CONFLICT AND COOPERATION

SYRIA – UNITED STATES RELATIONS

THROUGH 1970-2011

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Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis analyzes the dynamics of bilateral relationship between the United States of America and Syrian Arab Republic from Hafez Asad's grasp of power in 1970 to the latest domestic uprising of 2011. The relationship will be considered under three main vectors; struggle over Lebanon, tensions regarding peace process and Israel, and rogue statehood of Syria attributed by the United States.

Keywords: Syria, United States (U.S.), Lebanon, peace process, rogue state, terrorism

ÖZ

ÇATIŞMA VE İŞBİRLİĞİ
SURİYE – AMERİKA BİRLEŞİK DEVLETLERİ İLİŞKİLERİ
1970-2011

Tığrak, Fatih

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Bu tez, Hafız Esad'ın Suriye'de hakimiyeti eline aldığı 1970 yılından iç karışıklıkların başladığı 2011 yılına kadar olan dönemde, Suriye ve Amerika Birleşik Devletleri ilişkilerinin dinamiğini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Sözkonusu ilişki şu üç ana eksen çerçevesinde irdelenecektir: Lübnan üzerindeki çekişme, barış sürecine ve İsrail'e ilişkin gerginlikler ve Amerika tarafından Suriye'ye atfedilen haydut devlet nitelikleri.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Suriye, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri, Lübnan, barış süreci, haydut devlet, terörizm

To my beloved wife

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The dealings between the United States of America (U.S.) and Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) within the period 1970 - 2011 formed a complicated relationship with ups and downs over a set of issues. Volatile and weak bilateral relation between the two countries revealed itself in rapid oscillations. While the U.S. and Syria found rare conveniences to act in cooperation, Syrian bid for regional status and U.S. regional agenda generally diverged/collided on core areas of interest that rendered the nature of relations unstable and fragile.

Even though the bilateral relationship has been characterized by conflicts in the overall, the two antagonists worked in collaboration on "highly moral grounds" on some occasions. These conflicts which were obviously produced by the clash of interests, paradoxically presented opportunities at times when one party or both redefined their interests in the face of shifting strategic conditions. Thus the conflicts have been both the source of tension and base for cooperation in this volatile relationship.

In this context, this thesis aims to analyse the areas of conflicts and cooperation that emerged within the dynamics of the U.S.-Syria relations, and how these conflicts that tested the relationship served as both a spoiler and a constructor. The thesis further aims to predicate that the cooperation between the two countries as a result of strategic necessities on the ground remained limited and cyclical, and that the bilateral relationship was structurally inclined to stay on its conflict-prone course.

The questions regarding the nature of mutual relations, the basis bilateral issues stand on and the matters placed at the very core of relations are central to comprehend main reasons behind this conflictual relationship. To lay out these reasons, the evolution of the relationship is needed to be addressed first.

This thesis searches the evolution of U.S. - Syria relations on three different vectors; Syrian and U.S. dealings over Lebanon, the dialogue in the course of peace process

between Syria and Israel, and rogue state attributes of Syria. These three topics have essentially constituted the main pillars of interaction between the two countries since Hafez Asad's consolidation of power in 1970.

There are other areas as well that contributed to shape the relationship between the two countries, such as intra-Arab relations, Syria's relations with Turkey, Syria's and U.S.' relations with the European Union, etc. All of these obviously have their own impact on U.S.-Syria undertakings. Yet these "additional elements" in the relationship proved secondary in comparison to the three main vectors aforementioned. Lebanon, Israel and the peace process, Syrian support to terrorism and its alleged pursuit of weapons of mass destruction are central to any analysis that aims to expose U.S.-Syria relations. The additional elements mainly exist due to Syrian and/or U.S. willingness to score over the other in their dealings regarding these main vectors. To materialize, as will be elaborated in the fourth chapter, Syria as part of its foreign policy priorities, sought to benefit from its burgeoning relations with Turkey and with the EU to advance peace process with Israel. Turkey, in that regard mediated several rounds of talks in 2008 and French President Nicholas Sarkozy hosted Syrian and Israeli leaders separately in 2009 to find a basis for restarting the talks[1]. Both initiatives failed to evolve. Intra-Arab mechanisms on the other hand, were further exploited by the Syrian government to consolidate its dominant position in Lebanon and gain financial and political support vis-a-vis Israel, specifics of which were given in chapter two and three. Accordingly, in the course of this thesis, U.S.-Syria relations will be dealt through the said three vectors; Lebanon, peace process and Israel, and rogue state attributes of Syria.

Lebanon has been one of the major areas of contention for the two countries so long. The U.S. worked to prevent Syrian dominant position over Lebanon till the war against Iraq in early 1990s. Following Syria's instrumental support to anti-Iraq coalition, the U.S. Administration implicitly endorsed Syrian dominance over its neighbour. It is maintained that Syria lost its leverage on Lebanon, as materialized in its withdrawal, as a result of misreading the developments following the 9/11 attacks that led to the U.S. operation against Iraq. Prior to the first war, Hafez Asad manoeuvred such that his support for the coalition forces ensured him of any U.S. blocking to Syrian behaviour on Lebanon, and

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[1] Sharp, Jeremy M., *Syria: Background and U.S. Relations*, Report of the Congressional Research Service, 26 April 2010, pp.1

thus Syria semi-officialised its grip over this country. On the other hand, when in 2003 Bashar Asad faced to make a similar decision, he chose to resist American invasion that (*inter alia* other mistakes done) started the liquidation of Syria from Lebanon. Lebanon has been decisively an arena where a conflict between the two countries led to cooperation and struggle in accordance with the changing conditions.

