimed at an offensive; according to Patrick Seale, Sadat, at the same time, was deceiving Asad by leading him to believe that Egypt's offensive would be wider in scope than he ever intended.<sup>84</sup> Sadat had regarded the war option as a means to break the stalemate of "no peace, no war". He believed that a limited successful attack on Israel would be enough to disrupt the balance of power and pressure Israel into peace negotiations. So he had a political objective behind his surprise attack. In contrast, Asad had a purely military objective.<sup>85</sup> Asad envisaged the capture of the entire Golan (and Sinai) and subsequent pressure on Israel to give up the occupied Palestinian territories. It would seem that Asad's war aims were too ambitious and involved grave risks.<sup>86</sup>

While preparing for war against Israel, Asad had to take into account seriously the position of the Soviet Union, Syria's major strategic ally and arms supplier. Would the USSR send troops to the Golan in case of a Syrian defeat, or would it only impose, together with the United States, a cease-fire between Syria and Israel?<sup>87</sup>

Bearing all these uncertainties in mind, it would appear that Asad's firm determination to wage war against Israel was courageous. He psychologically and ideologically assumed the leading role in conducting the campaign against Israel. Consequently, despite his eventual military defeat, he achieved high prestige in the Arab world as a new leader of the Arab struggle against Israel.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., pp. 128-138, Patrick Seale, Asad of Syria : the Struggle for the Middle East (London: I.B. Taurus, 1988), pp. 197-199

<sup>85</sup> Rabil, op. cit., p. 24

<sup>86</sup> Ma'oz (1995), op. cit., p. 128

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 129

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., pp. 129-130



On October 6, Egypt and Syria launched their surprise attack. It can be briefly said that for the first time since 1948 the Egyptian and Syrian armies had succeeded in surprising and defeating the Israeli forces. Egypt crossed the Suez Canal, and Syria stormed the Golan Heights, stopping a few miles away from the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. During the first days, Israel seemed on the verge of defeat.<sup>89</sup> However, the Israeli forces pushed the Syrian troops back from the Golan by October 10 and subsequently advanced further inside Syrian territory, some 25 miles south of Damascus. The defeat of the Syrian army, which fought skillfully, was due not only to the effective Israeli domination of the Golan skies but also Egypt's defensive posture in Sinai enabled Israel to concentrate its efforts against Syria in the Golan. Angered by Egyptian duplicity, Asad had no choice but to insist that Sadat come to his aid. As the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) went forward inside Syrian territory, Sadat, on October 13, launched an attack into the Sinai Peninsula in order to relieve pressure on the Syrian forces and to prevent the IDF from launching a counteroffensive on the Egyptian front. Sadat's effort was too late. The IDF crossed the Suez Canal on October 15 and October 22 was less than 70 miles west of Cairo.<sup>90</sup>

At the time, the SU and the US were engaged in tense diplomacy. The Soviets were pushing for cease-fire proposals, which the US held up until Israel got back its losses. Only when Israel gained the upper hand on both the Egyptian and Syrian fronts did a ceasefire UNSCR 338 of October 22, 1973 went into effect.<sup>91</sup>

Sadat, who had sought a cease-fire with Israel already on October 16 without consulting Asad, accepted the resolution, as did Israel. Asad rejected the resolution, thus giving Israel a pretext to continue on fighting on the Syrian front, and recapturing the strategic Mount Hermon position on October 22. Only on October 23 Syria reluctantly accepted it, spelling out its own understanding that the resolution called for total Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and the safeguarding of Palestinian rights. Unlike the fairly pragmatic Egyptian and Israeli attitudes, the positions of Damascus and

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<sup>89</sup> Rabil, *op. cit.*, p. 23

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, See Appendix E.

Jerusalem in the post-war years were rigid and emotionally charged. Asad initially demanded a full Israeli withdrawal as part of his disengagement agreement with Israel. However, the Israeli government rejected Asad's demands; it was only ready to withdraw roughly to the pre-1973 war line.<sup>92</sup>

When we examined the consequences of the war, despite its military victory, Israel emerged from the war deeply shaken. According to Maoz, first, its defense strategy collapsed; the deterrence doctrine failed as Syria went to war against Israel despite its clear military weakness; the territorial depth enjoyed by Israel on account of the Golan did not prevent the outbreak of the war, and Israeli settlements in the Golan became a liability rather than an asset to defense, since valuable time and energy had to be spent on evacuating them. Secondly, despite its final military gains, Israel became diplomatically isolated in the international community and more dependent on the US for military and economic assistance.<sup>93</sup>

Asad's small territorial gain of Quneitra reflected his political and psychological achievements in the 1973 war. He managed to turn this military reverse into a great victory. He was considered as the new pan-Arab leader, the worthy successor to Nasser, while several Arab states offered Syria military, diplomatic, and financial support, and various Western leaders acknowledged his influential position in the Middle East.<sup>94</sup>

Rabil argued that Syria was defeated on the battlefield, but gained a certain victory through diplomacy. The 1973 fighting ended with Israelis capturing Syrian territories beyond the 1967 cease-fire line, backed by the strategic area of Mount Hermon. Syria had no other option than to accept US mediation in order to recover its newly occupied territory. Because she could not settle only for the restoration of the October 6 line. It needed a symbolic gain of land captured by Israel in 1967 to safeguard

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 25

<sup>93</sup> Ma'oz (1995), op. cit., p. 133

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

the legitimacy of the regime, to rationalize domestically the negotiations with Israel and to justify the October War itself.<sup>95</sup>

## **2. 5. Syria Explores the Peace Process**

At the aftermath of the 1973 war, the US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, embarked on a step-by-step strategy aiming at reaching interim political settlements.<sup>96</sup> He envisaged as a first step paving the way for an agreement between Egypt and Israel, under American auspices, while cutting out the SU and deferring the Syrian-Israeli issue to a later stage. Thus, following the Geneva peace conference on December 21, 1973, in Syria's absence, on January 18, 1974 Egypt and Israel signed their first disengagement of forces agreement (Sinai I). Unlike the pragmatic Egyptian and Israeli attitudes, the positions of Syria and Israel were very apart and rigid. Asad initially demanded a full Israeli withdrawal from all Syrian territories occupied in the 1967 and 1973 wars as part of his disengagement agreement with Israel. The Israeli government, charged with feeling of anger and revenge against Syria on account of its initial military gains, rejected Asad's demands. It was only ready to withdraw roughly to the pre-1973 war line.<sup>97</sup>

However, it was certain that as Drysdale and Hinnebusch pointed out that while the October War demonstrated that the Arabs could fight; but also showed that even a two-front, well-prepared, surprise assault could not drive Israel out of the occupied territories. The result clearly fell short of Asad's expectations. As a result, he was more inclined to rely on diplomacy to achieve his ends. From another perspective, the recovery of lost Arab dignity and the recognition of Arab interests by the West generated both Arab cohesion and a new readiness for peace. Syria believed that, under these conditions, a satisfactory comprehensive settlement could be achieved if the Arabs acted together, maintained the threat of renewed war and oil embargo, refrained from making separate deals, and refused to settle for less than a return to the 1967 lines.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 26

<sup>96</sup> See William B. Quandt, "Kissinger and the Arab-Israeli Disengagement Negotiations", Journal of International Affairs, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1975

<sup>97</sup> Ma'oz (1995), op. cit., p. 132

Hence, Syria embarked on an attempt, which would last until Camp David, to reach a political settlement with Israel. It formally accepted UNSCR 338 regarding the ceasefire, embracing UNSCR 242.<sup>98</sup> As Drysdale and Hinnebusch indicated, by accepting the resolutions, Syria, for the first time, explicitly accepted Israel's right to exist within secure borders.<sup>99</sup>

Henry Kissinger summarized Asad's post-1973 attitudes that Asad would have liked to destroy the Jewish state but he recognized that the cost of attempting it would damage Syria's domestic structure, perhaps even its existence. He was as prudent as he was passionate, as realistic as he was ideological. He concluded that Syria was not sufficiently strong to unite the Arab nation, and needed to regain its own territory before it could pursue larger ambitions.<sup>100</sup>

It was true that there was no a joint Arab strategy for the peace agreements. While Asad wanted to proceed patiently, preserving Arab leverage, Sadat, impatient, refused to be bound by a common strategy. Sadat was ready to accept separate, partial deals, beginning with the first military disengagement on the Egyptian front. As Sadat proceeded unilaterally, Asad accepted the necessity of negotiating with Israel and began to rely on Kissinger to broker a satisfactory disengagement on the Syrian front.<sup>101</sup> In early March 1974, before the disengagement agreement with Israel, he told that he was not pessimistic regarding peace prospects in the Middle East.<sup>102</sup>

The Israeli-Syrian negotiations for a disengagement of forces agreement, conducted indirectly by Kissinger's Jerusalem-Damascus 'shuttle', were slow and difficult and accompanied by frequent military clashes. Syria not only used the Israeli prisoners to pressure Israel, but during March-May 1974, Asad also initiated a war of attrition along the new cease-fire line, to back his diplomatic campaign against Israel.

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<sup>98</sup> Drysdale, Hinnebusch, op. cit., pp. 107-108

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ma'oz (1995), op. cit., p. 144

<sup>101</sup> Drysdale, Hinnebusch, op. cit., p. 109

<sup>102</sup> Ma'oz (1995), op. cit., p. 145

During the negotiations, Asad aimed to force the Israelis back as far as possible on the Golan Heights without permitting the disengagement agreement to become a substitute for an overall settlement. His minimum requirement was to acquire territory beyond the 1967 lines. Eventually, after five months of extremely difficult negotiation process, on May 31, 1974, Syria and Israel reached a disengagement whereby Damascus settled for only a fraction its original demands, namely an Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian salient occupied during the war as well as from the town of Quneitra, which had been captured by Israel in the 1967 war in return for the placement of a UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) between the Syrian and Israeli lines. In Kissinger's evaluation, this outcome represented a Syrian gain over what a strict calculation of the existing balance of forces would have warranted.<sup>103</sup>

While the withdrawal of Israeli forces was a security gain; there emerged a hope that this Israeli withdrawal would set a precedent for future withdrawal. However, this reduced the military pressure on Israel. The UNDOF presence would make any future war to retake the Golan Heights even more difficult. Asad also implicitly accepted an end to guerilla operations on the Golan. Syria feared that declining wartime crisis could reduce pressure for an overall settlement. The agreement also risked legitimizing step-by-step diplomacy of Kissinger, an approach that weakened the hand of Arabs to whom the Israelis were least likely to make concessions. As a result, the agreement was a watershed for Syria, deterring it from its earlier strategy of rejectionism.<sup>104</sup> One day after the signing of the agreement, Asad said that that agreement was an integral part of a comprehensive and just settlement and a step towards just and durable peace based on UNSCR 338.<sup>105</sup>

For roughly four years, from the Golan disengagement to Egypt's acceptance of the Camp David Accords in 1978, Syria was an active party in the US-brokered peace process. Asad offered a step-by-step peace like Kissinger's step-by-step diplomacy. According to Asad, first they had to end the state of belligerency. That meant the

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133

<sup>104</sup> Drysdale, Hinnebusch, *op. cit.*, p. 110

<sup>105</sup> Ma'oz (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 145

implementation of UNSCR 242. And the end of belligerency would mean the beginning of a stage of real peace. If the Israelis return to the 1967 frontier and the West Bank and Gaza strip become a Palestinian state, the last obstacle to final settlement would have been removed; the actual duration of a peace treaty would be a matter of procedure.

Drysdale and Hinnebusch identified Asad's offer to sign merely a non-belligerency agreement with Israel in return for its withdrawal from all occupied territories and the recognition of Palestinian rights.<sup>106</sup> They predicted that Syrians were not psychologically and ideologically prepared to establish normal relations with Israel at that time. Asad indicated this point by saying "The Syrian difficulty is that people who have been nurtured over twenty-six years on hatred towards Israel can't be swayed overnight by changing our course."<sup>107</sup>

Asad's offer fell far short of the full peace and direct negotiations demanded by Israel. Fortunately, by 1975 Asad was prepared to go further in making his readiness for peace explicit. And he accepted that when everything was settled it would have to be formalized with a formal peace treaty. Asad sought an international conference in which a united Arab delegation would settle for nothing less than total Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, thus preventing further unilateral deals on the Egyptian side. Within this context, the Soviet Union would balance US influence and Palestinian grievances would be addressed.<sup>108</sup>

When we look at the position of Israelis, they were willing to negotiate a territorial compromise but not a full withdrawal from the occupied territories. Immediately after the war, Israel indicated that a return of the Golan Heights depended on their demilitarization and an absolute guarantee of access to the waters of the Jordan River. But the Golan was soon included among the areas that, for security reasons, Israel had to keep. In addition, Israel's leaders were convinced that Syria would never be ready

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<sup>106</sup> Moshe Ma'oz, 'Syria, Israel and the Peace Process' in Barry Rubin, Joseph Ginat, Moshe Ma'oz (ed.), *From War to Peace: Arab-Israeli Relations 1973-1993*, (New York: New York Uni. Press, 1994), pp. 159-160, Drysdale, Hinnebusch, *op. cit.*, 145

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 112-114

for peace so long as Asad and the Ba'th Party were in power. And while many Israelis began to acknowledge Egypt's readiness for a settlement, Syria was perceived as remaining committed to the dreams of Arab nationalism and the Palestinian cause. It was still seen as the most hostile of Israel's neighbors. Israel justified the retention of the Golan Heights on the grounds that the Syrian border was close to the Israeli heartland and the enemy so implacable. While Israeli leaders told the US government that Israel would not give up the Golan Heights, but also they assured that territorial compromise was possible.<sup>109</sup>

Ma'oz pointed out that Asad knew well that Israel was by no means willing to withdraw to the pre-1967 lines even in return for full peace with Syria, and not certainly for a non-belligerency agreement. Asad's peace offers were thus directed not towards Israel, but towards Egypt and the United States in an attempt both to prevent a further separate Egyptian-Israeli agreement and to formulate a joint Egyptian-Syrian post war diplomacy towards Israel with American backing. So Asad was well aware that only Washington, with its effective leverage over Israel, was capable of helping him to regain the occupied territories.<sup>110</sup>

Richard Nixon, the US president, during his visit to Damascus in mid-June 1974, informed Asad that the US favored the substantial restitution of the 1967 lines on the Golan Heights within the framework of a general peace. Unfortunately, the American strategy in the Middle East was designed and carried out by Henry Kissinger who was aimed at first securing an Israeli-Egyptian settlement while deferring the Israeli-Syrian issue. Like Kissinger, President Gerald Ford coming to power on August 1974, adopted a pro-Israeli policy on the Golan issue, backed Kissinger's step-by-step strategy, and accepted Israeli's request that only cosmetic changes had to be made in the Golan line, within another interim agreement with Syria.<sup>111</sup>

Given Gerald Ford's approach to the agreements and the wide gap between the Syrian and Israeli positions, Israel tried to avoid negotiating with Syria and the PLO and

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 114

<sup>110</sup> Ma'oz (1994), op.cit., p. 160, Ma'oz (1995), op.cit., pp. 146-147

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 148

pursued a separate peace settlement with Egypt in the post-disengagement period.<sup>112</sup> Despite Asad's efforts to prevent signing a separate agreement – at the Rabat summit, Asad succeeded in gaining the support of the Arab states in rejecting separate solutions of Egypt towards Israel – Sadat signed another separate disengagement agreement with Israel (Sinai II) in September 1975. Asad criticized Sadat's action as a breach in Arab solidarity and a dangerous attempt at foiling Arab struggle since 1948. Because this agreement largely removed Egypt from the military equation, diminished pressure on Israel to deal with Syria. Ma'oz pointed out that while Asad initially criticized Sadat, he was careful not to burn the bridges totally with Sadat. In October 1976, Asad made a rapprochement with Sadat with Saudi mediation in order to design a new common Syrian-Egyptian strategy towards Israel, in anticipation of a fresh American administration by Jimmy Carter's presidency in Washington. However, Sadat did not lead Asad gain a veto power over his moves. Sadat chose to carry on his separate peace agreement with Israel because he felt that by adopting a joint pan-Arab strategy, Egypt was likely to undermine its chances of getting back Sinai.<sup>113</sup>

In late 1976 and early 1977, Syria was willing to resume negotiations in Geneva. Asad stated that he was willing to sign a peace agreement provided Israel withdrew from all territories occupied in 1967 and agreed to the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. He also implied that the United States had to have the major role in mediating such a settlement. According to Ma'oz, it would appear that Asad's offers were again towards the newly elected president (July 1976), Jimmy Carter, who believed that real peace between Arabs and Israelis could be achieved and wanted to play a role. The Carter administration recommitted the US to a comprehensive settlement and briefly held out hope for an all-party international conference. Also Carter advocated the creation of a homeland for the Palestinians, rejecting around the same time Israel's request to purchase some bombs. Asad was pleased by Carter's repeated support for a

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<sup>112</sup> Drysdale, Hinnebusch, *op.cit.*, p. 114

<sup>113</sup> Ma'oz (1995), *op.cit.*, pp. 146-147



Palestinian home land as well as by his point that the US would endeavor to persuade Israel to withdraw to the pre-1967 borders.<sup>114</sup>

However, the negotiations over President Carter's projected peace conference revealed major procedural as well as substantive differences between the parties. Although the new Israeli prime minister, Menachem Begin, initially appeared to be flexible on the Golan issue by stating that Israel would be ready to participate, without preconditions, in the Geneva Peace Conference on the basis of UNSCRs 242 and 338; Begin strongly rejected the Syrian and American notions of a unified Arab delegation in Geneva, of a Palestinian homeland in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as of a total withdrawal from the Golan Heights.<sup>115</sup> In such circumstances, with the domestic political pressure, Carter agreed to Israel's conditions. While there was to be a committee to negotiate the issue of the West Bank, Syria and the PLO would not be represented. The US-Israeli agreement and Syria's reluctance to join negotiations on these terms seemed to stalemate the peace process.<sup>116</sup> At that time, as Sadat believed that a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement was not feasible and thus opted for the more limited objective of recovering Sinai from Israel, he continued to object to a united Arab delegation in Geneva and preferred to sign a separate agreement with Israel without any linkage to Syria and Palestinians. Following his historic trip to Jerusalem in November 1977, Sadat signed the Camp David accords with Begin and Carter in September 1978, which led to the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty of March 1979, and to the collapse of Asad's diplomatic-political strategy towards Israel.<sup>117</sup>

Under these circumstances, Asad abandoned his diplomatic efforts. For the next decade he concentrated his energies on building a military option vis-à-vis Israel with the massive help from the Soviet Union. Syrian essential aim was to build a strong and credible army. By such an army, Syria would use its armed strength at the appropriate

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 150

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 151

<sup>116</sup> Drysdale, Hinnebusch, op.cit., pp. 116-117

<sup>117</sup> Ma'oz (1995), op.cit., p. 152, Ma'oz (1994), op.cit., p. 161

time to launch a war against Israel and to negotiate a comprehensive political settlement with Israel from a position of military strength.<sup>118</sup>

Asad's need to strengthen his military power became more urgent during the early 1980s. The first reason behind this urgency was that in June 1982, Israel invaded southern Lebanon, attacked Syrian troops, and advanced along the Beirut-Damascus highway in the direction of Damascus. Second, Iraq, Syria's rival as well as potential military ally, had been engaged in a war against Iran since 1980, thus indirectly strengthening Israel's hand against Syria. Third, Egypt did not exercise any pressure on Israel to withdraw from Lebanon. Fourth, the Ronald Reagan administration opted to back the Israeli action, as it was aimed at affecting a pro-Western order in Lebanon.<sup>119</sup>

## **2. 6. Syria in Lebanon**

Alongside with the Golan Heights, the South Lebanon reminded Israel that Syria was central to Israel's security concerns. Frederic Hof asserted that Lebanon was a place where Israeli and Syrian leaders tested each other's intentions. So any security activities made to Israel by Lebanon would have to be confirmed by Damascus. And an unstable situation in southern Lebanon could put the entire Arab-Israeli peace process at risk. In the context of the Syrian-Israeli track, it was not possible to have one set of rules for the Golan and another for southern Lebanon.<sup>120</sup>

Lebanon was founded on imbalance of religious confessional power in the absence of a real national integration. This imbalance exacerbated under significant stress when the PLO substituted Lebanon as a base for its activities in 1970s. For the Muslim communities, who were upset with the old power-sharing arrangements and sought to enhance their position in the confessional system, the PLO emerged as an effective instrument for achieving their goal. As a reaction, the Maronites initiated a process of cooperation with Israel. Meanwhile, Syria was attempting to prevent Israel from establishing a foothold in Lebanon while seeking to build its power base.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., pp. 161-162

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Frederic C. Hof, 'Syria and Israel: Keeping the Peace in Lebanon', Middle East Policy, (Oct. 1996), pp. 110-115

Lebanon was a highly important component in the Syrian strategic-military confrontation with Israel: the Beqa valley being a natural invasion way for the Israeli army towards Damascus, whereas Southern Lebanon could serve as a place for Syrian military offensive or Syrian-sponsored guerilla operations against northern Israel.<sup>122</sup>

As a result of imbalance of confessional power, mainly Muslim-Leftists were organized in the Lebanese National Movement (LNM) under the leadership of the Druze Kemal Junblatt. Their aim was to overthrow Maronite groups, notably the Phalangists. Consequently, a single violent clash between Phalangist militias and pro-Syrian Palestinian commandos on April 13, 1975 in Beirut developed into armed clashes. The Lebanese civil war had begun.<sup>123</sup>

It is more important to examine reasons behind the involvement of Syria and Israel and confrontation between two states during the phases of the war than the various aspects of the civil war. During the first phase, from April 1975 until early 1976, Damascus refrained from the direct military intervention. Because Syria was involved in the peace process under American auspices and did not want to antagonize Washington.<sup>124</sup> However, by early 1976 the last marks of communal coexistence erased, President Asad decided to intervene to prevent the total collapse of the Lebanese system. He sent his units into Lebanon in January. At first they fought alongside the Muslims and the Palestinians, but after they began to separate the combatants as Asad pressed for a cease fire.<sup>125</sup>

At that juncture, in February 1976, Asad, fearing further deterioration of the civil war, initiated a plan to settle the conflict by issuing a constitutional document, which, while improving the position of the Sunni Muslims, essentially preserved the old status quo in the political system. However, this document did not prevent further deterioration of situation. The Muslims went on the offensive on the Maronites. Asad feared that a

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<sup>121</sup> Rabil, op. cit., p. 43

<sup>122</sup> Ma'oz (1995), op. cit., p. 161

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 163

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 164

<sup>125</sup> Rabil, op. cit., pp. 50-51

victory of the left and the PLO would bring in Israel's intervention on behalf of the Maronites. So following his direct military intervention in early 1976, on June 1, 1976, Asad dispatched regular forces in various parts of Lebanon on behalf of the Maronites, apparently with the aim of imposing Pax-Syriana in the country.<sup>126</sup> Rabil contended that the idea of Syrian intervention in Lebanon was born out of Asad's strategic security needs rather than his ideological convictions about Greater Syria.<sup>127</sup>

The US, also, could not ignore Lebanon. The Soviet Union had been supporting the winning side. Moreover, as both Syria and Israel perceived Lebanon as crucial to their security, they could clash and lead the region another war. Therefore the idea of Syrian intervention in Lebanon to adjust the military balance appealed to the US. The US mission was, on the one hand, to convince Israel to consent to the Syrian military intervention in Lebanon, and on the other hand, to persuade the Christians to invite the Syrians so that Syrian military intervention would appear legitimate. Israel made its consent conditional on certain demands. Syrians agreed to Israel's conditions and the US gave green light for the Syrian army to enter Lebanon. This unsigned, oral US-Israeli-Syrian understanding came to be known as the "**Red Line Agreement**". Key elements of the agreement said that 1) the Syrian army would not enter southern Lebanon 2) the Syrian army in Lebanon would not be equipped with surface to air missile batteries 3) the Syrian army would not use its air force against the Christians in Lebanon.<sup>128</sup>

As Syria did not withdraw its army following the (interim) end of the civil war, the Maronites leaders became anxious that Syria intended to continue its control over Lebanon. In such a case, Israel encouraged the Maronites in opposing the Syrian designs. Israel believed that Israel's task as a Jewish state was to help the Christians fight against their fanatic common Muslim enemy.<sup>129</sup> In mid-March 1978, in reaction to a Palestinian terrorist attack, the Israeli army carried out a large scale offensive (the Litani Operation) against the PLO. Syria thought that the attack was a prelude to an

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<sup>126</sup> Ma'oz (1995), op. cit., pp. 164-165

<sup>127</sup> Rabil, op. cit., p. 51

<sup>128</sup> Rabil, op. cit., p. 52

<sup>129</sup> Ma'oz (1995), op. cit., p. 168

Israeli invasion of Syria. This aggravation could not have come at a more unfortunate time in the history of Asad's regime. After the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, President Sadat of Egypt signed the Camp David accords with Israel in 1978. This had left Syria isolated and at the mercy of Israel's unchallenged power in the region. In addition, Syria was facing domestic opposition by the Muslim Brotherhood, which had provoked dissent against the Alawi regime.<sup>130</sup>

As the Israeli reprisal exceeded the provocation, the US called Israel to pull its troops out and proposed that the Israeli forces in southern Lebanon be replaced by a UN force. This proposal resulted in the adoption of the UNSCR 425 of March 19, 1978<sup>131</sup>, which called for respect of Lebanon's territorial integrity and sovereignty, and called upon Israel to cease all military actions and to withdraw its forces from all Lebanese territory. The resolution also established the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Approximately three months from the date of invasion, Israel withdrew from the south of Lebanon by establishing a buffer zone to protect its border from guerilla attacks.<sup>132</sup>

As a matter of fact, the 1976 Syrian-Israeli understanding had already been eroded. During the first half of 1979, Israel, responding to the serious Palestinian terrorist actions, carried out several military operations north of the Red Line.<sup>133</sup> At that time, Israel's military support of the Lebanese Forces and the rising leadership of Bashir Jumayil increased Maronite confidence and sharpened their reservations about Syria. While a few years earlier, the Maronites had accepted Syrian intervention because of their near defeat, now because of their newly gained confidence they did not accept Syria's military presence in Lebanon. Jumayil understood that his forces could not expel the Syrians and the PLO. He needed to create a situation whereby Israel could intervene in Lebanon.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Rabil, op. cit., , pp. 61-62

<sup>131</sup> See Appendix F.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., pp. 58-59

<sup>133</sup> Ma'oz (1995), op. cit., pp. 169-170

<sup>134</sup> Rabil, op. cit., p. 60

However, until 1981, the Likud government in Israel was relatively careful to avoid major military clashes with the Syrian forces in Lebanon, for the following main reasons: Menahem Begin did not want to jeopardize the peace process with Egypt, nor did he wish to antagonize the Carter administration, which was strongly opposed to growing Israeli involvement in Lebanon as well as to renewed Israeli-Syrian confrontation in the region. All those constraints were removed by 1981, following the appointment of Ariel Sharon as the Defense Minister.<sup>135</sup>

Jumayil's continuous provocations, at the end, had led to skirmishes in Zahle on March, 1981. Syria surrounded Zahle and sent into its special command to attack the Lebanese Forces' positions. Also the Syrian forces cut off the supply road to Zahle and encouraged Jumayil to appeal to Israel for help. Israel faced a dilemma: intervening in a crisis initiated by Jumayil and risking a general war with Syria, or turning down Bashir's request and leading Syria maintain its strong position in the Beqa valley, knowing that Syria had breached the terms of the 1976 Red Line Agreement. At the end, Israel warned Syria by shooting down two Syrian transport helicopters, which meant that neither the use of the air force nor the advance toward Mount Lebanon would be tolerated.<sup>136</sup>

President Reagan sent his envoy, Philip Habib, to deal with a major outbreak between Israel and the Palestinians along the Lebanese border. He managed to conclude an understanding between Begin, Asad and Arafat in late July.<sup>137</sup> The US attempted to settle the overall Lebanese crisis through a comprehensive plan whereby Syria would withdraw its forces from Lebanon; the PLO would withdraw its heavy weapons from southern Lebanon; and Israel would terminate its military presence in the SLA (Southern Lebanese Army) strip.<sup>138</sup>

But none of these parties were inclined to accept the American proposal. The PLO continued its terrorist operations against Israel from other regions; Israel, on its part, considered such operations a breach of the agreement and in view of the expanding

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<sup>135</sup> Ma'oz (1995), op. cit., p. 170

<sup>136</sup> Rabil, op. cit., p. 63

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ma'oz (1995), op. cit., p. 172

PLO military infrastructure in Lebanon, Ariel Sharon, the new defense minister, started at once to prepare a large military operation against the PLO. Sharon also considered the Syrian occupation of Lebanon as not only harmful to the Christian community but dangerous to Israel's security. He thus planned to expel the Syrian army from Lebanon, destroy the PLO infrastructure there and establish an independent, pro-Israeli Lebanese government under Bashir Jumayil's leadership.<sup>139</sup>

On June 3, 1982, Palestinian extremists shot Israel's ambassador to Britain. The incident served as the needed provocation for Israel to launch its attack on Lebanon. On June 6, Israel launched "**Operation Peace for Galilee**". It was the beginning of the 1982 Lebanese war. The objective was to push back the PLO 40 km from the Israeli frontier in order to protect the settlements in the Galilee. However, in a few days, the IDF swept through Lebanon, going beyond its goal. Surprised by the scope of the Israeli invasion, the Reagan administration dispatched presidential envoy Habib to the region, and also voted for the UNSCRs 508 and 509 of June 6, 1982<sup>140</sup>, which called for an unconditional withdrawal.<sup>141</sup> Despite of the American-imposed cease-fire and growing domestic criticism in Israel, Israel continued further. The Israeli-Syrian fighting resulted by mid-August 1982 in an Israeli victory and Syrian and PLO defeat. According to an American-sponsored agreement, all Syrian troops and the PLO fighters would leave Beirut. And a multinational peace keeping force (MNF), composed of troops from Italy, France and the US, would monitor the evacuation and help the Lebanese government to reassert its authority.<sup>142</sup> And on August 23 Bashir Jumayil, the pro-Israeli Maronite leader, was elected as the new Lebanese president.

The partial evacuation of the Syrian troops from Lebanon and the election of Bashir Jumayil as president had a meaning of military and political defeat of Syria. Lebanon practically became Israel's satellite, while Israeli troops were stationed some

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 172-174, Rabil, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-66

<sup>140</sup> See Appendix G.

<sup>141</sup> Rabil, *op. cit.*, p. 66

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 69

25 miles west of Damascus.<sup>143</sup> However, Asad did not give up, and fought back on all fronts. By means of a guerilla war of attrition, he brought about the withdrawal of the Israeli army and the establishment of a Syrian protectorate over the country.<sup>144</sup>

On September 14, 1982 Bashir Jumayil was assassinated apparently by a Syrian agent. According to Rabil, the assassination shook not only the Lebanese Front, but also the Maronite-Israeli alliance. The next day, Sharon ordered the IDF into West Beirut and allowed the Lebanese Forces to enter the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatilla to sweep out the PLO guerillas. This act produced sharp criticism against the Israeli government, both at home and in the world, and brought about the withdrawal of the army from Beirut. Together with Bashir's assassination, this withdrawal contributed to the undermining of Israel's strategic position in Lebanon. Rabil argued that the next president, Amin Jumayil had doubts about the close cooperation with Israel and maintained good relations with Syrians as well as with the Muslim leadership of Beirut.<sup>145</sup> At the end, Jumayil took the middle way by calling on all foreign forces to leave Lebanon. Relying on the US mediation, Jumayil started the negotiations, which was culminated in the May 17 Agreement (1983), with Israel. The two countries terminated the state of war between them, agreed that their territories would not be used as a base for hostile activity against the other. Israel was to withdraw from the whole Lebanon.<sup>146</sup>

Asad rejected the agreement because of the Soviet support and encouraged the creation of the National Salvation Front, bringing together Lebanese factions that opposed the agreement. As opposition was rapidly building up against him, Jumayil's position became unsafe. He was caught in the contradictions involving his relations with the Lebanese Forces, the Reagan administration and Israel, the three backers of the May 17 Agreement.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Ma'oz (1995), op. cit., pp. 175-177

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Rabil, op. cit., pp. 70-71

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 72

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., pp. 72-73



From April to September 1983, the pro-Iranian Lebanese Shi'i militant organization Hezbollah committed, apparently under Syrian direction, a series of suicide assaults against Israeli, American and French targets. Consequently, in February 1984, while the Americans and French pulled their units out of Beirut, Amin Jumayil abrogated the May agreement with Israel, thus accepting Syrian orders. As a result of the guerilla campaign, the Israeli government decided in early 1985 to evacuate the army from Lebanon, without reaching any political or security agreements with Beirut. However, Israel unilaterally created a six-mile wide security belt along the border, under the control of the SLA.<sup>148</sup>

In 1988, the fortunes of the Christian camp suffered a serious blow when President Jumayil prepared himself to leave office. He appointed General Michel Aoun to head an executive cabinet until a president was elected. Immediately after his appointment, Aoun opposed Syrian presence in Lebanon. However, many pro-Syrian deputies disapproved of Aoun's appointment, regarding it constitutionally illegitimate, and lent their support to the government of Salim al-Hoss. In March 1989, General Aoun announced a liberation war against Syria. In view of the constitutional impasse, Lebanese deputies gathered in the city of Taif in Saudi Arabia and they managed to introduce significant amendments to the Lebanese constitution. The new version of the constitution became known as the Taif Accord. Over Aoun's objections, the deputies elected Elias Hrawi president.<sup>149</sup>

On October 13, the Syrian army, along with a unit of the Lebanese army, launched an all-out attack on Aoun's forces. Within hours, East Beirut, the last bastion of the Lebanese opposition to Syria, fell. Obviously, the US had yielded to Asad's demand for total hegemony over Lebanon as a price for bringing Syria into the anti-Iraq coalition in the Gulf crisis.<sup>150</sup>

The collapse of East Beirut and the emergence of a new Lebanon under Syrian hegemony expedited the implementation of the Taif Accord. The accord reduced the

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<sup>148</sup> Ma'oz (1995), *op. cit.*, p, 178

<sup>149</sup> Rabil, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-79

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

privileges of the Maronite president and enhanced the position of both the Sunni PM and the Shi'i speaker of the Parliament. It called for 1) building the armed forces to carry their national responsibilities in confronting Israeli aggression, 2) dismantling all militias, 3) implementing the UNSCR 425 and 4) taking the necessary measures to liberate all Lebanese territory from Israeli occupation. The accord also provided that the Syrian forces would assist the legitimate Lebanese Forces in establishing the state's authority within a period not exceeding two years. In line with accord, on May 22, 1991, the Syrian and Lebanese presidents signed a Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation, and Coordination. So Asad's aim of controlling Lebanon had been largely achieved militarily, politically and legally.<sup>151</sup>

In an overall conclusion, Shimon Peres claimed that although Israel won five wars militarily, it did not win them politically. The Arabs won them neither politically nor militarily. The wars were very costly and unproductive for both sides. Just as the wars were not perfect, the peace need not be perfect. Nevertheless, it was better to have imperfect peace than a perfect war in the Middle East.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., pp. 79-80, Ma'oz (1995), op. cit., pp. 179-180

<sup>152</sup> Shimon Peres, "Special Policy Forum Report: Peace on Three Fronts – Shimon Peres", The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Peace Watch #279, (September 22, 2000), pp. 1-2

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **FROM 1980s TOWARDS 1990s: CHALLENGES FOR SYRIA**

#### **3. 1. Economic Crisis and the Strategic Balance Policy**

In Syria, the 1980s, between two *infatih* (openness) periods would be remembered as a “lost decade for development”. According to Volker Perthes, Syria’s economic problems of the 1980s resulted from the development strategy and policies the Syrian leadership pursued after 1970. External factors, although exacerbating the crisis, played only a secondary role. By the end of 1980s, Syria was still dealing with the contradictory results of the boom that took place in the 1970s.<sup>1</sup>

Hafiz al-Asad coming to power in 1970 had introduced a new economic policy – *infatih* – that expanded the scope of the bourgeoisie in particular. Yet the state preserved a leading role; in essence, Syrian *infatih* meant a huge program of public economic investment. The objective was to reach the level of more advanced economies, namely that of Israel, in order to attain a strategic balance with enemy. This was one aspect of the strategic balance policy, whose other aspect would come later. In fact, the Syrian economy grew in 1970s but structural development was limited. Industrialization mainly concentrated on products for immediate consumption. The growth was not structurally inspired, but was due to Arab transfers. So in the early 1980s Syria faced a severe balance-of-payments and foreign exchange crisis. It had become clear that the state could no longer be the engine of capital accumulation. Even during the oil boom years of the 1970s, Syria did nothing to accumulate foreign exchange reserves toward more productive activity. So the drop in oil prices by the mid-1980s heavily damaged Syrian economy. Not only did this affect Syria’s own oil export revenues but it also reduced

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<sup>1</sup> Volker Perthes, “The Syrian Economy in the 1980s”, Middle East Journal, Vol. 46, No. 1, (Winter 1992), pp. 37-39

financial aid from the oil-rich Arab Gulf countries. Also, a decade-long drought devastated agricultural sector. In addition, the general Third World debt of the early 1980s reduced capital inflow, and the recession in the industrialized countries had negative effects on developing nations. As the economic policy was based on external aids, rather than its own structure, these changes heavily influenced Syria.<sup>2</sup> Therefore through the end of 1980s, the regime decided that the private sector had to be given more chance to fill the capital void, and the country as a whole had to create a more-investor-friendly business environment to attract foreign investment. This second infitah was brought on by economic crisis. A series of decrees in 1985, 1986 and 1991 were designed to open the country to foreign investment, gave the private sector more freedom and opportunity, and tightened up on corruption. Asad had embarked on a program of selective stabilization and liberalization because of the dilemma that if Asad liberalized too much it would undercut the public-sector patronage system.<sup>3</sup>

Despite of the devastating years of 1980s, Hafiz Asad imposed on the Syrian society and economy another burden of the policy of strategic balance with Israel after the Camp David Accord signed between Egypt and Israel in August 1978. This goal had three objectives: first, to enable Syria to resist an Israeli attack; second, to provide Syria with an offensive option to liberate the Golan Heights by force; third, in case of the negotiations for an agreement, to allow Syria to negotiate from a position of strength.<sup>4</sup> There is security dilemma here that the capacity to defend oneself is also a capacity to act offensively. So one state may see the other peaceful state's enhancing the effectiveness of its armed forces as a potentially hostile act.<sup>5</sup> It was inevitable for Syria to perceive the Israeli actions as hostile. It is argued that in the short term, this policy can

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<sup>2</sup> David W. Lesch, "Is Syria Ready for Peace? Obstacles to Integration in the Global Economy", Middle East Policy, Vol. VI., No. 3, (February 1999),

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Rabil, Embattled Neighbors Syria, Israel, and Lebanon (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), p. 175

<sup>5</sup> Chris Brown, Understanding International Relations, (Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press, 1997), pp. 99-100

meet the security requirements; in the long term, however, this policy will turn out to be a self-defeating one.<sup>6</sup> It is obvious that Syria made its calculations for a short term.