Throughout the peace process commenced by the U.S. in early 1990s, a channel of dialogue was constructed between the U.S. and Syria. The process in fact, provided the only venue for the two sides to get into a real bilateral interaction, given the overwhelming nature of their relations over third countries or issues. For the part of Syria on the other hand, the peace talks supplied an opportunity to get into a concrete dialogue with the U.S. That seems as the main reason making the peace talks significant for parties; thus making even the process itself worthy. Furthermore, any analysis of Syrian-American relations would put forth the centrality of Israel in that relation. In other words, Syrian-Israeli relations are placed at the core of Syrian-American relations mainly due to importance attached by the Syrian Administration to regaining of Golan Heights and peace with Israel as well as the impact of Israel on mainstream U.S. politics. On all aforementioned vectors of Syrian-American relations in the defined period, Syrian-Israeli undertakings were inclined to determine or affect significantly the path and level of interaction between the U.S. and Syria. Corollary to this, Israel's proved influence restrained U.S. politicians to go forward on their relation with Syria. This thesis thus argues that Israel, as an important ingredient of U.S. regional policy, has effectively managed to inhibit and carve according to its will the U.S. policies toward Syria. As a result, while the ups in Syrian-Israeli affairs particularly in the course of peace process limitedly contributed to U.S.-Syria relation, the downs on many other issues fed the harsh U.S. rhetoric against Syria that kept the level of exchange between the two at a low.

As per the third issue between the U.S. and Syria, Syrian rogue state attributes; mainly its support to terrorism and less its alleged pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, have been another area of struggle. Syrian support to terrorism has been complicated. Damascus both encouraged and inhibited organizations using terrorist methods as an important policy tool to forward its political agenda. Syrian Administration's relations with those organizations mainly reflected Damascus's desire to support terrorist groups and limit them due to political conditions. Damascus has empowered the Palestinian

groups and radicals as well as Hezbollah in Lebanon and also limited them with considerable care. In case of necessity, Syrian rulers managed to restrict the activities of these groups and cooperated with Westerners in accordance with Syrian interests. Syria's double game with these terrorist groups paved the way for closer relations with American administrations from time to time. Consequently however, these improvements in relations were cyclical and provisional that did not translate into real benefits. While Syrian support to militant groups prevented bilateral relations from being institutionalized (due to sanctions in effect), it did not stop two countries to work together and enjoy the moment in case of a situation where cooperation worked for both (as in Iraq in 1990). Syrian links to organizations that pursue terrorist methods are an important policy tool for Syria; on the other hand enabled Syria to play a more assertive and above-its-weight role in its foreign policy. These links nonetheless made Syria, a comparatively small, domestically conflict-prone, economically weak and resource-poor country, began to be a prominent factor in U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East[2]. Thus, Syrian connections could well be regarded as a crucial policy tool that would be hard to denounce. Reflective of this fact essentially, the U.S. documentation asserted Syria as an active state sponsor of terrorism and a staunch supporter of radical groups. Whatever the nature and situation of relations, State Department kept placing Syria under this banner that resulted in the continuation of sanctions.

On all three fronts mentioned, bilateral relations throughout the period 1970-2011 have been characterized by conflicts, and the level of cooperation have been determined by either willingness of the parties to concede from their initial position or their ability to look the other way from the existing conflictual relation. On the other hand, while the existence of conflicts between the U.S. and Syria did not prevent countries from engaging each other on occasion, it led parties to refrain from establishing a viable, sound bilateral relation. Thus the ongoing problems both served as a bridge between the parties and an element that spoiled the climate of cooperation.

A case in point was the Syrian-American dealings in the first and second war against Iraq in 1990 and in 2003. The differences in two wars showed how far Syria and the U.S. could marginalize. Syrian support to the U.S. in 1990 created an aura of understanding

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[2] Leverett, Flynt, *Inheriting Syria: Bashar's Trial by Fire,* (Washington D.C., The Brookings Institute, 2005), pp. 1

that enabled Syria to tighten its grip of Lebanon and to engage in peace process. In 2003 on the other hand, Syrian resistance to U.S. invasion of Iraq almost led to an armed conflagration between the sides. Moreover, the U.S., due to undesired actions of Syrian government, withdrew its Ambassador to Damascus a couple of times and in case of better atmosphere sent a new Ambassador to Syrian capital. This oscillation was, above all, the result of diverse global policies pursued by different U.S. administrations.

The thesis is comprised of five chapters; the first one as the introduction and the last as the conclusion. The analysis in each of the body chapters (second, third and fourth chapters) revolves around the developments in the U.S.-Syria relations based on the three vectors mentioned within the specified period.

The time span covers the period from 1970 when stability prevailed in the country following Hafez Asad's acquisition of power, to 2011 when the latest domestic uprisings risked the hard won stability of Syria. In other words, the bilateral U.S.-Syria relations of the stable period in Syria under Asad dynasty will be searched thoroughly. The term under discussion has been divided up into three sub-periods, namely; the period from Asad's grasp of power to the emergence of the U.S. as the sole superpower (roughly 1970-1990), decade of cooperation via U.S. led initiatives (roughly 1990-2000) and the successive decade of withdrawal from cooperation to the situation of conflict (roughly 2000-2011), each of which is elaborated in three consecutive chapters. These periods are deliberately selected since all these periods signify important trends for U.S.-Syria relations as well as for the region. To put it explicitly; 1970 marked the end of instability in Syria and the start of Hafez Asad's reign while the early 1990s, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, attested the end of the Cold War, and the ensuing Gulf War in 1991 that was perceived as the concrete sign of the emerging unipolar system which as well reshuffled the cards in the Middle East. The year 2000 witnessed the handing over of the rule in Syria to another Asad, however more importantly the first decade of 21st century will be remembered by the September 11 attacks in 2001, which set a crucial cornerstone in global affairs and dramatically altered U.S. policies toward the region in general and Syria in particular. Lastly, 2011 is yet another turning point in U.S.-Syria relations since the wave of domestic uprisings in many countries of the Middle East referred to as the "Arab Spring" has reached Syria and instability once again prevailed in this country.

The first period, as discussed in Chapter two, was instrumental in strengthening stability in Syria as well as Hafez Asad's grasp of the country. In the mentioned period, Asad patiently worked to form a complicated network of connections to a wide range of states and non-state organizations that elevated the status of the country from a pariah state to a power broker. During this period (and more broadly for three decades before the 9/11 attacks) Syria, under the leadership of Hafez Asad, "boxed above its weight" as both subject and object of the U.S. regional policy. At least since the 1973 Yom Kippur war, Syria has been an inevitable focus for the ongoing American quest to place the region on a more peaceful and positive strategic trajectory. This is true both with regard to resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict and, more broadly, to shaping the overall balance of power in the Middle East.[3] Throughout the 20 years during 1970-1990, bilateral relations with regard to Lebanon, Israel and the peace process, and Syrian rogue statehood were generally frictional. The relation led to no tangible results with the sole exception of Israel's security. Essentially, the main factor in this period that enabled the U.S. and Syria to engage was the issues revolving around the security of Israel.