In order to achieve these goals, substantial resources were allocated for military purposes. During the late 1970s and the first half of the 1980s, military expenditures constituted approximately 20 percent of the total GDP. By the mid-1980s, military expenditures were running between 50 and 60 percent of total Syrian governmental budget. Indeed, within only a few years, from the late 1970s until the mid-1980s, it seemed that the Syrian army achieved a balance with the Israeli army in terms of quantity, if not quality.<sup>7</sup> In spite of the decrease in governmental revenues and the beginning of economic recession in 1983-1984, the Syrian authorities initially did not withdraw from the strategic balance policy. Finally, by the late 1980s, they were obliged to recognize that they could not continue with the strategic balance policy.<sup>8</sup> Israel's superiority was obvious.

Nevertheless, economic problems did not result in a foreign policy change. For instance, despite the economy was under pressure in the 1980s, Asad refused to change his policies in Lebanon and his alliance with Iran to please his aids from the Gulf States. According to Ehteshami and Hinnebusch, although Asad had exploited foreign policy to win economic relief – this was a factor in joining the anti-Iraq coalition – Asad had no record of taking foreign policy decisions for economic reasons which would not otherwise have been taken on strategic grounds. They asserted that while the Asad regime had long been under internal pressures from economic stagnation, this did not translate into a change in foreign policy.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Shai Feldman and Abdullah Toukan, "Bridging the Gap: resolving the Security Dilemma in the Middle East", in Shai Feldman and Abdullah Toukan, Bridging the gap : a future security architecture for the Middle East, (Lanham, Md: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997), p. 73

<sup>7</sup> Onn Winckler, "The Syrian Road to the Middle East Peace Process: The Socioeconomic Perspective" in Moshe Ma'oz, Joseph Ginat, and Onn Winckler (ed.), Modern Syria From Otoman Rule to Pivotal Role in the Middle East, (Brighton, Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 1999), pp. 109-110

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 115

<sup>9</sup> Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Raymond A. Hinnebusch, Syria and Iran, Middle Powers in a Penetrated Regional System, (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 77-78

Fred H. Lawson also asked the question whether domestic pressures are fillip or hindrance to the peace process. There were some claims that trends within Syria's domestic arena were pushing the regime to adopt a more accommodative posture towards Israel. Such an argument was supported by two reasoning: first, Damascus was unable to find an internally-generated solution to the country's economic crisis. The regime was seen as having had to rely on assistance from outside in order to implement the economic programs that generate the popular support it needed to survive. As an example, following the collapse of the Soviet bloc, Damascus had found itself more than ever before compelling to develop ties with Riyadh and Washington. The best way to get aid from the US was to fall in with the Bush administration's effort to restart negotiations. Second, the Asad regime's ongoing moves to deregulate the Syrian economy were seen as a fillip to negotiations aimed at ending the Arab-Israeli conflict. The regime had strong incentives to conclude an agreement regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict that would enable the domestic economic reforms to bear fruit.<sup>10</sup> David Lesch supported this argument by saying that Asad had used the Arab-Israeli conflict at times to maintain power, but also getting back the Golan would provide him with a legitimacy momentum, allowing him to break the social and political contracts he had established with select groups, inhibiting his flexibility with regard to economic reform.<sup>11</sup> Also Hinnebusch asserted that as long as the confrontation with Israel continued, Asad would be reluctant to change his leadership team or to confront any of the groups that comprised the social and political base of the regime, such as the trade unions, the public sector, or the bureaucracy. So the dominant assumption was that serious domestic reforms would have to wait for a peace process with Israel to be concluded.<sup>12</sup>

Lawson claimed that it would be a great mistake to conclude either that Damascus could be pressured into accepting a disadvantageous settlement or that Syria

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<sup>10</sup> Fred H. Lawson, "Domestic Pressures and the Peace Process: Fillip or Hindrance?" in Eberhard Kienle (ed.), Contemporary Syria Liberalization between Cold War and Cold Peace, (London: British Academic Press, 1994), pp. 139-140

<sup>11</sup> Lesch, op.cit., pp.

<sup>12</sup> Volker Perthes, "The political Economy of the Syrian Succession", Survival, Vol. 43, No. 1, (Spring 2001), pp. 143-145

was likely to abandon its longstanding posture of declared support for the national aspirations of the Palestinians. In fact, domestic factors represented not so much a fillip to, as they did a brake against the Asad regime's acquiescence in any US-brokered peace agreement that could jeopardize Syrian interests.<sup>13</sup>

From another perspective, some argued that rather than the end of the conflict and reaching peace, the continuation of the conflict was necessary for Syria. One of them, Daniel Pipes, pro-Israeli critics, asserted that Syria could not even make peace, as Syria's authoritarian minority regime needed an external enemy to justify repressive rule and diverted attention from its Alawi character. So the regime used real external threats to justify its rule, and the peace process represented a very serious challenge to the Syrian regime.<sup>14</sup> According to Hinnebusch, the argument that Asad's regime needed the conflict with Israel and could not survive peace was very much exaggerated. Hinnebusch argued that Asad, far from shaping Syria's policy according to the survival needs of domestic politics, achieved substantial autonomy in foreign policy making. As foreign policy goals were altering, he was making the internal alterations needed to preserve regime autonomy and stability in an era of peace.<sup>15</sup>

In short, it can be concluded that domestic pressures were not directly detrimental in shaping of Syrian foreign policy, especially in the decision of beginning the peace negotiations with Israel. However, reaching the peace and the end of the conflict would open the way for political and economic reforms in Syria. So the domestic pressures were influential in the foreign policy in an indirect way.

Despite of these incremental changes in internal arena, sudden and radical changes were taking place in the regional and international balance of power and foreign policy of Syria responded immediately to these external threats and opportunities, more

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 140, "Commentary Analyzes Peace Options with Syria", Al Hamishmar in Hebrew, 25 Mar 1994, in FBIS-NES-94-062, 31 March 1994, p. 38

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Pipes, Greater Syria: The History of an Ambition, (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992)

<sup>15</sup> Raymond A. Hinnebusch, "Syria: The Politics of Peace and Regime Survival", Middle East Policy, Vol. 3, No. 4, 1994-1995

than to the internal changes. The most important was the rapidly declining Syrian ability to exploit the bipolar world.<sup>16</sup>

### **3. 2. Soviet Retreat and Its Ramifications for Syria**

Although the Syrian-Israeli conflict was confined for the most part to the region, Hafiz Asad had never lost sight of the global context within which the dispute was embedded. He knew that Syria could not fight Israel or equally important, make peace with it, without superpower involvement. For most of his rule, Asad exploited Cold War tensions to Syria's advantage, relying on Soviet military, economic, and diplomatic assistance to build his country into a major regional power. So Syria could pursue its goal of "strategic parity" with Israel. Without that backing, Syria could not have supported so large a military machine and could not have sustained its ambitious regional policies.<sup>17</sup>

However, since Mikhail Gorbachev's coming to power in 1985, Soviet policy toward the Middle East had undergone a major shift, because its global power was declining and its severe internal problems were overwhelmingly occupying the agenda.<sup>18</sup> John Hannah asserted that while domestically he sought to transform the totalitarian underpinnings of Soviet society, in foreign policy affairs, Gorbachev – under the rubric of "new thinking" – called for radical changes in the way the USSR did business internationally.<sup>19</sup>

Traditionally, the Soviet Union had supported a radical bloc of Arab parties that opposed peace with Israel and sought to undermine the Western influence in the Middle East. The importance of Gorbachev's "new thinking" was that it directly challenged many of the traditional dogmas that guided Soviet policy during the Brezhnev era. The "new thinking" suggested that the Soviet interests would be best served not by attempts

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<sup>16</sup> Ehteshami and Hinnebusch (1997), op.cit. p. 79

<sup>17</sup> Alasdair Drysdale and Raymond Hinnebusch, Syria and Middle East Peace Process (New York: Council of Foreign Relations Press, 1991), p. 149

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> John Hannah, At Arms Length: Soviet-Syrian Relations in the Gorbachev Era, (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1989), s . 1



to exploit regional tensions for unilateral gain, but by efforts to work with the United States to stabilize conflicts. How such a new attitude was formulated was answered by Hannah in terms of three factors: first, primarily economic, but including political, social, ideological and cultural crisis let Gorbachev to conclude for the need of *perestroika* (restructuring). And this demanded a reorientation of national resources, attention away from the costly foreign adventures of the Brezhnev era.<sup>20</sup> Second, the Soviets began to believe that the Western cooperation can help *perestroika*. And they became aware that the superpower relationship could not be stabilized if the Soviet Union continued to pursue a highly ideological, confrontational policy. Third, they recognized that the past policies, for the most part, did not successful. For example, in the Middle East, the efforts to exploit Arab-Israeli tensions, the arming of Israel's most opponents and the backing all the region's most radical actors did not produce major increases in Soviet power. It was very strange that despite increasing levels of the Soviet aid, these allies tended to act beyond Moscow's control. For example, Syria frequently acted against explicit Soviet wishes, invading Lebanon, attacking the PLO, supporting Iran against Soviet-supplied Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war.<sup>21</sup>

All these factors had provided Moscow with strong motivation to modify its traditional behavior in the Middle East. They claimed that the pursuit of regional stability, rather than conflict, was not only necessary to guarantee the success of domestic reform, but it would also result in a more fruitful foreign policy, increasing Soviet political influence among all the Middle Eastern states. Shortly, it meant more support for the forces of regional moderation and stability and less support for the forces of extremism. In practice, this meant normalizing relations with Israel and moderate Arab states and reduction in political and military support for the radical Arab states, particularly Syria, the single most intractable party to the conflict and the one most capable of impeding progress toward peace.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-10

Since coming to power, but especially since 1987, Gorbachev had initiated some obvious shifts in Soviet relations with Syria at political/diplomatic and the military/strategic levels. At a minimum, Gorbachev displayed a far more “confident style” than his predecessors in dealing with Syria. He seemed to be trying to establish the principle that Soviet actions would be dictated more by the Russian interests than Syrians.<sup>23</sup> It was asserted that Asad, long familiar with the leaders in Moscow and the structure of the Soviet ruling apparatus, was one of the first leaders to read the political situation in Moscow correctly. He understood that the process of reform was likely to lead to weakening and possible collapse of the Soviet Union. This understanding led to the Syrian assessment that Soviet ability to help Syria would only decrease.<sup>24</sup> Asad said

I sensed from the beginning where things were heading. This was not prophecy – no one could have predicted the course of events in any detail – but the Soviet Union’s decline was apparent to me. I could see that large scale changes were in the offing which we needed to take into consideration, and which would have an impact on the whole world, and not just on us. In fact, the negative impact, both economic and political, has been felt around the globe. It has even harmed the enemies of the Soviet Union. The socialist camp was a great productive and consuming power. Its sudden withdrawal from the world economic system was a major contributing factor to the economic crisis which much of the world has suffered.<sup>25</sup>

The shift in terms of political/diplomatic issues was firstly mentioned in April 1987 during Asad’s visit to Moscow. Gorbachev implicitly rejected Asad’s continuing goal of achieving strategic parity with Israel, asserting that the notion of a military solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict became completely discredited, while assuring to honor Soviet commitments to Syria’s legitimate defense needs.<sup>26</sup> In other words, the Soviets said that Syria had to be content with reasonable defensive sufficiency, arguing that if they supplied Syria with advanced weapons, the US would simply go one better

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47

<sup>24</sup> Eyal Zisser, *Asad’s Legacy Syria in Transition*, (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2001), p. 43, Fred Halliday, “The Middle East, the Great Powers, and the Cold War” in Yezid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim (ed.), *The Cold War and the Middle East*, (New York: Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 73

<sup>25</sup> Special Document, “Interview with Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. XXII, No. 4 (Summer 1993), p. 120

<sup>26</sup> Hannah, *op.cit.*, pp. 11-19

with Israel.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, Gorbachev declared that the absence of diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Israel and some moderate Arab states was abnormal. Further the Soviet Union called for a political settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, satisfying Palestinian aspirations while ensuring Israeli security, thereby achieving a “balance of interests” between the two sides. The Soviet Union obviously was retreating to a position of neutrality in the Arab-Israeli conflict. This call was very opposite to Asad’s view that the Arab-Israeli conflict was not open to diplomatic negotiation and compromise.<sup>28</sup> The strains in the Soviet-Syrian relations were exacerbated in the middle of 1989 by Syria’s involvement in the latest round of the Lebanese civil war. While Moscow was inclined to support international and Arab efforts to end the bloodshed and stabilize the situation, Syria was determined to continue fighting until its unchallenged hegemony over Lebanon was established.<sup>29</sup>

When we look at the shifts at the military/strategic level, the value of the Soviet arms’ transfers to Syria dramatically dropped since Gorbachev’s rise to power in 1985. Hannah asserted that the reduction was dramatic but only in the context of Moscow’s military excesses of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The amount of arms, mainly of defensive purposes, was still a significant amount of material to be shipping each year to Syria.<sup>30</sup> There were many reasons behind this reduction. First, the concentration of weapons in the Middle East was a danger to regional stability. Second, due to economic crisis, the Soviets were no longer willing to extend huge amounts of credit to Syria. Third, a primary factor motivating the re-evaluation was the fact that the Syrian government’s ability to pay was limited.<sup>31</sup> The supply of Soviet arms would henceforth be conditional on the Syria’s ability to pay for it. And Syria would have to be satisfied

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<sup>27</sup> Halliday, op.cit., p. 74

<sup>28</sup> Hannah, op.cit., pp. 11-19

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 26

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 36-37, Daniel Pipes, Damascus Courts the West: Syrian Politics, 1989-1991, (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1991), p. 16

<sup>31</sup> Hannah, op.cit., pp. 32-33

with acquiring weapons for the purpose of self-defense; in other words, it would have to abandon its aspiration to overpower Israel.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to Gorbachev's policy shift, Syria faced the collapse of the Eastern Bloc in 1989 and then the collapse of the Soviet Union, which meant the end of the Cold War. These events let Asad to fear for the future and he warned against the return of the western imperialism. He defined the collapse of the Soviet Union as the most significant event for Syria since the Syrian independence.

According to Zisser, Asad had good reasons to fear the ramifications of the Soviet collapse for the future of his regime and for Syria.<sup>33</sup> First, as the Soviet Union had been a key source of political, military and economic aid and support and backing for the Syrians, the collapse of it left Syria vulnerable to the threats. Second, the Soviet collapse strengthened the US position in the region and Asad did not reduce the possibility of a direct American assault. Third, the demise of the Soviet Union was effective on the wave of Jewish immigration from Russia to Israel. Asad perceived this as a factor likely to strengthen Israel even further and encourage it to proceed with new acts of aggression against the Arabs. Fourth, the collapse of the Soviet Union generated both an internal crisis and ideological split within the Syrian society and among the ruling regime as well. Zisser argued that the USSR and the Eastern Bloc states had been for the Syria regime a source of inspiration, and their collapse was symbolic of the disintegration of the Damascus regime's outlook. From many points of view the collapse of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe made the Syrian regime irrelevant. As a response, the Syrian regime began to emphasize its own pluralistic nature and its difference from the Soviet and the East European regimes. It was asserted that the collapse of the Eastern European regimes did not mean the end of socialism. This development expressed the collapse of one socialist method. Fifth, although all its thoughts centered on holding firm to preserve the status quo, it slowly became clear that standing on the spot in a changing world was identical to moving backwards. This sense let the Syrian regime to acknowledge the need to adopt a new path and institute real

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<sup>32</sup> Zisser, *op.cit.*, p. 44

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45

changes in its policy. However, the regime could not ignore the possibility of exacerbation of the issues. It feared a loss of control over the process of change. Also at least some of the changes would involve abandoning the worldview and the characteristic of the regime as the Syrian Ba'th regime was a dictatorial regime of sectarian cast.<sup>34</sup>

As a result, Syria sought to come to terms with the challenges presented to it. The major change of direction in Syria was in foreign policy. It sought a dialogue with the United States with the aim of finding a place in the new world and regional order that was taking shape under the US leadership. In conjunction with this aim, the Syrian regime acted to improve relations with the Arab countries, especially Egypt and the Gulf states. According to Zisser, these acts were essentially defensive. So this foreign policy aim did not rest on a vision of a new Syrian order. On the contrary, it aimed to prevent these from ever coming into being. However, in the wake of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, it was clearly this change that secured Syria from its troubles and improved its regional and international standing.<sup>35</sup>

### **3. 3. Syria during the Gulf Crisis**

The ascent of US political power, within the new climate, challenged the status of the former client states of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, Syria had managed to adjust to the "New World Order".<sup>36</sup> Because the Asad regime had understood the implications of the end of the cold war. This understanding let the regime to seek closer relations with the West before the Gulf Crisis began, as mentioned above. At that time, however, there were limits to such a rapprochement because the Western powers continued to suspect Damascus of sponsoring international terrorism. In this conjuncture, the Gulf crisis enabled Syria to demonstrate its willingness to play the new game. Hence the crisis provided an opportunity for Syria to openly support the new

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 45-49

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50

<sup>36</sup> Neil Quilliam, Syria and the New World Order, (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1999), p. 155

world order.<sup>37</sup> In spite of their country's improved status, the Gulf crisis made real to the Syrians its weakness and strategic inferiority. So the crisis was important for Syria in that it deepened the promotion of its newly-adopted path.<sup>38</sup> However, Syria's participation appeared to have been at odds with its ideological and nationalist perspective. The Syrian decision to join the US alliance appeared to contradict both its domestic and international agendas.<sup>39</sup>

There were many reasons explaining Syrian decision to join the US alliance: one of them was its global vulnerability as the influence of the Soviet Union receded. The decline of the Soviet support had forced Syria to re-examine its options. So Syria's motives for participating in the US-led coalition can be partially explained by its recognition of the need to realign its global position.<sup>40</sup> The other most important reason was its regional vulnerability. Rivalry between the Ba'th regimes of Damascus and Baghdad had deep ideological, historical, political and personal roots. This rivalry had intensified during the 1980s over Syria's support of Iran in the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). Iraq, for its part, had extended aid to opponents of the Syrian regime, chief among them the Muslim Brotherhood in 1976-1982. Iraqi victory from the war enabled it to divert its attention to its western borders and the balance of power in the Levant. Syrian fears were soon realized when, in 1989-1990, Iraq forced Syria into isolation in the Arab world.<sup>41</sup> So Syria's support of Iran translated into its exclusion from both the economic and security orders of the region. The formation of the Arab Cooperation Council (ACC) in February 1989, with Iraq as the center of gravity, served as a threat to Syria's claim for the leadership of the Arab nation.<sup>42</sup> In 1989 Iraq's involvement in Lebanon also increased by its growing influence through its sponsorship of the Maronite

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<sup>37</sup> Eberhard Kienle, "Syria, the Kuwait War, and the New World Order" in Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael (ed.), The Gulf War and the New World Order, International Relations of the Middle East, (Uni. Press of Florida, 1994), pp. 384-385

<sup>38</sup> Zisser, op.cit., p. 52

<sup>39</sup> Quilliam, op.cit., p. 157

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 159

<sup>41</sup> Zisser, op.cit., p. 53

<sup>42</sup> Quilliam, op.cit., p. 160

General Aoun, opponent of Syria. This move was a major obstacle in Damascus's path to acquiring hegemony in Lebanon and realizing its long-term goals there.<sup>43</sup> In the Gulf crisis, also, if Saddam had not been challenged, he would have been in a position to dictate the oil, foreign, and defense policies of his neighbors;<sup>44</sup> and so he would have been in a stronger position to claim Arab leadership in the conflict with Israel.<sup>45</sup> In addition, Asad certainly feared that the Iraqi invasion could unleash a wider war which Israel could exploit to attack Syria, and joining the coalition was a kind of insurance against that.<sup>46</sup>

Some argued that beside the rivalry with Iraq, Syria's economic needs were part of the reasons behind Asad's adhesion to the Western-led anti-Iraq coalition. Hinnebusch pointed out that Syria had long depended on Saudi economic support that would become all the more important as ties with Eastern bloc loosened. If he failed to support the Saudis, Syria would risk future loss of Saudi aid. The crisis was a perfect opportunity to revitalize the aids from the Gulf oil states that had dried up with the decline of oil prices. The Saudi and Gulf support was so crucial to the maintenance of Syria's strategic position in the battle with Israel.<sup>47</sup>

With the news of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, Syria was among the first Arab states to condemn the Iraqi move, and to demand immediate and unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait. While the United States succeeded in getting a series of anti-Iraqi resolutions adopted in the UN Security Council, at the Arab summit which finally met in Cairo on August 10-11, 1990, the Syrians together with Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states adopted a series of anti-Iraqi resolutions. According to a resolution, Arab troops would be sent to the Gulf alongside the US forces. This summit

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<sup>43</sup> Zisser, op.cit., pp. 53-54

<sup>44</sup> Halliday, op.cit., p. 74

<sup>45</sup> Raymond Hinnebusch, "The Foreign Policy of Syria" in Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami (ed.), The Foreign Policies of Middle East States, (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), p. 157

<sup>46</sup> Ehteshami and Hinnebusch (1997), op.cit. pp. 80-81

<sup>47</sup> Hinnebusch (2002), op.cit., p. 157

conference and the ensuing political and military preparations in the inter-Arab arena marked the consolidation of a new political axis in the Arab world: Syria, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.<sup>48</sup> The Syrian troops took up positions on the Iraqi border and successfully engaged Iraqi troops that crossed into Saudi Arabia during the war; after Iraq's rout in the ground war, they moved into Kuwait alongside other allied troops. In addition, the Syrian regime enforced the embargo and declined an Iraqi request to re-open the trans-Syrian oil pipeline.<sup>49</sup>

However, during the crisis, many Syrians disagreed with the government line. Therefore, from the start of the crisis the Syrian regime needed propaganda to explain its policy to public. Their propaganda was based on several arguments: Iraq's conquest of Kuwait was an illegitimate act in both inter-Arab and international terms; Saddam himself did not act for the good of the Arab people but rather out of personal, opportunistic motives so Saddam's policy damaged the general Arab interest as well as that of Iraq itself; Saddam's action had enabled the West to regain the upper hand in the region, so Syria had taken steps to prevent such a possibility; the crisis had strengthened Israel in military and economic terms and with an improved international position. As a result, Syria could not remain neutral in the struggle because this struggle jeopardized the resources of the Arab people; unless there was an Arab presence in the Gulf, the Western forces would take the place of the Arabs. Zisser argued that despite Syrian public opinion largely sided with Iraq, at the same time they perceived the measures adopted by the regime as unavoidable under the prevailing regional and international circumstances. After the crisis ended, the Syrian public came to appreciate the benefits to Syria afforded by this policy.<sup>50</sup>

Syria's position during the Gulf crisis, especially the legitimacy it gave to the actions of the US-led international coalition against Iraq, brought about a significant improvement in relations with Washington.<sup>51</sup> Asad was honored by the visits of US envoys to Damascus, among them the Secretary of State James Baker. These contacts

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<sup>48</sup> Zisser, *op.cit.*, p. 55

<sup>49</sup> Kienle, *op.cit.*, pp. 385-386

<sup>50</sup> Zisser, *op.cit.*, pp. 57-62

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*



were strengthened by the talks between President Asad and President Bush in Geneva on November 23, 1990, which brought about diplomatic rehabilitation to a regime condemned as one of the instigators behind the international terrorism.<sup>52</sup> Also a similar improvement took place in Syria's relations with the West European countries. The European Union began discussing the lifting of trade sanctions imposed on Syria in the late 1980s.

Kienle claimed that the short-term occupation of Kuwait by Iraq resulted in the long-term domination of Lebanon by Syria.<sup>53</sup> On October 13, 1990 the Syrians attacked the forces of Michel Aoun. The Syrian step apparently won tacit US approval. This approval of the Syrian action expressed American and Israeli recognition of Syria's hegemony in Lebanon – a position to which Syria had aspired since it stepped in there in 1976.<sup>54</sup> This led to the full implementation of the Ta'if agreement and the Syrian-Lebanese Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Coordination of May 1991.

After being outside the regional framework throughout the 1980s, Syria was able to reintegrate itself into the regional mainstream. During the crisis, contacts were intensified with Egypt and Saudi Arabia as well as with Iran, from which Syria emerged as one of the centerpieces of a new regional order. Such a new Arab order was explicitly referred to in the Damascus Declaration of March 6, 1991, in which Syria and Egypt agreed to contribute to the defense of Saudi Arabia and the other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council in exchange for economic cooperation. This declaration pointed to the success of Syrian diplomacy during the crisis.<sup>55</sup> However, the integration of the US in the Gulf through bilateral security pacts with the Gulf States reduced Syria's role there.<sup>56</sup>

In addition, the rise of Syria by the defeat of Iraq not only weakened parts of the Syrian opposition, which received support from Iraq, but enabled Damascus to act more

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<sup>52</sup> Kienle, *op.cit.*, p. 386

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 387

<sup>54</sup> Zisser, *op.cit.*, p. 57

<sup>55</sup> Kienle, *op.cit.*, p. 386

<sup>56</sup> Rabil, *op.cit.*, p. 96

freely on the regional arena. Syria could now pursue its policies toward Israel and Palestinians in a more flexible manner and without interference from Iraq.<sup>57</sup>

The Gulf crisis provided Syria with an opportunity to compensate for the loss of the economic support of the Soviet Union through the promotion of the Syrian-Egyptian-GCC security order. Syria received \$ 2 billion for its role from the Gulf Arab states alone.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, during the crisis, the Syrian treasury benefited from the temporary rise of oil prices. Funds invested in military strengthened the Syrian regime's position.

Alongside all these benefits, something about the experience made tangible to Syria the limits of its power, together with several other fundamental problems: the Syrians became aware of the position of the US as the world's sole superpower and witnessed the superiority of the Western technology. Moreover, despite of its deep and enduring hostility with Iraq, Syria had hitherto viewed Iraq as a source of strategic depth and possible support in the face of a future Israeli threat.<sup>59</sup> So after the devastation of the Gulf war, and its bitter legacy of inter-Arab hatred, there was no longer any realistic possibility of Syria and Iraq combining in an 'Eastern Front' against Israel, which had always been Asad's hope and Israel's nightmare.<sup>60</sup>

As a result, Syria had no choice but to repair and diversify its international connections. In particular, Asad understood that he could not realize his goals in opposition to the remaining superpower.<sup>61</sup> Syria's struggle with Israel would have to take a chiefly diplomatic form and that required détente with the United States, which alone had leverage over Israel. Asad needed the US to accept Syria as the key to peace and stability in the Middle East and to recognize its legitimate interests in an equitable

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<sup>57</sup> Kienle, *op.cit.*, p. 387

<sup>58</sup> Quilliam, *op.cit.*, p. 162

<sup>59</sup> Zisser, *op.cit.*, pp. 63-64

<sup>60</sup> Halliday, *op.cit.*, p. 75

<sup>61</sup> "Prime Minister Interviewed on Peace Process", Hamburg Die Welt in German, 22 Feb 93, in FBIS-NES-93-034, 23 February 1993, p. 32

settlement with Israel.<sup>62</sup> So if Syria could not retrieve its occupied territory by force, the only other option available would be the peace process. It was argued that Asad entered the peace process not with the aim of abandoning Syria's objectives but of adapting his strategy to new conditions.<sup>63</sup> Kienle asserted that Syria could challenge Israeli interests, but always within the general acceptance of the rules governing the new world order.<sup>64</sup>

### **3. 4. Madrid Peace Conference**

#### **3. 4. 1. Madrid Initiative and its Background**

On October 30, 1991, after intensive diplomatic maneuvering by Secretary of State James Baker, the Middle East Peace Conference opened in Madrid under the co-sponsorship of the United States and the Soviet Union. This was the first time that representatives from all the major parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict – Israel, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation – faced one another to discuss peace. As explained before in detail, a number of international and regional circumstances had created favorable conditions that helped Baker's efforts to arrange the Madrid peace conference: the collapse of the Soviet Union and the cessation of Soviet influence in the Middle East and Moscow's willingness to collaborate with the US in the region; Syria's need to cooperate with the West as a result of its loss of Soviet patronage; Bush's unprecedented popularity as a result of his performance in the Gulf war; the drastic deterioration of the PLO's status in the Arab world as a result of Arafat's support for Saddam Hussein during the Gulf war; Israel's shocking trauma as a result of the Iraqi Scud attacks during that war and the country's need for loan guarantees to help settle the influx of Soviet immigrants; and the Arab world's great sense of expectation that the US, as the only remaining superpower, could influence the peace process.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Hinnebusch (2002), op.cit., p. 158

<sup>63</sup> Raymond A. Hinnebusch, "Does Syria Want Peace? Syrian Policy in the Syrian-Israeli Peace Negotiations", Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. XXVI, No. 1, (Autumn 1996), p. 48

<sup>64</sup> Kienle, op.cit., pp. 387-390, Daniel Pipes, "Is Damascus Ready for Peace?" Foreign Affairs, Vol. 70, No. 4, (Fall 1991), p. 41

<sup>65</sup> Ziva Flamhaft, Israel on the Road to Peace Accepting the Unacceptable, (Colorado, Oxford: Westview Press, 1996), p. 89

To stabilize the region, the US developed a new Middle East strategy. Four days after the UN Security Council set the terms to oversee the end of hostilities in the Gulf, on March 6, 1991, President Bush told that he was committed to peace in the Middle East. Bush outlined four main foreign policy goals, including the creation of shared security arrangements in the region, the control of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the missiles used to deliver them, the creation of new opportunities for peace and stability in the Middle East, the fostering of economic development for the sake of peace.<sup>66</sup>

Eytan Bentsur, an American diplomat, evaluated the situation from another point of view and indicated that after the outbreak of the Intifada in December 1987, it had become increasingly accepted to define the Arab-Israeli conflict as an Israeli-Palestinian dispute alone. Diplomatic initiatives naturally followed this Palestinian-centered definition of the Arab-Israeli conflict – the wider issues that constituted the real threats to Israel have been ignored. In order to correct this diplomatic fault, the US Foreign Ministry developed ideas for combining progress on the Palestinian track with recognition and normalization in relations between Israel and the other Arab states. The essence of this diplomatic approach was to develop a two-track peace process in which progress on the Palestinian front would correspond to progress in relations with the Arab states. The two-track process was supposed to be complemented by a third track – the multilateral track – whose basis was a vision of regional development and finding solutions to major problems of the region. The basic idea was to pursue a full regional peace in order for Israel to avoid becoming bogged-down in the Palestinian track alone, with no change in its relations with the Arab world.<sup>67</sup> This was the essence of the Madrid Peace Talks.

As a part of new Middle East strategy, the prospect of an Arab-Israeli peace now was better than ever, Bush initially believed that Arabs and Israelis faced a common enemy during the Gulf war. But he offered no new ideas on how to achieve peace.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 77

<sup>67</sup> Eytan Bentsur, “The Way to Peace Emerged at Madrid: A Decade Since the 1991 Madrid Conference”, The Jerusalem Letter, (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, February, 2002)

Instead, Bush reiterated long-standing US position, maintaining that a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace must be based on the UNSCR 242 and 338, and the principle of territory for peace; the preservation of Israel's security and the recognition of Israel by the Arab states; the granting of legitimate political rights to the Palestinians.<sup>68</sup>

The day after Bush delivered his speech, James Baker arrived in the region. By skillfully using the momentum from the formation of a "historic" international coalition and new hope for diplomacy created by the defeat of Saddam Hussein<sup>69</sup> that included Arab states to start up the peace process on a new basis, Baker advanced the initiative through the shuttle diplomacy, systematic negotiations, fighting against doubts and giving guarantees, formulations and formulas. Slowly, the US created conditions for the convening of a conference designed to help the sides reach a lasting peace through the direct negotiations.<sup>70</sup>

During this pre-conference period, Israelis agreed to a two-track approach to a settlement under the auspices of a limited regional conference. However, it conditioned participation in the conference on the isolation of Palestinians from East Jerusalem and Palestinian supporters of the PLO from the talks. Also, it refused to permit the UN to sponsor the conference or to empower the conference with any authority to impose on the parties. On the contrary, Syria demanded an extensive conference and a significant UN role in it.<sup>71</sup>

To break the deadlock, on June 1 President Bush sent letters of assurances to key regional leaders including Yitzhak Shamir and Hafez al-Asad in which he offered that the US and the Soviet Union would preside over the conference, the UN and the European Community would attend the conference as observers, and the conference would dissolve into a series of bilateral negotiations but would be periodically reconvened.<sup>72</sup> The US devised its letters to Syria and Israel to fit their own separate

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<sup>68</sup> Flamhaft, op.cit., p. 77

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Bentsur, op.cit.

<sup>71</sup> Flamhaft, op.cit., pp. 78-79

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

understandings of how to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. The letters were a classic case of “constructive ambiguity” used by the Bush administration to bring the two embattled neighbors together under one roof. In the letter of assurances to Syria, the Bush administration stated that the peace conference and talks had to be based on the UNSCRs 242 and 338 and that the US would continue to be committed to the land-for-peace principle as applicable to all fronts, including the Golan Heights.<sup>73</sup> In the letter to Israel, the administration affirmed that Israel held its own interpretation of the UNSCR 242, alongside other interpretations and that the US re-confirmed ex-president Gerald Ford’s commitment of September 1975 regarding importance of the Golan Heights to Israel’s security.<sup>74</sup> As a result, while these letters succeeded in bringing the two embattled states to Madrid, they kept the opening positions of the two sides far apart.

#### **3. 4. 2. Response of Syria and Israel**

Ma’oz argued that Bush had probably already made a commitment to bring about a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute to Asad during their meeting in Geneva on November 23, 1990 to discuss Syrian participation in the war against Iraq. Asad very likely asked at that meeting for an American undertaking to support a comprehensive settlement whereby Israel had to totally withdraw from the Golan and agreed also to find a solution to the Palestinian problem.<sup>75</sup> Faruq al-Shara mentioned in his speech that when George Bush addressed the US Congress on March 6, 1991, he was fully aware that Syria in particular and the Arabs in general, would not agree to the implementation of the Security Council Resolutions against Iraq, while ignoring those relating to the Arab-Israeli conflict. This was emphasized by Asad in many occasions until the Madrid Conference.<sup>76</sup> So Syria was indeed better prepared to participate in a peace conference with Israel due to these American commitment and awareness. According to Ma’oz, this was the part of a strategy which from 1988 Syria revived and

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<sup>73</sup> Rabil, *op.cit.*, pp. 199-200

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, Moshe Ma’oz, *Syria and Israel From War to Peace Making* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 213-214

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201

<sup>76</sup> Barry Rubin, “Understanding Syrian Policy: An Analysis of Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shara’s Explanation”, *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA)*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (June 2000), p. 10

applied to achieve a political settlement of the Arab/Syrian-Israeli conflict, albeit on its terms, and without renouncing its military reinforcement. Further, this strategy represented the continuation of the two-track strategy that Asad had initiated since his rise to power in 1970, and particularly after the 1973 war, the simultaneous development of military option and the use of diplomacy in order to regain the Golan Heights as well as other occupied Arab territories, and also implement the national rights of the Palestinian people.<sup>77</sup> Asad's letter to Bush of July 14, 1991 expressed Syria's willingness to take part in direct negotiations with Israel. Bush depicted it as a good response and breakthrough.

The Likud-led Israeli government of the time pursued hard-line position toward Syria. Although Likud leaders stated in July 1990 that Israel was prepared to negotiate with Syria without preconditions, in August 1990, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir told representatives of the Golan settlers that "our presence in the Golan is eternal". Yet several Likud ministers and Knesset members apparently felt uncomfortable with Shamir's uncompromising line vis-à-vis the new, more flexible Syrian position regarding the negotiations with Israel. The reactions to Asad's bold diplomatic move indicated that the Israeli government was caught by surprise and put on the spot.<sup>78</sup> General Mustafa Tlass, the defense minister of Syria, explained the situation

The truth is that Israel, by nature, is antagonistic to peace. When it discovered that Syria and her neighbors were willing to participate in the Madrid Peace initiative and expressed their readiness to co-operate with the peace process, it reluctantly decided to participate. It continues to disrupt at all stages the ongoing efforts towards peace.<sup>79</sup>

Despite after a series of talks with Baker, in June 1991 Shamir had rejected Bush's proposal for a Middle East peace conference. On July 31, during the first post-Cold war summit in Moscow, Bush and Gorbachev issued a joint statement in which they called for a jointly sponsored Middle East peace conference, to be held in October

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<sup>77</sup> Ma'oz (1995), op.cit., p. 201

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 212

<sup>79</sup> Lieutenant General Mustafa Tlass, "Syria and the Future of the Peace Process", Jane's Intelligence Review, Vol. 6, No. 9, (September 1994), p. 412

at an undetermined site. Subsequently Shamir had to re-evaluate his position in the light of Asad's positive response. It should be mentioned that Israel at that time was awaiting American assurances of the loan guarantees for settling Soviet-Jewish immigrants; and in order to obtain these assurances and avoid confrontation with Washington on the peace process, on August 1, 1991 Shamir announced his conditional acceptance of the American proposal for a peace conference; and on October 22, 1991 the Israeli cabinet voted to go to the Madrid Peace Conference.