The third chapter examines roughly the developments in the course of last decade of 1990s. In these initial years of post-Cold War era, there have been some improvements in relations, driven by the U.S. desire to assert itself as the sole global power and Syrian motivation to regulate its position accordingly. The U.S.-led coalition against Iraq formed the main platform the two countries had built their fledgling dynamics of relation. Syrian support to anti-Iraq effort was very much welcomed in Washington. The main belief has been that the reward Syria got from this invaluable support was ensuring its control of Lebanon. Alongside, Syria was included in the peace process that would seem as the only viable way in the post-Soviet world to get back its long invaded Golan Heights. However, the rapprochement in this period did not translate into a stable partnership and rather remained provisional. The parties attained an understanding regarding Lebanon and the peace process but they could not reach to the critical mass to establish a base where they could flourish their cooperation.

The fourth chapter has been an effort to explain the rapid drawing back from the hard won situation of 1990s. Throughout the term under consideration, the U.S.-Syria dealings were tested by overarching U.S. policies toward the Middle East commanded by neo

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[3] Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, pp. xi.

conservatives. On all three vectors, the U.S. pressure, coupled with the strategic mistakes perpetrated by inexperienced Asad, forced Syria to step back from its holdings of 1990s. Facing severe U.S. pressure and shifting strategic environment, Syria, as detailed out in the fourth chapter, once again resorted to its potential to create unrest. Obviously in this term, Syria under Bashar Asad failed to understand or at least underestimated the impact of the 9/11 attacks and the ensuing American-led war against terrorism. The failure to read rapidly unfolding developments has brought a considerable cost to Syria in all hard issues between itself and the U.S. Very concretely, in the period defined, Syria had been pushed by the U.S. and the international community to withdraw its forces from Lebanon, could not involve in a peace process with Israel and severely criticized by the U.S. because of its links to militant organizations and its support to Iraqi insurgency. It was long defended by the neo-cons in Washington that the following war on terror should aim at Syria. The period in the overall has been one of tense and the damage given to the relations seemed beyond repair.

In the final analysis this thesis reflects that the relations in bilateral sense lacked a sound economic, investment, social, cultural and humanitarian background to flourish which drove the relationship to a sole political level. An important aspect of relations between the two counties could be defined as their dealings and struggle over the third countries or issues. The U.S. and Syria usually faced each other in the context of third parties/issues like the struggle over Lebanon, Syria-Iran ties, U.S. invasion of Iraq, Syrian-Israeli relations and so on. Syrian support to militant Palestinian factions and Hezbollah has been the only bilateral issue of which the two sides could (potentially) directly handle, yet the issue was only talked within the context of peace negotiations; again another example of lack of bilateral engagement between the parties but talks in the context of third parties.

CHAPTER 2

SYRIA-U.S. RELATIONS FROM REVOLUTION TO GULF WAR

2.1 TWENTY YEARS PRIOR TO U.S. HEGEMONY

In 1970, the world witnessed Hafez al-Asad's capture of power in Syria. This revolution successfully closed the age of turmoil and coups enabling Asad to found a centralized and powerful regime. The event has since been named by the Syrians as the Corrective Revolution (*al Thawra al-Tashihiyya*); a referral to the end of instability in the country that made its future, politics and survival foreseeable.

Prior to the Corrective Revolution, political instability prevented the successive governments to employ their political agenda and sound, effective policies. The rifts between different segments of society were so deep that the Syrian rulers were pushed into radical politics obliged with giving priority to overall Arab interests over Syrian ones. After gaining independence in April 1946, till the Bath Revolution in 1963, the country had been ruled by Sunni urban elite. However the Sunnis were dismembered in different groups seeking power, failed to show necessary determination to run a state. Their internal struggle was based partly on ideological grounds and partly on socio-economic ones with regional, sectarian and personal rivalries.[4]

Foreign powers on the other hand, did not remain impartial observers of the struggle for Syria. Its Arab neighbours, Israel and the superpowers all sought to assure a hold on the Syrian state, which was seen as a key to attaining influence in the region.[5] Lack of stability, till Asad's instalment to power, made Syria prey to an increasing involvement of inter-Arab and Western forces in its affairs. These forces aimed to exploit its fragility to achieve influence, and in so doing exacerbated an already shaky situation, sometimes undermining its very existence as an independent state.[6] Syria perceived itself the subject

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[4] Zisser, Eyal, *Asad's Legacy: Syria in Transition*, (London, Hurst & Company, 2001), pp.5-6

[5] Seale, Patrick, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-war Arab Politics 1945-1958*, (London, I.B. Tauris, 1986), pp. 140

[6] Zisser, *Asad's Legacy,* pp 6

of constant military and political pressures brought upon its by the West in collusion with Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Turkey. On the other hand, Egypt and Soviet Union were also active in the area. Egypt, for instance, fought hard against the Baghdad Pact and made sure no Arab state, especially Syria, would follow Iraq. Nasser won the fight centred on Syria which had the potential of tipping the balance in favour or against the Pact.[7]

1970 is important in the sense that it marked the end of struggle for Syria and opened the "age of struggle for the Middle East".[8] Another watershed date for Syria and the Middle East in general is 1990. The year witnessed the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent American-led Gulf Operation against Saddam Hussein. Hafez Asad made a historic decision of supporting the Americans against a neighbour Arab people. Syria's political backing and military contribution to the coalition forces had been instrumental in creating a ground of legitimacy for the operation. This was a turning point of Syrian policy that proved fruitful mainly due to the fact that the Syrian grip on Lebanon implicitly recognized by the U.S. and the threat perceived from Washington in the eyes of Syrians was thwarted.

Furthermore, 1990 is a globally important year for it marks end of the Cold War. The collapse of the Soviet Union was a major strategic difficulty for Syria that had to be dealt with swiftly in the face of growing American engagement in the region. Thus the change in Syrian attitude was not a direct reaction to Gulf Crisis. Rather, it was the consequence of the shift away from Soviets that began in late 1980s.

The 1970-1990 period was domestically stable compared to previous 30 years. However, the foreign environment in which Syria was a central part of was considerably shaky and challenging for Asad and his fledgling regime. The civil war in Lebanon which created risks of war with Israel and thereby grave problems with the United States had been a major concern for Syria. Likewise, Syrian objection to the peace processes to protect its own interests was another point of friction with the U.S. and the world in general. Lastly, Syria's direct committal to terrorism and its support to organizations pursuing terrorist methods has been a third area of clash in its foreign relations.

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[7] Rabil, Robert, *Syria, the United States and the War on Terror in the Middle East,* (Westport, Greenwood Publishing, 2006), pp.38

[8] Term belongs to Patrick Seale.

This chapter goes through these three foreign policy areas so as to define the environment that was effective in the making of Syrian-United States relations.

2.2 THE LEBANON ARENA

Syria has a geographical advantage over Lebanon serving as an opening for the latter to the Arab world; it also has a bigger size and population. The peoples of the two have historically been well connected to each other. These advantages of Syria over Lebanon however were largely neutralized by the Syrian state's internal weaknesses and instability prior to Asad's march to power.

Hafez Asad brought an end to the long period of alienation between two neighbours. He managed to establish a stable regime in Damascus aiming at consolidation of Syria's regional status, with special attention to Lebanon. His familiarity to some of the country's prominent families enabled him to engage in power brokering in Lebanon's political groups. Suleiman Faranjiyya, a colleague of Asad from 1960s and the patriarch of Maronites in Zagharta region was elected President of Lebanon in 1970. Asad's moves started the process of Syrian entrenchment in Lebanon and the subsequent civil war erupted in April 1975 only speeded up this process.[9]

The civil war was the consequence of a multitude of events that pressured the Lebanese system to the point of no return. Among these pressures were the changing demographic balance between Christians and Muslims, domestic social and economic difficulties and most of all the Palestine Liberation Organization's (PLO) entrenchment in South Lebanon that was used as a base for raids against Israel and its "state within a state" status. [10]

In the political calculations of the United States, Lebanon had an important place whose political status quo should be maintained. To this end, the United States have long before involved in Lebanese crisis. In 1958, the U.S. rushed to react. Then president Eisenhower, "in view of his responsibility to 2500 American citizens in Lebanon and on the urgent plea of President Chamoun of Lebanon", considered the efforts of the United Nations insufficient and sent contingents "to protect American lives and by their presence to assist the Lebanese government to preserve its territorial integrity and political independence".

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[9] Zisser, *Asad's Legacy,* pp 132

[10] Rabinovich, Itamar, *The War for Lebanon 1970-1985*, (New York, Cornell University Press, 1986), pp 34

Then the American Navy sent marines to Beirut. Eisenhower also noted that this action would be ended when the Security Council had restored conditions of peace and security.[11] The landing of marines in Beirut was perceived at that time as the West's commitment to the preservation of Lebanon's political status quo. Some fifteen years later, however, the conditions of the 1958 intervention had faded, position of the United States had changed considerably. In mid 1970s, the U.S. was not to intervene to an outdated political system. In addition, the U.S. and Western Europe were seeking friends and influence in other parts of the Arab world and were not likely to jeopardize these interests for the sake of vague notion of Christian Lebanon.[12]

These thoughts, coupled with the oil crisis, became a force majeure for the Westerners to refrain from acting against the general Arab public opinion. The cost of inaction on the other hand, was also growing which made it compulsory to find a way-out politically acceptable both to the West and the Arabs as well. In an interview in June 1978, Richard Falk of Princeton University asserted that;

> *The leverage OPEC had over the industrial world has crystallized the centrality of a Middle Eastern policy to the overall foreign policy of the United States. It is that crystallization that I think is the new element. It has taken place under a set of shifting circumstances, at home and especially in the Middle East. The biggest of these in the Carter period has been the effect of the disintegration of Lebanon through civil war.[13]*

Moreover, the oil pipeline[14], TAPLINE (Trans Arabian Pipeline Company), which was owned by several Western companies, carrying Arab oil to Lebanese city of Sidon ceased to operate in 1976 due to the civil war. This made combating the PLO one of the main

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[11] Wright, Quincy, "United States Intervention in the Lebanon", *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol:53 No: 1 (Jan. 1959)pp. 112-125

[12] Rabinovich, *The War for Lebanon 1970-1985*, pp. 35

[13] An Interview with Richard Falk, *Stalemate and Stagnation: United States Policy in the Near East*, Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Autumn, 1978), pp. 85-99.

[14] This pipeline was important in the sense that it turned Lebanon into a hub of exchange for Middle Eastern gold and oil for Western goods; thus a trade centre. There quickly emerged many Western firms operating in Beirut and capital from all over the world flew to Lebanon making it the center of finance and trade of the Arab world. Grendzier, Irene, "Exporting Death as Democracy: U.S. Foreign Policy in Lebanon", in Nubar Hovsepian (ed.), *The War on Lebanon*, (Northampton, Olive Branch Press, 2008), pp. 127

concerns of the U.S. It was in this vein that Israel's support to Phalange militia against PLO was approved by Washington.[15]

As regards Syria, the collapse of the state in Lebanon forced it to re-evaluate its policies there, but Syria did not rush to react. Syria's ties in Lebanon were very close with anti-establishment groups (mainly PLO) and with the legal establishment prior to the Civil War. Both insurgents and members of the Lebanese establishment appealed for Syrian support by January 1976. This rare instance of appeals by both incumbents and insurgents to the same external actor reflects the depth and breadth of Syrian ties to parties traversing the Lebanese political spectrum. The primacy of Syrian influence in Lebanon persuaded both pro- and anti-establishment forces that they had better seek Syrian assistance in order to prevail.[16]

Syria's involvement in the Lebanese civil war changed dramatically in both character and intensity during the spring of 1976. Earlier Syrian participation in the fighting that had broken out among the various Lebanese militias had been limited to tactical operations carried out by those parts of the Palestine Liberation Army under Damascus's control. Around April, these efforts were supplemented by a virtual blockade of Lebanon's ports by elements of the Syrian navy, whose purpose was to prevent the warring factions from being resupplied with arms and ammunition. In the same month, regular infantry and armoured units of the Syrian armed forces moved into Lebanese territory. This offensive was stopped at the outskirts of the two cities, Beirut and Sidon, around 10 June. But more or less serious fighting continued during the rest of the month as the role and composition of an Arab peace-keeping force were negotiated in Cairo. These talks produced no mutually acceptable resolution to the conflict and were soon broken off.[17]