Ma'oz asserted that this decision was rather tactical, aiming at throwing the ball back into the Syrian court and avoiding American accusations of obstructionism.<sup>80</sup> Rabil indicated that Israeli government voted to attend the conference after Washington acceded to Shamir's demands concerning the Palestinians: no PLO members, no one from East Jerusalem, and no one from outside the territories was to be present in the peace negotiations. Also the strategic geopolitical implications of the Gulf War<sup>81</sup> and the impact of the *intifada*<sup>82</sup> on Israel brought her to Madrid.<sup>83</sup> Former ambassador Alfred Leroy Atherton explained the situation by pointing out that once it became clear that all the Arab parties were prepared to accept the invitation, the Israelis realized that they had to accept as well. Israel could not ignore the changed international scene any more.<sup>84</sup>

By August 7, Israeli and the US officials began to clarify the procedure of the Madrid conference and the terms of the parties' participation. These terms were set in the letters of assurance Washington sent to each of the participants in mid-October. And on October 18, Secretary Baker and the Soviet Foreign Minister, Boris Pankin,

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<sup>80</sup> Ma'oz (1995), op.cit., p. 214

<sup>81</sup> A former intelligence chief, Aharon Yariv, argues that the Gulf crisis have substantiated many lessons for Israel: the US was the superpower hence the inconceivability of any world order without its involvement; Israel depended on the US and was vulnerable to missile attacks; the despotic regime in Iraq was durable; and Syria has had a change of heart concerning the peace process. As a result, continued confrontation will inevitably increase tension. A situation of no peace, no war will sooner or later bring about the crystallization of an Arab military coalition that will go to war against Israel. At the end, Israel will again face peace negotiations, so why not begin today. Rabil, op.cit., p. 95

<sup>82</sup> The *intifada* had brought the Palestinian problem before the eyes of the world and most importantly inside the Israeli home. Suddenly, Israel appeared as an oppressor nation. The peace process loomed as a sound alternative for Israel to fight back the *intifada*'s effects. Rabil, op.cit., p. 95

<sup>83</sup> Rabil, op.cit., p. 95

<sup>84</sup> Alfred Leroy Atherton Jr., "The Shifting Sands of Middle East Peace", Foreign Policy, Vol. 86, (Spring 1992)



announced in Jerusalem that their governments had invited Israel, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Palestinian representatives to attend a Middle East Peace Conference to be held on October 30 in Madrid.<sup>85</sup>

At the opening of the Madrid Conference on October 30, 1991, President George Bush set the principles to advance the process. First, negotiations were directed toward peace agreements; diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties; and investment in development and tourism. Second, peace would only be achieved through direct negotiations based on give-and-take and territorial compromise. Third, peace could not be imposed – it could only come from within the region. Fourth, the process would be two-tracked and the multilateral track would follow. Fifth, the US would refrain from defining the meaning of a stable settlement in the Middle East or final borders – but these borders had to promote security and fair diplomatic arrangements.<sup>86</sup> In addition, the conference would have no decision making powers and no mechanism for reconciling differences or for achieving simultaneous progress on all tracks.<sup>87</sup>

Israel manifested a mixture of rigid and positive positions at Madrid. In his opening speech in Madrid, Shamir appealed for peace between Israel and the Arab states, for Arab recognition of Israel's legitimacy, as well as for the building of confidence between the parties. He omitted Israeli claims with respect to the Arab territories, and did not rule out eventual Israeli withdrawal from some of the territory occupied in 1967. On the other hand, Shamir portrayed Syria as one of the most oppressive tyrannical regimes in the world and demanded that the Arabs had to refuse jihad and the PLO covenant, and end violence and terrorism.<sup>88</sup> The speech of Shamir was rhetoric typical of the Likud Party, of which he was a historic leader: "to appreciate the meaning of peace for the people of Israel, one has to view today's Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel against the background of our history. Jews have been persecuted throughout the ages in almost every continent." Where Bush had made no

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<sup>85</sup> Flamhaft, op.cit., pp. 80-81

<sup>86</sup> Bentsur, op.cit., pp. 3-4

<sup>87</sup> Muhammad Muslih, "Dateline Damascus: Assad is Ready", Foreign Policy, Issue 96, (Fall 1994), p. 3

<sup>88</sup> Ma'oz (1995), op.cit., p. 216

mention of the territorial aspect of the negotiations, Shamir referred openly to it: “We know our partners to the negotiations will make territorial demands on Israel. But, as an examination of the conflict’s long history makes clear, its nature is not territorial... It will be regrettable if the talks focus primarily on territory. It is the quickest way to an impasse.”<sup>89</sup> Shamir did not hold out the hope of any speedy resolution of his country’s long-running conflict with the Arabs. “Today, the gulf separating the two sides is still too wide, the Arab hostility to Israel too deep, the lack of trust too immense, to permit a dramatic, quick solution. But we must start on the long road to reconciliation with this first step.”<sup>90</sup>

In its opening speech, as well as at subsequent sessions, Syria manifested its traditional hostile ideological attitude towards Israel: it did not acknowledge Israel’s legitimacy, attempting to create a joint Arab position and minimize direct debates with the Israeli delegation. In contrast to Shamir, Farouk al-Shara, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Syria, based his argument on modern-day international law, specifically on the UNSCRs 242 and 338. Thus, while stressing Syria’s genuine desire for a just and comprehensive peace based on the UN resolutions, Shara, in his opening speech, sharply attacked Israel for its aggression since 1948 against the Arabs, its inhuman and unjust behavior in the occupied territories, as well as its settler-colonialist nature and its distorted, illegitimate claim for Jewish sovereignty in Palestine. He also insisted that not one inch of the Golan Heights, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the East (Arab) Jerusalem had to remain in Israeli hands. He did not spell out what kind of peace Syria was prepared to offer Israel in return for this withdrawal.<sup>91</sup>

Strong feeling of hostility between Israelis and Syrians were evident inside and outside of the plenary chamber. Each side accused the other of falsifying history. The bad atmospherics between these two parties predicted poorly for the long-term success of the peace-making scheme being launched in Madrid.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Helena Cobban, The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks 1991-1996 and Beyond, (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Pres, 1999), p. 16

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 17

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., Ma’oz (1995), op.cit., p. 215

<sup>92</sup> Cobban, op.cit., pp. 17-18

The Madrid Peace Conference created a new reality in the Middle East. For the first time the region came closer to the definition of a new Middle East. The Conference represented a breakthrough in relations between Israel and the Arab world. For the first time, Israel engaged in direct, face-to-face negotiations with all its immediate neighbors. Madrid also launched a multilateral process that brought Israeli diplomats into contact with representatives of Arab states. Such regular and direct lines of communication were the best guarantee for regional stability and the avoidance of miscalculation in the future. In short, the Madrid Conference was the starting point of a long road that would lead to the eventual bridging of polarized positions in order to forge a comprehensive peace, of which Israeli-Syrian peace would be one of the most important steps.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Bentsur, op.cit., p. 4

## CHAPTER 4

### COMPONENTS OF THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS

Before exploring the bilateral peace negotiations between Israel and Syria, to understand the offers and rejections by the parties, the subjects of the negotiations should be outlined.

#### 4. 1. Procedural Issues

The initial problems faced by Syria and Israel were about procedural issues, rather than substantial ones. However, first of all, they had to be overcome. Syria had previously demanded a full-fledged international conference under the UN sponsorship, to meet only after an advance commitment by Israel to withdraw from all occupied territories. At such a conference, whose resolutions would be binding, the Arabs were to negotiate with Israel jointly rather than separately, and indirectly rather than directly; the Palestinian people were to be represented by the PLO and be entitled to establish an independent state in the occupied territories.<sup>1</sup> In short, Syria adhered to the five no's: no negotiations with Israel before its withdrawal from occupied territories, no face to face negotiations, no partial solutions, no separate deals, and no normal peace treaty.<sup>2</sup>

Under the new American terms, Syria now agreed to convene a regional conference under the US and Soviet sponsorship, with only a passive UN observer, and, following the opening of the conference, to conduct direct negotiations with Israel. Syria also dropped the demands that Israel had to commit itself in advance to withdraw from the occupied territories or that the PLO had to represent the Palestinians as a condition to

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<sup>1</sup> Moshe Ma'oz, "Syria, Israel and the Peace Process" in Barry Rubin, Joseph Ginat, and Moshe Ma'oz (ed.), From War to Peace: Arab-Israeli Relations 1973-1993, (New York: New York University Press, 1994), p. 166

<sup>2</sup> R. Reuben Miller, "The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations", Mediterranean Quarterly, Vol. 11, No. 4, (2000), p. 130

begin the negotiations. Nor did Damascus insist on the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, demanding only that the Palestinian problem had to be resolved.<sup>3</sup>

#### **4. 1. 1. Comprehensiveness vs. Separate Deals**

Throughout his life, Asad had been consistent vis-à-vis Israel and observed Israel's success in dividing the Arabs in negotiations on the diplomatic front. He wanted to sustain a common and united Arab diplomatic front against Israel.<sup>4</sup> In an interview, Asad said "...peace must be comprehensive...We did not want the conference to be divided into bilateral committees, if that precluded overall coordination between the Arab parties."<sup>5</sup> And in a speech to a delegation of the Palestinian refugees of 1948 who visited Syria in March 1994, Asad said "We want a complete and comprehensive peace, and unless it is so, it cannot be termed as peace."<sup>6</sup> And he defined the comprehensiveness like "When we speak of a comprehensive peace, we do not mean that everybody marches shoulder to shoulder, like soldiers on parade."<sup>7</sup>

According to Shara, one of the battles in the Madrid Conference was Arab coordination. While some wanted the Arabs to go as separate delegations, Syria insisted on a unified Arab delegation and on being at the same place and time during the talks, so that when a delegation came out of a bilateral meeting it would be able to meet and talk about what Israel proposed to it, to stop any tactics or misinterpretation of the UN resolutions. However, it became clear from the first day of the Madrid peace talks that the Arab parties, except Lebanon<sup>8</sup>, were not interested in coordination with Syria. It was

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<sup>3</sup> Ma'oz (1994), op.cit., p. 167

<sup>4</sup> Miller, op.cit., p. 130

<sup>5</sup> Special Document, "Interview with Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad", Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. XXII, No. 4 (Summer 1993), pp. 112-113

<sup>6</sup> Lieutenant General Mustafa Tlass, "Syria and the Future of the Peace Process", Jane's Intelligence Review, Vol. 6, No. 9, 1994, p. 412

<sup>7</sup> Muhammad Muslih, "Dateline Damascus: Assad is Ready", Foreign Policy, (Fall 1996), Issue 96, p. 7

<sup>8</sup> Along the whole peace process, Syria and Lebanon declared to adhere to the principles of a comprehensive settlement. "No 'Seperate Peace Accords' Pledged", Manama Wakh in English, 21 Feb 94, FBIS-NES-094-036, 23 February 1994, p. 39, "Press: Israeli Stands Threaten Peace Opportunity", Damascus Syrian Arab Reublic Radio Network in Arabic, 20 Feb 94, in FBIS-NES-94-037, 24 February 1994, p. 38

obvious that the Arab coordination ended when the Arab parties agreed to enter the multilateral talks. Nevertheless, until the signing of the Oslo Agreement, Syria continued to brief the other Arab delegations about what went on with it.<sup>9</sup> Also in principle the Madrid formula specified bilateral negotiations and had a built-in discrepancy between the Syrian-Israeli track and the Palestinian one.<sup>10</sup>

In an interview by Patrick Seale, Asad's bibliographer and a specialist on Syria, concerning the comprehensiveness, Asad said "the process, as a whole, was based on the necessity of a comprehensive solution... If they have any notion of a separate peace, it would run contrary to the ground rules on the basis of which the peace process was launched in the first place."<sup>11</sup> This principle seemed contrary to the agreement reached at Madrid that there would be no formal linkage between the various negotiating tracks. To clarify this contradiction, Asad said "Bilateral agreements will stand on their own feet. This does not negate the existence of the Arab nation. There is no contradiction here. When the Arab delegations negotiate over particular issues, each will eventually reach a bilateral agreement with Israel... In the end, there will be a number of bilateral agreements. But this will not affect the traditional heritage of all the parties concerned... What is important is that we must be absolutely certain that the whole process aims at achieving a comprehensive agreement." About the question whether the tracks can move at different speeds, Asad answered "This is a matter of only minor tactical importance."<sup>12</sup>

Why the principle of comprehensiveness is so much important? Because, according to Asad, "Any peace which is not comprehensive will not last. Syria could have concluded a bilateral agreement with Israel a long time ago... But we did not think that such an act would have been to the benefit of the people of the region. In any event,

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<sup>9</sup> Barry Rubin, "Understanding Syrian Policy: An Analysis of Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shara's Explanation", Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA), Vol. 4, No. 2, (June 2000) p. 13

<sup>10</sup> Raymond A. Hinnebusch, "Does Syria Want Peace? Syrian Policy in the Syrian-Israeli Peace Negotiations", Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. XXVI, No. 1 (Autumn 1996), p. 49

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Asad, op.cit., p.113

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp.115-116

speaking of a separate peace is no longer appropriate in the context of the efforts now being made. Once we embarked collectively on the process, the idea of a separate peace was no longer relevant.”<sup>13</sup>

#### **4. 1. 2. Regional Conference vs. International Conference**

Israel was demanding a regional conference. For example, Yitzhak Shamir, Prime Minister between 1983 and 1984 and then 1986 and 1992, had in mind only a regional conference to discuss political, security, economic and environmental issues and cooperation on disarmament, i.e. the disarmament of the Arabs. He also had in mind cooperation in resolving the refugee problem at the expense of the Arabs. While he wanted to discuss the subject of water so Israel could take all it wants from the Golan and other places; Israel did not want the agenda to include anything concerning the land.<sup>14</sup> On the contrary, Asad wanted a full international conference under the UN patronage, which could bring international and joint Soviet-American pressure on Israel concerning all the problems in the region. At the end, as the Soviet Union’s influence declined, so the prospects for a true international conference that would bring pressure on Israel; increasingly, only American pressure seemed likely to count.<sup>15</sup> It became meaningless to insist on such a demand for Syria.

#### **4. 1. 3. Direct Talks vs. Indirect Talks**

Although Syria rejected direct talks before, one of the principles set by President George Bush at the opening of the conference was that peace will only be achieved through direct negotiations based on give-and-take and territorial compromise.<sup>16</sup>

#### **4. 2. The Nature and Content of the Peace**

Both sides remained far apart in their conceptions of peace and peaceful relations. While for Syria, the core issue was not the niceties of peace but the restoration of Arab lands and rights; Israel’s position on the nature of peace with Syria following a

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118

<sup>14</sup> Rubin, *op.cit.*, p.11

<sup>15</sup> Hinnebusch, *op.cit.*, pp. 48-49

<sup>16</sup> Eytan Bentsur, “The Way to Peace Emerged at Madrid: A Decade since the 1991 Madrid Conference”, *The Jerusalem Letter*, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, (February 2002), p. 3

final agreement was forthright. During the negotiations the Syrians did not speak in terms of a peace treaty, but rather an agreement of non-belligerency in return for full withdrawal by Israel from the Golan Heights. This was also the Syrian interpretation of the UNSCR 242. According to the Syrians, this resolution did not predicate Israeli withdrawal on a peace agreement. Rather, withdrawal stands on its own: Israel had to first withdraw from the Golan Heights and from all the territories occupied during the Six Day War, and would only afterwards be entitled for a peace agreement, as part of a settlement. This was what the Syrians meant by total peace. Indeed, when asked about a peace treaty, Syrian representatives responded that there would be no problem attaining it after full Israeli withdrawal on all fronts.<sup>17</sup>

For Israelis, a state of non-belligerency was not sufficient. Israel equated peace with full normalization of relations, meaning full diplomatic relations, open borders, trade relations, tourism flowing in both directions, and open embassies in both capitals.<sup>18</sup> Israel wanted assurance that it would receive full peace in exchange for the Golan, especially since giving territory was a material concession while diplomatic commitments were an abstract, potentially reversible, arrangement.<sup>19</sup>

Muallim's words were an answer to Israeli expected normal relations after the peace:

Israel believed that you can push a button to make peace warm, to direct Syrian popular attitudes from a state of war to a state of peace. This is not logical, especially since it is rare to find a household in Syria that has not lost someone on the battlefield. It is always necessary to educate and inform the people. They need to read the agreement to see whether it conforms to their interests, they need to believe in it. You cannot oblige them to buy Israeli goods or visit Israel if they are not convinced that Israel has changed from being an enemy to a neighbor.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ze'ev Schiff, Peace with Security: Israel's Minimal Security Requirements in Negotiations with Syria, (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1993), p. 81

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 85, James W. Moore, "An Israeli-Syrian Peace Treaty: So Close and Yet So Far", Middle East Policy, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1994-1995, pp. 72-73

<sup>19</sup> Rubin, op.cit., p. 5, Brian S. Mandell, "Getting to Peackeping in Principle Rivalries Anticipating an Israel-Syria Peace Treaty", Journal of Conflict Resolution, Vol. 40, No. 2, (June 1996), p. 242

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Ambassador Walid al-Moualem, "Fresh Light on the Syrian-Israeli Peace Negotiations" Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. XXVI, No. 2 (Winter 1997), p. 86



Also it was argued that following 25 years of social and economic hardship in Syria accompanied by a lack of political freedom, the Syrian government was fearful of the impact that immediate open-ended and normal relations with Israel would have on the Syrian society. Despite of the recent economic liberalization, there existed a fragile social balance that could be shaken by an uncontrolled influx of tourists and businessmen from Israel. So first of all Syria had to digest the concept of peace before it represented the public to the uncertainties inherent in such dramatic changes.<sup>21</sup> In short, Syria objected to launch normalization straight after the first phase of withdrawal, in which no settlements were to be evacuated, and was demanding gradual normalization.<sup>22</sup>

#### **4. 3. Security Arrangements**

For both Syria and Israel, security arrangements were crucial because they went to the very heart of their respective visions of peace. Security arrangements would be the facilitators of the peace agreement. Some cases had illustrated the illogic of the strategic depth before the beginning of the peace process. The Gulf War demonstrated Israel's vulnerability to medium-range missiles from Iraq; and the former Israeli security zone in Lebanon failed to provide total security. These events enhanced the availability of the security alternatives to the conventional concept of strategic depth. The security arrangements include demilitarization of the Golan Heights, early warning systems, electronic surveillance, no-fly zones, precision guided missiles and weapons, international peacekeeping forces, and the possibility of stationing the US troops on the Golan Heights for a period of time. Actually the issue should not be of capability but rather of intentions. The security considerations were an obstacle in the early phases of the peace process but should not be in the twenty-first century.<sup>23</sup>

While Syria was demanding equal security arrangements on both sides of the border, Israel wanted arrangements to be proportionate to the countries' size, as was the

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<sup>21</sup> Alon Ben-Meir, "Israel and Syria: The Search For a 'Risk-Free' Peace", Middle East Policy, Vol. 4, No. 1&2, 1995-1996, pp. 143-144

<sup>22</sup> "Israel Proposes Egypt Model for Syrian Track", Ha'aretz in Hebrew, 28 Jul 94, in FBIS-NES-94-145, 28 July 1994, p. 2

<sup>23</sup> Miller, op.cit., pp. 121-122

case with Egypt and neutralized Syria militarily and secured Israel's long-term dominance.<sup>24</sup> The chief concerns of Israel were as follows: fear of a Syrian surprise attack and the need to halt it with as little damage as possible; defending Israel's northern water sources; removing any military threats from the Lebanese border; an overall concern that Syria could play a negative role in the region. Ze'ev Schiff mentioned that the thinking was based on war with Syria, which was assumed as almost inevitable. As the Syrians spoke in terms of military solutions, the need to eliminate the Zionist entity; over the years, Syria was thus considered to be Israel's most incredible enemy with whom there was no chance of ever reaching a peace settlement. Concerns over a Syrian surprise attack and defending water sources let the Israeli planners to attach great significance to keeping the Golan Heights.<sup>25</sup>

Israelis maintained that total withdrawal from the Golan was a dramatic move that can be justified only if the government could show that in exchange, full peace was achieved and national security was not compromised. Once the Golan given back, Israel would have lost a critical strategic territory and consequently, could trust only those security measures over which direct and total control could be exercised.<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, Syria views its struggle with Israel as a comprehensive struggle – cultural, political, and economic – for the future of the Middle East and Syria's place in it. It is part of a larger contest for regional hegemony that will determine the leadership of the Arab world, in which Syria sees itself as the standard-bearer.<sup>27</sup> So for Asad, peace, indeed, was the best guarantee of security. And he insisted that security arrangements had to be reciprocal, though not necessarily applied in a symmetrical fashion.<sup>28</sup> In particular, Syria's specific concerns were the need to recover the Golan; the direct threat posed by Israel to Damascus; fear of Israeli activity harmful to Syria's

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<sup>24</sup> Special Document, Patrick Seale, "The Syria-Israel Negotiations: Who is Telling The Truth?", Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. XXIX, No. 2 (Winter 2000), pp. 71-72, "Israel Proposes Egypt Model for Syrian Track", Ha'aretz in Hebrew, 28 Jul 94, in FBIS-NES-94-145, 28 July 1994, p. 2

<sup>25</sup> Schiff, op.cit., pp. 51-61

<sup>26</sup> Ben-Meir, op.cit., p. 149

<sup>27</sup> Schiff, op.cit., p.64

<sup>28</sup> Mandell, op.cit., p. 245

status and interests in Lebanon; fear that Israel might be able to isolate and encircle Syria by reaching separate agreements with various Arab states; fear that Israel might use its military muscle to extract concessions from Arab states and dictate the results of negotiations.<sup>29</sup>

Asad fought to limit the security arrangements to what he recognized as Israel's real needs, but refused to go beyond that. By any military measure, Israel was already far stronger than Syria: it could not legitimately demand further strategic advantage. According to Muallim, Israel exaggerated the security arrangements since the Israelis have the military superiority over any combination of Arab states. They have nuclear bombs, the most advanced arms and technology as the American arms and technology are completely open to them. Muallim said "yet despite all this, they used to tell us they are afraid of Syria."<sup>30</sup>

It is understood that the security concerns of Israel and Syria parallel each other in several ways: both fear of a surprise attack; both are concerned that Lebanese territory will be used as an attack route against them; and both face difficult geographic constraints on the Golan. As Schiff pointed out that both parties have security problems which had to be resolved. Israel used to face special difficulties when Syria controlled the Golan Heights. Now with Israel control of the Golan and maintaining troops so close to Damascus, Syria feels the threat turned against it. Also both sides demand that security requirements should be formulated in a way that will not pose a potential threat to the other side.<sup>31</sup>

The settlement must reduce the danger of a surprise attack, which was the main and common concern of both sides, limit the destruction of war if the agreement were to fall apart for any reason, and facilitate avoiding mistakes rather than assigning blame after the fact. It was mentioned in non-paper on the aims and principles of the security arrangements of May 1995 that goals of security arrangements were to lessen if not to prevent completely the possibility of a surprise attack, to prevent daily clashes along the

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<sup>29</sup> Schiff, op.cit., pp.64-65

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Moualem, op.cit., p. 86

<sup>31</sup> Schiff, op.cit., pp.89-90

border, to lessen the probability of a wide-ranging offensive, an invasion or general war.<sup>32</sup> Particularly, security arrangements in the Golan Heights, one of the critical conditions for peace, must reinforce both sides' sense of security, not weaken it. At this point, Schiff asserted "the Golan is too small an area to allow for the simple drawing of a territorial line that will ensure equal security for both sides. The arrangement, therefore, must be broader, and go beyond the territorial dimension alone."<sup>33</sup>

To arrange the security between two countries, there are several ways like demilitarization of some territories, maintaining a buffer zone, deployment of limited forces in some territories, early-warning station or satellite systems, and the deployment of international force surveillance.

#### **4. 3. 1. Demilitarization, Buffer Zone, Limited Deployment**

Demilitarization means the removal of the offensive elements of weapon systems, surface-to-air missile batteries as well as precision guided munitions, whose defensive uses cannot be separated from their offensive uses. There should also be a ban on the construction of landing platforms for helicopters inside the demilitarized area. Changes in force structure must also involve changes in the deployment of certain weapon systems outside the demilitarized areas, including fighter-bombers, surface-to-surface missiles and armored divisions.<sup>34</sup> Demilitarization should not instill a feeling of insecurity in either side, but rather prevent surprise attacks, make it difficult for either side to mass forces. It should be implemented without significantly diminishing the ability of either side to defend itself. The purpose is to minimize offensive elements without affecting defensive capability. It will provide an apparatus for early detection of violations while preventing friction and unintentional escalation.<sup>35</sup>

In Syrian-Israeli case, Israel proposed that the middle of the demilitarized area would be a buffer zone. A limited number of Syrian police armed only with light

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<sup>32</sup> Robert Rabil, Emabttled Neighbors Syria, Israel and Lebanon, (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), p. 232

<sup>33</sup> Schiff, op.cit., p. 90

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 97-98

<sup>35</sup> Schiff, op.cit., p. 97

weapons will be allowed to operate inside the zone. An international force will be deployed inside this buffer zone to separate the forces and help monitor the security arrangements.<sup>36</sup> Without such an international force, there will be a dangerous vacuum, inviting violations. The international force, similar to the force currently monitoring the Separation of Forces Agreement, will not be evacuated from the area except by the consent of both parties. If there is a need to replace the force of one of the countries participating in the international force, the new force will be determined by the Security Council, which will act as a guarantor of the agreement. Neither party will be allowed to maintain a military presence in the buffer zone. Also Israel has always objected to foreign forces taking responsibility for Israel's ongoing security. It is best not to invite the US to dispatch military units to keep the agreement between Syria and Israel and stand between them.<sup>37</sup>

On both sides of the buffer zone, there will be not only demilitarized areas but also areas of limited deployment, with only limited forces remaining for guard duty. They will be equipped with short-range artillery and no anti-aircraft missiles. No armored units will be stationed in the areas of limited deployment. The large fortifications will be destroyed. The limited forces in the demilitarized zone will not be allowed to hold maneuvers at more than battalion strength, nor will they be allowed to transport troops by helicopter. Any maneuvers that were to take place will be reported to the other side at least on week in advance.<sup>38</sup>

Israelis, beside demilitarized and limited force zone, proposed a third zone where there can be only two divisions and one airfield, and finally an unrestricted zone in the rest. While Syrians announced what was to be a basic principle of his negotiation: security arrangements had to be restricted to the areas of confrontation between Syria and Israel, a narrow strip of territory 5 to 7 kilometers on either side of the June 4 line, and wanted equal limited forces zones on both sides of the border, which Israel refused. This zone, where military forces were to be banned or limited, became known to the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 101

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 98

negotiators as the “relevant areas”. The major disagreement was the width of the relevant areas in the negotiations.<sup>39</sup>

Syria seems prepared to acknowledge that Israel has security concerns, it is only by emphasizing that both sides have them and not only Israel, and that any arrangements must be reciprocal.<sup>40</sup> Reciprocity is one of the principles mentioned in the non-paper that security arrangements on both sides will be equal and reciprocal. If the implementation of geographic reciprocity is too difficult; experts from both sides will discuss the problematic of the specific arrangement and solve it by either changing or redefining it, or by addressing it in a mutually agreed manner.<sup>41</sup>

#### **4. 3. 2. Early Warning Station vs. Satellite**

Early warning provides sufficient time to respond to threats of attack, from the moment enemy preparations are noticed. The importance to Israel of early warning stations using and generating real-time intelligence will greatly increase, if it withdraws from the Golan Heights. In its continuous monitoring of Syrian intentions, this will help maintain Israel’s deterrent capacity and compensate for lack of strategic depth and for Syria’s large advantage in standing forces.<sup>42</sup> According to Schiff, Israel will have no choice but to exercise extreme care with regard to early warning.<sup>43</sup> So the negotiations stalled over an Israeli demand for an early-warning station on Mount Hermon. This Israeli demand was unacceptable for Syrians. At any rate, the rejection of any Israeli ground stations on the Golan is not subject to compromise; because such a facility has long been a source of anger and humiliation to the Syrians. It enables Israel to look deep into Syria and Lebanon, and even into Iraq. It also enables Israel to listen telephone conversations in Damascus. Most importantly the existence of any Israeli ground station

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<sup>39</sup> Special Document, Patrick Seale, *op.cit.* p. 72, Hinnebusch, *op.cit.*, p. 54

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82

<sup>41</sup> Rabil, *op.cit.*, pp. 232-233, Moore, *op.cit.*, pp. 78-79

<sup>42</sup> Mandell, *op.cit.*, pp. 247-248, “Israeli Security Demands, Syrian Responses Deatiled”, Yedi’ot Aharonot in Hebrew, 26 May 95, in FBIS-NES-95-103, 30 May 1995, p. 11

<sup>43</sup> Schiff, *op.cit.*, p. 99

will symbolize occupation.<sup>44</sup> Muallim said “We will not permit under any circumstances a ground station in our territory manned by the Israelis – we would refuse even if it would be manned by the Americans. They offered us a ground station in Safad, and we said no because we will not allow one on our soil. Given advanced technological means, the only reason for the Israelis to insist on having a ground station is to show that they are in the Golan against our sovereignty.”<sup>45</sup> And Asad explained his opposition to the establishment of the Syrian early warning station by saying that “Syrian monitoring in Safad is less crucial than my opposition to an Israeli presence on Mount Hermon.”<sup>46</sup>

Instead, Asad proposed that early warning could adequately be provided to both sides by satellite and aerial reconnaissance and by an international force positioned on the Golan between the parties.<sup>47</sup> Israelis asserted against Syrian arguments that while satellites can provide important information, their effectiveness can be greatly limited by inclement weather or technical difficulties. There is no adequate substitute for early warning stations on the ground. The use of observation balloons and aircraft may increase only early warning capabilities.<sup>48</sup> It is argued that such demands by Israelis and rejection by Syrians are issue related to much more the Israeli and Syrian national psyches than to real security considerations.

#### **4. 3. 3. International Force**

International force is required to monitor the security arrangements. There is mutual agreement on international involvement in a possible treaty regime. Both Israel and Syria accept the notion of a multinational force. For its part, Syria is flexible to the structure of the force. It is argued that whatever the structure, the key element for the Syrians is American participation. Damascus wanted to include American troops as part of a monitoring force. This will prove their flexibility and strengthen their links with the

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<sup>44</sup> Rubin, op.cit., p. 14, 17

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Moualem, op.cit., p. 87

<sup>46</sup> “Al-Asad Rejects Proposal on Early-Warning Station”, Ma’ariv in Hebrew, 29 May 95, in FBIS-NES-95-103, 30 May 1995, p. 12

<sup>47</sup> Special Document, Patrick Seale, op.cit., p. 72

<sup>48</sup> Schiff, op.cit., pp. 98-99

Americans. In Israel, some favor American participation in the treaty regime. A UN force without the US troops will not suffice since such peacekeeping missions are not constituted as fighting forces and do not have the same ability to deter.<sup>49</sup> And some are suspicious of the prospect of American ground forces interposed between Syria and Israel. They fear that the presence of these troops will only constrain Israel, leaving it unable to initiate a pre-emptive strike without the US permission. They argued that placing American troops on the Golan would force the US to become neutral rather than remaining Israel's ally.<sup>50</sup>

#### **4. 4. Time Period of Territorial Withdrawal**

The time period of territorial withdrawal is meant the phases of the treaty implementation. Israel was calling for a 3 to 5 year withdrawal period, enough to modify its deterrence posture away from one reliant on territory to one grounded in mutually agreed upon security arrangements. Syria was willing to accept a phased withdrawal from the Golan; however, for the withdrawal to be regarded as reasonable to the Syrians, it would likely have to be undertaken in a period no longer than 3 years.<sup>51</sup> Farouk al-Shara, Syrian Foreign Minister, called that “...from a logistical point of view, and because of the small size of the Golan Heights, there is no need for a long period to conclude the withdrawal.”<sup>52</sup>

For Israel, phased withdrawal would provide an opportunity to adjust to new security arrangements, normalize relations with Damascus, and test Syrian intentions and commitments over time. An incremental withdrawal also would provide time to lay the necessary political groundwork for the dismantling of Israeli settlements. Strategically, the period of the withdrawal would allow Israel to establish early warning mechanisms, to develop safeguards for the water resources, and gradually to build a regional arms control regime. For Syria, phased withdrawal would mean recovering all of the Golan within a time frame no longer than of that of the Israeli withdrawal from

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<sup>49</sup> Moore, op.cit., pp. 80-81

<sup>50</sup> Ben-Meir, op.cit., p. 152

<sup>51</sup> Mandell, op.cit., p. 243

<sup>52</sup> Ben-Meir (1997), op.cit., p. 5



the Sinai: 3 years. Strategically, phased withdrawal would mean limiting Israel's capacity to conduct preemptive strikes against Damascus, whether across the Golan Heights.<sup>53</sup>

#### **4. 5. Withdrawal from the Golan Heights: How to Manage Israeli Security with Syrian Sovereignty**

The Golan Heights, a Syrian mountainous plateau with an average altitude of 1000 meters, covers an area of 1,750 square kilometers. Israel captured about 1,250 square kilometers of this area on June 9-10, 1967. As a result of the 1973 war and the Syrian-Israeli disengagement agreement of 1974, Israel returned to Syria about 100 square kilometers. The Golan has a north-south length of 65 kilometers, and an east-west dimension varying from 12 to 25 kilometers. It is important to note that the Mt. Hermon massif (2224 m.) in the north has exceptional geo-strategic value because it offers a commanding position overlooking southern Lebanon, the Golan plateau, and much of southern Syria and northern Israel. At present, the Israeli army is stationed about 35 kilometers from Damascus, while the Syrian army is stationed about 250 kilometers from Tel Aviv. The Golan's importance also comes from its regional water sources. This is particularly true of the area of Mt. Hermon, where the headwaters of the Jordan River lie. Additionally, the Banias Spring, a major Jordan River source, is located on the lower slopes of the Golan, thus enhancing the latter's importance.<sup>54</sup>

There are a number of phases of the dispute related to the Golan Heights, which was initiated by the 1967 war. In the first phase, Syria refused to accept the UNSCR 242 and this made the prospect of an Israeli withdrawal a non-starter. The initial Israeli proposal to completely withdraw from the Golan in return for total Syrian demilitarization of the area fell through following the Khartoum Arab summit resolution and the three nos. In the second phase, the position of both parties significantly changed following the 1973 war and Syria for the first time was willing to accept the UNSCR 242 as the basis of the peace after the Disengagement Agreement of 1974, which

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<sup>53</sup> Mandell, *op.cit.*, pp. 246-247

<sup>54</sup> Muhammad Muslih, "The Golan: Israel, Syria, and Strategic Calculations", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 47, No. 4, (Autumn 1993), p. 621

enabled Syria to reclaim a small portion of the Golan. The third phase began in 1981 when a decision to apply Israeli law to the Golan Heights was taken in the Knesset by majority, thereby raising doubts about Israeli commitments about the application of the UNSCR 242 to the Syrian front. Despite the law does not explicitly address the question of sovereignty, in 1990, in an interview, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir admitted that it ruled out territorial compromise by saying “Golan is part of the State of Israel just as Jerusalem is part of Israel”. The victory of the Labor Party in 1992 and Prime Minister Rabin’s willingness for a territorial compromise on the Golan marked the fourth phase. For the first time since 1967, the settlement of the Israeli-Syrian dispute over the Golan was in the realm of possibility. At least in private the Israeli government was willing to accept the Syrian demand and withdraw to the June 4, 1967 borders on the Golan. The victory of the Likud leader Netanyahu in May 1996 temporarily shifted the situation to the 1981-1991 period when Israel was formally committed to peace while seeking to retain the Golan Heights. While Barak’s coming to power gave some hope again, Ariel Sharon swept all the hopes totally. Kumaraswamy asserted that in all these phases, Israel found itself confronted with a series of predicaments in dealing with its relationship vis-à-vis Syria and they could broadly be classified as strategic threats and political predicaments.<sup>55</sup> The issue will be examined from different perspectives: legal, strategic, political, economical, ideological and existential ones.

#### **4. 5. 1. Legal Dimension**

While the UNSCR 242 and 338 are the essential reference points and building blocks for the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations, as they were for the peace agreement between Egypt and Israel in 1979 and Jordan and Israel in 1994. Eugene Rostow called them as the only documents setting out principles for peace-keeping on which Israel, its Arab neighbors and the Security Council have formally agreed.<sup>56</sup> Both parties and all interpreters have common idea that the UNSCR 242 has dominated the diplomatic scene

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<sup>55</sup> P. R. Kumaraswamy, “The Golan Heights: Israel’s Predicaments”, Strategic Analysis: A Monthly Journal of the IDSA, Vol. XXXIII, No. 7, (October 1999)

<sup>56</sup> Eugene Rostow, “The Intent of UNSC Resolution 242 – The View of Non-Regional Actors”, UN Security Council Resolution 242: The Building Block of Peacemaking, (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1993), p. 6

as the only acceptable basis for establishing a comprehensive peace since it is a multidimensional resolution with political, legal, territorial, and human dimensions. Meir Rosenne, a legal advisor to Israel's Foreign Ministry from 1971-1979, pointed out that the resolution is only a framework and a list of general principles which can become operative only after detailed measures have been agreed upon and further the detailed elements of these principles have to be negotiated between the parties.<sup>57</sup> Nabil Elaraby, the Permanent Representative of Egypt to the UN in 1990s, also accept this issue, by saying that the resolution is definitely not self-implemented because paragraph 3 of the resolution provides for the appointment of a special representative to promote an agreement in order to achieve a peaceful settlement in accordance with the provisions of the UNSCR 242.<sup>58</sup>

However, the UNSCR 242 has some ambiguities, specifically the extent of Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, the nature of the peace and security in the region; this ambiguity leads to several different interpretations among the parties. While both parties have common idea that the UNSCR 242 has dominated the diplomatic scene; all of them cannot share the one sole interpretation of the resolution.

First, the preamble's reference to the inadmissibility of acquisition of territory by force is interpreted differently. Israelis argue that the resolution deals with the acquisition of territory, not military occupation. And there is nothing in the Charter of the UN or in any source of international law that makes the mere military occupation of captured territory until a peace treaty can be signed illegal. Stephen Schwebel argued that Israel's action in 1967 was defensive, and on the theory that since the danger in response to which defensive action was taken remains, occupation –though not

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<sup>57</sup> Meir Rosenne, "Legal Interpretations of UNSC 242", UN Security Council Resolution 242: The Building Block of Peacemaking, (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1993), p. 29

<sup>58</sup> Nabil Elaraby, "Legal Interpretations of UNSC 242", UN Security Council Resolution 242: The Building Block of Peacemaking, (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1993), p. 40

annexation- is justified, until a peace settlement is reached.<sup>59</sup> So the Israeli action until 1981 may be accepted as legal, but after 1981, it is obviously illegal.