The military offensive of Syrian army continued throughout the summer. Then in October, with a massive offensive, Syrians managed to take control of central Lebanon and urban areas. One reason of these military attacks and the aspirations of having control

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[15] Baylouny, Anne Marie, "U.S. Foreign Policy in Lebanon", in Robert E. Looney (ed.), *Handbook of US-Middle East Relations,* (London, Routledge Press, 2009), pp.315

[16] Weinberger, Naomi J., *Syrian Intervention in Lebanon*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 5-6

[17] Lawson, Fred, "Syria's Intervention in the Lebanese Civil War, 1976: A Domestic Conflict Explanation", *International Organization*, Vol:38, no:3, pp.451

of Lebanon was Hafez Asad's ideological concern for Arab unity and for the "historical indivisibility" of Syria and Lebanon.[18] The Syrian refusal to establish diplomatic relations with Lebanon reflecting an enduring perception that Lebanon was a part of Syria, could be considered in this regard.[19] One further reason was the Syrian leaders' eagerness to take benefit of the incident that it was regarded as an opportunity to bolster independence vis-a-vis the Soviet Union and ... obtain American support for Syria's policy in the Arab-Israeli conflict and for its regional ambitions.[20] Daniel Tschirgi lays out several additional "strategic objectives" that Syria had in intervening in Lebanon: to prevent the establishment of a radical regime in Beirut, whose activities might pull Syria into an unwanted war with Israel; to prevent the destruction of the Palestinian movement in Lebanon, a development that could only hurt the combined Arab position vis-a-vis Israel; and to prevent the emergence of a power vacuum in Lebanon that might allow Syria to be outflanked by Israel in the event of war.[21] An interesting account –concerning Syria's domestic interest groups- argued that "Syria's intervention in the Lebanese civil war during the late spring of 1976 can best be seen as an attempt by the country's ruling coalition to reinforce its collective position in relation to its domestic opponents, who were based primarily in Aleppo, Hamah, and Homs."[22]

All these factors undoubtedly contributed to the Syrian decision to militarily intervene in Lebanon. However, given that Syria is a newly stabilized country having real difficulty in sustaining a peaceful environment, it seems more dependable to take Syrian security interests in Lebanon above all in analysing its involvement. Lebanon, for years had provided a suitable climate for the nourishment of opponent groups that became instrumental in jeopardizing the stability of itself and that of Syria as well. In the 1950s and 60s, this activity explicitly contributed to Syria's internal destabilization, hence the importance for the Syrian regime to influence and control what happened in Lebanon

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[18] Dawisha, A. I., "Syria in Lebanon, Asad's Vietnam", *Foreign Policy*, No:33 (Winter 1978-79) , pp. 138

[19] Weinberger, *Syrian Intervention in Lebanon,* pp.31

[20] Rabinovich, Itamar, "The Limits of Military Power: Syria's Role"*, in P. E. Haley and L. W. Snider, (eds.), *Lebanon in Crisis,* (Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1979), pp. 55

[21] Tschirgi, R. D. & Irani, George, "The United States, Syria, and the Lebanese Crisis", UCLA Center for International and Strategic Affairs Research Note 8, (Los Angeles, 1982) cited from Lawson, *Syria's Intervention in the Lebanese Civil War, 1976: A Domestic Conflict Explanation.*

[22] Lawson, *Syria's Intervention in the Lebanese Civil War*, pp. 476

became evident and thereby to block the activities of these opposition elements when necessary.[23] Moreover, Lebanon's becoming another front of struggle with Israel has added to the sense of insecurity perceived by Syrian rulers. Particularly, Palestinian radicalization in Lebanon giving a reason to Israel to attack, and the possibility of Christian community's creating an alliance with Israel were two crucial motives for Syrian leaders to take a deeper attention to its neighbour's affairs.[24] Syria, thus felt imperative to entrench its position in the neighbour to secure the strategic Bekaa valley against Israel. All these proved enough to encourage Syria to broaden its influence in Lebanon.

The question is whether Syria was capable of expanding its base in Lebanon on its own will or it acted on a common international understanding. Clearly it is implausible to expect from a relatively small state with limited capabilities and assets that recently gained its stability to react any incident without taking into account the international winds. Syria is no exception. In this case, Syrian intention to intervene Lebanon came true simply after it received necessary green lights.

2.2.1 Syria in U.S. Documents

It took some time for the American politicians to agree on a Syrian intervention to Lebanon since the more favoured option at that time was diplomacy. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, in a National Security Council briefing in April 7, 1976 said:

> *Our concern is based upon the fact that Israel would move into Southern Lebanon should Syria intervene in Lebanon and that would clearly risk a full scale Middle East war… The United States would prefer the same political outcome as the Syrians do, and so do the Israelis. Yet the United States and Israel do not want Syrian military intervention. But the paradox is that without Syrian intervention the PLO may in fact win. Our policy is designed*

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[23] Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, pp. 210

[24] Agha, Hussein J. & Khalidi, Ahmad S., *Syria and Iran: Rivalry and Cooperation,* (London, Pinters Publishers, 1995), pp. 16-17

to prevent a Syrian intervention, but to support their political mediation efforts.[25]

Kissinger pointed out to the convergence of interests among Syria, Israel and the US, however his hesitancy was obvious concerning Syrian intervention.

In May 4, 1976 General Brent Snowcraft Assistant to President Ford for National Security Affairs and Charles Helou former President of Lebanon held a meeting regarding the situation in Lebanon. Helou appealed for the United States to use its "intellectual and political power" to bring about a solution that would save Lebanon and stop the massacre and subversion. Snowcraft replied that;

Unfortunately the situation in the United States is no longer what it was in 1958 and there is simply no sentiment for the U.S. to take that kind of action and that the U.S. is doing what it could through the efforts of Dan Brown (U.S. Special Envoy to Lebanon) to facilitate a ceasefire and a political settlement.[26]

This dialogue clearly exhibited the U.S. position that no plans of intervention was on the agenda. U.S. was keen to keep itself away from involving in this conflict and having been associated with any party. Helou insisted that U.S. could do more than only sending envoys and raised the idea that "no solution was possible without Syrian troops but there were too many obstacles to their being used decisively. By providing international cover for the Syrians through adding international contingents or observers from other nations (preferably through the United Nations), the Israelis would be reassured as to the limited Syrian objectives, the Palestinians would also be reassured that the Syrians were not a threat, and the Christians of Lebanon would also be reassured that the Syrians would not stay. The weight of international opinion would also discourage those who were

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[25] National Security Council Meeting minutes, National Security Adviser's Memoranda of Conversation Collection at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, 7 April 1976, http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/guides/Finding%20Aids/Memoranda_of_Conversations.asp#Ford, accessed on October 16, 2010

[26] Memorandum of Conversation, National Security Adviser's Memoranda of Conversation Collection at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, 4 May 1976, http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/guides/Finding%20Aids/Memoranda_of_Conversations.asp#Ford, accessed on October 12, 2010

intervening to create trouble. In this way the warring factions could be separated and a solution could be found."[27]

What the Americans had in mind was actually not much different from this Christian Lebanese thinking. Syria ultimately emerged as the only way-out. President Ford, in a meeting with U.S. Ambassador to Damascus Richard Murphy, asked him whether the Syrians had the military capability to clean the mess in Lebanon; and in return receives the answer that Syrians were capable but restrained by not wanting to be assaulting the Palestinians.[28] In other words, Syria needed international and Arab consensus before taking action and it was clear that American policy-makers were increasingly becoming more favourable of a Syrian option.

The US, in a last move to find a diplomatic settlement, sent an experienced diplomat, Ambassador Dean Brown, to the region to cool down the temperature and to communicate between different sects. The Brown Initiative aimed at facilitating and precipitating the election of a new Lebanese president. However his efforts turned out to be futile. The consequent limited Syrian military incursion into Central Lebanon in April-May 1976 aimed at the election of Elias Sarkis as president. Then in June 1976 came the full-fledged intervention of Lebanon by the Syrian army. United States and Israel preferred to stay silent, thus tacitly approved Syrian move.

The June 1976 intervention was acceptable (given its limits) to both U.S. and Israel. In the first place, Syria intervened to defend the Phalange militia who were fighting PLO. Secondly, Syria intervened against the wishes of its patron, the Soviet Union, to defeat another Soviet ally (PLO) using Soviet weapons. Washington approved these moves, viewing Syrian actions as positive for U.S. interests as they thwarted the PLO and protected the Christian Phalange. But the administration was aware that too much Syrian involvement would draw the Israelis into the conflict. An Israeli move against Syria could

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[27] Memorandum of Conversation, 4 May 1976.

[28] Memorandum of Conversation, National Security Adviser's Memoranda of Conversation Collection at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, 31 July 1976, http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/guides/Finding%20Aids/Memoranda_of_Conversations.asp#Ford, accessed on October 13, 2010

incite Soviet intervention and a broader war with larger economic consequences directly tied to the U.S. interests, including use of the oil boycott weapon.[29]

2.2.2 Asad's Intervention

The direct Syrian intervention of Lebanon commenced in June 1976. What assisted Syria in its intervention was the proposal of the French President Giscard d`Estaing, on May 22, 1976, to send French troops to Lebanon in a peacekeeping effort, to re-establish order with the approval of President-elect Sarkis and all the parties to the conflict. This French proposal did not succeed but only made the Syrian military intervention more palatable to various Arab states[30] that were already in favour of it.

One example was the Jordanian King Hussein who advocated and actively supported Syrian intervention. He even went to the U.S. in April and lobbied that "only Syria can put an end to strife in Lebanon". King Hussein also played an important role in his capacity to act as conveyor of intentions between Syria and Israel. A letter from Israeli premier Yitzhak Rabin who was informed (by King Hussein himself) of Asad's intentions for military intervention, was sent to Hussein. This letter was disclosed by Haaretz 20 years later on April 8, 1995. Rabin accepted Syrian intervention; yet there were limits such that Syria would be bound by the clauses agreed upon in the US-mediated "red line agreement". [31] The agreement stipulated that "Israel would accept Syrian forces in certain parts of Lebanon and Syria would not dispatch forces south of the Litani River, would not use its air force, and would not deploy ground-to-air missiles on Lebanese territory."[32] Thus, along with explicit Arab support, the most-feared Israeli objection to Asad's intervention plans was averted and conditions proved ripe for a full-scale intervention. Having granted this green light, Syria felt free to commence the incursion. Developments in the inter-Arab arena also evolved in favour of Syria. October 1976 summits of Arab League, held in Riyadh and Cairo, convened to consider Lebanese civil war and the subsequent Syrian behaviours, implicitly ratified Syrian move, by indicating the need to

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[29] National Security Council Meeting minutes, 7 April 1976.

[30] Deeb, Marius, *The Lebanese Civil War*, (New York, Praeger, 1980), pp. 131

[31] Ibid, pp.19

[32] Rabinovich, *The War for Lebanon,* pp.106

reinforce the Arab peace force by 30.000 soldiers more[33] - with the Lebanese president pro-Syrian Elias Sarkis at the moment as the head of this force - which would have mainly been covered by Syrian forces.

The United States, on the other hand, believed that the Syrian presence in Lebanon could produce some very important gains. Washington assumed the Syrian forces would make peace among the parties in the civil war and that Assad was an objective arbiter who would leave as soon as he finished his job. These assumptions naively overlooked the possibility that Syria, having its own interests in Lebanon, might decide to stay in that country in order to exert control over Lebanese politics. In any event, the White House announced publicly on April 19, 1976, that "Syria has been playing a constructive role."[34]

The red line agreement was also a diplomatic success for the U.S. reconciling the Israeli concerns with Syrian aspirations on a base acceptable to all parties. Satisfied with its achievement, Washington tried in 1977 to extend the agreement to southern Lebanon. The idea was to allow the Syrians to take over the bridges on the Litani River without letting them reach the Israeli border. This action would enable the Syrians to extend their control over additional territory in southern Lebanon. In return the Syrians would take the responsibility for preventing the Palestinians from conducting guerrilla operations against Israel out of southern Lebanon. Damascus was amenable, but the territory was too close to the border for Israel's liking. In February 1977 the Syrians withdrew in response to an Israeli demand.[35] The ongoing rapprochement between the U.S. and Syria[36] had been seriously bogged down with Sadat's initiative to talk peace directly with Israel. The U.S. and Israel had no choice but to go after the peace process with Egypt. Thus a new equilibrium among the US, Israel and Syria was established at the expense of Syria once again.