When we look at the arguments of Arabs, Nabil Elaraby made clear by giving reference to the report of Dag Hammarskjöld of “the jurisprudence of the UN has been consistent and quite clear: the UN cannot condone a change of the status juris resulting from military action contrary to the provisions of the charter; it should be mentioned that the status juris existing prior to such military action be re-established by a withdrawal of troops and by relinquishing or nullification of rights asserted in territories covered by the military action and depending upon it.”<sup>60</sup> And Adnan Abu Odeh, the Permanent Representative of Jordan to the UN in 1990s, pointed out that the resolution, by basing on twin requirements of security and withdrawal, refutes the notion of security through territorial gain. It makes the two incompatible and contradictory.<sup>61</sup>

The most important differentiation in the interpretations is about the question of withdrawal. Israel points out that the resolution does not explicitly require that Israel withdraw to the lines occupied by it on June 5, 1967. From Israeli point of view, the resolution simply approves the principle of “withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict” and interrelates this with the principle that every state in the area is entitled to live in peace within “secure and recognized boundaries”. According to them, the notable omissions in regard to withdrawal are the words **all**, **the** and **the June 5, 1967 lines**. The Israelis emphasize that there is lacking a declaration requiring Israel to withdraw from **all** of the territories occupied by it and after **June 5, 1967**. Further Israel asserts that the presence of the secure and recognized boundary language demonstrates the necessity for border adjustments to maintain Israel’s security, inasmuch as its boundaries were neither secure nor recognized under

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<sup>59</sup> Stephen M. Schwebel, “What Weight to Conquest?”, UN Security Council Resolution 242: The Building Block of Peacemaking, (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1993), p. 144

<sup>60</sup> Nabil, op.cit., p. 37

<sup>61</sup> Adnan Abu Odeh, “The Origins and Relevance of UNSC 242”, UN Security Council Resolution 242: The Building Block of Peacemaking, (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1993), p. 49

the armistice regime prior to June 5, 1967.<sup>62</sup> Meir Rosenne indicates answers of some officials of the time about the question of withdrawal: Michael Steward, British secretary of state for foreign and commonwealth affairs, said “the omission of the word “all” before the word “territories” is deliberate”; George Brown, the British foreign secretary in 1967, stated “the proposal said ‘Israel will withdraw from territories that were occupied’, not ‘from the territories’, which means that Israel will not withdraw from all the territories.”<sup>63</sup> Further he asserts “this was affirmed by Syria’s outright rejection of the UNSCR 242 after its adoption on November 22, 1967. Syria stated that this resolution is totally unacceptable because it does not imply an obligation for Israel to withdraw from all the Syrian territory occupied in the 1967 war. So boundaries still need to be negotiated.”<sup>64</sup> As a response to the discrepancy between the French text, which is represented as a proof by the Arabs, and the English text, Rosenne said “it should be noted that, in international law, if there is any difficulty in interpreting the language of texts, the original text is used as the reference point. Since the resolution was a British proposal, it is the English text that prevails.”<sup>65</sup> In short, according to Israelis, the boundaries have yet to be negotiated.

In contrary, the Arab states emphasize that the resolution calls for a complete Israeli withdrawal and say that Israeli interpretation is overly restrictive. They point to the language of the resolution emphasizing “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war” and “respect for and acknowledgement of the territorial integrity of every state in the area”. According to them, this language in effect calls for complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from all the territories occupied by them in the Six Day war. In addition, they contend that the UN Charter itself in spirit supports their contention that military conquest of territory is inadmissible as a matter of international law.<sup>66</sup> Nabil

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<sup>62</sup> Arthur J. Goldberg, “United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 and the Prospect for Peace in the Middle East”, UN Security Council Resolution 242: The Building Block of Peacemaking, (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1993), p. 133

<sup>63</sup> Rosenne, op.cit., p. 31

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., pp. 32-33

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pp. 31-32

Elaraby said “with respect to the UNSCR 242’s reference to ‘secure and recognized boundaries’, I would like to stress that the withdrawal clause is clear. It does not mean new secure and recognized borders, but secure and recognized existing borders.” He tries to clarify the issue by saying “the French text, of course, says “des territories” which is always referred to as “the territories”. And he argues that the omission of the definite article turns over the legitimacy which is anchored in jurisprudence and philosophy of the UN Charter.<sup>67</sup> Adnan Abu Odeh claimed that any interpretation of the UNSCR 242 as Israelis was semantical acrobatics.<sup>68</sup>

#### **4. 5. 2. Strategic Dimension**

The Golan Heights represent a vital strategic asset for both Israel and Syria. From defensive point, the Golan Heights is important for the defense of Israel, especially the Galilee. Also it facilitates the defense of the Huleh valley and allows greater time for the mobilization of reserves. From the offensive point of view, it provides with an excellent springboard into Syrian territory, if Israel find itself under attack. From the Mount Hermon, Israeli intelligence can observe the Syrian capital and see Syrian military deployments over a large area. Holding the Golan assures Israel better battlefield management and containment of attacking forces in wartime. Also holding the Golan insures that if Syria attacks Israel, the ensuing war will be conducted not on Israeli but on Syrian territory. The Syrians know this and thus the Golan serves as an important Israeli deterrent against Syrian aggression.<sup>69</sup>

In considering the Golan from the Israeli perspective, one can identify three Israeli views: those adopting an ambivalent position with respect to the extent of potential withdrawal from the area; those stressing Israel’s need to retain the Golan; and those advocating an almost total Israeli withdrawal in return for full peace.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Goldberg, *op.cit.*, p. 130

<sup>67</sup> Elaraby, *op.cit.*, p. 38

<sup>68</sup> Abu Odeh, *op.cit.*, p. 49

<sup>69</sup> Schiff, *op.cit.*, p. 48

<sup>70</sup> Muslih (1993), *op.cit.*, p. 622

Those adopting an ambivalent position argue that unlike the vast Sinai Peninsula, by virtue of overlooking the densely populated Israeli settlements of the north and containing the sources of the Jordan River, the narrow Golan is a strategic value that it cannot be returned to Syria in its entirety. Mentioning the Jewish settlements on the Golan, many of them are averse to the idea of dismantling Jewish settlements. And they demand that Syria must spell out the nature of peace before Israel defines the extent of the withdrawal; an extensive security regime must be established.<sup>71</sup>

According to those stressing Israel's need to retain the Golan, many Likud members and some Labor hard-liners, security is territory.<sup>72</sup> Many in the military establishment insisted on keeping the Golan as a buffer zone and as an early warning system. Despite of its small size, Golan's difficult accessibility makes it an important buffer zone to Israel. This commanding topographic feature gives them extra-psychological reassurance, knowing that no one is looking down on them.<sup>73</sup> And they deny that today's advanced weapons would make the Golan insignificant. They give the example of the 1973 war which proved that having the Golan as a buffer zone gave the Israelis both the time they needed to mobilize forces and the strategic advantage that permitted them to stop the advancing Syrian army.<sup>74</sup> David Eshel asserted that even in an age of missiles and unconventional warfare, strategic ground and sufficient depth in territory is still crucial factor. He further argued that physical presence on the Golan cannot be compensated by early-warning installations, demilitarized zones.<sup>75</sup>

According to those advocating total withdrawal in return for full peace, mainly Labor party doves, security is not only territory, but rather real peace, strict

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., pp. 622-623

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 624

<sup>73</sup> Rabil, op.cit., p. 170

<sup>74</sup> Alon Ben-Meir, "Why Syria Must Regain the Golan to Make Peace", Middle East Policy, Vol. 5, No. 3, October 1997, p. 5, Andrew Duncan, "Land For Peace: Israel's Choice", in Efraim Karsh (ed.), Between War and Peace: Dilemmas of Israeli Security, (London: Frank Cass, 1996), p. 62

<sup>75</sup> David Eshel, "The Golan Heights: A Vital Strategic Asset for Israel", Israel Affairs, Vol. 3, No. 3&4, Spring/Summer 1997, and in Efraim Karsh (ed.), From Rabin to Netanyahu, Israel's Troubled Agenda, London: Frank Cass, 1997), p. 231

demilitarization, and security guarantees.<sup>76</sup> They say that in a missile age, a missile launched from Damascus will not stop on the Golan for getting a visa. As a security arrangement, they propose a staged withdrawal which would allow a demonstration of Israeli willingness to withdraw, time for confidence in the new peace treaty to be gained in Israel and the establishment of diplomatic relations before the final withdrawal. After withdrawal there should be zones with limitations of armaments.<sup>77</sup>

In considering the heights from Syrian perspective, the Syrians consider the Golan as a critical natural defense against Israel. The continued Israeli occupation of the Golan presents strategic liabilities that are compounded by the absence of natural barriers. At the closest point the Israeli army is at a distance of only 35 kilometers from Damascus. Thus Syrian planners believe that the Golan Heights in Syrian hands provides a defensive depth that is indispensable for the security of Syria, while a Golan controlled by Israel poses a lethal threat to the Syrian heartland.<sup>78</sup>

#### **4. 5. 3. Political Dimension**

The Golan Heights is not only a question of security. It is also a question of political instability, settlements, and economic considerations, ideological and personal needs. The Israelis who oppose full withdrawal have some legitimate concerns about the potential for political instability in Syria. The Israeli concerns over future Syrian political instability explain why Israel seeks a phased pullout while beginning the normalization of relations immediately after signing the agreement.<sup>79</sup>

The situation of about 15,000 Israeli settlers after a peace agreement remains an emotional and highly charged issue in Israel. Only a few doves regard the evacuation of all the settlers as the inevitable price to be paid for reaching a peace agreement. According to Muslih, the powerful Golan lobby, the strong opposition of Labor hardliners and the National Religious Party, and Labor's long-standing belief that civilian

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<sup>76</sup> Muslih (1993), op.cit., pp. 624-625, "Minister Calls For Golan Heights' Return to Syria", Cairo Mena in Arabic, 16 Feb 94, in FBIS-NES-94-034, 18 February 1994, p. 20

<sup>77</sup> Duncan, op.cit., p. 63

<sup>78</sup> Muslih (1993), op.cit., pp. 626-627

<sup>79</sup> Ben-Meir (1995-1996), op.cit., pp. 146-147



settlements have a military value are the obstacles to stand in the way of dismantling the settlers.<sup>80</sup> Rabil argued that the encompassing political and psychological process provoked by the Golan settlers makes it difficult for any Israeli government to decide on the withdrawal and removal of the settlements from the Golan.<sup>81</sup> Ben-Meir indicated that when Israel finally agrees to a full withdrawal, it may cause nothing less than a national trauma, affecting not only the settlers but nearly all Israelis.<sup>82</sup> When we examine trends of the settlers toward Israeli withdrawal, it is generally negative; many could argue that they had struck roots and that a new generation had been born there. And they, unlike those of the West Bank, were encouraged to settle there by the government itself and through a wide national consensus. Most of them said that their lives had become more secure after the election of Netanyahu, who was a hard-liner.<sup>83</sup>

From a psychological perspective, Asad's characterization of the requirements for peace – full Israeli withdrawal – touches deep nationalistic and emotional chords. Asad made the removal of all consequences of the 1967 war a matter of national honor and thereby a prerequisite for peace. The Syrians were told that the Golan was captured through a war of aggression that exacted a heavy national toll; therefore, as desirable as peace, national pride and honor are necessary for the Syrians. Walid Muallim, chief negotiator of Syria, explained the situation by saying that “No Syrian government could relinquish a single inch of the Golan to Israel, because that would betray the trust of the people.” Many Israeli officials believed that Asad had a personal stake in making peace with Israel, especially since it was he who lost the Golan, when he served as Syria's defense minister.<sup>84</sup> Asad had invested a tremendous amount of political capital in the peace process, making the formula of “full withdrawal for full peace” central to his new strategy. What has complicated the peace process was the question of how to fold this

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<sup>80</sup> Muslih (1993), op.cit., p. 623, Kumaraswamy, op.cit., pp. 7-8, Ben-Meir (1995-1996), op.cit., p. 147

<sup>81</sup> Rabil, op.cit., p. 165

<sup>82</sup> Ben-Meir (1997), op.cit., pp. 5-6

<sup>83</sup> Ilene R. Prusher, Christian Science Monitor, 12/26/96, Vol. 89 Issue 22

<sup>84</sup> Ben-Meir (1997), op.cit., pp. 2-3

formula into an agreement with compromising Israel's security and Syria's sovereignty over the Golan.<sup>85</sup>

Fortunately, the Golan occupies a marginal role in the ideological debate in Israel, unlike the West Bank and Gaza. So the Golan was not a sanctified area but rather a strategic asset.<sup>86</sup> Rabil argued that since the historical ideological component of the Jewish claim to the Heights was inapplicable, and since they were not considered a part of Eretz Israel, certain ambivalence became evident in the Zionist ideology with regard to the Heights.<sup>87</sup>

From an economic perspective, interests are primarily water-related. The Heights and the surrounding areas are vital for Israel's water supplies and the Banias Spring constitutes about 20 percent of the Jordan's flow into the Sea of Galilee. Both the spring and the Banias River came under Israeli control in 1967. A number of pre-1967 confrontations revolved around the attempts of either party to divert and change the flow of water into the Jordan River. Israeli withdrawal would place three major tributaries of the Jordan River under Syrian control, thereby undermining the flow into the Sea of Galilee, which supplies 30 percent of Israeli water need at present. And the withdrawal would place Syria along the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Even if demilitarized, Syria would be sharing the waters of the Sea of Galilee. P. R. Kumaraswamy argued that though it managed without the Golan water before 1967, with its limited natural resources, the question of water rights play an important role in Israel's negotiation strategy concerning the Golan.<sup>88</sup> From the Syrian perspective, the situation is similar that if Syria were to regain the Golan, it would enable to better its interests in matters involving the riparian in the Jordan-Yarmouk basin.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Kumaraswamy, op.cit., p. 10

<sup>87</sup> Rabil, op.cit., p. 36

<sup>88</sup> Kumaraswamy, op.cit., p. 10

<sup>89</sup> Muslih (1993), op.cit., pp. 628-629

#### 4. 6. Existential Dimension of the Golan Heights: Water

In the Middle East peace process, water issue was discussed in the multilateral talks, which Syria rejected to participate before reaching an agreement on the border with Israel. Water issue is related to border issue, that's why here it should be mentioned. Because the northernmost DMZ was adjacent to the Banias River and its springs, feeding the Jordan River, located on the lower slopes of the Golan Heights. The Jordan River itself ran through the DMZ north of the Sea of Galilee.<sup>90</sup>

The issue of water security is so existential that the conflicts over water between Israel and her neighbors are so deep and intractable that the alone will be one of the major obstacles to peace in the region and might even lead to exacerbation of the conflict between the countries of the region.<sup>91</sup> Shimon Peres noted in February 2000 in an international conference in The Hague that water is the key to peace in the Middle East.<sup>92</sup>

Ze'ev Schiff argued that if the Golan's military significance for Israel is primarily operational, specifically the defense of the Galilee, the need to defend the water sources is absolutely strategic and indeed existential.<sup>93</sup> Robert Rabil indicated that water is crucial issue between the two embattled neighbors, affected no less by its scarcity<sup>94</sup> in the Jordan River basin than by the politics of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Israel and Syria looked at the issue through the prism of power politics, ultimately

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<sup>90</sup> Rabil, op.cit., p. 188

<sup>91</sup> H. I. Shuval, "Are the Conflicts Between Israel and Her Neighbors Over the Waters of the Jordan River Basin an Obstacle to Peace? Israel-Syria As a Case Study", Water, Air, and Soil Pollution, Vol 123, 2000, pp. 605-606

<sup>92</sup> Miller, op.cit., p. 123

<sup>93</sup> Schiff, op.cit., p. 50

<sup>94</sup> According to the study of the Population Action International, many countries in the Middle East now face or will be facing severe water shortages as their populations grow and their water resources remain fixed. The intensity of the differences over water resources in the Jordan River basin appear to be particularly grave since three of the five partners to the disputed waters – Jordan, the Palestinian, and Israel – face serious, long term water problems, particularly when considering the expected doubling of populations within the next thirty years or so. It has been suggested by the World Bank that for a country to be considered as having sufficient water for all purposes it would be desirable to have at its disposal at least 1000 cubic meters/person/year (CM/P/Yr.) Israel's water resources for the year 2000 are about 270 CM/P/Yr; Jordan's are about 200 CM/P/Yr; and Palestinians' in the West Bank and Gaza are about 90 CM/P/Yr. The two upstream Jordan River riparians, Syria and Lebanon, have more abundant water supplies: The potential total water resources available to Syria on a per capita basis are about 900 CM/P/Yr; the water resources available to Lebanon are 1200 CM/P/Yr.

transforming it into a strategic matter, a matter of national security and foreign policy.<sup>95</sup> Before the 1967 war, one of the greatest and strategic headaches for Israel was Syrian control over some of the water sources of the Jordan River and its close proximity to other important water sources such as the Sea of Galilee.<sup>96</sup>

In retrospect, in 1926, the British and the French completed a good-neighbor agreement whereby people in that area could have access to the water through a pier that was built. From the 1920s onward, the Syrians fished and swam in the lake. The Syrians wanted the line that prevailed after 1926 and before the 1967 war with Israel to be their frontier. Before the 1967 war, the Syrians were on the upper Jordan River and on the northeastern corner of the lake. They did not want to take water from the lake, but instead wanted to access to the lake for fishing and swimming; the Syrians wanted to share the water that flows into the lake according to the rules of international law that protect the rights of upstream and downstream states.<sup>97</sup>

For Israel since the founding of the state, water was a significant strategic dimension. She had to develop its water resources in order to accommodate a growing number of immigrants, to build settlements, and to reclaim land for agriculture. Water was ideologically, demographically, politically, and economically significant.<sup>98</sup> However, Syria perceived Israel's development of water resources as a threat. Arab waters had become sources upon which their enemy depended to strengthen its state. The Arab countries perceived this issue as essentially a political problem and the core of the struggle against Israel.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Rabil, op.cit., p. 186

<sup>96</sup> Schiff, op.cit., p. 37

<sup>97</sup> Patrick Seale, Uri Lubrani, Raghida Dergham, and Daniel Pipes, "The Middle East in 2000: A Year of Critical Decisions: Roundtable Discussion", Soref Symposium, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, (May 18-19, 2000), p. 2, Jerome Slater, "Lost Opportunities for Peace in the Arab-Israeli Conflict Israel and Syria, 1948-2001", International Security, Vol. 27, No. 1, (Summer 2002), p. 102

<sup>98</sup> Rabil, op.cit., p. 188

<sup>99</sup> Moshe Shemesh, "Syria's Struggle over Water with Israel, 1959-1967", in Moshe Ma'oz, Joseph Ginat, and Onn Winckler (ed.), Modern Syria From Ottoman Rule to Pivotal Role in the Middle East, (Brighton, Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 1999), p. 245

#### **4. 6. 1. Period between 1949 and 1967**

Donald Neff pointed out that the Syrian-Israeli relations prior to the June War of 1967 fall into two general phases. From 1951 to 1956, the overarching dispute was over the sovereignty of the demilitarized zones (DMZ), one aspect of which was Israel's efforts to harness the waters of the area. From 1957 to 1967, the struggle focused more specifically on water.<sup>100</sup>

The first crisis occurred in the beginning of 1951 when Israel embarked on drainage of Huleh Marshes (an integral part of the Jordan River system) and irrigation of the Negev and the Jerusalem corridor. Implementation of the drainage caused foreign policy complications and even shooting incidents because the Jordan's waters were to be channeled out of the basin and also because the Huleh drainage infringed on the demilitarized zone with Syria.<sup>101</sup> Syria complained to the MAC, the Commission ruled that the Israeli project constituted a violation of the armistice agreement. As a response, Israel asserted for the first time that it held sovereignty over the zone and thus had a right to proceed. And the Israeli cabinet soon decided that the DMZ had to be clear of Arabs. On May, the Security Council called for a cease-fire and passed Resolution 92 calling on Israel to stop draining the marshes of Lake Huleh and to allow the return of Arabs evicted by Israeli forces from the DMZ. The area remained relatively calm for the next two years until another crisis erupted, this time a diplomatic one involving not only the UN but also the US.<sup>102</sup>

In September 1953, Israel had commenced work on a project to re-channel the Jordan River in the central DMZ. The plan called for digging a canal at the B'not-Ya'acov Bridge to produce electricity. Again Syria complained to the MAC in reference to Israel's use of heavy earth-moving machinery. In light of the Security Council debate, Israel was forced to stop work, mainly due to American pressure that the threat of

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<sup>100</sup> Donald Neff, "Israel-Syria: Conflict at the Jordan River, 1949-1967", Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. XXIII, No. 4, (Summer 1994), p. 30

<sup>101</sup> Thomas Naff, "Water in the International Relations of the Middle East: Israel and the Jordan River System", in John Spagnolo (ed.), Problems of the Modern Middle East in Historical Perspective (Oxford, Berkshire: Ithaca Press, 1992), p. 196

<sup>102</sup> Neff, op.cit., p. 32

postponing economic assistance unless Israel ceased further earth-moving operations.<sup>103</sup> This canal plan constituted the first stage of Israel's National Water Carrier (NWC) aiming to transport water in a pipeline from the Jordan River in the north to the arid south.<sup>104</sup>

At the time, some efforts were exerted to reach a multilateral accord on water allocation between the riparian states. The most sustained effort was undertaken by Eric Johnston, an American diplomat, between 1953 and 1955. **The Johnston Plan**, based philosophically on the Marshall Plan, was, of all the schemes for the Jordan River, the most important and comprehensive, and came closest to being successfully adopted.<sup>105</sup> Johnston avoided discussing water rights and succeeded in reaching an agreement on a fixed distribution among the technical committees of the Arab states and Israel regarding waters of the Jordan River. The final version of the plan allocated to Jordan 480 million cubic meters per year (MCM/Yr), to Israel 466 MCM/Yr, to Syria 132 MCM/Yr, and to Lebanon 35 MCM/Yr. Although it was accepted by Israel and the official Arab representatives at the technical level, the plan was not approved by the Arab League. One of the interpretations maintained that the plan was rejected on the political grounds. Syria let the opposition to the plan, fearing that the cooperation in a water scheme would imply indirect recognition of the Jewish state and pave the way for normalization of relations.<sup>106</sup> The experience with the Johnston Plan showed that political and security-related concerns dominated the issue of reaching an accord between the riparian states.<sup>107</sup>

Despite of the heightened tension in the DMZ, Israel was able to complete its NWC in June 1964. As a response, with the backing of the Arab League, Lebanon and Syria initiated their own plans in 1965 to divert the headwaters of the Jordan River in order to prevent Israel from unilaterally utilizing its waters. However, Israel responded

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<sup>103</sup> Shemesh, op.cit., p. 246

<sup>104</sup> Shuval, op.cit., p. 610

<sup>105</sup> Naff, op.cit., p. 196

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 612

<sup>107</sup> Rabil, op.cit., p. 189

by launching several air strikes that brought the Lebanese and then the Syrian works to a halt in 1966.<sup>108</sup>

#### **4. 6. 2. Period after the June 1967 War**

The 1967 War completely changed the hydro politics of the Jordan basin because Israel took control of all the tributaries and springs of the Jordan River. This condition allowed Israel to increase its use of water from the Jordan River far above the Johnston Plan's allocation.<sup>109</sup> Utilization of water among the riparians became more unilateral, competitive, and in some instances, arbitrary. Israel's achievement of hydro strategic dominance had ended all question of headwater diversion by Syria.<sup>110</sup>

Throughout the years Israel's consumption of water incrementally increased as its population multiplied and its irrigation land expanded. The country's demand for water exceeded its supply while at the same time its climatic and hydrological features further compounded the problem. Israel never wavered in its attitude of controlling the sources of the Jordan River, as it constitutes the only surface water in the country.<sup>111</sup>

All this has a direct bearing on Israel with regard to its negotiations with Syria. The country potentially needs every drop of water and can ill afford any possible Syrian risks to its water resources. Consequently, Israel's critical water condition accounts for the importance of protecting the headwaters of the Jordan, and makes the country extremely cautious respect to relinquishing the Golan to Syria.<sup>112</sup> Since there are some risks regarding water issue by Israel's withdrawal from the Golan to cease-fire lines that existed prior to the June 1967 war. First, Syria might attempt to divert the waters of the Banias as in 1965. Second, given its hegemony in Lebanon, Syria could well convince the Lebanese to divert the waters of the Hasbani River. Finally, Syria can not only renew its claim to fishing and navigating rights in the Sea of Galilee, but also claim riparian rights to the Jordan River itself. These risks become visible in Israel's security

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 189-190

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Naff, *op.cit.*, p. 202

<sup>111</sup> Rabil, *op.cit.*, p. 190

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 190-191

perceptions, particularly as Syria has refused to join any multilateral negotiations dealing with the water issue.<sup>113</sup> Against these arguments, Slater asserted that if the Syrians wanted to use water as a weapon against Israel after a settlement is reached and they regain control over the Golan Heights, it is irrelevant whether they have a direct foothold on the northeast corner of the Sea of Galilee. But use of water weapon would be equivalent to declaring war on Israel. The consequence would be that the Israelis would not only drive the Syrians from the shores of the Sea of Galilee but almost certainly would re-conquer the entire Golan Heights. In those circumstances, the Israelis would have widespread international support, and it would be hard to imagine that they would ever again relinquish this territory. There is every reason to believe that the Syrians fully understand the logic of this situation.<sup>114</sup>

It is argued that if Israel was to return the Golan Heights to Syria and protect the usage level of its water sources, it would need some arrangements that would ensure the country's control of its current resources, thus assuring Israel of water security on its border with Syria and Lebanon. In 1991 a study was made on this question by the Jaffe Center for Strategic Studies of Tel Aviv University. The center evaluated the possibility of drawing up water security borders with Syria which would assure that all the strategic water elements that Israel is currently utilizing would remain in Israeli control. This water security map would include within the borders of Israel the key water security areas of importance to Israel in both Syria and Lebanon. This would include the water tributaries of the Jordan River – the Baniyas, and Hasbani, the El Hama springs, the side wadis of the Golan Heights and the entire area contiguous to the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee. So Israel would not have to hold on to most of the Golan from a water security point of view.<sup>115</sup>

Another possible arrangement was that when Israel withdraws to the 1923 international border, as a condition for a peace agreement, a special status water security zone under joint or international management should be established. This water security

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Slater, op.cit., pp. 102-103

<sup>115</sup> Shuval, op.cit., p. 615



zone would include a strip of some 1-3 kilometers in width all along the entire eastern side of the border within Syria which would include all the main water sources and assure that there would be no direct Syrian access to the Jordan River, the Banias, and El Hama or to the shores of the Sea of Galilee.<sup>116</sup>

One of the main reasons that led to the failure of the Israeli-Syrian negotiations in 2000 revolved around water security borders. Questioning why the Syrians would need access to the Sea of Galilee, Shimon Peres stated that the problem is not over acquiring a minimal access to the Lake. The minute the Syrians touch the Lake, they would become partners in it. This is international law and this is the problem. The water issue for Syria, on the one hand, is inseparable from the border issue with Israel, which is a matter of national interest. In its peace negotiations with Israel, Syria was adamant about returning to the cease-fire lines that existed prior to the 1967 war, which would allow the country to claim a riparian right to the Jordan basin. On the other hand, Syria still has to worry about its future water supplies, which injects a factor of uncertainty into the calculus of water concerns between Syria and Israel.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Rabil, op.cit., pp. 191-192

## CHAPTER 5

### **THE ISRAELI-SYRIAN PEACE NEGOTIATIONS: “NO LAND, NO PEACE” VS. “NO PEACE, NO LAND”**

The bilateral negotiations between Syria and Israel began on November 3, 1991 in Washington. The Syrian delegation, which was composed of mainly diplomats, was headed by Muwaffaq Allaf, a retired Syrian diplomat. The Israeli delegation, whose members represented a plethora of government departments and agencies, was headed by Yossi Ben-Aharon, a member of the inner core of Yitzhak Shamir's government, and one of the architects of his policies. It is argued that neither Ben-Aharon nor Allaf came to Washington to search for the middle ground on which a deal was to be made. Both represented their leaders with a message defined by reluctance and suspicion. Since both countries assumed that the negotiations were likely to fail, much of things done in the negotiations were designed for immediate and future public consumption.<sup>1</sup>

#### **5. 1. Negotiations Going Nowhere**

The rhetoric of the sides was opposite to each other. The Syrians insisted “land for peace” that for peace, Israel had first to agree to a full withdrawal from the Golan Heights as decreed by the UNSCR 242. The Israeli position was a derivative of the Shamir government's “peace for peace” policy. By withdrawing from the Sinai, Israel asserted that she had met her obligations and was now entitled to peace with her Arab neighbors without offering any additional territorial concessions.<sup>2</sup> Also Israelis refused to deal with first the territorial issue but sought to identify other steps that could build

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<sup>1</sup> Itamar Rabinovich, The Brink of Peace The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 40-41

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

confidence concerning security before any discussion of territory.<sup>3</sup> As Ben-Aharon put it

We attempted to establish a common basis from which we could move on to substantive issues. We explained that before addressing the thorny issues of borders and normalization – which we had no intention of evading – it was necessary to establish some symmetry between the two sides. We proposed, for instance, that both sides begin by recognizing each other's right to exist; that both sides refrain from engaging in, or supporting, military or violent activities against each other, at least during the negotiations; and that we discuss and agree on elementary confidence-building measures, such as establishing direct lines of communication and moving the talks to the region itself. The Syrian response was negative. Withdrawal was, and should be, the first item on the agenda. It would be a precondition to any progress, the key to any agreement, and there could be no bargaining on territory, which the Syrians considered theirs by right, to the very last inch.<sup>4</sup>

However, the Syrians refused to discuss any substantive issues until Israel conceded that the Golan would have to be returned.<sup>5</sup>

After several rounds of bilateral talks, the atmosphere surrounding the talks improved and some progress was made. The Syrian delegates became interested in discussing peace, not only territory, while the Israelis suggested that Israeli withdrawal was not excluded. Subsequently, in March 1992, the Syrian delegation for the first time adopted a more positive position, talking about now recognizing Israel's security needs, becoming good neighbors and finally reaching a peace agreement, the feature of which still remained unclear, provided that Israel was prepared to withdraw from the entire Golan Heights, as well as from the other occupied territories.<sup>6</sup>

Despite of these positive steps, the two positions were irreconcilable. The gap was compounded by sharp disagreements over the past. In Syrian views, Israel was an

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<sup>3</sup> Helena Cobban, The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks 1991-1996 and Beyond, (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Pres, 1999), p. 39

<sup>4</sup> Yossi Ben-Aharon, "Negotiating with Syria: A First-Hand Account", Middle East Review of International Affairs, Vol. 4, No. 2, June 2000

<sup>5</sup> Special Document, Patrick Seale, "The Syria-Israel Negotiations: Who is Telling the Truth?", Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. XXIX, No. 2, (Winter 2000), p. 66

<sup>6</sup> Moshe Ma'oz, Syria and Israel From War to Peacemaking, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 216

expansionist aggressor who had been violating the armistice agreement between 1949 and 1967 and then had launched an aggressive war through which added the Golan Heights to its unlawful possession. Israel's narrative was that of an aggressive Syria that for nineteen years had been shooting at Israeli civilians from the Golan Heights and in the 1960s pushed the region into the 1967 war. Israel took the Golan Heights in self-defense and was holding on to them lawfully. And if the Syrians condemned the Israelis as expansionist oppressive occupiers, the Israelis explained the Syrians as the oppressive occupiers of Lebanon and merchants of regional and international terrorism.<sup>7</sup>

It is argued that the disparity between Israeli and Syria positions were compounded by cultural communication challenges. Israel approached with a Western orientation rooted in core values such as pragmatism, rationality. They viewed negotiations as problem solving meetings. On the other hand, the Syrian approach was rooted in core values of courage, dignity. The Syrian orientation was more holistic and focuses on the totality of the historical context behind the immediate issues. Thus, the Syrians did not make decisions based on Western empirical reasoning; the leader always made the final decision and was not subordinated to the evidence.<sup>8</sup>

In such circumstances, it seemed that a pre-negotiation phase had been required before a real negotiation could begin. Israeli and Syrian representatives had not met for forty years. By the pre-negotiation phase, the contradictory versions of the past had to be confronted and the legacy of grievances overcome before a rational negotiation for settlement began.<sup>9</sup>

As a result, the negotiations expectedly led nowhere, while the political parties in Israel prepared for the upcoming elections in summer 1992. Shamir's government showed no sign either of accommodating the Syrian position on the peace process or stopping the expansion of settlement activity in the territories. Consequently, the

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<sup>7</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., pp. 41-42

<sup>8</sup> R. Reuben Miller, "The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations", Mediterranean Quarterly, Vol. 11, No. 4, (2000), pp. 117-118

<sup>9</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., pp. 41-42

Syrians lost whatever little faith they may have had in that government. As it turned out, Shamir later admitted, after his failure in the election, that if he had been reelected he would have delay negotiations for at least ten years.<sup>10</sup>

Israeli voters went to the polls on June 23, 1992; Labor had increased its representation from 39 to 44, while the more clearly pro-peace Meretz Party triples its representation to 12 seats. Likud lost eight of its previous 40 seats. On July 13, 1992, Labor leader Yitzhak Rabin announced a new governing coalition. Rabin announced a shift in government priorities away from Likud's stress on continuing settlement construction in the occupied territories and toward more active engagement in the peace process. He named Shimon Peres as his Foreign Minister and named a new head for Israel's negotiating team on the Syrian track: Itamar Rabinovich, a respected Israeli historian of modern Syria.<sup>11</sup>

Rabin and Peres, embarked on the path of the peace process. But they knew that peacemaking with Syria and the Palestinians involved deeply embedded competing values that touched Israel's existential roots. The Golan Heights, the West Bank and Gaza, unlike Sinai, represented the core of Israel's ideological, security, territorial, and settlements values.<sup>12</sup>

## **5. 2. A Window of Opportunity:**

### **“Full Peace for Full Withdrawal” Formula**

Itamar Rabinovich, the chief negotiator of Israel, pointed out that the Israeli-Syrian negotiations of the years 1992-1995 were shaped by numerous forces, but they were dominated by the personalities of Yitzhak Rabin and Hafiz Asad. Both leaders had interacted in the past and had developed respect for each other. Asad was the one unquestioned leader of a personalized one-party regime whereas Rabin headed a coalition government resting on a small parliamentary majority, and was also

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<sup>10</sup> Robert G. Rabil, Embattled Neighbors Syria, Israel, and Lebanon, (Boulder London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), pp. 200-201

<sup>11</sup> Cobban, op.cit., pp. 42-43

<sup>12</sup> Rabil, op.cit., p. 157

restricted by significant limitations within his own party, cabinet and government. Yet, in their different styles both men shaped their countries' approach to negotiations.<sup>13</sup>

Before the elections Rabin had stated that if he were to be elected prime minister, he would work to grant autonomy to the Palestinians, whereas peace with Syria had to wait until the end of the process, and it was doubtful whether a comprehensive peace would be reached. Ma'oz assumed that apart from the difficulty of negotiating on two crucial issues, by first dealing with the Palestinian track, Rabin intended to put pressure on Asad to meet Israel's terms regarding the territorial compromise.<sup>14</sup> Despite of such intentions, a change in the policy and in the character of the negotiations with Syria was obvious.

Rabin made a number of statements that could be interpreted as signals to Syria, as well as to the Golan settlers, that Israel was ready to consider at least a partial withdrawal from the Golan.<sup>15</sup> A statement that Israel accepted the UNSCR 242 in all its parts and provisions as a basis for the current peace talks was an indirect way of saying that the new government did not support the notion of peace for peace and was ready to seek a settlement with Syria that would include an element of withdrawal.<sup>16</sup>

There were many reasons behind the change in the policy. First, according to Rabinovich, Rabin was impressed by Baker's convictions that Asad was ready to make peace with Israel after Baker's latest visit to Damascus in July 21-22, 1992 and that Baker was willing to commit the American administration to undertake a serious effort on this track. So apart from his initial intentions, Rabin saw the advantage of dealing first with an authoritative head of state rather than with the dispersed Palestinian polity.<sup>17</sup> Second, Rabin recognized that Syria could undermine the Israeli-Palestinian track.<sup>18</sup> Third, no one believed seriously in the prospect of "peace for

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<sup>13</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., p.43

<sup>14</sup> Ma'oz, op.cit., pp. 227-228

<sup>15</sup> Special Document, Patrick Seale, op.cit., p. 66

<sup>16</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., pp. 57-58

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 54-58

peace”, and everyone understood that peace meant at least some withdrawal.<sup>19</sup> Fourth, Rabin himself believed that may be not an ideological transformation, but a strategic change had occurred in Damascus towards Israel. Specifically, Rabin wanted Asad to convince him and the Israeli public by spelling his readiness for genuine peace, and making gestures, such as meeting with Rabin. However, Asad continued to insist on a prior Israeli commitment to total withdrawal from the Golan, as well as the comprehensiveness of any peace agreement.<sup>20</sup>

By August 31, the Syrians finally gave up and gave Israelis a paper titled “Draft Declaration of Principles” which would serve as a guide to the next rounds of negotiations. The draft declaration itself was a clear formulation of Syria’s concept of peace settlement with Israel.<sup>21</sup> The four items - withdrawal, security arrangements, normal peaceful relations, time table for implementation - mentioned by Walid Muallim, the Syrian ambassador to the US, was lying at the heart of this document. They would soon become referred by both sides as the “four legs of the table” of the peace settlement.<sup>22</sup>

The draft declaration rested on the Syrian interpretation of the UNSCR 242 and 338 and the principle of “land for peace”. Once they were accepted, there was no need for elaborate negotiations. All that was required was the implementation that would provide for total Israeli withdrawal from the Golan and dismantling of all Israeli settlements and in return for termination of state of belligerency between the two. Security arrangements were to be reciprocal and without any prejudice neither to the sovereignty of any party nor to the principle of equal rights for both. Demilitarized zones and limited zones could be part of the security arrangements but they should be equally established on both sides. However, from the Israeli perspective, there were

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<sup>18</sup> Ma’oz, op.cit., p. 225

<sup>19</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., pp. 54-55

<sup>20</sup> Ma’oz, op.cit., 227-230

<sup>21</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., pp. 59-61

<sup>22</sup> Cobban, op.cit., p. 46

some shortcomings: in return for full withdrawal, Syrians was offering only a non-belligerency agreement; the Syrians were placing markers for a future negotiation over the security arrangements, and creating an ambiguity over the issue of linkage between the Syrian and Palestinian tracks; in the text of the draft, Syria and Israel was not mentioned as the two peacemaking parties.<sup>23</sup> It seemed that Asad was serious about a settlement but remained determined to obtain from Israel a commitment to full withdrawal from the Golan before any discussion on the nature of peace.<sup>24</sup>

In response to these developments on the Syrian side, the Israelis prepared their own document, in which they included the term “territorial dimension”. Then, in late October, Israeli delegation mentioned for the first time the term “withdrawal”, but without any reference to its extent. Although the Syrian delegation was delighted with this new approach, it resented the fact that Israel linked withdrawal to establishing “secure and recognized boundaries”.<sup>25</sup>

During fall 1992, the Israeli-Syrian negotiations in Washington revolved around Syria’s consistent demand for a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan, and Israelis counter-demand from Syria for the clarification about the nature of the peace. Israel wanted to hear principally about normalization and security issues. It also tried to persuade the Syrians of the great benefit of public policy to the peace process.<sup>26</sup> As a response, Syrians argued that the normalization was not the obvious outcome of the negotiations; it was not part of the UNSCR 242. And they asserted that normalization should be discussed in due course at the multilateral track.<sup>27</sup>

On November 17, the Syrians made an attempt to break the deadlock by using the “hypothetical question” technique. Allaf asked “Supposing I would satisfy you in the area that is of interest to you (namely the nature of the peace), would you be ready to satisfy me in the area that is of interest to me (namely withdrawal)?” Israelis’

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<sup>23</sup> Rabinovich, *op.cit.*, pp. 61-62

<sup>24</sup> Rabil, *op.cit.*, p. 201

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202, Rabinovich, *op.cit.*, pp. 75-76

<sup>26</sup> Rabil, *op.cit.*, p. 202

<sup>27</sup> Rabinovich, *op.cit.*, p. 76



instant response was that this sequence was not acceptable to them. They needed to know first whether peace meant full peace including diplomatic relations, open borders, and normalization; second, whether peace between Israel and Syria, while being part of a comprehensive settlement, would not be prevented by developments on other tracks.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, in early November after his previous saying “withdrawal on the Golan, not from the Golan”, Rabin reached a new formula that remained the hallmark of his Syria policy for a long time: “The depth of withdrawal will reflect the depth of peace”. It implied that full withdrawal was within the realm of the possibility. As a response, Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq Shara offered a less attractive formula, “total withdrawal for total peace”. But this was refused by Israelis.<sup>29</sup>

At the end, while Israel, in principle, had stated that the UNSCR 242 was applicable to the Golan Heights and had given priority to the negotiation with Syria, Syria declared its readiness for a “peace agreement” with Israel and made other positive gestures such as permitting Syrian Jews to travel abroad. But on the other core issues like the Syrian definition of peace and the extent of the Israeli withdrawal, a wide gap still existed between two parts. Whereas Israel was ready to withdraw on the Golan in return for a separate, full peace and normalization with Syria, Syria insisted on a total Israeli withdrawal from the entire Golan, southern Lebanon, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Syria also insisted on that the peace should be comprehensive, on all Arab fronts, and particularly include the implementation of the Palestinian rights to statehood as well as to the return of the 1948 refugees to their homes in pre-1967 Israel.<sup>30</sup>

In November and December 1992, the negotiators continued to expand the agenda, explore further issues, but neither side was expecting a breakthrough. In the mid-December, under the combined impact of the elections in the US and the crisis of

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78, Ma'oz, *op.cit.*, p. 234

<sup>29</sup> Rabinovich, *op.cit.*, p. 83

<sup>30</sup> Ma'oz, *op.cit.*, p. 231

the Hamas deportees<sup>31</sup>, the Washington talks were suspended until the spring of 1993. The American presidential elections of November 1992 had a profound impact on the Syrian-Israeli track. Asad believed in people more than institutions. Asad had built a dialogue with George Bush and Jim Baker; and from Asad's point of view Bill Clinton was mystery, and nothing certain was known about the policies he would pursue in the Middle East. The round of negotiations thus ended abruptly without setting a date for the resumption of the talks.<sup>32</sup>

The Clinton administration began its term on January 20, 1993 and already in early February the new Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, was assigned to revitalize the peace process which had been suspended for several months, because of the divergent positions of the Arab and Israeli delegations. Both Asad and Rabin had recognized that the prospects of peace in the Middle East, notably between Syria and Israel, would depend to a large extent on the position of the incoming American president.<sup>33</sup>

Secretary Christopher traveled to the region in order to mediate the outstanding issues. He met Asad and Shara in late February 1993 and talked them into resuming the negotiations.<sup>34</sup> The US Administration informed Damascus that Christopher was carrying proposals aimed at the US would exert pressure on Israel to end the deportees issue in preparation for proposing ideas for the next peace talks and the US would play the role of a full partner and to exert all possible efforts to advance the peace process. And Syria affirmed to Christopher its interests in the resumption of

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<sup>31</sup> Hamas had begun a campaign of terror against Israelis in Gaza and the West Bank in order to derail the peace process. In a show of resolve in December 1992, Rabin deported to Lebanon 400 Muslim activists suspected of instigating trouble. Beirut refused to take them in, and the Palestinians ended up in what was referred to as "no-man's land". (Rabil, op.cit., pp. 202-203)

<sup>32</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., pp. 70-71, 84

<sup>33</sup> Ma'oz, op.cit., p. 231, "Media Comment on Christopher Visit, Deportees Tour 'Appreciated' Move", Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, 6 Feb 93, in FBIS-NES-93-024, 8 February

1993, p. 47, "Press Comments on Christopher's Middle East Tour", Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, 19 Feb 93, in FBIS-NES-93-032, 19 February 1993, p. 55

<sup>34</sup> Rabil, op.cit., p. 203, "Rabin Believes Talks to Resume After Christopher Visit", Jerusalem Qol Yisra'el in English, 16 Feb 93, in FBIS-NES-93-030, 17 February 1993, pp. 22, 42

the talks.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, bilateral negotiations were resumed on April 27, 1993, after a few months' hiatus. Again the Israeli delegation continued to ask for an explicit definition of full peace, recognition of Israel's security needs, and public statements to convince public opinion in Israel. Israelis also asked that Syria clarify its position regarding the linkage between the Syrian-Israeli settlement and a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement. Only then would Israel be prepared to discuss the extent of its withdrawal from the Golan. And the Syrian delegation continued to insist on Israeli commitment to full withdrawal from all territories occupied in 1967 as a precondition for a full peace, whose nature they still refused to define.<sup>36</sup>

The opening move came from Allaf offering "full peace for full withdrawal"<sup>37</sup> rather than Shara's original "total peace for total withdrawal". If total withdrawal could be possibly interpreted as referring to withdrawal from all Arab territories captured in 1967 and rejected by Israelis before, full withdrawal could conceivably be limited to the Golan. So the term "full peace" was introduced into the vocabulary of the negotiations. This meant that Damascus obviously departed from its original position of establishing a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Allaf's pressure to hear the words of withdrawal continued until he stated that for Syria this was a precondition and without obtaining this commitment they would not move forward in the negotiations.<sup>38</sup> Peres answered that they were all familiar with the Syrian formula and he proposed a different formula: real peace, to be accompanied by a real withdrawal. Everything depended on the nature of the peace.<sup>39</sup> And Rabin challenged Syria to explain meaning of peace and explained their position in February 1993 that

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<sup>35</sup> "Sources Report on Contents of Christopher Talks", London Al-Sharq Al-Awsat in Arabic, 21 Feb 93, in FBIS-NES-93-034, 23 February 1993, p. 50, "Media Comment on Christopher Tour, Peace Talks", Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, 19 Feb 93, in FBIS-NES-93-034, 23 February 1993, p. 51

<sup>36</sup> Ma'oz, op.cit., p. 234

<sup>37</sup> "US Asked to Mediate with Syria Paralel to Bilaterals", Tel Aviv Ha'aretz in Hebrew, 18 Feb 93, in FBIS-NES-93-032, 19 February 1993, p. 36

<sup>38</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., pp. 94-95

<sup>39</sup> "Peres Hopes Chrsitopher to Crack Syrian 'Enigma'", Jerusalem Israeş Television Network in Arabic, 19 Feb 93, in FBIS-NES-93-033, 22 February 1993, p. 25

they would be willing to implement the UNSCR 242 and 338 to reach peace with Syria. The meaning of this was readiness for an IDF withdrawal on the Golan Heights to secure and recognized borders, but they would not negotiate the dimensions of the withdrawal before Syrian explanation of peace. In addition, once a peace agreement was signed, it had to be stand firmly on its own two feet and not influenced by negotiations with the other Arab partners.<sup>40</sup>

Another improvement was about Syrian understanding of normalization. The original Syrian paper envisaged peacemaking as the simultaneous implementation of the executive steps that grew out of the UNSCR 242. Israelis saw the term “simultaneous” as designed to preempt any Israeli demand that Syria implement her part of the bargain earlier as confidence-building measure and as act of public diplomacy. At that time Syrians asked to distinguish between two categories of issues, one of which would be subject to simultaneity and the other would not. So the Syrians realized that no peace agreement would be made with Israel without a component of normalization.<sup>41</sup>

The most significant move was made by Syria outside the conference room. On May 10, Patrick Seale, the British journalist, published an interview given to him by Asad in Damascus. Asad said “Bilateral agreements will stand on their own feet...When the Arab delegations negotiate over particular issues; each will eventually reach a bilateral agreement with Israel. In the end, there will be a number of bilateral agreements. But this will not affect the traditional heritage of all the parties concerned...If everyone recognizes that peace must be comprehensive, the basic rules in each case will be similar; this will be left to each country to apply individually, to Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and to the Palestinians. We all entered the peace process on the basis of the UNSCR 242 and 338. The resolutions apply to all, but the mode of work may be different...This is a matter of only minor tactical importance.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> “Rabin Challenges Syria to Explain Meaning of Peace”, Jerusalem Television Network in Arabic, 19 Feb 93, in FBIS-NES-93-033, 22 February 1993, p. 26, “Prime Minister Interviewed on Peace Process”, Hamburg Die Welt in German, 22 Feb 93, in FBIS-NES-93-034, 23 February 1993, p. 33

<sup>41</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., pp. 95-96

According to Rabinovich, the general mood of the interview was positive, its main significance lay in a new approach that Asad proposed for resolving the comprehensiveness issue. Asad said that there were four negotiating tracks and they could each develop at its own pace.<sup>43</sup> However, Rabil argued that Asad did not want to convey to Israel the ideas of severing his negotiating track from the others. He mentioned Asad's statement in the interview that "any peace is not comprehensive will not last".<sup>44</sup> According to Rabil, Asad was trying to maintain coordination among the different Arab-Israeli negotiating tracks, while at the same time offering Israel a separate settlement that would stand on its own feet as the Israelis frequently like to describe it.<sup>45</sup>

Three weeks from June 5 were characterized by Syrian defensiveness and tension between the Syrian delegation and the American peace team. The talks witnessed the attempts by the Syrian delegation to extract from Israelis an acceptance of the notion of full withdrawal. When the Israelis rejected this, the Syrians offered a softer version – withdrawal to the line of June 4. As it was rejected, Syrian complaints that the Israelis acted with a sense of power became more frequent. There was a warning that things could deteriorate to pre-August 1992 status.<sup>46</sup>

By mid-July 1993 neither Syria nor Israel were ready to say the magic words, peace and normalization or total withdrawal, respectively. Apparently, in reaction to Rabin's declared refusal to give up the entire Golan in return for peace, Asad again resorted to his old tactics of exerting military pressure on Israel through southern Lebanon – Hezbollah intensified the tension on the Lebanese-Israeli border by firing Katyousha rockets at the Galilee.<sup>47</sup> Asad was combining his diplomacy with military

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<sup>42</sup> Speical Document, "Interview with Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad", Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. XXII, No. 4, (Summer 1993), pp. 115-116

<sup>43</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., pp. 96-97

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Asad, op.cit., p. 118

<sup>45</sup> Rabil, op.cit., p. 204

<sup>46</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., p. 98

<sup>47</sup> Ma'oz, op.cit., pp. 234-235

pressure, something that became the characteristics of Syria's relations with Israel. Rabin responded by launching Operation Accountability. The main objective was to provoke a Lebanese mass departure from the south to Beirut, thereby putting pressure on the Lebanese government and in turn on its Syrian patron. This proved that two statesmen were observing each other through the prism of power politics while engaged in the peace negotiations.<sup>48</sup>

As the operation led to worldwide criticism of Israel, Secretary Christopher applied himself to obtain a cease-fire. He worked out an oral agreement, setting the rules of engagement in Israel's security zone in the south of Lebanon. Hezbollah would not launch rockets against Israel while Israel would not fire into villages north of the security zone unless fired upon from within a village.<sup>49</sup> This agreement demonstrated not only that Damascus was capable of restraining the Hezbollah and held the key to stability in the region; it also indicated that Asad was not interested in a military showdown, but rather in a political settlement.<sup>50</sup>

In Christopher's meeting with Rabin on August 3, 1993, Rabin mentioned that Israel could not move forward on two tracks simultaneously, so that progress in the peace process would have to be phased. Rabin's own preference was to move first with Syria and Lebanon, and to settle on a limited simultaneous progress with the Palestinians. In order to find out this choice was feasible, Rabin asked Christopher to tell Asad the assumption that Israel is ready for full withdrawal from the Golan when Israel would be satisfied regarding the linkage to the pace of progress with others, normalization, implementation of the process in the phases, security arrangements, the US participation in the post-settlement security regime. And Rabin added that there would have to be a referendum in Israel before he could sign an agreement with Syria. This was a major problem for Asad, because it might mean that Syria could end up with no agreement at all despite having made painful public concessions to Israel.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Rabin, *op.cit.*, p. 204

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205

<sup>50</sup> Ma'oz, *op.cit.*, p. 205

According to Israelis, this was an assumption.<sup>52</sup> In other words, Rabin's gambit was a hypothetical approach, leaving the window open for Asad.<sup>53</sup>

The message was conveyed indirectly, orally and secretly to the Syrians; since Rabin insisted on total confidentiality.<sup>54</sup> Although Asad accepted the basic equation, there were some disappointing points for Rabin. Asad was willing to offer formal contractual peace for full withdrawal. He did not accept Rabin's demand of a large measure of normalization for a limited withdrawal within a five-year time frame and offered instead a six-month period for implementing the agreement. Also Asad's response on the issue of linkage to the other tracks, while positive in principle, was not clear. Rabin understood that Syria would insist on full linkage to the Lebanese track, and that Asad needed a measure of progress with the Palestinians in order to legitimize his own move, but it was not clear what that measure was. Asad agreed to a full-fledged peace, but had difficulties with the term "normalization". Thus he rejected Rabin's idea of establishing a direct discreet channel.<sup>55</sup> While Asad appreciated the opening, he wanted to know what Rabin had in mind for withdrawal: was it to the 1923 international boundary or to the line of June 4, 1967? Rabin was so disappointed by Asad's response and he shifted attention from the Israeli-Syrian to the Palestinian track by giving Peres green light to bring the Oslo negotiations to conclusion. As a result, the Israeli-Syrian negotiations stalled and soon after the Syrians were shocked by learning in late August that the Palestinians and the Israelis had reached a separate agreement.<sup>56</sup>

There was an important aspect of Rabin's opening to Syria: timing. It was assumed that Oslo was Peres's baby, that Rabin kept himself distant from the

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<sup>51</sup> Jerome Slater, "Lost Opportunities for Peace in the Arab-Israeli Conflict", International Security, Vol. 27, No. 1, (Summer 2002), pp. 96-97

<sup>52</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., pp. 104-106

<sup>53</sup> Rabin, op.cit., p. 205

<sup>54</sup> Special Document, Seale, op.cit., p. 67

<sup>55</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., p. 106

<sup>56</sup> Rabin, op.cit., p. 205, Cobban, op.cit., pp. 48-51, Special Document, Seale, op.cit., p. 67

negotiations. To the contrary, Seale asserted that this view was not supported by the evidence. It was simply not true that Rabin left the negotiations to Peres. From the spring of 1993, the Oslo negotiations were in Rabin's office. He personally followed and approved every move. Moreover, he faced far more pressure to do a deal with the Palestinians than with Syria, and he had a far greater incentive to do so. Because the Golan front was quiet, as it had been since 1974, whereas the Palestinian *intifada* was shaking the ground. Not only was it more urgent for him to deal with the Palestinians than with Syria, it was also far easier politically. There was no move in the Syrian track from June 1992 to August 1993. In contrast, the secret talks with the Palestinians in Norway proved to be absorbing. And an agreement with Syria was not much attractive, because in any deal, Asad demanded a public commitment to full withdrawal from the Golan and the dismantling of Jewish settlements. The question of what was the meaning of Rabin's offer comes into mind. Seale replied that the evidence suggested overwhelmingly that it was a political trick. Rabin's offer aimed to prevent Asad's attack on Oslo while at the same time, frightening the Palestinians into concessions. Playing one Arab party against the other was a time-honored Israeli strategy.<sup>57</sup>

On August 31, 1993, Israel and the PLO announced the conclusion of the Oslo Accord of August 19, 1993, in Washington. It was consisting of a "Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements" as well as a statement of mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO. This accord signed by Rabin and Arafat on September 13, 1993 undoubtedly represented a historical breakthrough in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and indeed in Arab-Israeli relations.<sup>58</sup>

Asad was taken aback by the Oslo accord, which gave Israel a considerable tactical advantage and undermined his strategy regarding the Syrian-Israeli negotiations. Indeed, whereas Syria had obviously not expected Israel to coordinate the Oslo Accord and was probably not surprised by this move, it was deeply disturbed by the PLO's independent action. It would appear that the PLO-Israeli agreement

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 68

<sup>58</sup> Ma'oz, op.cit., p. 236



placed Asad in an interior tactical position vis-à-vis Rabin, reinforcing his suspicions of Israel's intentions: Rabin was now again pressing for an advance on the Palestinian track, expecting to get more concessions from Syria. The Oslo Accords undercut both their hope that they were near a breakthrough in their own diplomacy with Israel and the hope they had expressed in their public rhetoric that they could enjoy productive coordination with the other Arab parties in the peace diplomacy.<sup>59</sup> In Asad's eyes, Arafat had not merely undermined Syria's strategy in the peace talks; he had done that for the sake of an unsatisfactory agreement that failed to meet Arab nationalist criteria for a proper solution to the Palestinian problem. According to General Mustafa Tlass, Israel deceived itself that lasting peace would be found from the Oslo Accords. The mere entry of Arafat to Gaza and Jericho under Israeli bayonets, humiliated by the Palestinian population and their Arab brethren, was evidence of that delusion. And he added that the greatest losers would be those who have signed humiliating deals based on partial solutions.<sup>60</sup> Rabinovich summarized the state of the Israeli-Syrian track by mid-September 1993 as a long competition with the Palestinian track, the latter won and the Arab-Israeli peace process was to be predicated on the Israeli-Palestinian breakthrough.<sup>61</sup>

After the signing of the Oslo accord, one of Israel's policies was to have the US persuade Syria to wait patiently for several months rather than seek to obstruct progress on the other tracks. So Asad had to wait his turn while the government of Israel was reinforced by the implementation and success of its agreement with the Palestinians.

Meanwhile, there were secret meetings between Israel and Jordan. Peace with Jordan would add a third Arab party to the Arab-Israeli peace club. It could also prove to be a comparatively painless agreement. Jordan insisted on concessions regarding territory and water, but compared to Syria's territorial demands and to the shock of

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<sup>59</sup> Cobban, *op.cit.*, p. 59

<sup>60</sup> General Mustafa Tlass, "Syria and the Future of the Peace Process", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Vol. 6, No. 9, p. 413

<sup>61</sup> Rabinovich, *op.cit.*, pp. 115-119

reconciliation with the PLO, this was a minor issue.<sup>62</sup> During Dennis Ross's trip to the region, while Ross advocated the Syrian track, Peres argued that Israel's next agreement should be with Jordan. And when Ross asked Rabin to recommit himself to the message of August 1993, he declined. Ross told Rabin in Christopher's name that the secretary's view was that agreement had actually been reached in August. Rabin had disagreed since Christopher returned from Damascus without an agreement that met the conditions set by Israel. Also Rabin mentioned that he needed three or four months without a controversy regarding the Golan, but that time frame was not definitive and depended among other things on the pace of the implementation with the Palestinians. He thought that Asad had missed his opportunity and should pay a price for it. On October 22 Ross met Asad and Asad made clear that if it turned out that Rabin had changed his mind with regard to Syria, he would turn against the current peace process and lash out against the PLO, Jordan, and other Arabs who were soft on Israel.<sup>63</sup>

Rabin repeated his ideas to President Clinton on November 12 in Washington. Rabin reaffirmed to Clinton that he was committed to his original message, but his priorities were to implement the Oslo accords and to move forward with Jordan. Since the complex issues relating to peace, withdrawal, and security continued to separate the Israelis and Syrians.<sup>64</sup> During that period (from October to early December 1993), Rabin not only gave priority to the Palestinian track while belittling the Syrian's role, but also he demanded that Damascus conduct secret negotiations with Israel while making public gestures towards it; and that Asad should not obstruct Israel's tacit agreement with Jordan of September 14, 1993. Asad for his part rejected the request for secret talks.<sup>65</sup>

Given the US preference for a breakthrough with Syria, preparations began for a Clinton-Asad summit meeting; Christopher went to the region in December 1993 in

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 122-123

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 124-126

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127

<sup>65</sup> Ma'oz, *op.cit.*, pp. 240-241

an effort to move the Israeli-Syrian negotiations forward. In Damascus, after meeting with Asad, Christopher announced on December 5 that Syria had agreed to invite a team of the US congressional staffers to help resolve the problem of Israelis missing in action and to allow Syrian Jews to leave the country. Apparently, Christopher was sending a message to Israel highlighting Syria's desire to proceed with the peace process, as well as paving the way for Clinton's meeting with Asad.<sup>66</sup>

The year 1994 opened with an optimistic event. Clinton met Asad in Geneva in January and they focused on how to move the peace process forward. Clinton sought to continue the process of rapprochement with Asad, initiated by Bush, in order to strengthen the dual containment of Iran and Iraq and promote the Arab-Israeli peace process. This summit contributed to a resumption of peace negotiations between Syria and Israel,<sup>67</sup> and crystallized a general international approach that was committed to a just and comprehensive peace.<sup>68</sup> It was true that Asad at the joint press conference said that Syria sought a just and comprehensive peace with Israel as a strategic choice that secures Arab rights, ends the Israeli occupation, and enables all people in the region to live in peace, security and dignity. He then added that "we want the peace of grave, a peace which secures the interests of each side...If the leaders of Israel have sufficient courage to respond to this kind of peace, a new era of security and stability in which normal peaceful among all shall dawn."

According to Rabil, this constituted an important turning point in Asad's approach to negotiations with Israel. By committing himself to establishing normal relations within the context of peace, Asad was sending Israel a message of his readiness, unlike before, to discuss normalization.<sup>69</sup> While General Tlass viewed this summit as a turning point which was indicating massive international attention focused on the positive stand of Asad, praising his desire to safeguard rights, liberate

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<sup>66</sup> Rabil, *op.cit.*, p. 206

<sup>67</sup> Ma'oz, *op.cit.*, pp. 241-242

<sup>68</sup> "Press: Israeli Stands Threaten Peace Opportunity", Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, 20 Feb 94, in FBIS-NES-94-037, 24 February 1994, p. 37

<sup>69</sup> Rabil, *op.cit.*, p.206; Special Document, Seale, *op.cit.*, p. 71

the occupied territories and reach a just and comprehensive peace according to international legitimacy and the relevant resolutions.<sup>70</sup> Rabinovich argued that Asad's statements were positive but vague. Asad used the term normal, peaceful relations, but he did not refer specifically to Israel but rather spoke of normal, peaceful relations among all in the region. Asad had agreed to peace and normalization but remained adamant on security for both sides and on equal footing. Also in terms of public diplomacy the summit produced very little; Asad did not offer enough positive message, and his insistence on comprehensiveness was a setback. For his part, in any event, Rabin was not given anything with which to persuade the Israeli public.<sup>71</sup>

After the summit, Rabin declared in the Knesset that if an agreement involving significant territorial concessions were to be reached, the government would submit it to a public referendum. Since the issue was very important to the people of Israel, so the opinions of the people had to be taken into account.<sup>72</sup> By bringing the notion of a referendum to the open, Rabin sought to achieve several goals: calm down the Israeli political system, confront Asad with the need to grapple with the need for a referendum.<sup>73</sup>

In mid-February 1994, the Washington talks were resumed; however, in late February, the peace process was not faring very well. Israel's negotiation with Syria was stalemated, as requested by the Israeli side to hold consultations with its government<sup>74</sup>. Arab papers stressed that Israel was avoiding decisive answers on the substance of the peace process regarding the question of complete withdrawal, especially after it was pushed into a difficult dilemma by the Syrian position and the

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<sup>70</sup> Tlass, op.cit., p. 413

<sup>71</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., pp. 128-130

<sup>72</sup> "Rabin Grants Interview on Peace Process", London MBC Television in Arabic, 13 Feb 94, in FBIS-NES-94-030, 14 February 1994, p. 38

<sup>73</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., pp. 128-130

<sup>74</sup> Another reason was the common decision of the Arab governments to suspend the negotiations. This decision was to put on record their vehement denunciation of the Ibrahimim Mosque massacre. "Arabs Suspend Washington Peace Talks After Hebron Shooting – Syrian Envoy Announces Suspension", Paris Radio Monte Carlo in Arabic, 28 Feb 94, in FBIS-NES-94-039, 28 February 1994, p. 1

Geneva summit.<sup>75</sup> According to Tishrin, Israel considered the talks as an end, rather than a means to achieve a just, comprehensive peace. So Israel was trying to hide its intransigence and rejection of the terms of peace in an attempt to prolong the talks.<sup>76</sup>

Thus, Rabin's visit to Washington in mid-March provided an opportunity for restarting the peace process<sup>77</sup>. The bulk of the meeting with Christopher was devoted to the Syrian track. Christopher complained about Rabin's failure to renew his commitment. In the meeting with Clinton, Rabin agreed to a procedural concession. The US and Israel were to put together two packages: one, addressing the timetable, phasing, and security issues, would then be presented by the US to Syria in order to draw the Syrians out and have them present a counter package; the second would be a bilateral American-Israeli security package that would focus on the defense and security aid that the US would be offering to Israel in the event of an Israeli-Syrian agreement.<sup>78</sup>

Rabin recognized the importance of Syria to a comprehensive peace in the area and confirmed to Clinton that peace with Syria had always been Israel's strategic choice. But Rabin was careful to indicate that he would not compromise on security and that he would do what was required of him if the Syrians were ready to do what was required of them. Rabin's statements suggested that while he remained in principle committed to peace negotiations with Syria, he was aware of the security obstacles that lay ahead on that track.<sup>79</sup> And Rabin underlined the test of normalization with the Syrians before discussing the line on which they would have to make a

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<sup>75</sup> "'Discouraging' Climate of Resumed Talks Noted", Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, 17 Feb 94, in [FBIS-NES-94-033](#), 17 February 1994, p. 41

<sup>76</sup> "Press: Israeli Stands Threaten Peace Opportunity", Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, 20 Feb 94, in [FBIS-NES-94-037](#), 24 February 1994, p. 37

<sup>77</sup> "Reports, Commentaries Note Clinton-Rabin Talks", Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, 17 Mar 94, in [FBIS-NES-94-053](#), 18 March 1994, p. 27

<sup>78</sup> Rabinovich, [op.cit.](#), p. 136

<sup>79</sup> Rabil, [op.cit.](#), p. 207

commitment to withdraw. According to Rabin, this was some sort of better formula to clarify the problems between two parts.<sup>80</sup>

While no progress on the Syrian-Israeli front took place in the spring, the Israeli-Palestinian talks resumed and some progress was achieved. In late April, Christopher went to the region to witness this progress, which took the form of the Jericho-Gaza Agreement. At the same time, he had in mind the reviving of the Israeli-Syrian talks. He discussed the time frame, the phasing, and the security arrangements, the three components of a peace package that Israel was by now insisting upon.<sup>81</sup> Because, according to Rabinovich, negotiation could not consist of the two parties repeating their respective stands. He further said “in the reality of Israeli-Syrian relations, questions such as security, water, and a genuine implementation of the agreement are no less important than the verbal and legal formulations on which the negotiations had focused until recently.”<sup>82</sup>

Rabin explained two new points to Christopher. First, he argued that peace had to be implemented in a period of five years. He detailed on the three phases of implementation: the first phase, nine months after the signing, would involve a limited withdrawal; no Israeli settlement would be affected (although a Druze village could), and Syria would have to offer normalization. A second phase would take place after eighteen or twenty-four months, and a third phase would be withdrawal to **a line to be agreed upon**.<sup>83</sup> And a variety of security arrangements had to be implemented, including demilitarization and reduction of troop concentrations – largely on the Syrian side – as well as creating early-warning stations and deploying an international force to supervise the security arrangements.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> “Rabin: ‘Better Formula’ Found for Syrian Talks”, Tel Aviv IDF Radio in Hebrew, 25 Mar 94, in FBIS-NES-94-058, 25 March 1994, p. 18

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> “Rabinovich Comments on Talks with Syria”, Tel Aviv IDF Radio in Hebrew, 28 Mar 94, in FBIS-NES-94-060, 29 March 1994, p. 6

<sup>83</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., p. 140

<sup>84</sup> In the meeting between the US team and General Ehud Barak, Israel’s chief of staff, argued that the main purpose of the security arrangements was to minimize the danger of a surprise attack. In order to

In Damascus Asad told Christopher that from his point of view full withdrawal from the Golan Heights had to be to the lines of June 4, 1967, and not to the international border of 1923. Asad's time frame remained six months. He could accept some of Israel's general principles for the security arrangements, but continued to insist on "equal footing" and "on both sides". He had in mind fourteen kilometers of demilitarization and an additional area of limited deployment. He was opposed to early-warning stations in time of peace. Normal peaceful relations were to be implemented in stages. Upon signing the agreement, the state of war would be terminated. Diplomatic relations would be announced earlier but implemented only after a comprehensive settlement was achieved.<sup>85</sup>

Rabin said Christopher that the Syrian package failed to respond to the three fundamental principles of the Israeli package. He did not intend to start bargaining over the specifics of the Syrian response. According to Rabin, Asad was trying to undermine Arafat's position particularly by raising the issue of comprehensiveness. Also Rabin attached a great deal of significance to the distinction between the international border and the line of June 4, 1967.<sup>86</sup>

### **5. 2. 1. Ambassadors' Channel**

Despite the halt in the peace talks, meetings and consultations were still under way to break the deadlock and advance the peace process.<sup>87</sup> The most important attempts to break the deadlock were Christopher's visits to the region. It was against this background in May and July and October 1994 that Christopher further augmented his mediating efforts by coming to the region. In his meeting with Rabin on May 15, Christopher asked the border issue "Could he give Asad clarity with

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minimize this danger he proposed that Syria's territory be divided into four categories of demilitarization, reduced deployment, and mutual inspection and confidence building. He explained that from a Professional military perspective he had to say that a defensible border with Syria was on the Golan, but that was up to the political level to make the final decision. (Rabinovich, op.cit., p. 140)

<sup>85</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., pp. 143-144

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 144

<sup>87</sup> "Al-Bath Calls for Complete Israeli Withdrawal – Said 'Basic Condition' for Peace", Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, 29 Aug 94, in FBIS-NES-94-168, 30 August 1994, p. 51

regard to the end of the line?" Rabin had clearly committed that he could actually fit the issue into the paradigm built on August 3 as long as it was a clarification and not a commitment. After return from Damascus on July 21, Christopher told that Asad knew that he had no commitment from Rabin but that he was willing to proceed on the basis of the clarification. He was now willing to have the deal implemented in twelve months and in two phases of six months each. At the end of the first phase he was still offering little by way of normalization. He wanted diplomatic relations to be implemented only in the aftermath of a comprehensive settlement, comprehensiveness being now limited to Syria and Lebanon.<sup>88</sup> Muallim explained the circumstances in a much different way:

After Rabin became prime minister, we still insisted on discussing withdrawal only. When Rabin finally realized that the Syrians would not move a step ahead in discussing any of the other elements of a peace settlement before being convinced of Israel's intention of full withdrawal, he made the opening. That was in August 1993, and we negotiated the details of the withdrawal element for almost a year, until July 1994, when we finalized the agreement on full withdrawal to the June 4, 1967 lines. This opened the way for negotiations on the other elements of a peace agreement... So in September 1994, I began discussing with Mr. Rabinovich the other elements and presented our vision of each.<sup>89</sup>

In the meantime, progress was taking place on the Israeli-Jordanian track. On July 25, 1994, the two countries signed the Washington Declaration, ending the state of belligerency between two. Again, Syrian thought that Rabin was bypassing them.<sup>90</sup> Asad's reaction was similar to his reaction to the PLO's decision in August 1993. Privately he was furious, but publicly he combined acquiescence with subtle criticism. Rabinovich asserted that as long as he chose to stay in the peace process he could not launch an all-out assault on an Arab party that had made peace with Israel.

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Ambassador Walid al-Moualem, "Fresh Light on the Syrian-Israeli Peace Negotiations", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. XXVI, No. 2, (Winter 1997), pp. 84-85

<sup>90</sup> Rabil, *op.cit.*, p. 208



Beside Christopher's mediating efforts, the ambassadors' channel began on July 29, 1994 in Washington. According to Rabin, who seemed to be supporting Muallim's argument, beside Christopher's mediating efforts, Israel's unambiguous admission at the time that full withdrawal meant to the line of June 4, 1967, brought about the change in Syria to begin the ambassadors' channel. This channel intended to bring Rabinovich, the Israeli ambassador to the US, together with his Syrian counterpart, Muallim, to discuss privately what is known as the four legs of peace: normalization, security arrangements, withdrawal, and the time frame.<sup>91</sup> The talks had so far centered on procedural issues and attempts to improve the atmosphere between Damascus and Jerusalem.<sup>92</sup>

What was achieved was a much better presentation and exploration of the packages of each side and gaining much deeper insight into each other's position. While Rabinovich demanded that they would have to come to understanding on three legs of the table before they could deal with the territorial issue; Muallim went directly into limiting the time frame, the notion of implementing the agreement over five years and in three phases.<sup>93</sup>

During his trip to the region, Christopher expressed his satisfaction with the new channel. And he asked Rabin to reciprocate for the concessions made by Asad in July. Rabin agreed to two concessions: the frame could be shorter and four categories of territory of Syria would be taken off the table. However, at that time, Asad provided Christopher with no new concessions during the meeting on August 7, in Damascus.<sup>94</sup>

At the beginning of September, a new Israeli proposal for negotiations with Syria was ready. It was proposed that a tiny withdrawal would take place on the Golan in the first stage without uprooting of any settlement, and the final arrangement would be determined after a three-year trial period. During this time, long-term security

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., "Rabin Al-Hayah Interview on Golan Withdrawal", London Al-Hayah in Arabic, 23 Aug 94, in FBIS-NES-94-164, 24 August 1994, p. 31

<sup>92</sup> "Arab-Israeli Talks – Israeli, Syrian Officers to Resume Talks", Tel Aviv Ha'aretz in Hebrew, 9 Dec 94, in FBIS-NES-94-238, 12 December 1994, p. 1

<sup>93</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., p. 151

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 152

arrangements, an early warning system, and US involvement would be examined.<sup>95</sup> According to Shara, this three-year time period would complicate matters.<sup>96</sup> And the papers noted that Rabin's statements and proposal meant the reversal of the land-for-peace principle.<sup>97</sup>

In an interview, Rabinovich explained what happened after the Syrians' rejection of the proposal. The US had advised to engage in public diplomacy; but the Syrians understood it as a function of substantial progress; and the Israelis maintained that it was not about making concessions, because the purpose would be to promote the process for the benefit of all the parties.<sup>98</sup>

So the channel produced an unusual wave of public diplomacy. Syrian leaders made conciliatory references regarding the nature of peace with Israel. In a press conference in London, on September 8, 1994, Faruq al-Shara said for the first time that Syria was prepared to offer Israel a warm peace including full diplomatic relations between the two countries in exchange for full withdrawal from the Golan.<sup>99</sup> And on September 10, Asad for the first time told the Syrian parliament that he would honor the objective requirement of peace, namely normal relations with Israel. Aim was to prepare the Syrian people for a peace.<sup>100</sup> And after Christopher's visit in mid-October to the region, some papers noted that Asad made a creative effort to overcome the problems in the negotiations; Asad had raised several interesting ideas which Israel

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<sup>95</sup> "Rabin on Proposal", Jerusalem Qol Yisra'el in Hebrew, 8 Sep 94, in FBIS-NES-94-174, 8 September 1994, p. 33, "Rabin comments on Golan at Cabinet Meeting", Jerusalem Qol Yisra'el in Hebrew, 8 Sep 94, in FBIS-NES-94-175, 9 September 1994, p. 36

<sup>96</sup> "Foreign Minister Discusses Peace Process – Offers 'Warm' Peace", Paris Radio Monte Cralo in Arabic, 8 Sep 94, in FBIS-NES-94-174, 8 September, p. 47

<sup>97</sup> "Full Withdrawal From Golan 'Basic Condition'", Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, 8 Feb 94, in FBIS-NES-94-174, 8 September 1994, p. 48

<sup>98</sup> "Rabinovich Sees 'Slight Movement'", Tel Aviv Ha'aretz in Hebrew, 9 Sep 94, in FBIS-NES-94-176, 12 September 1994, p. 4

<sup>99</sup> "Full Withdrawal From Golan 'Basic Condition'", Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, 8 Feb 94, in FBIS-NES-94-174, 8 September 1994, p. 48

<sup>100</sup> "Envoy Rabinovich Comments on al-Asad Speech", Tel Aviv IDF Radio in Hebrew, 11 Sep 94, in FBIS-NES-94-176, 12 September, p. 5

did not accept at this stage but which were interesting in terms of the change in Asad's attitude.<sup>101</sup> On October 27, 1994, in his meeting with Clinton in Damascus, Asad apparently persuaded Clinton that Syria was ready for full peace with Israel in return for full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan.<sup>102</sup> And Asad meant by the comprehensiveness, only Lebanon.<sup>103</sup> For his part, Clinton mentioned that peace had to be secure for both sides and security for one side had not to come at the expense of the other's security.<sup>104</sup>

Despite these positive statements by Syria, the Israeli government would not commit itself to total withdrawal from the Golan. It was obvious that Rabin's ambiguous stand concerning the extent of Israeli withdrawal did not match Syria's clear statements regarding normal peace relations. Rabin's agenda was influenced by the growing opposition in Israel, including in his own party, to a full withdrawal from the Golan. He was possibly worried that peace with Syria would not be approved in a referendum and would thus cause the collapse of his government.<sup>105</sup> As Rabinovich mentioned that the talks with Muallim produced no major progress. He made clear that the two sides were struck on the number and length of phases of withdrawal and corresponding normalization of relations; and there had been no serious negotiations on the Golan security arrangements.<sup>106</sup>

As the discussion failed in the ambassador's channel, there emerged awareness that in order to break the ice an exchange between military professionals had to take place. Rabinovich said "I could envisage a senior Syria general and an Israeli

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<sup>101</sup> "Al-Asad Said Making 'Creative Effort' in Talks", Tel Aviv Davar in Hebrew, 18 Oct 94, in FBIS-NES-94-202, 18 October 1994, p. 40. It should be noted that the paper mentioned the creative efforts of Asad, but it did not explain what were these creative efforts.

<sup>102</sup> "Al-Asad, Clinton News Conference in Damascus", Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, 27 Oct 94, in FBIS-NES-94-209, 28 October 1994, p. 47

<sup>103</sup> Ma'oz, op.cit., p. 251

<sup>104</sup> Cobban, op.cit., p. 65

<sup>105</sup> Ma'oz, op.cit., p. 251

<sup>106</sup> "Rabinovich: 'tiring' Talks with Syria Ahead", Jerusalem The Jerusalem Post in English, 22 Sep 94, in FBIS-NES-94-185, 23 September 1994, p. 26

counterpart exploring these issues after they had warmed up to one another. This would not be easy, but without it I could not imagine a resolution of the crucial security dimension of this conflict.”<sup>107</sup>

### **5. 2. 2. Talks by the Chief of Staffs**

From November 1994 to June 1995, security talks dominated the agenda of the negotiations, and the two chiefs of staff, Ehud Barak of Israel and Hikmat Shihabi of Syria, met in Washington on December 21. These talks had been agreed in the wake of Clinton’s visit to the region.