2.2.3 Litani Operation

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[33] Documents and Source Material, "Arab Documents on Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol.6 No.2, (Winter 1977), pp. 192

[34] Schiff, Ze'ev, *Dealing With Syria*, Foreign Policy, No: 55 , 1984, pp.99

[35] Schiff, *Dealing With Syria*, pp.101

[36] Materialized with Carter Administration's financial aid to Syria amounting to $90 million in 1978 and $60 million in 1979. Moreover Syria and the U.S. signed a cultural agreement providing economic assistance for Syrian educators, engineers, scholar, etc. (Rabil, *Syria and the United States,* pp.64)

Syria crushed in PLO harshly but its ultimate aim was not the final extermination of the organization. On July 29, 1976, immediately after the fall of Tal al Zatar Palestinian camp into the hands of Lebanese Forces, the Palestinian-Syrian Agreement was signed in Damascus which was a victory for Asad. In the agreement, the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon was not mentioned at all; the PLO had to praise Syria's stand in support of the PLO and the Palestinian cause; and the relations between Syria and the PLO were depicted as "historic" and "special."[37] Asad thus managed to subordinate PLO which had no choice given its vulnerability on the battle ground.

Having consolidated its control over the PLO once again, Asad was quick to use it to hamper the peace process Sadat initiated. The guerrilla attacks against Israel were intensified. On March 11, 1978 Fath commandos captured a bus in Tel Aviv. The battle resulted in death of 34 Israelis and 9 Palestinians. This became sufficient for Israel to take action. On March 14 Israel attacked and occupied whole of South Lebanon up to the Litani River, which gave the operation its name; "Operation Litani."

Israel established a zone of influence in the south. However the action was carried out without U.S. approval. Washington protested Israel and voted for UN Security Council Resolution 425 calling for an Israeli withdrawal and establishing a UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to monitor Israeli withdrawal, help restore peace and security in the region and assist the government of Lebanon in ensuring its effective authority in the area. President Carter considered the Israeli reprisal to have far exceeded the provocation that incited it. He stated: *"I consider this major invasion to be an overreaction to the PLO attack, a serious threat to the peace in the region."*[38]

Israel withdrew from the area it invaded about three months later but not before creating a buffer zone to protect itself from guerrilla attacks. It established a new, proxy militia in this occupied land; the South Lebanon Army headed by Major Saad Haddad.[39] The objective was to extend the territory under the control of major Haddad to a ten kilometre security belt along the border. Israel, additionally supported Bashir Jumayil whose forces

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[37] Khuwayri, "Al-Harb fi Lubnan", 1976, Vol. 2, pp. 797 cited from Deeb, *Syria's Terrorist War on Lebanon*, pp. 26

[38] Carter, Jimmy, *The Blood of Abraham: insights into the Middle East*, (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 2007), pp.96

[39] Baylouny, U.S. *Foreign Policy in Lebanon*, pp.316

were at the time fighting the Syrians around the capital. Faced with increasing Israeli involvement, Syria was taken aback and refrained from engaging the Israelis. Asad felt besieged by Lebanese Forces and Israel at the same time, thus concentrated efforts on building a defensive position in the strategic Bekaa Valley, the western gate to Damascus. While Syria was not ready to give up its influence in Lebanon, Israel was reinforcing its position in cooperation with the Lebanese Forces.[40]

From Israeli withdrawal in 1978 to 1982, there had been continuous conflict and battle over Lebanon, rarely directly between Israel and Syria and generally over Lebanese factions. The Israeli aggression in 1978 led Asad to devise his famous "strategic military parity" vis-a-vis Israel with the Soviet assistance. Soviets were also eager to support Syria after having lost Egypt to the US. To this end, Syria and USSR concluded a twenty-year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation on October 1980. Gaining confidence, Syria began to act more assertively. In this context, when Lebanese Forces challenged his authority in Zahle and Israel shot down two Syrian helicopters, Asad moved Syrian missiles to Bekaa practically giving an end to the red line agreement.[41] Middle East became an arena of Cold War power struggle, Israel with U.S. backing on one side and Syria with Soviet support on the other.

2.2.4 The Reagan Period

Ronald Reagan was more confrontational than his predecessor, and his chief concern was the Soviets. That made Israel a valuable partner and a strong ally in the Middle East. An example of this is what President Reagan wrote in his memoirs regarding the sale of AWACS to Saudi Arabia: *"We have assured the Israelis we will do whatever is needed to see that any help to the Arab States does not change the balance of power between them & the Arabs."*[42]

Despite Israel's importance for Reagan, there was ongoing tussle between Israel and the U.S. regarding the mentioned sale of AWACS and Israel's plans to strike Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor. These accompanied by the upcoming elections in Israel, Israeli PM

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[40] Rabil, Robert, *Embattled Neighbours, Syria, Israel and Lebanon*, (Colorado, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), pp.59

[41] Schiff, Ze'ev, "The Green Light", *Foreign Policy,* No:50, 1983*,* pp.75

[42] Reagan, Ronald, *The Reagan Diaries*, (New York, Harper Collins Publishers, 2007), pp.14

Menachim Begin refrained from infuriating Washington further and decided to take benefit of diplomatic channel at first in dealing with Syria's infringement of red line agreement rather than directly destroying the missiles in Bekaa.[43] Begin, to this end, invoked Washington's mediatory capacity to settle the issue.

Washington has sent Philip Habib to the region to defuse the crisis among PLO, Israel and Syria. With Saudi help, he managed to attain a tri-partite cease-fire between Asad, Begin and Arafat in late July 1981. According to unsigned understanding, Syria would keep its missiles in Bekaa but on the condition that they would not be fired; (it was practically impossible to persuade Asad to take missiles out of Bekaa since Begin announced the annexation of Golan Heights) Israel would continue reconnaissance flights over Lebanon but would not attack the missiles and the Palestinians and Israelis would stop firing upon each other across the border.[44] Moreover, the special units of the Lebanese Forces had to leave Zahle, the decisive factor in defusing the crisis.[45] This understanding created a new status quo in South Lebanon with slightly better outcome for Syria compared to red line agreement, however failed to prevent Israeli invasion in 1982.