Asad had accepted the notions of settlement and peace with Israel, but his concept of peace was much different. As he saw the conflict with Israel in geopolitical terms, he saw its resolution through the same prism. The peace would be congruent with Syria’s dignity. The modest security arrangements were called for, since security was not something that Israel needed. In fact, Syria had long been the victim of Israel’s aggression and needed the protection afforded by security arrangements more than Israeli did. In addition, Syrians laid out a series of general principles from which the specific security arrangements should emanate: equality, reciprocity, protection of sovereignty, and symmetry.<sup>108</sup> Before all these principles, Syria would not give up one inch of land. Muallim also emphasized that Syria would not accept any demands for changes in the deployment of her armed forces. It might in the future decide voluntarily on some changes, but this could not be stipulated in the peace treaty.<sup>109</sup>

The Israeli position with regard to the security arrangements lacked some of the clarity of the Syrian position. One of the reasons for that was Rabin’s tactical decision not to announce his line of withdrawal and to keep a measure of ambiguity in that matter. According to Rabinovich, from Israel’s perspective it would be more accurate to speak of a security regime than of security arrangements. Aims of this regime were to reduce the danger of a surprise attack, to minimize the risk of friction, and to provide a mechanism for building up cooperation and confidence. This security

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<sup>107</sup> Rabinovich, *op.cit.*, p. 154

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 168-169

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172

regime also integrated five elements: the depth of the demilitarized area and area of limited deployment, the size and deployment of Syrian armed forces, at least one Israeli early-warning station on the Golan, monitoring by a non-UN international force with the US participation, and a system of verification and transparency.<sup>110</sup> Concerning the border issue, Ehud Barak presented his views by responding Syrian's insistence on the June 4 line that there existed a dialectical relationship between the components of the settlement and that a deeper withdrawal would require more massive security arrangements.<sup>111</sup> The Syrians sources said that Damascus went to Washington after declaring that it was ready to discuss security affairs on both sides of the borders of June 4, 1967.<sup>112</sup>

In the first meeting between Barak and Shihabi on December 21, both sides were clearly waiting for the give-and-take of the discussion in order to engage each other. Some potential avenues of progress were identified, but there was not enough time to explore them. In the meantime, Asad was about not to dispatch his own chief of staff to a second round any time soon. He objected to what he saw as far-reaching Israeli demands in the security area.<sup>113</sup> But Israel insisted on discussing only its security and refused to discuss any security commitments to Syria; and insisted on maintaining Israeli early warning stations inside Syrian territory following the withdrawal. Such a position of Israeli aborted the meetings because Syria believed these stations would violate Syria's sovereignty.<sup>114</sup> They were impossible proposals which Syria could not fulfill.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., pp. 169-170, Rabil, op.cit., p. 209

<sup>111</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., p. 172

<sup>112</sup> “ ‘Syrian Sources’ on Participation in Washington Talks”, Abu Dhabi Al-Ittihad in Arabic, 30 Dec 94, in FBIS-NES-95-005, 9 January 1995, p. 2

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., pp. 174-175

<sup>114</sup> “ ‘Syrian Sources’ on Participation in Washington Talks”, Abu Dhabi Al-Ittihad in Arabic, 30 Dec 94, in FBIS-NES-95-005, 9 January 1995, p. 2

<sup>115</sup> “Arab-Israeli Talks – Syrian Negotiators See Israeli ‘Backtracking’”, London Al-Hayah in Arabic, 11 Jan 95, in FBIS-NES-95-009, 13 Jan. 1995, p. 1

It was against that background that Christopher arrived in the Middle East on March 8, after a comparatively long absence of four months in the meeting of chiefs of staff in an effort to break the deadlock in the Israeli-Syrian security talks. Having stated his own intentions of being interested in coming to an agreement with Syria, Rabin asked Christopher for his estimate of Asad's intentions.<sup>116</sup> After Christopher's shuttle diplomacy, it had been agreed to resume the talks in Washington on the level of the ambassadors and the US Peace Coordinator Dennis Ross would return to the region in an attempt to renew the talks between the chiefs of staff to discuss the security arrangements.<sup>117</sup> Christopher declared that Syria was still interested in finalizing an agreement but had her own doubts regarding Rabin's intentions and timetable.<sup>118</sup>

In the ambassadors' talks, Syria stood firm in its demand for absolute equality in the security arrangements, while Israel was willing to accept reciprocity in terms of the military forces but was demanding a geographical ratio of 1:9 based on the proportion between the territories of the two countries.<sup>119</sup> It meant the deadlock. Rabin said in an interview that there was no intention of discussing seriously a demand for geographic equality in security arrangements.<sup>120</sup>

At the same time, in his visit to Washington at the beginning of May, Rabin showed flexibility in his proposals. Rabin told Christopher that he could assure Asad

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<sup>116</sup> "Rabin Presents Christopher 'More Flexible' Stand on Syria", Tel Aviv Ha'aretz in Hebrew, 12 Mar 95, in FBIS-NES-95-048, 13 March 1995, p. 36

<sup>117</sup> "Results of Christopher Talks Examined", Paris Radio Monte Carlo in Arabic, 15 Mar 95, in FBIS-NES-95-050, 15 March 1995, p. 41

<sup>118</sup> "Waren Christopher, Delegation Visit Damascus – Christoher's Statement on Talks Cited", Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, 13 Mar 95, in FBIS-NES-95-049, 14 March 1995, p. 55, "Christopher Delegation Continues Visit to Damascus – Christopher: Syria-Israel Talks To Resume", Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, 14 Mar 95, in FBIS-NES-95-050, 15 March 1995, p. 41

<sup>119</sup> "Israel Demanding Geographical Ratio With Syria", Tel Aviv Ma'ariv in Hebrew, 7 Apr 95, in FBIS-NES-95-068, 10 April 1995, p. 1

<sup>120</sup> "Rabin on Peace Process, US Involvement", Tel Aviv Ha'aretz in Hebrew, 14 Apr 95, in FBIS-NES-95-073, 17 April 1995, p. 39

that Israel was not interested in extending the security arrangements deep into Syria<sup>121</sup>; he accepted the concept of relevant areas stretching from Damascus to Safad; he envisaged an area of limited deployment on the Israeli side in order to address Syria's concern with an Israeli surprise attack. This was a gesture. Asad liked the notion of relevant areas but resented the inclusion of Damascus. He insisted that a formula be agreed upon with regard to equality before he would agree to send his chief of staff to a second session. Rabin warned that Asad was in no hurry and felt under no pressure. He was relying on Iran and was not menaced by Iraq. Under these circumstances he was trying to obtain a better deal.<sup>122</sup>

In May 25, 1995, it was reported that the Americans have succeeded in thawing the freeze; Syria had accepted the Israeli stand and was resuming the negotiations on the basis of balance and reciprocity but without unequivocally demanding that geographic parity be maintained in the security arrangements.<sup>123</sup> Immediately after this, Christopher announced that Israel and Syria had agreed on a framework of understanding on security arrangements. This understanding, called as the non-paper on the Aims and Principles of the Security Arrangements, would be the basis for meetings, in which military experts from both sides would discuss the issue in Washington toward the end of June.<sup>124</sup> Aims were to reduce, if not to almost totally eliminate the danger of a surprise attack, to prevent daily friction along the border, and to reduce the danger of a large-scale offensive, invasion or comprehensive war. The agreed principles were first, the security of one party should not be achieved at the expense of the other; second, the security arrangements would be equal, mutual and reciprocal on both sides; third, security arrangements had to coincide with each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Fourth, the security arrangements would be

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<sup>121</sup> "Rabin, Clinton Talks on Syrian Track Detailed", Tel Aviv Ha'aretz in Hebrew, 9 May 95, in FBIS-NES-95-089, 9 May 1995, p. 27

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., pp. 176-178

<sup>123</sup> "Syria Reportedly Drops Demand for Geographic Parity", Jerusalem Qol Yisrael in Hebrew, 25 May 95, in FBIS-NES-95-101, 25 May 1995, p. 31

<sup>124</sup> "Radio Reports Security 'Understanding' With Israel", Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, 25 May 95, in FBIS-NES-95-101, 25 May 1995, p. 45

confined to the relevant areas on both sides of the border.<sup>125</sup> It seemed that aims were accordance with the concerns of Israel, while the principles were with the concerns of Syria. This paper opened the way for the second chiefs of staff meeting held on June 27. The next agenda was organized to consider three major issues: first, the security regime for the relevant areas along the Golan front line, second, an early-warning station, third, the role of international forces.

In the chief of staff meeting on June 27, while Shihabi presented the traditional Syrian demands – equal and mutual security arrangements and a full Israeli withdrawal to the June 4, 1967 borders; Shahaq expressed Israeli demand for maintaining a presence on Mount Hermon and permitting the Syrians to establish two early warning stations of their own in the Galilee and Safad. Also Shahaq called for an immediate initiation of joint patrols along the border, the setting of a direct hot line to prevent the misunderstandings.<sup>126</sup>

Syria claimed that the Israeli positions were extreme and unacceptable. Shihabi warned that a failure could have dangerous repercussions, and proceeded to present a modest set of security arrangements that grew directly out of the agreed principles. On both sides of the line demilitarized zones would be established in which international forces and local police could be deployed. Depth would be added to them by contiguous areas of limited deployment. Monitoring would be implemented by non-intrusive measures like satellites. Shahak responded by expressing disappointment. According to him, Israel could accept most of what Shihabi had described, but this did not address all concerns.

When Israel presented the plan for a security regime by General Shtaubert (the Shtaubert document)<sup>127</sup>, Shihabi rejected the plan on grounds of principle without

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<sup>125</sup> "Israel-Syria 'Understandings' Before Talks Detailed", Tel Aviv Ha'aretz in Hebrew, 29 Jun 95, in FBIS-NES-95-125, 29 June 1995, p. 4

<sup>126</sup> "Syria Rejects US Proposal for Troops on Golan", Tel Aviv Ma'ariv in Hebrew, 28 Jun 95, in FBIS-NES-95-124, 28 June 1995, p. 10

<sup>127</sup> The Shtaubert document spelled out the security-enhancing features that it considered Israel gained from its existing military presence on the Golan Heights. The document stated, in the context of the envisioned peace agreement, the IDF would withdraw and cede an excellent defense line, which should not improve the positions of the Syrian Army. Therefore, the first principle is that any area vacated by



getting into detail. He objected to four aspects of the plan: it was not predicated on the assumption of Israeli withdrawal to the lines of June 4, 1967; it included an Israeli ground station on the Golan; it expanded the notion of relevant areas; and it interfered with the size and order of battle of Syria's armed forces.<sup>128</sup>

Shahak agreed with Shihabi that early warning could be obtained from the air. And Shihabi made an interesting gambit, he pointed to the relevant areas from Quneitra to Safad against Rabin's original from Damascus to Safad. The proportion was 10:6 and this was a clear departure from the mechanical approach to the notion of equality.<sup>129</sup> All these developments occurred despite Benjamin Netanyahu, the leader of opposition, disclosed the Shtauber document.<sup>130</sup>

When Syrians heard about the leaking of the Shtauber document and then a second key document titled as "An Analysis of the Document of Understandings" on June 29 to journalists in Israel<sup>131</sup>, they felt that the Israelis were not serious. And then when the two chiefs of staff came to discuss an early-warning regime from air and space, they felt that a step ahead in this complicated negotiation was made. And all of a sudden, Shahak came up with a demand of a monitoring station on Mount Hermon. According to Muallim, these two things poisoned the atmosphere. Rabin could have stopped the leaking. And they believed that Rabin ordered Shahak to come up with this new demand regarding the ground station. Foreign Minister Shara asserted that Shahak's seemingly unexpected introduction of the ground station seriously harmed the good measure of confidence that the Syrians had gained in the Rabin government's intentions in July 1994. This raised serious questions about the credibility and

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Syrians should be demilitarized and remain clear of any military infrastructure and presence. (Cobban, op.cit., p. 89)

<sup>128</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., p. 181

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 184, "Reportage on Washington Peace Talks with Syria – Syria Proposes 10:6 Demilitarization Ratio", Tel Aviv Ha'aretz in Hebrew, 3 Jul 95, in FBIS-NES-95-127, 3 July 1995, p. 41

<sup>130</sup> "Netanyahu Document on Golan Security Detailed", Jerusalem Israel Television Channel 1 Network in Hebrew, 28 Jun 95, in FBIS-NES-95-125, 29 June 1995, p. 23

<sup>131</sup> " 'Text' of IDF Planning Document on Golan Security", Tel Aviv Yedi'ot Aharonot in Hebrew, 29 Jun 95, in FBIS-NES-95-126, 30 June 1995, p. 36

seriousness of the Israeli leadership with which they were trying to negotiate over the important security issues.<sup>132</sup> Particularly, Asad complained that at the end of every meeting that failed to produce results Israel proved to be a net winner and Syria the loser. Nevertheless he emphasized that Syria was ready for further meetings between the ambassadors but not for the chiefs of staff.<sup>133</sup>

On the Israeli side, the disclosure succeeded in clearing the ambiguity and secrecy in Rabin's negotiating strategy up to that point. Rabin's main reaction was about his tactical decision to put the Syrian-track negotiations on the back burner in his scheme of leadership priorities.<sup>134</sup> Rabin remained adamant about continuing the peace talks, but focused more on the Palestinian track. By mid-July the negotiations on the Palestinian track were starting to absorb a lot more of his attention than he had intended. Those negotiations would lead to the September 28, 1995, signing of the Oslo II agreement<sup>135</sup> in Washington, infuriating Asad anew.<sup>136</sup>

In retrospect, despite the continued gaps between the two sides, some significant progress had indeed been made. While Shahaq noted that both parties clarified their positions and it was very clearly understood that there remained very wide gap between both parties' positions and so there was need a great deal of work;<sup>137</sup> Rabinovich noted that no agreement was reached on most of the questions, but the discussions ended with a clear feeling that each side understood the position of the other side better and that further discussions could narrow the gaps.<sup>138</sup> Syria had

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<sup>132</sup> Cobban, op.cit., pp. 92-95

<sup>133</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., pp. 185-187

<sup>134</sup> Cobban, op.cit., pp. 99-100

<sup>135</sup> Oslo II agreement mandated further Israeli withdrawals from the West Bank, the holding of elections by the Palestinians in the occupied territories, and an Israeli handover of additional powers to the Palestinian Authority for the remainder of an interim period whose final point was still to be negotiated. (Cobban, op.cit., p , 100)

<sup>136</sup> Rabil, op.cit., p. 211

<sup>137</sup> "Shahaq on 'Dialogue' With Syrians", Tel Aviv IDF Radio in Hebrew, 30 Jun 95, in FBIS-NES-95-127, 3 July 1995, p. 43

always insisted on the principle of equality to govern the restriction placed on both sides in the security arrangements. So the ratio of 10:6 that Shihabi was offering for the relevant areas signaled the start of a new phase of negotiations. Also in late June, Syria sent its first ever delegation to take part in one of the multilateral talks.<sup>139</sup> Nevertheless, the Syrians wanted various details worked out before the further talks resume. Progress was not ruled out and the ongoing negotiations by themselves could not but keep the hope that a breakthrough was in the realm of the possibility.

In the meantime, at the beginning of July, Dennis Ross was shuttling between Jerusalem and Damascus in an attempt to speed up the Israeli-Syrian negotiations. The early warning stations were the main issue in these shuttles.<sup>140</sup> However, disagreements and difficulties had emerged in the talks; and no date had been set for the resumption of the talks. Rabinovich blamed the Syrians that Ross heard positions contradicting the spirit of the statements made by Shihabi in Washington.<sup>141</sup> According to Peres, there was a slowdown in the negotiations with Syria but Israel did not want to turn it into a crisis.<sup>142</sup> Not surprisingly, Arab press was holding Israel responsible for stalled talks, since it was Israel, which was inclined to creating difficulties on the issue of establishing ground early warning stations.<sup>143</sup> In the meantime, Rabin rejected Christopher's appeal to resume the ambassadors' talks;

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<sup>138</sup> "Reportage on Washington Peace Talks with Syria – Syria Proposes 10:6 Demilitarization Ratio", Tel Aviv Ha'aretz in Hebrew, 3 Jul 95, in FBIS-NES-95-127, 3 July 1995, p. 42, "Rabinovich on Shahaq-Shihabi Meeting", Tel Aviv Davar in Hebrew, 30 Jun 95, in FBIS-NES-95-127, 3 July 1995, p. 46

<sup>139</sup> Cobban, op.cit., pp. 101-102, "Israeli-Syrian Multilateral Talks Held in Geneva", Jerusalem Qol Yisra'el in Hebrew, 30 Jun 95, in FBIS-NES-95-128, 5 July 1995, p. 9

<sup>140</sup> "Syria Criticized on Warning Stations", (Internet) Judean Voice in English, 11 Jul 95, in FBIS-NES-95-134, 13 July 1995, p. 46

<sup>141</sup> "Problems Remain on Syria Track After Ross Meeting", Jerusalem Qol Yisra'el in Hebrew, 14 Jul 95, in FBIS-NES-95-135, 14 July 1995, p. 36

<sup>142</sup> "Peres: No Crisis in Syria Negotiations 'Slowdown'", Jerusalem Qol Yisra'el in Hebrew, 20 Jul 95, in FBIS-NES-95-139, 20 July 1995, p. 54

<sup>143</sup> "Press Holds Israel Responsible for Stalled Talks", Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, 20 Jul 95, in FBIS-NES-95-139, 20 July 1995, p. 67, "Commentary: Israel Responsible for 'Stalemate'", Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, 24 Aug 95, in FBIS-NES-95-164, 24 August 1995, p. 55

since they were coming at the expense of the officers' talks.<sup>144</sup> And it became an almost regular feature every few weeks for either the PM or the foreign minister to sharply attack Syria at the Knesset.<sup>145</sup> After August appeal, at the beginning of September, another US plan was proposed behind the scenes to bring the parties back to the negotiating table.<sup>146</sup> These attempts were futile. At the end of October, Asad said that he had received an indirect message from Rabin saying there would be no progress in the negotiations before April 1996.<sup>147</sup> In an Israeli paper –Davar Rishon-, it was reported that both Israel and Syria regarded Ross as one of those chiefly responsible for the deadlock. Because, the chief of staff meetings in July were preceded by a Ross shuttle between Syria and Israel, by which negotiating format was decided. During these shuttles, Israel expressed its demand on discussing the positioning of ground early warning stations on the Golan. Asad's response was under no circumstances; no way. Ross did not tell Rabin that Asad rejected any discussion of the issue; only mentioned the possibility of some kind of difficulties.<sup>148</sup> The argument of Syria was that the Security Council's resolutions did not sanction the occupation of the land of other by force and they did not approve of building settlements on this land.<sup>149</sup>

Tragically, on November 4, 1995, Rabin was assassinated by a fanatic orthodox Jew, Yigal Amir, who believed in putting an end to the peace process by killing the prime minister. Foreign Minister Shimon Peres replaced Rabin as prime

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<sup>144</sup> "Rabin Rejects US Appeal to Resume Syria Talks", Jerusalem Channel 2 Television Network in Hebrew, 2 Aug 95, in FBIS-NES-95-149, 3 August 1995, p. 30

<sup>145</sup> "Peres 'Disappointed' With al-Asad's 'Tone'", Tel Aviv IDF Radio in Hebrew, 4 Sep 95, in FBIS-NES-95-171, 5 September 1995, p. 56

<sup>146</sup> "US Plan for Israel-Syria Talks Said Launched", Jerusalem Channel 2 Television Network in Hebrew, 4 Sep 95, in FBIS-NES-95-171, 5 September 1995, p. 8

<sup>147</sup> "Rabin Said Delaying Progress with Syria until Apr", Tel Aviv Davar Rishon in Hebrew, 30 Oct 95, in FBIS-NES-95-210, 31 October 1995, p. 64

<sup>148</sup> "Ross Said to Blame for Deadlock in Syrian Talks", Tel Aviv Davar Rishon in Hebrew, 1 Nov 95, in FBIS-NES-95-211, 1 November 1995, p. 65

<sup>149</sup> "Radio: Nation Demands Nothing Beyond UN Resolutions", Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, 31 Oct 95, in FBIS-NES-95-211, 1 November 1995, p. 80

minister and defense minister and appointed Ehud Barak as foreign minister. Uri Savir, the director-general of the foreign ministry and a principle architect of the Oslo Accords, soon emerged as Peres's point man for the Syrian track.<sup>150</sup>

### **5. 3. A New Vision for the Middle East**

Immediately after Rabin's killing, Peres took a major decision to reverse the priorities Rabin had seemingly decided on earlier, whereby he had deferred the talks on the Syrian track.<sup>151</sup> Robert Lifton, ex-president of the American Jewish Congress, argued that Peres had undertaken the politically risky effort of trying to make peace with Syria. He had done so with a bold new approach, one that simultaneously sought to satisfy Israeli security concerns while flattering Hafiz Asad with the offer to become the leading figure of the Arab world. Peres had taken a number of steps to change the tone of Israeli negotiations with Syria – warmly inviting Asad to join with him to make peace, breaking out of the limited military talks that Rabin insisted on, having civilian negotiators sit down at the Wye Plantation in unstructured talks. The most important change had been for Peres to accept Asad's insistence on a comprehensive peace. Lifton summarized Peres's message to Asad "We Israelis want a comprehensive peace<sup>152</sup>; as Syria is the beating heart of the Arab nation and the key to ending the Arab-Israeli conflict, use your leverage for signing of Arab-Israeli peace. All the states that held out on your account must agree to full peace and full diplomatic relations with Israel. So then we Israelis can be far more flexible about issues like the placement of Israeli forces on the Golan and the drawing of international borders." According to Lifton, this approach both flattered Asad and put him on the spot. If Asad accepted this approach, this would fascinate the Israeli public,

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<sup>150</sup> Rabil, *op.cit.*, p. 211, "Savir to Head Negotiating Team on Syrian Track", Jerusalem Channel 2 Television Network in Hebrew, 21 Nov 95, in FBIS-NES-95-225, 22 November 1995, p. 28

<sup>151</sup> Cobban, *op.cit.*, p. 107, "Peres Said Desiring Accord with Syria before Elections", Tel Aviv Ma'ariv in Hebrew, 7 Nov 95, in FBIS-NES-95-216, 8 November 1995, p. 36

<sup>152</sup> "Peres Proposes Full Golan Withdrawal for Peace", Tel Aviv Ha'aretz in Hebrew, 22 Jun 94, in FBIS-NES-94-122, 24 June 1994, p. 1

which might well conclude that peace without the Golan offers more security than the Golan without peace, so that Peres would win the referendum or elections.<sup>153</sup>

Peres had removed a major obstacle in the way of resuming the negotiations, namely the land-based early warning station, and replaced it with superior US technology, guaranteeing the effectiveness of the airborne early warning station on which the Syrian side agrees. And a specific agenda had not been determined; this would give the sides an opportunity to perform a qualitative shift in the art of negotiation, from tactics to strategy.<sup>154</sup>

Peres indicated the quality of peace rather than a cold peace made by Egypt and frustrated the Israeli public. He was aware of Asad's ideas that the minimum conditions could be legitimately fitted into a formal contractual peace. The value of an Israeli-Syrian peace could be enhanced by its quality and by turning it into the stepping stone toward a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>155</sup>

There were some differences between outlooks of Rabin and Peres. Peres knew very well that Asad would not sign a peace treaty with Israel without a full withdrawal from the Golan Heights, but he believed that the border between two countries was yet to be negotiated. Unlike Rabin, Peres did not seek to extend the period of implementation. In fact, he saw potential advantages in rapid implementation. Secondly, Peres had a different view of security dimension of the negotiation with Syria. He did not underestimate the importance of the security arrangements, but he sought a change of emphasis. He advocated a simultaneous negotiation over the principle issues, thus taking away the primacy given to previously to the security dimension.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Robert K. Lifton, "The Inner Logic of Israel's Negotiations: Flatter Asad", Middle East Quarterly, (March 1996) or <http://www.meforum.org/article/285>

<sup>154</sup> "Syria-Israel Optimism Said Due to Peres' Style", London Al-Hayah in Arabic, 19 Dec 95, in FBIS-NES-95-244, 20 December 1995, p. 15

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>156</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., p. 201, Cobban, op.cit., p. 121

The most important aspect of Peres's quality of peace laid in his ideas regarding a new Middle East based on economic development. In particular for Syria, real security, according to Peres, lay in the development of economic interests along the border and of economic ties between the two countries. Syria would not interfere with the flow of water from the Golan to Lake Tiberias. And the Golan Heights should become a free economic zone. Such a development would be an important long term incentive for keeping the peace and an important disincentive for contemplating war. There was an additional political calculus. Economic cooperation in the Golan would ease the immense difficulties and pain inherent in any withdrawal. Rabinovich indicated that these ideas of Peres never stated explicitly, but Peres's own thinking in this matter was very clear.<sup>157</sup> And Peres proposed establishing in the Middle East a regional framework on the model of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which turned out to be Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Such a framework could establish a comprehensive mechanism for confidence building in the security and political spheres.<sup>158</sup>

Regarding the withdrawal, Peres committed the same formula of Rabin that the depth of withdrawal on the Golan Heights would be equal to the depth of peace. If the Syrians were prepared to accept this formula, they were prepared to start negotiations even at this stage. And Peres warned that Syrians had not to expect them to make concessions on vital issues that the previous government was not prepared to concede.<sup>159</sup>

Another vision of Peres was a Clinton plan emphasizing on Israel's agreement with Syria, a bilateral American-Israeli treaty and a regional security pact. Peres was hoping to persuade Clinton to launch a bold initiative of the creation of a regional security organization. But continuing Arab-Israeli conflict was one of the chief traditional obstacles to such an initiative. That's why; the Israeli-Syrian agreement which would lead to a comprehensive settlement had to be maintained. President

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<sup>157</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., pp. 201-202, Special Document, Seale, op.cit., p. 76

<sup>158</sup> "Peres Proposes Full Golan Withdrawal for Peace", Tel Aviv Ha'aretz in Hebrew, 22 Jun 94, in FBIS-NES-94-122, 24 June 1994, p. 1

<sup>159</sup> Cobban, op.cit., p. 108

Clinton's response to this idea was predictably cautious. Clinton was clearly not eager to associate himself too closely with a project with such uncertain prospects.<sup>160</sup>

During Dennis Ross's preparatory discussion with two parties at the beginning of December, Peres added a number of elements to the fundamental package: a definitive solution of the water problem, cessation of terrorism, and public diplomacy. Peres insisted on an early meeting with Asad as an essential component of an agreement. Only such an extraordinary development would persuade the Israeli public. More significantly Peres said to Ross that he had yet to make a final decision depending on Asad's response on both substance and process.<sup>161</sup>

Asad's response was cautiously positive but very guarded. With regard to development projects he emphasized regional development rather than cooperation, and expressed preference for development schemes in the Golan. Asad wanted to find out more about what Peres expected and was willing to offer before he committed himself further. Rabinovich thought that Asad was ready for some upgrading of the negotiations.<sup>162</sup> The Syrian negotiators expressed their readiness to discuss the content of normalization under three headings: the exchange of embassies, the transport of goods across the border and the movement of people across the border.<sup>163</sup>

After many preparatory talks, they agreed on resuming the talks at the Wye Plantation in Maryland near Washington, on December 27, 1995. These talks were identified by the press of the both countries as an "opportunity"<sup>164</sup>, "good step forward"<sup>165</sup>, and "new breakthrough"<sup>166</sup> for the peace in the region. At the end of the

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<sup>160</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., pp. 203-206

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., "Arab-Israeli Talks – Al-Asad Reportedly Rejects Peres Peace Proposal", Tel Aviv Hatzofe in Hebrew, 6 Dec 95, in FBIS-NES-95-234, 6 December 1995, p. 3

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 208

<sup>163</sup> Cobban, op.cit., p. 132

<sup>164</sup> "Paper: Washington Talks 'Opportunity' for Peace", Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, 19 Dec 95, in FBIS-NES-95-243, 19 December 1995, p. 40

<sup>165</sup> "Papers: Resumption of Talks 'Good Step Forward'", FBIS-NES-95-242, 18 November 1995, p. 69

<sup>166</sup> "Radio: Resumption of Talks 'New Breakthrough'", FBIS-NES-95-242, 18 November 1995, p. 69



first round, an American source stated that more was accomplished during the first round (six days) than in the previous four years of negotiation. And all the participants seemed to agree that it was working well.<sup>167</sup> Since the basic strategy was quite simple: suspend direct and explicit discussion of withdrawal and concentrate on the Israeli half of the peace equation. Once the contents of that half became mutually acceptable, withdrawal would be addressed.<sup>168</sup> The focus was on the quality of peace, normalization, economic cooperation, and comprehensiveness. What was encouraging was that Asad had agreed to what Rabinovich explained as the principle of interface, meaning that the Syrian president would accept some normalization before a meaningful Israeli withdrawal. Comprehensiveness, from the Syrian point of view, meant Syria and Lebanon only. And the term comprehensiveness acquired several layers: using an Israeli-Syrian agreement as the first step toward a comprehensive settlement, severing the linkage between the Syrian and the Palestinian track, and instituting an international effort led by the US for regional economic development. According to Rabinovich, as comprehensiveness had been one of the least controversial issues in the Israeli-Syrian negotiation since 1994 and it was the case at Wye.<sup>169</sup>

However, Muallim remained adamant on the question of bilateral economic ties. He cited three reasons: history and sensibilities; the gap between the economic position of the two countries as reflected in the per capita income; and the Syrian fear of Israeli economic hegemony.<sup>170</sup> Muallim said

They wanted open borders, open markets for their goods...This would have an obvious effect on our own economy. Our economic regulations are not against them; we do not open our markets to any country. And how can you integrate two economies when one has a per capita income of \$900 per year and the other has a per capita income of \$15.000 per year? Such integration is not

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<sup>167</sup> “Newspapers Analyze New Round of Talks with Israel”, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, 28 Dec 95, in FBIS-NES-95-249, 28 December 1995, p. 32, “Arab-Israeli Talks – Israel, Syria Said Favoring US Bridging Proposa”, FBIS Editorial Report, FBIS-NES-95-249, 28 December 1995, p. 7

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 134, Rabinovich, op.cit., p. 210

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., pp. 210-214

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p. 213

possible, so we discussed a transitional period during which we could raise our economy to the level where there can be competition without undue hardship on our society.<sup>171</sup>

At the same time, the negotiations were governed by the question of the Israeli election date, whether the elections should be held in late October or moved up to late May. A satisfactory agreement with Syria to be achieved by the summer was a crucial element in Peres's decision. Muallim also mentioned the deadline in June 1996 to close the gaps and finalize all the elements of an agreement. Their expectation was that by September 1996 the final document would be ready.<sup>172</sup> However, Syria's position on normalization and economic cooperation was discouraging. It was also necessary for Israel to begin a serious discussion of the security and water issues, but Asad was reluctant about discussing these issues.

The second round of talks in Wye Plantation opened on January 24, 1996. Beside water issue, security issues became the focus of difficult and tense discussions. The two parties discussed over the scope and extent of demilitarized zones and limited deployment of troops, as well as over the deployment and size of Syria's strike forces inside the country.<sup>173</sup> Israel had presented a security regime composed of six elements: a demilitarized buffer zone; a zone of limited deployment; early warning; control, inspection and verification; dealing with terrorism and its infrastructure; and establishing a mechanism for communication, dialogue and transparency. And Syria would agree to the notion of confidence-building measures. As a response, Muallim proposed that relevant areas of twenty-five kilometers wide be established on both sides of the border. That area would be divided into demilitarized zones and zones of limited deployment. International forces and civilian police would be deployed in the demilitarized zones. Against Muallim's demand on both sides, Israel had accepted the notion of equality in principle, but was categorically opposed to the notion of symmetry. Regarding the deployment of a sizable portion of Syria's strike forces near

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<sup>171</sup> Interview with Muallim, op.cit., pp. 86-87

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 81

<sup>173</sup> Rabil, op.cit., p. 213

the Israeli border after peace, Muallim protested that Israel was interfering in Syria's domestic affairs. This would be Syrians own free decision and not an obligation of a treaty.<sup>174</sup> Eventually, the atmosphere of the negotiations became charged and a stalemate occurred. At that time, a third zone was proposed by Israelis, so that the relevant area on the Syrian side could be expanded without imposing a difficult concession on the Syrian side.

From the Syrian point of view, 75 percent of the work of negotiating agreement was completed. There would be a complete Israeli withdrawal in two stages though there was a gap on the total implementation time, while Israelis required three years, Syrians offered sixteen months. Regarding security arrangements, early warning from air and space would be agreed; zones of demilitarization and zones of limited forces in the area from Quneitra to Safad would be agreed though the types and precise locations of these deployments were still disagreed. While confidence-building measures were agreed, on normalization Syrians agreed on nine elements out of fifteen elements on the table.<sup>175</sup> Nevertheless, for the Israelis the prospects of concluding a peace deal was diminishing before May, as a result Peres decided to move up the elections to May 29.

Syria was unhappy with Peres's decision, but did not stop the talks. The talks were resumed on February 28 under the shadow of suicide bombings of February 25. Such events shook Peres's government and the public faith in the peace process. Other attacks were to follow in early March. Obviously the assaults were a means to disrupt the peace process.<sup>176</sup> And the Syrian refusal to denounce the terrorist attacks made Israelis stay at Wye invalid, and finally led Peres to suspension of the negotiations on March 4. Rabinovich pointed out that the morning session of March 4 became the last act in the Israeli-Syrian negotiation of the years 1992-1996. Given the fact that no Israeli-Palestinian negotiations were scheduled after this period, and given the suspension of the multilateral talks, the peace process came to a virtual end. Attention

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<sup>174</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., p. 221

<sup>175</sup> Cobban, op.cit., p. 136

<sup>176</sup> Rabil, op.cit., p. 213

and activity shifted first to the campaign against terrorism and then to Operation Grapes of Wrath in Lebanon.<sup>177</sup> In Muallim's words

We had the first session the weekend before the bombs went off in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv and the Israelis informed us, through the Americans, that they had suspended the talks. From that time, everything began to collapse. The international and Israeli focus shifted to combating terrorism...This was a one-sided decision because they believed that their public opinion would not agree to continue talks with Syria after the Palestinian suicide bombs...Peres's decision to call early elections must have depended on pressures from within his own party, because the margin between Labor and Likud had started to narrow in the polls.<sup>178</sup>

There were many valuable aspects of the Wye formula: the seriousness of the two parties to reaching a final resolution; the active engagement of the US administration; the regional comprehensiveness of the peacemaking vision; the multi-topic structure of the talks. However, when Peres switched signals with his decision to hold elections before completion of the negotiation, Asad felt betrayed by this move.<sup>179</sup>

An international summit was organized in Sharm al-Shaykh in Egypt to deal with combating terrorism. The Syrians refused to attend. They interpreted this summit as helping Peres domestically, as a concerned campaign against Damascus and Tehran, and as a US and Israeli scheme to shift the focus from the peace process to combating terrorism.<sup>180</sup>

As a response Syria and Iran had pushed Hezbollah to heighten tension in the South Lebanon. Apparently Syria was using its leverage against Israel. Peres, like Rabin, decided to launch an operation, Grapes of Wrath, against Lebanon on April 2, 1996 in an effort both to strike at Hezbollah and to put pressure on the Lebanese government and in turn on its Syrian patron. However the operation resulted in the unintended consequence of shooting a large group of civilians. World public opinion

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<sup>177</sup> Rabinovich, *op.cit.*, p. 229

<sup>178</sup> Interview with Muallim, *op.cit.*, pp. 81-82

<sup>179</sup> Cobban, *op.cit.*, p. 150

<sup>180</sup> Rabil, *op.cit.*, p. 214

pressured Israel to end the operation. Peres stopped the operation without achieving anything to help rehabilitate his image at home. Secretary of State Christopher helped bring about a cease-fire, and managed to organize a committee drawn from Lebanese, Syrian, Israeli and French diplomats to monitor the cease-fire between Israel and the Hezbollah guerillas. The parties worked out an agreement, in fact an extension of the 1993 agreement, which called on Hezbollah not to fire Katyousha rockets into Israel and on Israel not to target civilians in Lebanon. This agreement became known as the April understanding.<sup>181</sup>

#### **5. 4. From “Land for Peace” to “Peace for Peace” Formula**

The surprise election of hard-line Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu as prime minister of Israel on May 29, 1996, profoundly changed the tempo and direction of the Middle East peace process. Neill Lochery asserted that Netanyahu was faced with dealing with an increasingly complex set of peace negotiations of Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres. In effect, both Rabin and Peres had left the difficult stages of reaching agreement with the Palestinians and the Syrians to a second term Labor-led government.<sup>182</sup>

Netanyahu’s attempt to separate the Lebanese-Israeli track from the Israeli-Syrian track, and his insistence that the Israeli-Syrian negotiations be resumed with irrespective of progress made between the Syrians and the Labor government have effectively frozen the peace process. This deadlock mainly based on deeply-held ideology, sovereignty claims and national security considerations and particularly Netanyahu’s rigid beliefs of Greater Israel.<sup>183</sup> Lochery viewed Netanyahu’s vision as a third way, because his policies towards the peace process rejected the ideologically dominated era of Yitzhak Shamir and the visionary new Middle East of his predecessor Shimon Peres. More specifically, Netanyahu set three criteria on which he argued that a lasting peace had to be built: security, reciprocity, and democracy and

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Neill Lochery, “The Netanyahu Era: From Crisis to Crisis, 1996-99”, Israel Affairs, Vol. 6, No. 3&4, (Spring/Summer 2000), p. 221

<sup>183</sup> Sami G. Hajjar, “The Israel-Syria Track”, Middle East Policy, Vol. VI, No. 3, (February 1999), pp. 1-2

human rights. However, the form that this third way vision took in the real world remained unclear.<sup>184</sup>

Rabinovich evaluated the coming of Netanyahu in a pessimistic way. The negotiations were resumed; there was one brief contact between the two governments followed by the exchange of several messages by proxy, but they all failed to clarify the positions and restart a dialogue. In the absence of a dialogue and of the prospect for a renewal of the negotiation, fear of war reentered the picture. Furthermore, Netanyahu had criticized Rabin's and Peres's policies in the negotiations with Syria. He had accused them of agreeing to withdraw from the Golan Heights, and publicized the Shtaubert document in June 1995 in order to alert the Israeli public. The Golan lobby and settlers were represented in his government. Also Netanyahu criticized Syria as a promoter of terrorism. He announced that he would not negotiate with Syria under the shadow of Hezbollah's activities, and threatened to launch a campaign to contain Syria alongside Iran and Iraq.<sup>185</sup> In his meeting with Clinton in July, Netanyahu tried to persuade the president to adopt a policy of triple containment. In this way, Netanyahu hoped to add Syria to the existing US policy of dual containment of Iraq and Iran and therefore isolate it.<sup>186</sup>

Netanyahu had made it clear during his election campaign and after his victory that he rejected the land for peace formula and sought instead peace with security. Netanyahu declared never to return the Golan Heights to Syria. The Likud's position regarding the Golan was largely shaped by Netanyahu's principle national-security adviser, Dore Gold. In short, Gold's ideas were centered on the consideration that Israel had to keep significant portion of the Golan to guarantee its security, since the Golan give some strategic advantages to Israel like its early warning capability. Israeli security was very important and could only be achieved by direct Israeli military-strategic advantage.<sup>187</sup> Thus instead of actively re-engaging in the peace talks, the new

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<sup>184</sup> Lochery, *op.cit.*, pp. 228-229

<sup>185</sup> Rabinovich, *op.cit.*, pp. 256-258

<sup>186</sup> Rabil, *op.cit.*, p. 215

<sup>187</sup> Hajjar, *op.cit.*, pp. 7-9

government set in motion an accelerated program of strengthening Israel's demographic and administrative hold on Golan.<sup>188</sup>

Rabinovich indicated that all subsequent efforts to resume the Israeli-Syrian negotiations collapsed against two sets of obstacles. First, Asad continued to insist that the negotiation be predicated on an acceptance of his demand for full withdrawal, while Netanyahu refused to accept this premise even in hypothetical terms and the application of the talks to territory as well as to everything else.<sup>189</sup> Second was of a procedural nature: Asad demanded that the negotiations be resumed at the point at which they had been interrupted, but Netanyahu refused this. Since he argued that Syria signed no binding international agreement with the previous government, and therefore he was not obliged to continue the policies of the previous government.<sup>190</sup> According to Muallim, Netanyahu wanted to disregard the work of the last four years and to find a new basis for the negotiations and new terms of reference – peace for peace rather than land for peace. Muallim said “Israelis have to agree to resume talks from the point where they left off in February 1996. All these issues were approved in the presence of the American cosponsor. If ever we were to agree to return to the table without Netanyahu's commitment to full withdrawal, we would lose all we achieved in the negotiations. It would be like throwing away Israel's earlier commitments and going back to square one.”<sup>191</sup>

Beside all these, Netanyahu was in no hurry to conclude a peace treaty with Syria. Since they were not on the verge of war with Syria and the road to peace with Syria had not ended. They would work for the peace during the phase ending in the year 2000, otherwise in the next phase ending in the year 2004. Lochery asserted that to some degree, Netanyahu used the negotiations with Syria as a way to loosen his

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<sup>188</sup> Cobban, op.cit., p. 178

<sup>189</sup> “Lost in the Golan Heights”, Economist, 2/22/1997, Vol. 342, Issue 8005

<sup>190</sup> Lochery, op.cit., p. 234

<sup>191</sup> Interview with Muallim, op.cit., p. 91

hawkish credentials to his party and coalition while making difficult compromises in the Palestinian negotiations.<sup>192</sup>

Throughout Netanyahu era, instead of a peace process, Syria faced a series of hostile regional maneuvers.<sup>193</sup> Early in his tenure, Netanyahu raised the idea of Lebanon first, based on the Israeli withdrawal from security zone in the south Lebanon, preferably in concert with Syria. According to Netanyahu, there was no policy of unilateral withdrawal, because that would increase Hezbollah attacks into the Galilee. If the government of Lebanon joined in establishing the proper security arrangements in southern Lebanon, they would be happy to get out of Lebanon in the framework of implementing the UN Resolution 425. Hajjar asserted that Netanyahu proposed the Lebanon first option considering it a trick design to split the Lebanese-Syrian tracks and therefore weaken the negotiation position of each side. He called this “the policy of istifrad”.<sup>194</sup>

Syria and Lebanon dismissed these moves as attempts to separate their tracks, no doubt to allow Israel to withdraw from Lebanon while remaining on the Golan.<sup>195</sup> On the one hand, some demanded that if Israel was bleeding, let the pressure continue and serve as a means of pressure on Netanyahu to return to the negotiating table on Asad’s terms.<sup>196</sup> According to Hajjar, Syria’s hegemony over Lebanon was its weapon against the policy of istifrad. So the Israeli proposal to withdraw from the south Lebanon met with strong Syrian condemnation.<sup>197</sup> On the other hand, Muallim said “We would applaud, if Israel fulfilled the UNSCR 425 obliging it to withdraw to the international border, without preconditions, we would be delighted.”<sup>198</sup> The Economist reported that the Lebanese government would be glad to see the Israelis get out of

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<sup>192</sup> Lochery, op.cit., p. 234

<sup>193</sup> Special Document, Seale, op.cit., p. 76

<sup>194</sup> Hajjar, op.cit., p. 4, 13

<sup>195</sup> Special Document, Seale, op.cit., p. 77

<sup>196</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., p. 260

<sup>197</sup> Hajjar, op.cit., p. 13

<sup>198</sup> Interview with Asad, op.cit., p. 89



Lebanon. But it would not negotiate on that except in the context of comprehensive negotiations including Syria. Hezbollah, for its part, said that once the Israelis had gone, there would be no need for resistance, and security in south Lebanon would be the job of the real Lebanese army.<sup>199</sup>

Netanyahu's policy on Syria can be summarized that against a background where one party predicated the peace process on the principle of land for peace and the demand of full withdrawal from the Golan, while the other championed the formula of peace for peace along with some withdrawals.<sup>200</sup> Hajjar formulated the deadlock that the problem was the inverse relationship between the defining elements of the stalemate: the Syrian demand for sovereignty and the Israeli quest for security.<sup>201</sup>

It was argued that there were secret negotiations between Syria and Israel. Daniel Pipes asserted that based on information from several sources with firsthand knowledge of the talks, during 1998, Netanyahu became deeply involved in a secret negotiation with Asad over the terms and conditions under which Israel would transfer the Golan Heights. In the two-month period from August to September 1998, Asad agreed to one high-level Israeli calls. These negotiations took place completely outside any governmental framework. Syrians and Israelis never had direct contact; instead, the talks took place in a classic shuttle diplomacy style.<sup>202</sup> Hajjar also mentioned a report in Jordanian weekly Shihaan that Netanyahu offered to the US administration to revive the secret forum between Israel and Syria as an irreversible Israeli condition if Syria wanted to join real talks that could culminate in its recovery of the Golan Heights and secure Israel against any future Syrian military threat. According to source, the breakdown of the talks had to do with mechanics rather than details: the Syrian leadership sensed that the Americans and Israelis would be setting a trap for them if they proceed with the secret talks.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> "Lost in the Golan Heights", op.cit.,

<sup>200</sup> Rabil, op.cit., p. 216

<sup>201</sup> Hajjar, op.cit., p. 14

<sup>202</sup> Daniel Pipes, "The Road to Damascus: What Netanyahu almost gave away", New Republic, July 5, 1999, p. 1 or <http://www.meforum.org/article/pioes/311>

According to Netanyahu's critics, Netanyahu engaged in the talks for two reasons: first, he feared that the Americans would pressure for a deal with the Palestinians unless he could produce a deal with Syria; and second, his government was struggling with a succession of domestic and foreign crises. A breakthrough with Syria would give Netanyahu a favor at the polls and a second term as prime minister.<sup>204</sup> Therefore he began the talks by picking up where his Labor predecessors left off: Israel would return the territory on the Golan, accepting the international border but not the cease-fire lines. Yet, faced with Asad's rejection of these terms, he agreed that Israel would return to the 1967 lines. Second, having initially demanded that the Israeli withdrawal took place over a 10-to-15 year period, he ultimately settled on 16 to 24 months. Concerning the demilitarization, Netanyahu demanded an extensive demilitarization of Syrian territory. As Asad refused the suggestion, Netanyahu backed off on this point, too; by the end of the negotiations, a semi-agreement lacking specifics was reached that each side would demilitarize a single zone ten kilometers wide along its border. Also Netanyahu demanded that Israel maintain an early warning station on Mount Hermon. As Asad disagreed, Netanyahu was said to have offered Asad a deal under which the two sides would share control over the warning station. Asad only agreed to a UN team manning the station; and if the UN meant US and French national, Netanyahu said, he could accept it. The matter was left there.<sup>205</sup>

The Netanyahu camp insisted that his political ambitions had nothing to do with the talks. They said that Netanyahu signaled the Syrians that he wanted to talk but that he needed more security concessions than Labor had required. While they accepted that he did show flexibility on the issue of a timetable for Israeli withdrawal, they insisted that he took a hard line on the other issues.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Hajjar, op.cit., p. 3

<sup>204</sup> Pipes, op.cit., p. 2

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-3

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

If many issues were agreed upon, the question of why there was no deal at the end comes to the minds. According to Pipes, Netanyahu personally lacked the credibility to make such far-reaching concessions that contradicted the principles of both his party and cabinet. Lacking support from Mordechai or Sharon, Netanyahu could not go alone. As a result, the agreement was stillborn.<sup>207</sup> At that point, Galia Golan indicated that Netanyahu had more power than any previous PM as a result of the electoral reform, and he had tried to introduce a presidential type of concentrated decision-making power. However, Israeli system was still built upon a coalition form of government. Netanyahu era represented a period of transition in which the full extent of the effects of the changes in the electoral system was not transferred to the political system.<sup>208</sup> Therefore, even with the added powers accorded by the reform, Netanyahu was not free of the ideological and political restraints by his coalition partners and his electorate, majority of which came from the settler movements.<sup>209</sup> Netanyahu was attacked by both the right and the left sides. The right charged him with abandoning their ideology and political agenda; and the left accused him for trying to kill the spirit and letter of the peace process. This difficult political situation for Israel prompted early elections on May 17, 1999.<sup>210</sup>

### **5. 5. A Wide Open Door to a Comprehensive Peace in the Middle East**

In early elections on May 17, 1999, Ehud Barak, the Labor Party leader, was elected as the prime minister. Barak immediately worked for building a broad-based coalition government. He tried to wed left and right, secular and religious, dove and hawk, by forming a coalition government. Barak entered office in a much stronger position than Netanyahu did in 1996. Lack of strong inter-party opposition to his leadership, a cabinet consensus on the peace process and acceptance of his mandate by

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Lochery, op.cit., p. 236

<sup>209</sup> Galia Golan, "Can the Arab-Israeli Peace Process Continue Under the Likud Government?", Working Paper #11, Center for International Relations, (University of California, August 1996), pp. 3-4

<sup>210</sup> Rabil, op.cit., p. 216

other leaders would all allow Barak being able to develop the strength of the executive.<sup>211</sup>

Upon assuming office in July 1999, he set as his goal reaching a comprehensive peace settlement embracing Israel, the Palestinians, Syria and Lebanon. He set out to do what his predecessors refrained from, that is, dealing with more than one negotiating track at the same time. Secondly, he reaffirmed his campaign pledge to withdraw Israeli troops from the security zone in the south Lebanon by July 2000 regardless of whether an agreement with Syria was reached or not.<sup>212</sup>

Like his political mentor, Rabin, Barak saw the Middle East through a different prism. He strove to bring the Arab-Israeli conflict to a close. In the meeting between Ehud Barak and Patrick Seale, Barak said that he was really very keen to know if it was possible to conclude a peace of the brave with Syria, since the only way to build comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East was through an accord with Syria. For him, that was the foundation stone for peace. He added that his policies aimed at strengthening Israel's security by putting an end to the conflict with Syria. And further he praised Asad by saying that he built a strong, independent, and self-confident Syria. In the meeting between Seale and Asad, as a response, Asad said that there was a movement toward the center; and there was a leader capable of moving anything he decided to do. As Seale heard these comments from the two leaders, he concluded

There is an honest desire for peace on both sides. Neither Israel nor Syria has previously ever shown such a degree of readiness to reach a settlement. It appears that the present situation offers more than merely a window of opportunity; rather, it presents a wide open door through which these two opponents can pass through together to put an end to their historic conflict, benefiting the entire region.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Lochery, *op.cit.*, p. 236

<sup>212</sup> Rabil, *op.cit.*, p. 216

<sup>213</sup> "Kisses across the Golan Heights", *Middle East Quarterly*, September 1999 or <http://www.meforum.org/article/479>

Beside this wide open door situation, Raghida Dergham mentioned the logic of negotiation in Syria. Dergham argued that Syria was giving the logic of negotiation precedence over the logic of resistance to liberate the Golan Heights. He commented that if Barak committed himself to certain basic strategic outlines, Syria would show flexibility.<sup>214</sup>

In July, Barak traveled to the US to meet the President Clinton. In this meeting, Clinton pledged that he would get in touch with Asad to emphasize that a golden opportunity lay before him to complete a peace deal with Israel. An agreement was also reached to diminish the degree of Washington's intervention in the coming Israeli-Syrian negotiations. The US would not serve as a full-time intermediary in the future negotiations. After the summit, President Clinton and Secretary of State Madeline K. Albright tried to bring the two parties to resume the negotiations. Israel and Syria agreed to Clinton's proposed formula for resuming the negotiations from the point they were left off.<sup>215</sup>

On December 15, 1999, Israel and Syria resumed talks in Washington after a hiatus of almost four years in an effort to complete a peace accord by the end of 2000. Some argued that it would be difficult to reach agreement with Syria. By evaluating the previous negotiations, the process would be lengthy and tedious, and they would probably exceed expectations.<sup>216</sup> And it became true.

In the Washington talks, Faruq al-Shara maintained his country's traditional posture by repeating grievances against Israel. Shara shocked everyone by launching a tirade, mentioning the long conspiracy to oppress and victimize Syria, against Israel and the US.<sup>217</sup> Fortunately, the talks in Washington had a narrow goal to set a time and the ground rules for more formal negotiations on the sensitive issues that divided

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<sup>214</sup> Raghida Dergham and Joel Singer, "Special Policy Forum Report: A Syria-Israel Summit – Prospects for Peace", Peace Watch #241, (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 7, 2000), p. 1

<sup>215</sup> Rabil, op.cit., p. 217

<sup>216</sup> Shlomo Brom, "The Negotiations with Syria: Quo Vadis?", Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies - Strategic Assessment, Vol. 2, No. 3, (December 1999), p. 7

<sup>217</sup> David Wurmser, "Does Syria Want Peace?", On the Issues, (American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, February 2000), p. 1

Israel and Syria, namely security, borders, bilateral relations, and water. The parties agreed to meet on January 3, 2000, to begin intensive peace talks.<sup>218</sup> While Prime Minister Barak headed Israeli delegation, Foreign Minister Shara headed Syrian delegation. Yet Asad assured Clinton that Shara carried plenipotentiary powers to conclude an agreement with Israel.

The parties agreed to structure the talks by setting up four committees to discuss the specific issues of bilateral relations, security, water, and drawing borders. Keeping to its old pattern, Syria insisted on discussing the issue of borders first, while Israel insisted on discussing security and bilateral relations before all other issues. President Clinton was quick in intervening and breaking the procedural impasse, after which Israel and Syria agreed to discuss both border and security simultaneously. However, no substantive progress took place, as each delegation contrarily expected to achieve some progress on the issues that were important most to it.<sup>219</sup> And it was reported that this was never going to be an easy negotiation; since both sides had to show their publics that they were driving a hard bargain. At that point, on January 7, Clinton presented a document outlining the remaining differences that would serve as a working agenda for the talks.<sup>220</sup> According to Rabil, the paper was more in the form of a draft treaty.<sup>221</sup> America had tried to introduce a positive spin by claiming progress. The progress appeared to be that the two sides had agreed to meet again at some point. After their last meeting with the president, both sides suspended the talks for twenty-four hours. But this temporary suspension was prolonged as no progress had taken place, and each party prepared to go home, supposedly to return to resume the negotiations in about two weeks. As State Department officials said, the parties went home to study the working paper.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Rabil, op.cit., p. 219

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., pp. 219-220

<sup>220</sup> Kevin Whitelaw, "Trying to Envision a Peace", U.S. News & World Report, Vol. 128, Issue 2, 17/01/2000, p. 34

<sup>221</sup> Rabil, op.cit., p. 220

<sup>222</sup> Adel Darwish, "Countdown to Peace?", Middle East, Issue 298, February 2000, p. 6

The Syrian delegation left the Washington feeling angry with Barak. They felt that Barak was escaping discussing the June 4, 1967 line. Indeed, unlike other committees, the border committee barely met. Asad had believed in Barak's agreement with the two fundamental achievements of the previous period. But this was followed by a great disappointment. Barak had wanted to renegotiate the two points: he did not want to accept the June 4 line concerning Lake Tiberias and he wanted to renegotiate the security paper so that Israel would have an early-warning station on Mount Hermon that the Americans could not provide. The Syrians realized that they were not going to strike a deal with Barak, and so the entire peace process broke down.<sup>223</sup>

In the meantime, Syrians leaked a part of working paper to al-Hayat. This upset the Israelis, who pointed out that the published text was inaccurate and biased, and then proceeded to leak the whole working paper to Ha'aretz. Its publication made clear where each side stood, and revealed that the text was not just a working paper but the draft of a treaty.<sup>224</sup> This leakage made things worse. Since it revealed that Syria and Israel had already agreed on many issues relating to security and normalization before the joint committee in charge of the border issue had even met. Indeed, the paper openly admitted that the parties continued to disagree over borders. So Asad was blasted throughout the Syrian public and the Arab world whole as someone who had made major concessions to Israel - for example, promising to join Israel in fighting terrorism - even before Israel had agreed to withdraw to the 1967 lines. Asad stood accused of being prepared to compromise Arab positions no less than the fellow Arab leaders whom he had criticized so bitterly. For Asad, it was a matter of rescuing his legacy and the honor of Syria, a country that prides itself on being the beating heart of Arab nationalism.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Patrick Seale, Uri Lubrani, Raghida Dergham, and Daniel Pipes, "The Middle East in 2000: A Year of Critical Decisions: Roundtable Discussion", Soref Symposium, (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 18-19, 2000), p. 6

<sup>224</sup> Rabil, op.cit., p. 220

<sup>225</sup> Henry Siegman, "Being Hafiz al-Asad: Syria's Chilly but Consistent Peace Strategy", Foreign Affairs, (May/June 2000), p. 2

After the humiliation of the release of the American draft, Asad refused to return to the talks without a clear public acknowledgement by Barak of Israel's willingness to withdraw to the June 4, 1967 line. Nothing less than this could remove the shame now attached to Asad.<sup>226</sup> However, Barak was reluctant to discuss the issue of the June 4 lines, since this was a highly emotional matter in Israel. He had to contend not only with the opposition but also with the skeptical mood of the nation toward Syria having a foothold on the edge of Lake Tiberias.<sup>227</sup> It was always known that it would be a struggle to get a Syrian deal approved by a referendum, but now, with an increasingly uncertain majority, Barak faced a struggle in parliament too.<sup>228</sup> Barak made a serious tactical error when he decided not to publicize his agreement to withdraw to the June 4 lines until he could show skeptical Israelis what they would get from Asad in return. If Barak had announced his intention to withdraw early in his term, when he was still enjoying the momentum of his victory, most Israelis would merely have said that he was sticking to his often declared principles. By insisting that he had not yet decide this issue, Barak painted himself into a corner.<sup>229</sup>

In the meantime, the US tried to break the impasse between the two countries. These efforts culminated in a decision to hold a summit meeting in Geneva between Asad and Clinton on March 26, 2000. It was their first meeting in more than five years. According to Seale, the Syrians went to Geneva with great hopes. They had been let to believe that Barak was ready at last to approve the commitment to withdraw to the June 4 line. Asad was prepared in return to give some major assurances on normalization, water, and the timetable. He went to Geneva with a large delegation of 130 people and thought that this was going to be a great historic moment that would re-launch the peace process.<sup>230</sup> However Clinton informed Asad that Barak

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Rabil, op.cit., p. 221

<sup>228</sup> "After Asad", Economist, 17/06/2000, Vol. 355, Issue 8175

<sup>229</sup> Siegman, op.cit., pp. 2-3

<sup>230</sup> Seale, Lubrani, Dergham, and Pipes, op.cit., pp. 8-9



was indeed ready to fully withdraw from the Golan Heights, but on the condition that the northeastern edge of Lake Tiberias remain under Israel's sovereignty. In return Barak was prepared to trade a larger amount of land southeast of the Kinneret. Barak also wanted Asad to agree to confidence-building measures that mostly dealt with public diplomacy to allow the Israeli leader to win the support of public opinion. Within the context of his offer, Barak appeared to come up with a proposal to the effect that Syria would have free access to the northeastern edge of the lake while this would leave an essential Syrian demand unsatisfied since Syrian sovereign territory would not reach the lake.<sup>231</sup> In such a case, Clinton failed to persuade Asad to resume the negotiations. Asad was adamant about his long-held view that Israel withdraws to the June 4 lines. During the summit, when Clinton relayed on behalf of Barak to the Syrians delegation that the window of opportunities was narrowing, the Syrians spoke about their readiness to wait for the future generations to retrieve the whole land.<sup>232</sup> It was reported in *Economist* that America's Arab friends were offering anxious assurances that all was not yet lost; but the Americans and Israeli understood that Asad meant what he said – insistence on recovering the north-eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.<sup>233</sup>

What appears to have happened was that Barak mobilized Clinton into putting forth his own maximalist demands, which included total control of the lake and total mastery over the waters flowing into the lake. Why did Barak think that Clinton could pressure Asad into making these concessions? According to Seale, one of the reasons was that the Israelis were influenced by Kissenger's account of his negotiations with Asad that Asad would negotiate until the very last minute; at the very last minute, he would then yield. Another reason was that the Israelis thought that Asad could be pressured; because very often one heard in Israel that the Syrian economy was on its

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<sup>231</sup> "Syria Under Bashar (I): Foreign Policy Challenges", ICG Middle East Report No: 23, (Amman/Brussels, 11 February 2004), p. 2

<sup>232</sup> Rabil, op.cit., pp. 225-226

<sup>233</sup> "Israel, Syria and that Sliver of the Galilee Shore", Economist, Vol. 355, Issue 8164, 01/04/2000, p. 241

knees, that Asad was dying, and that he wanted to hand over power to his son. However the contrary was true. Yes, he would like to free his successor from the burden of peace making with Israel to enable the new regime to focus on the domestic agenda. But the agreement should be an honorable deal and therefore likely to be harder in negotiations.<sup>234</sup>

It was argued that Asad operated in a conceptual myth from which he could not deviate. The Syrian judgment called for avoiding the mistakes made by Anwar Sadat, King Hussein of Jordan, and Arafat. Asad's objective to level the playing field vis-à-vis Israel in the military, political, and economic areas had failed. He saw Israel as a victor, and he could not allow himself to be defeated again diplomatically. Also, how could he negotiate anything less than the Egyptians?<sup>235</sup> He wanted a negotiation between equals, and he wanted a peace that was not dependent on Israeli power alone. He wanted a peace based on some sort of balance of power, mutual deterrence, equality of treatment, and equality of security arrangements.<sup>236</sup> According to Hisham Melhem, Asad was the only Arab leader who negotiated with Israel not solely on a bilateral basis but as a regional player. He had been stubborn in his defense of Syria's interests, not only to get back all of the Golan, but also to preserve for Syria a regional role in the post-peace Middle East that would make it possible for the Syrians not to live constantly in the shadow of Israeli power.<sup>237</sup>

According to subsequent Israeli reports, Barak acted unilaterally, without consulting his cabinet and without any internal discussion of what Israel's vital interests were. There is now evidence that top Israeli military officials were willing to agree to the Syrian position on the border: "IDF officers now feel at liberty to state explicitly that responsibility for the failure of negotiations with Syria was borne by Barak, not Asad. General Staff officers were willing to assent to Asad's demand that

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<sup>234</sup> Seale, Lubrani, Dergham, and Pipes, *op.cit.*, p. 9; Martha Kessler, Helena Cobban, Hisham Melhem, "What About Syria?", *Middle East Policy*, Vol. VII, No. 1, October 1999, p. 109

<sup>235</sup> Miller, *op.cit.*, p. 131

<sup>236</sup> Seale, Lubrani, Dergham, and Pipes, *op.cit.*, p. 6

<sup>237</sup> Kessler, Cobban, Melhem, *op.cit.*, p. 109

Israel withdraw from the northeast shoreline of the Sea of Galilee and they believed that Barak's intransigent refusal to comply with the Syrian demand reflected a triumph of passing domestic political considerations over permanent security needs. Israel bears the greater responsibility for the latest breakdown. Since the Syrians always insist on their aspirations to regain the Golan as well as symbolic access to the Sea of Galilee.”<sup>238</sup>

In short, the collapse of the Geneva summit formalized the demise of the talks. According to Eyal Zisser, the failure was not one of the ups and downs that the negotiations had experienced before; it was the end of the process. There was nothing to expect because it was quite clear that neither side could deliver what the other insisted on.<sup>239</sup>

Barak had promised during the 1999 election campaign to withdraw Israel's troops by July 2000, he fully intended such a withdrawal to occur as part of an agreement with Syria, which controls Lebanon, since there was an understanding of the Golan Heights and the South Lebanon constituting a unitary strategic block. It would be strategically advantageous for both sides to engage in a simultaneous withdrawal across two fronts in accordance with, for Israel the UNSCR 425 and for Syria Taif Accord. But the intense domestic outcry over the recent rise in Israeli fatalities in southern Lebanon - Hezbollah had heightened the tension in the security zone by escalating its attacks on Israeli troops and the SLA – had made it impossible for Barak not to withdraw from Lebanon, even without a Syrian agreement. On the other hand, Barak knew that a unilateral withdrawal could have unpredictable consequences including more authority for Hezbollah in Lebanese politics or renewed attacks on northern Israel as in the 1970s. These might foreclose Syrian-Israeli peace and continue Israel's regional isolation for a long time.<sup>240</sup> So it was an enormous risk.

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<sup>238</sup> Slater, *op.cit.*, pp. 99-101, ICG Middle East Report No: 23, p.1

<sup>239</sup> Eyal Zisser, “Special Policy Forum Report, The Lebanon-Syria-Israel Triangle: One Year After Israeli Withdrawal”, *Peacewatch*, No. 326, May 22, 2001, <http://washingtoninstitute.org/watch/Peacewatch/peacewatch2001/326.htm>

<sup>240</sup> Siegman, *op.cit.*, p. 4

But it was even worse now, because the kind of morale and spirit in Israel that would allow them to stand up for themselves in the 1970s was no longer there.<sup>241</sup>

Before the withdrawal, the two options were at the front of Syria. The first option was that Syrian policy was to keep quiet, and accept that Israel was leaving Lebanon, while only temporarily staying on the Golan. The second possibility was that they could tolerate a certain amount of low-intensity activity on the frontier, so reminding the Israelis that until there is peace with Syria, they will not have a particularly quiet life. But low-level violence was extremely difficult to control, it could be escalated easily.<sup>242</sup>

Syria seemed anxious and ambivalent about Israel's decision to unilaterally withdraw from Lebanon. Israel was warned that a unilateral withdrawal without prior negotiations with Beirut and Damascus could lead to a new conflict, as Palestinian refugees in Lebanon would resume their attacks on Israel. However, Israel's response came in the form of air strikes against two Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon close to the border, sending a clear message that Israel would not tolerate any armed Palestinian activity.<sup>243</sup>

The Barak's commitment to withdraw by July 7, 2000, completed six weeks earlier, deprived Asad of his Lebanese card and undermined Syria's justification for staying in Lebanon. Moreover, the Israeli withdrawal took away from Syria the initiative in Lebanon and an important Syrian weapon – the Hezbollah. With Israel gone, Syria became the only foreign occupier of Lebanese territory.<sup>244</sup>

On June 10, 2000, Hafiz Asad died. Immediately after his death, by a series of actions, Bashar Asad became the new leader of Syria. Rabil mentioned that Hafiz Asad departed from life without signing a peace agreement with Israel and left his son

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<sup>241</sup> Seale, Lubrani, Dergham, and Pipes, op.cit., p. 15

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., p. 17

<sup>243</sup> Rabil, op.cit., p. 225

<sup>244</sup> Miller, Seale, op.cit., p. 130

not only an unfinished task but also a peace process legacy that Bashar could not manage easily.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Rabil, op.cit., p. 273

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

As demonstrated in the preceding chapters, Syria had a central place in the Arab-Israeli conflict and as such played a critical role in the subsequent Middle East peace process. This was acquired by the policy of the combination of “strategic consistency” in the objectives with “tactical flexibility” in the ways to reach the objectives.<sup>1</sup>

The Syrian conflict with Israel is rooted in the Anglo-French dismembering of geographic Syria into four states – Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine – and sponsoring the colonization and establishment of the state of Israel in Palestine. The conflict had taken the form of political and ideological hostility to Jewish identity since 1920s, and the military threat had been inserted since 1948, in which the five Arab states attacked on Israel. The result of the war for Arabs, in particular for Syria, was a disaster; while for Israel, it was the realization of its independence. During the armistice negotiations and after the armistice agreement, Syrian leaders, coming to power after coup d’etats one after another, had offered signing peace agreement rather than just an armistice agreement. This marks the ups and downs in the strategy towards Israel at that time. While the regime sought to sustain legitimization through militant rhetoric against Israel since foreign policy became a weapon in the internal power struggles, at the same time, the leaders of the coups had accepted the role of the peace in the consolidation of their regime and in improving their relations with the US. Due to Israeli rejections of the peace offers, the armistice agreement remained the legal basis of the Syrian-Israeli relations.

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<sup>1</sup> Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Raymond A. Hinnebusch, Syria and Iran, Middle Powers in a Penetrated Regional System, (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 85

Ehteshami and Hinnebusch asserted that the Syrian revisionist and irredentist policy toward Israel, which was the result of the mixture of anti-imperialist, anti-Zionist, pan-Arab and pan-Syrian sentiments in Syria, reached a climax in the effort of the radical wing of the Ba'th party to make Damascus the bastion of a pan-Arab revolution and a war of popular liberation in Palestine. However, this revisionism only resulted in the 1967 defeat and the Israeli occupation of new Arab lands, including the Golan Heights. This was the highest point in the Arab-Israeli conflict, which locked Syria into the struggle with Israel, but also opened the way for an era of realpolitik of limited goals under Hafiz Asad.<sup>2</sup> Before Asad coming to power, rather than pursuing an effective foreign policy, Syria was under pressure of the stronger Arab states -Iraq and Egypt-, which fought to put Syria under their sphere of influence. Furthermore, Syria's traditional elite was de-legitimized for its inability to cope with Israel and defend the Palestinians. Asad challenged the residual revisionism deriving from Syria's historical experience and created a policy according to realities of Syria's limited power resources and its geographical vulnerability. Asad was successful in his goals by making Syria a major actor in the region.<sup>3</sup> The realpolitik replacing revisionism was evident in the limited objectives of the 1973 war. While the October War demonstrated that the Arabs could fight; but also showed that even a two-front, well-prepared, surprise assault could not drive Israel out of the occupied territories. As a result, Asad was more inclined to rely on diplomacy to achieve his ends.<sup>4</sup> In other words, when Syria failed to recover the Golan militarily but seemed to acquire enhanced political leverage from its credible challenge to the pro-Israeli status quo, Asad entered the negotiations with Israel.<sup>5</sup> However, he was still refusing to settle for less than a return to the 1967 lines and giving the Palestinian rights. It formally accepted the UNSCR 338 regarding the ceasefire,

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 57-58

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 66

<sup>4</sup> Alasdair Drysdale, Raymond Hinnebusch, Syria and Middle East Peace Process, (New York: Council of Foreign Relations Press, 1991), pp. 107-108

<sup>5</sup> Ehteshami and Hinnebusch, op.cit., p. 70

embracing the UNSCR 242. This meant the Syrian explicit acceptance of Israel's right to exist in the secure borders.

After the disengagement agreement in May 1974 until 1978, the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt, which resulted in the peace treaty between the two in 1979, Asad continued to explore the possibility of a political settlement. Israel, rejecting these offers, formally annexed the Golan Heights in 1981. It should be underlined that this inclination to diplomacy was only a tactical flexibility, keeping in mind the real objectives consistent. It was the case that while Asad was exploring the political settlement with Israel; he did not hesitate to intervene in Lebanon due to security reasons despite Israeli sensitivities.

Under these circumstances, Asad gave priority to build a military option against Israel with aid from the Soviet Union. Syrian essential aim was to build a strong and credible army. By such an army, Syria would use its armed strength at the appropriate time to launch a war against Israel and to negotiate a comprehensive political settlement with Israel from a position of strength.<sup>6</sup> This behavior was part of the policy of strategic consistency with tactical flexibility. According to Ehteshami and Hinnebusch, Asad, as a realist, tried to build up Syria's military power to reach a strategic parity with Israel. His diplomacy was conditioned by the belief that a stable peace with Israel could only be built on a balance of power with it. The ability to deter an Israeli attack was not only the heart of national security but essential to a credible Syrian bargaining hand in negotiations over a settlement.<sup>7</sup>

In a state of mutual military deterrence between Syria and Israel, the latter continued to maintain a clear strategic advantage over Damascus. In the meantime, Syria faced the devastating years of the 1980s. Because of the economic crisis, Asad could not pursue the strategic balance policy, which was only achieved in terms of quantity rather than quality. Therefore, the domestic economic crisis had an indirect role in Asad changing policy from military strategy to diplomatic one. Actually it was again a tactical

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<sup>6</sup> Moshe Ma'oz, 'Syria, Israel and the Peace Process' in Barry Rubin, Joseph Ginat, Moshe Ma'oz (ed.), From War to Peace: Arab-Israeli Relations 1973-1993, (New York: New York Uni. Press, 1994), pp. 161-162

<sup>7</sup> Ehteshami and Hinnebusch, op.cit., p. 68



change without abandoning the objectives. Rather than domestic constraints, external ones were more influential in changing the Syrian strategy towards Israel. At the international level, the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union following Gorbachev's new thinking deprived Syria of its key source of political, military and economic aid and support; and it left Syria vulnerable to the threats, and strengthened the US position in the region. Most importantly the collapse of the Soviet Union deprived Syria of the option of a credible threat of war in the absence of an acceptable peace.<sup>8</sup> As a result, it sought a dialogue with the United States with the aim of finding a place in the new world order that was taking shape under the US leadership. At the regional level, the Syrian regime acted to improve relations with Egypt and the Gulf states. In the wake of the Gulf crisis, the changed position of Asad secured Syria from the troubles and improved its regional and international standing.<sup>9</sup> Again the Syrian policy would have to rely on diplomatic strategy instead of military one, and that meant détente with the US which alone had leverage over Israel. Asad needed to get the US to accept Syria as the key to peace and stability in the Middle East, as a state whose interests had to be recognized. The Gulf crisis presented a golden opportunity for American acknowledgement of Syrian interests.<sup>10</sup> In short, realist and pragmatist Asad, without abandoning his objectives, had adapted his strategy to new conditions emerging after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the Gulf crisis, which strengthened the superiority of America. Asad believed that he had the chance to reach his objectives through diplomacy. As Ehteshami and Hinnebusch claimed the apparent strengthening of the UN since the Gulf war and the coincidence of this development with American interests in a new world order favored Syria since the UN resolutions required Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories.<sup>11</sup>

As a result of these international and regional circumstances, the US formulated a new Middle East strategy, including the creation of new opportunities for peace and

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81

<sup>9</sup> Eyal Zisser, *Asad's Legacy Syria in Transition*, (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2001), pp. 49-50

<sup>10</sup> Ehteshami and Hinnebusch, *op.cit.*, p. 81

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158

stability in the Middle East. By intensive American diplomatic maneuvering, representatives from all the major parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict convened at the Madrid Middle East Peace Conference under the co-sponsorship of the United States and the Soviet Union.

Syria had initially showed its flexibility in the procedural issues. On the eve of the Madrid peace conference, Syria agreed to conduct direct negotiations with Israel even in the absence of previous Israeli commitments to withdraw from the occupied territories and agree to Palestinian statehood. It also accepted that the peace conference would be a regional conference rather than an international one, and that it would be convened under American and Soviet sponsorship rather than under the sponsorship of the UN Security Council.

The bilateral negotiations just after the Madrid Peace Conference were going nowhere as the positions of Syria and Israel were irreconcilable. Syria insisted on the “land for peace” formula, while Israel insisted on the “peace for peace” formula. The gap was compounded by sharp disagreements over the past. This initial formidable positions reminded the worth of the pre-negotiation phase, by which the contradictory versions of the past could be confronted and the legacy of grievances could be overcome.<sup>12</sup>

Under the Labor Party prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, a window of opportunity was opened as a result of changing formula from “total withdrawal for total peace” to “depth of withdrawal determine depth of peace” and lastly to “full peace for full withdrawal”. This last formula also meant that the Syrian demand for “land for peace” was accepted by Israel. These efforts resulted in a breakthrough in August 1993 by Rabin’s hypothetical question that if Israel was ready for full withdrawal from the Golan, how much Israel would be satisfied about the nature of peace and security arrangements. After Rabin’s assassination, Peres widened the vision of the peace in the Middle East, and the hope for the breakthrough for the peace agreement continued until the election of Benjamin Netanyahu, who refused to resume the talks at the point where Peres suspended them. This was the indication of the turning back to the “peace

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<sup>12</sup> Itamar Rabinovich, The Brink of Peace The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 41-42

for peace” formula. Ehud Barak’s election in 1999 again opened a wide door for a stable comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The breakthrough was not realized because of a narrow piece along the northeastern shore of Lake Tiberias. Barak was ready to fully withdraw from the Golan Heights, but on the condition that the northeastern edge of Lake Tiberias remain under Israel’s sovereignty. However, Syria, pursuing the strategic consistency in its objectives, was adamant on getting back the every inch of the Golan Heights. Just after the close of the door opened by Barak, the vital changes occurred in the Middle East.

In retrospective, there were some breakthroughs in the negotiation process. Rabin had opened a window of opportunity, Peres had widened the vision of the peace in the Middle East, Barak had opened a wide door for a comprehensive peace in the region; but still the peace could not be reached. There are many different explanations for the failure in reaching the peace. They are related to domestic politics as well as regional and strategic maneuvers and considerations. They are ideological and psychological barriers, the different visions of Syria and Israel toward peace and peace process, lack of public diplomacy, different political systems, and the procedural obstacles.

In terms of psychology, Ma’oz claimed that the two sides lack knowledge of one another in terms of society, culture, history, concerns, aspirations, and sensitivities. According to him, there was no sympathy or empathy.<sup>13</sup> In terms of ideology, Syria regards itself as the beating heart of Arabism and anti-Zionism. Thus, as Rabinovich asserted, for Asad, the essence of any settlement was the containment of Israel and thus holding the line against Israel. Brain Mandell claimed that Asad’s goal was to weaken the capacity of his adversary by extracting maximum concessions. Also Hinnebush and Zunes took Israeli and Syrian views of the post-peace situation in the region into consideration, and concluded that while Israel wants peace to permit its incorporation into the Middle East; Syria aims to contain Israeli influence within its

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<sup>13</sup> Moshe Ma’oz, “Can Peace Be Reached Between Israel and Syria? The Lessons of Trial and Error”, [vegeta.hum.utah.edu/mec/Lectures/2004%20lecture%20pages/Lecture%20pdf/Maoz%20lecture.pdf](http://vegeta.hum.utah.edu/mec/Lectures/2004%20lecture%20pages/Lecture%20pdf/Maoz%20lecture.pdf), February 11, 2004, p. 1

pre-1967 lines.<sup>14</sup> Helena Cobban added that Asad had been careful in his defense of Syria's interests, not only get back all of the Golan, but also to preserve for Syria a regional role in the post-peace Middle East that would make it possible for the Syrians not to live in the shadow of Israeli power.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, the two sides' visions of peace are not compatible, while Israel was burdened with security; dignity, getting back every inch of the occupied territories and the Palestinian rights, was the meaning of peace for Syria. Alon Ben-Meir mentioned that Asad made the removal of all consequences of the 1967 war a matter of dignity and thereby a prerequisite for peace. According to Ben-Meir, Syrian national pride was not a slogan; it was as real as the territory itself.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, many scholars like Hinnebusch and Reuben Miller, emphasized that Syria and Israel both initially viewed the peace process as a zero-sum game. The proposition was that "if you do not win, you lose, and losing is so complete that it is to be avoided at all costs." So the negotiations remained a power struggle over the shape of the peace.<sup>17</sup> From oriental and exaggerated perspective, first, Miller mentioned the cultural communication challenges that the Israelis viewed the negotiations as problem-solving meetings and addressed the issues by resorting to objective reality, the Syrian approach was rooted in core values of honor and dignity. The Syrian orientation was more holistic and focused on the totality of the historical context behind the immediate issues.<sup>18</sup> Second, Pipes attributed the failure to Asad's interest in keeping the process going without ever coming to closure. According to Pipes, an authoritarian-minoritarian Syrian

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<sup>14</sup> Stephen Zunes, "Israeli-Syrian Peace: Long Road Ahead", Middle East Policy, Vol. 2, No. 3, (1993), p. 64, Ramond A. Hinnebusch, "Does Syria Want Peace? Syrian Policy in the Syrian-Israeli Peace Negotiations", Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. XXVI, No. 2, (Autumn 1996), p. 51

<sup>15</sup> Martha Kessler, Helena Cobban, Hisham Melhem, "What About Syria?", Middle East Policy, Vol. VII, No. 1, (October 1999), p. 109

<sup>16</sup> Alon Ben-Meir, "Why Syria Must Regain the Golan to Make Peace", Middle East Policy, Vol. V, No. 3, (October 1997)

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., R. Reuben Miller, "The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations", Mediterranean Quarterly, Vol. 11, No. 4, (2000), p. 118

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 188-119

regime needs an external enemy to justify repressive rule in the domestic politics.<sup>19</sup> In addition, Rabinovich pointed out that Syria was more interested in dialogue with the US than its bargaining with Israel.<sup>20</sup>

In terms of public diplomacy, from Israeli point of view, Asad was not generous in his gestures towards Israel. He made some gestures like allowing about 5000 Jews of Syria to emigrate from Syria and allowing a delegation of Israeli Arabs to visit Syria, but they were not enough. Because as Ma'oz indicated the Israelis were used to Anwar Sadat, who came to Jerusalem and won over most Israelis before the Camp David accords. Also Bashar had not been helpful in public diplomacy. During Pope's visit to Syria, he equated Israel with the Nazis and he suggested to the pope forging an alliance between Islam and Christianity against Judaism.<sup>21</sup>

It is argued that the two sides' different political systems were part of reasons behind the failure. While the Syrians faced the complexities of and rules of the game in the Israeli political system, being slow and manifold process; Israelis had an easier task in dealing with a centralized, stable system dominated by one person. Ma'oz asserted that there was not a very consistent Israeli policy vis-à-vis Syria. During the negotiations, Israel had five leaders: Shamir, Rabin, Peres, Netanyahu, and Barak. While the Israeli leaders were under pressure by the Israeli public and could not have the majority in the Knesset,<sup>22</sup> so the fluid nature of Israeli domestic politics does not support a position for long<sup>23</sup>; Hinnbeusch pointed out that Asad of Syria had achieved substantial autonomy of domestic constraints on his foreign policy through a patient process of power consolidation. So the foreign policy was not subject to bureaucratic politics where different factions could veto Asad's decision. Nor could public opinion

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<sup>19</sup> Daniel Pipes, Greater Syria: The History of An Ambition, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Pres, 1990)

<sup>20</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., p. 245

<sup>21</sup> Ma'oz (2004), op.cit., pp. 4, 10-11

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 3

<sup>23</sup> Miller, op.cit., p. 124

directly constrain foreign policy.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless there were other problems with the Syrian political system. Ben-Meir indicated that the Israelis had had some concerns about the potential for political instability in the post-Asad period. They were concerned whether Asad's successor would adhere to agreement made by his government.<sup>25</sup>

In terms of procedural issues, Israeli side indicated that there should be a referendum in Israel before an agreement with Syria is signed. This was a major problem for Syria, because it might mean that Syria could end up with no agreement at all despite having made painful public concessions to Israel.<sup>26</sup>

Ma'oz asserted that both sides used all kinds of tactics to outmaneuver the other. Syria used Hezbollah to carry out acts of terror inside Israel. They wanted to send a message to Israel, "if you want to get rid of Hezbollah, give us the Golan Heights."<sup>27</sup> When the Israelis wanted the Syrian side to denounce the terrorist attacks on Israel, Syria refused to do this. Israel retaliated by the operations, which gathered the world wide criticism. Also Israeli governments used one track against another; and many times put Syria aside by insisting their inability to digest progress in more than one track at a time.

There was another problem that the US as a mediator faced many challenges. On the one hand, it tried to promote a peace settlement enhancing the long term security of its ally --Israel- and on the other hand, it tried to advance the US national interest by helping to contain Iran and Iraq, fight international terrorism, and promote a stable and independent Lebanon. Alongside these ends, the US should explore ways to bridge the gaps between Israel and Syria.<sup>28</sup> Stephen Zunes indicated that the US

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<sup>24</sup> Hinnebusch, op.cit., p. 44

<sup>25</sup> Ben-Meir, op.cit., p. 6

<sup>26</sup> Jerome Slater, "Lost Opportunities for Peace in the Arab-Israeli Conflict", International Security, Vol. 27, No. 1, (Summer 2002), pp. 96-97

<sup>27</sup> Ma'oz (2004), op.cit., p. 3

<sup>28</sup> James Phillips, "Washington's Role in the Syrian-Israeli Peace Talks: Do's and Don'ts", The Heritage Foundation Background Paper Executive Summary, No. 1345, February 4, 2000, p. 13

role as a superpower with strong strategic and economic interests in the region often conflicted with its role as mediator in the Syrian-Israeli peace process.<sup>29</sup>

Although a peace agreement could not be reached, the negotiation process produced some positive legacy for the future. Both sides became familiar with each other's position; and the general outlines of a prospective settlement were drawn and several important barriers were overcome. Three Israeli prime ministers had indicated to the Israeli public their willingness to make concessions in order to achieve peace with Syria, and Asad had agreed to make full peace and to offer normalization with Israel.<sup>30</sup>

This legacy of the past will have to be used at a point of time in the future, since without an agreement with Syria, the peace circle around Israel remains incomplete, keeping up the possibility of the military escalation alive. The Syrian location at the center of the Middle East, giving an exceptional strategic importance to it, made Syria a *sine qua non* of the peace in the Middle East. In addition, Syria was a frontline state against Israel. Restraining the Palestinian rights and occupying the Arab lands including the Golan Heights, Israel had let Syria to build its frontline against Israel. Accordingly unless this front is closed, it is certain that peace in the region will be impossible. Syria has always reminded Israel that without closing this frontline by giving the Palestinian rights back and withdrawal from the occupied territories, the peace agreement is impossible.

Ma'oz mentioned that it is in Israel's interest to complete the circle of peace and through this to eliminate the threat from Lebanon, Hezbollah. This would also help to settle the Palestinian issue. According to Ma'oz, one of the crucial issues in the Palestinian situation is the refugee problem. In Syria, there are about 350,000 Palestinian refugees and in Lebanon the same numbers. Syria controls Lebanon; for this refugee issue to be settled, an Israeli-Syrian settlement is a must.<sup>31</sup> Beside an end

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<sup>29</sup> Stephen Zunes, "The Peace Process Between Israel and Syria", Foreign Policy in Focus, Vol. 7, No. 5, (May 2002)

<sup>30</sup> Rabinovich, op.cit., p. 247

<sup>31</sup> Ma'oz (2004), op.cit., p. 9

to Hezbollah attacks against Israel, according to Zisser, a peace between Syria and Israel will eliminate the Syrian military threat to Israel, and lessen the Iranian threat.<sup>32</sup>

Regarding Lebanon, Syria was very upset about the Israeli withdrawal because it could have led to pacification of the Lebanese-Israeli border. However, Hafiz Asad had managed to find a pretext for the Lebanese government and Hezbollah that the Israeli withdrawal was not completed. He argued that a piece of land, Shib'a farms, which was claimed as the part of the Golan Heights by Israel, belonged to Lebanon, and unless Israel withdrew from it, then Hezbollah operations should continue. Marius Deeb asserted that Syria has neither allowed the Lebanese-Israel border to be pacified nor permitted Lebanon to negotiate separately with Israel. According to him, the reason is clear that Lebanon could easily sign a peace treaty with Israel.<sup>33</sup> So the Syrian-Israeli peace agreement is a formidable step for the Israeli-Lebanon peace agreement. The Israeli peace agreement with these two states will complete the circle, and also opened the way for the only remaining issue: the Palestinian predicament.

As a conclusion, the strategic consistency in the goals with tactical flexibility in the ways to reach these goals explains the place of Syria in the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Middle East peace process in the period between the 1948 war and 2000. For today and the future, while the "strategic consistency" keeps the war option alive, the "tactical flexibility" gives the hope for the peace in the Middle East.

#### **6. 1. Peace after Hafiz Asad?**

In June 2000, Hafiz Asad, the realist and experienced leader of Syria, died and Bashar Asad became the president. The new president faced both domestic and foreign policy challenges. While trying to respond to the domestic challenges in a different way from his father, he could not ignore later Asad's legacy on foreign policy. Domestically, Bashar wanted to respond to the calls for reform by intellectuals inside and the opposition movements like the Muslim Brotherhood outside. During his first year, Bashar opted for reforming the country while preserving the political

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<sup>32</sup> Eyal Zisser, "Is there a Syrian Option?", Tel Aviv Notes, No. 10, January 28, 2001, p. 1

<sup>33</sup> Marius Deeb, "Lebanon since 1979 Syria, Hizballah, and the War against Peace in the Middle East", in Robert O. Freedman (ed.), The Middle East Enters the Twenty-First Century, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), p. 215



structure.<sup>34</sup> After awhile, Bashar changed his mind, and it was called that “Damascus spring” had come to end. According to Najib Ghabbian, reasons behind this change were, first, fear of the regime’s old guard about the possible catastrophic effects of the reform, second, reform not coming by the pressure from below, just a blessing of the leader.<sup>35</sup> It was argued that Bashar was aware that Syria’s longer-term stability requires change, modernization and foreign help to save the country from an economic crisis generated by widespread corruption, an unproductive public force, outdated socialist laws. But also Bashar realized that his longevity was tied to the stability of the regime, which depended on the continuation of certain domestic and regional policies.<sup>36</sup> According to Eyal Zisser, the end of the Damascus Spring showed that Bashar had no clear vision of his own goals.<sup>37</sup>

In foreign policy, Bashar faced a stalled peace process together with his father’s legacy, rising pressure from Lebanon for Syrian forces to pull out of that country, and the *intifada* in Palestine, followed by the renewed activities of Hezbollah against Israel’s northern border, and the war on terrorism declared by the US in the wake of the attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001 and the war on Iraq. Bashar was committed to his father’s legacy and said that his strategic choice of peace with Israel still dominated the government’s agenda, while Syria would remain true to the Hafiz Asad’s insistence that every inch of Syrian territory be returned.<sup>38</sup> However, the atmosphere was no longer appropriate. According to Zisser, issues other than making peace with Israel were at the front of Bashar: managing Syrian interests in Lebanon and maintaining Syria’s relative status in the Arab

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<sup>34</sup> Najib Ghabbian, “The New Asad: Dynamics of Continuity and Change in Syria”, Middle East Journal, Vol. 55, No. 4, Autumn 2001, pp. 635-636

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 638

<sup>36</sup> “Syria Under Bashar (II): Domestic Policy Challenges”, ICG Middle East Report No: 24, (Amman/Brussels, 11 February 2004), p.6

<sup>37</sup> Eyal Zisser, “Does Bashar al-Assad Rule Syria?”, Middle East Quarterly, Vol. 10, No. 1, Winter 2003, p. 19

<sup>38</sup> “Bashar’s World”, Economist, 17/06/2000, Vol. 355, Issue 8175, p. 26

world.<sup>39</sup> Along the unwillingness of Israel to accept full withdrawal to the pre-1967 lines, one of the most important reasons was the Al-Aqsa *intifada*, which erupted following Ariel Sharon's visit to the al-Aqsa mosque in September 2000. The failure of the peace process together with the excessive use of force by the Sharon government, which came to power in February 2001, against the Palestinians temporarily evaporated the accusation of intransigency leveled at the Syrian government. The Palestinian *intifada*, as well as the renewed Hezbollah activity against Israel, threatened to create a regional conflagration or at least an Israeli-Syrian confrontation and Bashar escalated his rhetoric against Israel. Also the *intifada* tempted Syria to resume support for radical secular Palestinian groups.<sup>40</sup> Zisser claimed that Bashar thought to exploit the *intifada* to promote his personal standing as well as Syria's regional status, and to establish himself as the leader of the radical Arab camp. The rash statements of Bashar reminded his father's statements in the early years of his rule. But Hafiz Asad over the years had matured and adopted a balanced tone and a pragmatic policy. Zisser argued that rather than continuing from the point where his father left, Bashar started all over again, at the very same rhetorical point where his father began in November 1970.<sup>41</sup>

The terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, on September 11, 2001, introduced a new era in the Syrian-American relations. These events, as about a decade ago, had similar implications for the Middle East and Syria in particular. The US, emerging from the terrorist attacks more determined to strike at its enemies, was quick to demand that Syria change its course and join efforts with the international community to fight terrorism. On the one hand, Syria took steps to prevent a frontal and direct confrontation with Washington; and it was prepared to cooperate with the US in its struggle against the al-Qaida. Syria provided some useful intelligence to US about al-Qaida cells operating in Syria and Europe. On the other hand, Syria continued

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<sup>39</sup> Zisser (2001), op.cit.

<sup>40</sup> Stephen Zunes, "The Peace Process Between Israel and Syria", Foreign Policy in Focus, Vol. 7, No. 5, (May 2002)

<sup>41</sup> Zisser (2003), op.cit., pp. 19-20

to adhere to its worldview.<sup>42</sup> President Bush signaled out Iran, Iraq, and North Korea as countries making up an “axis of evil” in his State of Union address in January 2002. In addition, he mentioned Hezbollah as a terrorist organization. Although Bush left Syria out from his speech, he put the country into a double bind. He highlighted Syria’s regional role but compelled the country to make a choice with respect to any US potential future action against Iraq, Iran, or Hezbollah.<sup>43</sup>

After this initial dilemma, American preparations to strike at Saddam Hussein created new tension in the Syrian-US relations. Syria chose to place itself at the head of the Arab camp opposing the war and criticized Washington’s decision to go to war. Beside rhetorical support, Syria continued to permit the smuggling of weapons into Iraq and allow Arab volunteers to cross the Syrian border into Iraq. Syria also joined to attempts to stop Washington’s efforts to recruit the international support. Syria voted for the UNSCR 1441, which included a strong demand that Iraq agree to renew the international inspections or suffer the consequences; Syrian claim was that they had succeeded in foiling or at least postponing the American attack on Iraq.<sup>44</sup>

As a result, Washington and Damascus were on a collision course. However, as Zisser mentioned that the US was not eager for a confrontation with Syria. Threats were kinds of pressure to change the Syrian policy on hosting terrorist groups or turning over Iraqi officials. The US Secretary of State, Colin Powell offered Damascus chance to choose whether it wanted friendship or conflict with the US.<sup>45</sup> It was mentioned during Powell’s visit to Damascus at the beginning of May 2003. Like an opportunity for peace following the Gulf War in 1991, there was a renewed sense of hope for peace in the region following the downfall of Saddam’s regime in Iraq.<sup>46</sup> Because the post-Iraq war atmosphere, which produced the roadmap for an Israeli-

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<sup>42</sup> Zisser, “Syria and the War in Iraq”, Middle East Review of International Relations, Vol. 7, No. 2, (June 2003), p. 47

<sup>43</sup> Rabil, op.cit., p. 278

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp., 47, 50

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 53

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/05/02/opinion/diplomatic/main552142.shtml>

Palestinian settlement had also generated speculation that the Bush administration might seek to encourage a comprehensive peace process including Syria.<sup>47</sup> Colin Powell said “even though the road map relates principally to the Palestinians and the Israelis, the United States sees this as part of a comprehensive settlement that must be achieved that would include the interest of Syria and Lebanon, as well.”<sup>48</sup>

However, the initial hope for peace was immediately frustrated. The circumstances were much different than the one occurred after the Gulf crisis at the beginning of the 1990s. Firstly, Bashar was inexperienced, and not have the vision of his father. Hafiz Asad had sided with the US in the Gulf War despite of the certain amount of opposition of the Syrian people. However, at the end, he had not lost his domestic credibility, but also gained credibility in the region and the international arena. Bashar had initially prepared to cooperate with the US in its struggle against terrorism; but after the US war in Iraq, Syria chose to place itself at the head of the Arab camp opposing the war. As a result, Bashar only maintained his domestic credibility. The Israeli attitude was the same as in the 1990s. At that time, the Likud-led government headed by Yitzhak Shamir was one of the most intransigent governments of the Israeli political history like Ariel Sharon, who won the elections in February 2001, mainly due to the increasing tensions by the Al-Aqsa intifada. From Israeli side, which seemed not much interested in a political settlement with Syria, they had some goals such as removal of Syrian troops from Lebanon, ending Syrian support of anti-Israeli terrorist groups and Syrian disarmament, and these goals only could be achieved through the Americans. In addition, Arabs were skeptical about the road map, which might lead to fruitless negotiations.<sup>49</sup>

Alongside these circumstances, the most important difference was the attitude of the US. The US, whose intensive diplomacy let to the peace process in the 1990s,

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<sup>47</sup> <http://www.peacenow.org/nia/briefs/QA051203.html>

<sup>48</sup> Powell Outlines Objectives of Talks with Syrian Leaders, Secretary briefs Before Meeting with President Asad in Damascus, at <http://usinfo.state.gov/mena/Archive/2004/Feb/05-275016.html>, May 3, 2003

<sup>49</sup> Robert Novak, “Pressuring Syria”, Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, Vol. 22, Issue 5, June 2003, p. 16

now, was not giving hope. They described Syria's leadership as "off-balance", "in panic mode", unable to adjust to the new regional situation.<sup>50</sup> In early October 2003, the Bush administration dramatically shifted its policy toward Syria by openly supporting Israel's first air strike on Syrian territory in three decades<sup>51</sup> and dropping its long-standing objection to congressional sanctions on Damascus. The US Congress approved the Syria Accountability Act (SAA)<sup>52</sup> on October 2003. Because Syrian sponsorship of armed Palestinian and Iraqi militants had not been reduced while its cooperation against al-Qaida had proven to be ineffective. This change in US policy discredited US's "policy of constructive engagement" with Syria, which aimed at avoiding public threats in diplomacy with Syria. This doctrine had some merit with Hafiz Asad; however, in dealing with inexperienced Bashar, avoidance of coercive public diplomacy undermined the credibility of American warnings.<sup>53</sup> So this time the US had preferred to use stick rather than carrot to deal with Syria.

Max Abrahms argued that the Bush administration had adapted the domino theory of the Cold War, if Vietnam went communist, the whole Asia would be communist, by contending that victory in Iraq would lead the rest of the Middle East to fall in the US's political direction. According to Abrahms, the case of Syria was not encouraging.<sup>54</sup> Syria was on the State Department's list of terror-sponsoring nations for its support of groups like Hamas and Hezbollah. US officials also said that Syria had not done enough to prevent anti-American fighters and arms from crossing its border with Iraq.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> ICG Middle East Report, No. 23, p. 3

<sup>51</sup> Moshe Ma'oz, "The Precarious Triangle", at <http://usa.mediamonitors.net/content/view/full/1900,06/11/2003>

<sup>52</sup> The Act threatens to impose economic and diplomatic sanctions against Syria if Damascus continues to harbor terrorist organizations, to develop weapons of mass destruction, and to occupy Lebanon. And the Bush administration ordered the economic sanctions on May, 2004 against Syria for supporting terrorism and not doing enough to prevent militant fighters from entering neighboring Iraq.

<sup>53</sup> Ziad K. Abdelnour, "The US-Syrian Crisis: Why Diplomacy Failed", Middle East Intelligence Bulletin, Vol. 5, No. 10, October 2003

<sup>54</sup> Max Abrahms, "When Rouges Defy Reason: Bashar's Syria", Middle East Quarterly, Fall 2003, and at <http://www.meforum.org/article/562>

So there was the problem of initiating the peace negotiations, at the first hand, since the US policy had changed dramatically. Even after overcoming this problem, the prospect of reaching a political settlement seemed negative. Despite of the US behavior, Bashar, in an interview with the New York Times on December 1, 2003, offered to renew peace negotiations with Israel, by calling on the US to prompt Israel to return to the talks based on the 2000 deliberations between Syria and Israel. Ariel Sharon responded cautiously that although Israel wanted peace with Arab states, the background of the Syrian proposal had to be clarified, to make sure that it was not merely an attempt to reduce the US pressure on Damascus.<sup>56</sup> Beside Israeli suspicion of Syrian attempt to reduce the US pressure, Israel was aware of Syria's territorial demands on the Golan Heights and it would be very difficult to add new dilemmas on the public alongside the Palestinian track.<sup>57</sup> Moreover in response to Bashar's call for renewing the talks based on the 2000 deliberations, Sharon said that in the event of talks between Israel and Syria, they would start from the beginning.<sup>58</sup> Israel also conditioned renewed talks on Syrian stopping all support for Palestinian terror groups, which was a higher priority than ending Syria's backing for Hezbollah in Lebanon.<sup>59</sup>

Despite the negative attitude of Sharon towards Bashar's proposal, the top echelon of the Israeli army demanded that Israel should respond positively, putting Bashar to the test if it appeared that the Syrian proposal was for tactical reasons. According to them, a positive response would force Bashar to take steps such as restricting Iranian and Hezbollah activity. Sharon did not accept the army's position, believing that Israel could not conduct negotiations with Syria while dealing with the confrontation with the Palestinians. Some politicians also were favoring renewing

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<sup>55</sup> "US to impose sanctions on Syria this week", Ha'aretz, May 11, 2004

<sup>56</sup> "PM Cautiously Reviews Syrian Offer of Talks", Ha'aretz, December 28, 2003

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> "PM: Syria talks must start from scratch", Ha'aretz, December 29, 2003

<sup>59</sup> "Israel: Syria must stop terror aid before talks", Ha'aretz, January 11, 2004, "Sharon: Syria must stop its support for terror before talks", Ha'aretz, January 12, 2004

talks. One of them, Netanyahu, believed that Asad's weakness made it possible to sign a deal that would leave most of the Golan in Israel's hands.<sup>60</sup>

Also the US declared that they did not intend to sponsor any resumption of Syrian-Israeli talks, but would not object, if Israel chose to respond positively to Bashar's proposal. The American officials expressed their skepticism about Asad's intentions, arguing that if he had been serious, he would have used diplomatic channels rather than calling for new talks in a newspaper interview. In addition, they were skeptical about Bashar's capability to do so.<sup>61</sup>

In June 2004, Bashar renewed his proposal to initiate the talks between Syria and Israel. At a news conference, Bashar said, "We are definitely interested in a comprehensive peace process... We think there will be no effort to reactivate the peace process until the US elections are held. However, we are prepared to undertake any attempt, any effort aimed at achieving peace."<sup>62</sup> These statements of Bashar, again, drew skeptical response from the Bush administration. It was hard to reconcile those kinds of statements with support for violent groups.<sup>63</sup>

It seems that the Syrian-Israeli peace, which is a sine qua non of peace in the Middle East, does not give hope for the near future. In the region, emphasis is given to fighting against terrorism rather than peace. Nevertheless, Bashar Asad keeps the strategic decision of his father to make peace with Israel.

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<sup>60</sup> "IDF presses Sharon for talks with Syria", Ha'aretz, January 8, 2004

<sup>61</sup> "United States leaving Syrian track to Israel's discretion", Ha'aretz, January 9, 2004, "US doubts Assad's capability to execute decisions", Ha'aretz, January 15, 2004

<sup>62</sup> "Assad: Syria wants to resume talks with Israel", Ha'aretz, June 3, 2004

<sup>63</sup> "Syrian calls for peace talks with Israel draw US skepticism", Ha'arezt, June 6, 2004

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## **NEWSPAPERS**

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## **APPENDICIES**

### **APPENDIX A:**

#### **UN Security Council Resolution 62, November 16, 1948<sup>64</sup>**

##### **The Security Council,**

Reaffirming its previous resolutions concerning the establishment and implementation of the truce in Palestine, and recalling particularly its resolution of 15 July 1948 which determined that the situation in Palestine constitutes a threat to the peace within the meaning of Article 39 of the Charter,

Taking note that the General Assembly is continuing its consideration of the future government of Palestine in response to the request of the Security Council of 1 April 1948 (S/714),

Without prejudice to the actions of the Acting Mediator regarding the implementation of the resolution of the Security Council of 4 November 1948;

Decides that, in order to eliminate the threat to the peace in Palestine and to facilitate the transition from the present truce to permanent peace in Palestine, an armistice shall be established in all sectors of Palestine;

Calls upon the parties directly involved in the conflict in Palestine, as a further provisional measure under Article 40 of the Charter, to seek agreement forthwith, by negotiations conducted either directly or through the Acting Mediator on Palestine, with a view to the immediate establishment of the armistice including:

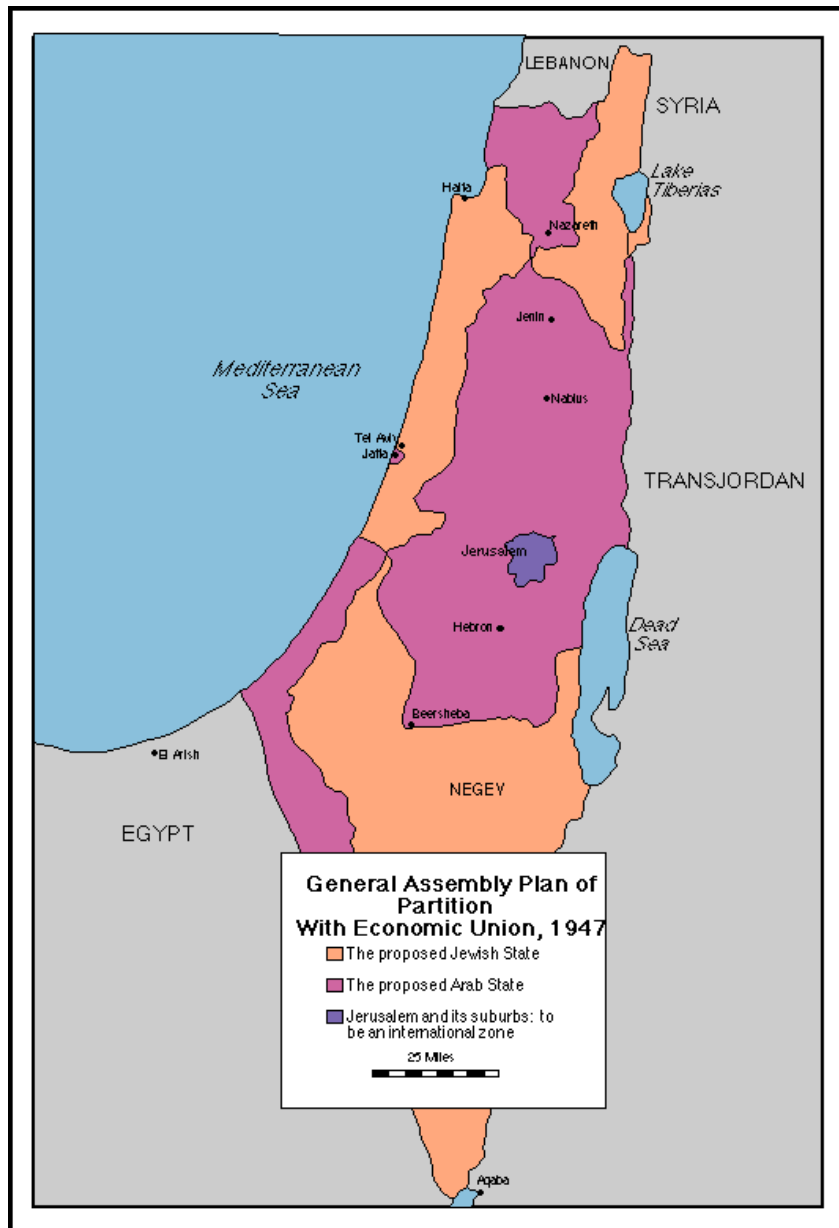
- a. The delineation of permanent armistice demarcation lines beyond which the armed forces of the respective parties shall not move;
- b. Such withdrawal and reduction of their armed forces as will ensure the maintenance of the armistice during the transition to permanent peace in Palestine.

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<sup>64</sup> <http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/UN/unres62.html>

## APPENDIX B:

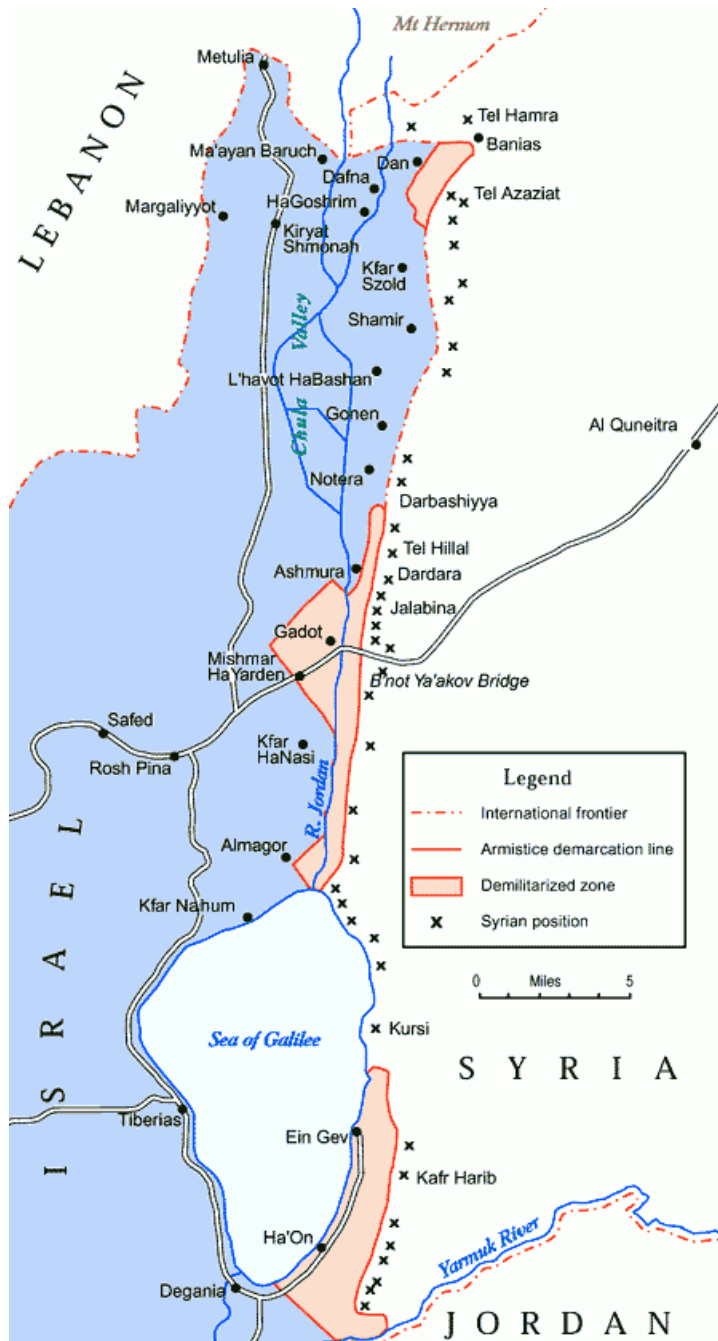
### Map of UN Partition Plan for Palestine according to The UN General Assembly Resolution 181, November 29, 1947 <sup>65</sup>



<sup>65</sup> <http://www.mideastweb.org/unpartition.htm>

## APPENDIX C:

### Demilitarized Zones in the Armistice Agreement<sup>66</sup>



<sup>66</sup> <http://www.mideastweb.org/isrsyrmistice1949.htm>

## **APPENDIX D:**

### **U.N. Security Council Resolution 242, November 22, 1967<sup>67</sup>**

#### **The Security Council,**

Expressing its continuing concern with the grave situation in the Middle East,

Emphasizing the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and the need to work for a just and lasting peace, in which every State in the area can live in security,

Emphasizing further that all Member States in their acceptance of the Charter of the United Nations have undertaken a commitment to act in accordance with Article 2 of the Charter,

Affirms that the fulfillment of Charter principles requires the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East which should include the application of both the following principles:

Withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict;

Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force;

Affirms further the necessity

For guaranteeing freedom of navigation through international waterways in the area;

For achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem;

For guaranteeing the territorial inviolability and political independence of every State in the area, through measures including the establishment of demilitarized zones;

Requests the Secretary General to designate a Special Representative to proceed to the Middle East to establish and maintain contacts with the States concerned in order to promote agreement and assist efforts to achieve a peaceful and accepted settlement in accordance with the provisions and principles in this resolution;

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<sup>67</sup> <http://www.mideastweb.org/242.htm>

Requests the Secretary-General to report to the Security Council on the progress of the efforts of the Special Representative as soon as possible.

## **APPENDIX E:**

### **U.N. Security Council Resolution 338, October 22, 1973<sup>68</sup>**

In the later stages of the Yom Kippur War -- after Israel repulsed the Syrian attack on the Golan Heights and established a bridgehead on the Egyptian side of the Suez Canal -- international efforts to stop the fighting were intensified. US Secretary of State Kissinger flew to Moscow on October 20, and, together with the Soviet Government, the US proposed a cease-fire resolution in the UN Security Council. The Council met on 21 October at the urgent request of both the US and the USSR, and by 14 votes to none, adopted the following resolution:

#### **The Security Council,**

1. Calls upon all parties to present fighting to cease all firing and terminate all military activity immediately, no later than 12 hours after the moment of the adoption of this decision, in the positions after the moment of the adoption of this decision, in the positions they now occupy;
2. Calls upon all parties concerned to start immediately after the cease-fire the implementation of Security Council Resolution 242 (1967) in all of its parts;
3. Decides that, immediately and concurrently with the cease-fire, negotiations start between the parties concerned under appropriate auspices aimed at establishing a just and durable peace in the Middle East.

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<http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Peace%20Process/Guide%20to%20the%20Peace%20Process/UN%20Security%20Council%20Resolution%20338>

## **APPENDIX F:**

### **UN Security Council Resolution 425, March 19, 1978<sup>69</sup>**

#### **The Security Council,**

Taking note of the letters from the Permanent Representative of Lebanon and from the Permanent Representative of Israel, Having heard the statement of the Permanent Representatives of Lebanon and Israel, Gravely concerned at the deterioration of the situation in the Middle East and its consequences to the maintenance of international peace, Convinced that the present situation impedes the achievement of a just peace in the Middle East,

1. Calls for strict respect for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon within its internationally recognized boundaries;
2. Calls upon Israel immediately to cease its military action against Lebanese territorial integrity and withdraw forthwith its forces from all Lebanese territory;
3. Decides, in the light of the request of the Government of Lebanon, to establish immediately under its authority a United Nations interim force for Southern Lebanon for the purpose of confirming the withdrawal of Israeli forces, restoring international peace and security and assisting the Government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area, the Force to be composed of personnel drawn from Member States;
4. Requests the Secretary-General to report to the Council within twenty-four hours on the implementation of the present resolution.

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<sup>69</sup> <http://www.mideastweb.org/425.htm>

## **APPENDIX G:**

### **U.N. Security Council Resolution 508, June 5, 1982<sup>70</sup>**

#### **The Security Council,**

Recalling Security Council resolution 425 (1978), 426 (1978) and the ensuing resolutions, and more particularly, Security Council resolution 501 (1982),

Taking note of the letters of the Permanent Representative of Lebanon dated 4 June 1982 (S/15161 and S/15162),

Deeply concerned at the deterioration of the present situation in Lebanon and in the Lebanese-Israeli border area, and its consequences for peace and security in the region,

Gravely concerned at the violation of the territorial integrity, independence, and sovereignty of Lebanon,

Reaffirming and supporting the statement made by the President and the members of the Security Council on 4 June 1982 (S/15163), as well as the urgent appeal issued by the Secretary-General on 4 June 1982,

Taking note of the report of the Secretary-General,

1. Calls upon all the parties to the conflict to cease immediately and simultaneously all military activities within Lebanon and across the Lebanese-Israeli border and no later than 0600 hours local time on Sunday, 6 June 1982;
2. Requests all Member States which are in a position to do so to bring their influence to bear upon those concerned so that the cessation of hostilities declared by Security Council resolution 490 (1981) can be respected;
3. Requests the Secretary-General to undertake all possible efforts to ensure the implementation of and compliance with this resolution and to report to the Security Council as early as possible and not later than forty-eight hours after the adoption of this resolution.

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<sup>70</sup> <http://www.lebanese-forces.org/lebanon/unresolutions/un508.htm>



## **U.N. Security Council Resolution 509, June 6, 1982<sup>71</sup>**

### **The Security Council,**

Recalling its resolutions 425 (1978) of 19 March 1978 and 508 (1982) of 5 June 1982,

Gravely concerned at the situation as described by the Secretary- General in his report to the Council,

Reaffirming the need for strict respect for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon within its internationally recognized boundaries,

1. Demands that Israel withdraw all its military forces forthwith and unconditionally to the internationally recognized boundaries of Lebanon;
2. Demands that all parties observe strictly the terms of paragraph 1 of resolution 508 (1982) which called on them to cease immediately and simultaneously all military activities within Lebanon and across the Lebanese-Israeli border;
3. Calls on all parties to communicate to the Secretary-General their acceptance of the present resolution within 24 hours;
4. Decides to remain seized of the question.

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<sup>71</sup> <http://www.lebanese-forces.org/lebanon/unresolutions/un509.htm>