Events unfolded in the region in the context of power struggles on Lebanon following the Israeli withdrawal on July 1981 led inevitably to the inception of "Operation Peace for Galilee" on June 6, 1982. The peace brokered by Habib enabled PLO to continue its military build-up in Lebanon. It led the organization to embolden its impact on Lebanese politics and on the Palestinians in Israel as well. Begin administration, urged desperately to suppress Palestinian nationalism and when this effort proved futile, the government began to deliberate on clipping PLO's wings in Lebanon.[46] That would require a vast invasion of Lebanon, much bigger than the Litani operation. The question in the minds of Israeli rulers was what the American reaction to an overall invasion would be.

2.2.5 The Green Light

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[43] Rabil, *Embattled Neighbours*, pp.63

[44] Seale, Patrick, *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988), pp.371

[45] Rabil, *Embattled Neighbours*, pp.63 (The author personally witnessed this event: "I observed the arrival of Lebanese Forces unit that left Zahle to Hazmieh.")

[46] Rabinovich, *The War for Lebanon*, pp.127-131

The memories reminiscent of U.S. reaction to Israel's Litani operation was still fresh. Thus, a carefully carved out plan was necessary to ensure U.S. support or at least prevent its opposition. Begin knew that Reagan administration was devoted to combating communism and regarded Israel as a bulwark against Soviet expansion via Syria in the Middle East. This was the strategic value of Israel to the US. The Begin government asked U.S. officials about their reaction in case of an Israeli attack to PLO. Begin and Sharon probed U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig about a possible U.S. reaction. Haig asserted that "unless there is a major, internationally recognized provocation, the United States will not support such an action." On the contrary, Haig maintained in a public statement that "time has come to take concerted action in support of both Lebanon's territorial integrity and a strong central government."[47] These responses were seen as vague by the Israelis. Moreover, the comments of Richard Allen, National Security Advisor to the President, justifying Israeli raids into Lebanon as "hot pursuit" of terrorists were far more sympathetic to Israeli violations of Lebanese sovereignty than any Carter Administration officials had ever made, at least in public. [48] These statements signalled what was to come.

The Israeli anti-PLO thrust in Lebanon and the overall U.S. anti-Soviet momentum in the region appeared to merge in Haig's visit to Jerusalem in early April 1981. Israeli officials were delighted to hear the U.S. Secretary of State name the PLO as a "Soviet proxy" in the region. Haig told the press that his two meetings with Begin had produced a convergence of outlook in the area of broad, strategic threat to the Middle East region, to include traditional military threats from unfriendly superpowers, to include assessments of proxy activity, and to include some very important discussions on the overall issue of international terrorism. Israeli Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir exulted that Haig conducted a major review of U.S. policy with Israeli officials, concentrating on Lebanon, and that the U.S. was putting together a "revolutionary" new approach, asking states in the region to put aside their differences to fend off the Soviet threat. The Reagan Administration, the Israeli Foreign Minister emphasized, is "more friendly than previous" administrations. The apparent change of attitude by the U.S. toward the Syrian role in

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[47] Haig, Alexander, *Caveat: Realism, Reagan and Foreign Policy*, (Macmillan, New York, 1984), pp.326-328

[48] Ryan, Sheila, "Israel's Invasion of Lebanon: Background to the Crisis", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol 11/12, 1982, pp.29

Lebanon appears to have been a key element. Shamir told a Knesset committee: "Once, the U.S. administration assessed Syria as a moderating factor; but this assessment is now being re-examined in view of the fact that there are about 10,000 Soviet advisers in Syria today."[49]

In December 1981, Ariel Sharon said: "We have to establish a buffer zone in Lebanon as it is clear that the Lebanese government will do nothing to stop terrorism. The establishment of such a zone will obviously mean the annexation of part of Lebanese territory"[50] which explicitly laid Israeli intentions. Washington knew what was about to happen. It possessed information in abundance about Israel's intentions and operational plans for Lebanon. Washington was cognizant about the highly visible concentration of forces on the borders of Lebanon and that Israel intended to invade Lebanon with a large army. Thus Washington's vague murmurings and apparent indifference were interpreted by the Israeli government as a signal for Operation Peace for Galilee.[51]

A certain identity of purpose, therefore, had already begun to emerge between the United States and Israel regarding Lebanon. Both the United States and Israel were interested in removing the Syrians and their missiles from Lebanon and in restraining the PLO. The United States, wanting to prevent a direct Israeli attack against the Syrian missiles, invoked the threat of Israeli troop concentrations. The threat succeeded in getting the PLO out of Beirut in 1982-but the Syrian missiles were not removed from Lebanon the previous year.[52]

Following a key meeting in May 1982 between Haig and Sharon, the former was convinced that the final green light had come from Washington. The meeting continued for two and one-half hours in Washington in mid-May. Sharon made the point that an Israeli military move against the PLO in Lebanon was likely to start at any moment-perhaps even during their conversation. To ward off an American warning against entanglement in Lebanon, Sharon told Haig that no country had the right to tell another country how best to protect its citizens. Haig, on the other hand, issued no threat against

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[49] Ryan, *Israel's Invasion of Lebanon,* pp.30

[50] Jansen, Michael, *The Battle for Beirut: Why Israel invaded Lebanon*, (London, Zed Press, 1982), pp. 120-121

[51] Schiff, *The Green Light*, pp.74

[52] Ibid, pp. 76

Israel. He emphasized that it would take an unquestionable breach of the cease-fire by the PLO to warrant an Israeli riposte. Without such a breach, he said, an Israeli attack would be neither understood nor accepted in the international arena. Judging by Haig's comments, it was obvious that he envisioned a limited, lightning-strike operation. Thus, Haig's response for Sharon was that the United States did not oppose a limited military operation provided there was sufficient reason for one. From Sharon's point of view the American had provided a green light.[53] It is debatable if that was genuinely a green light or not. In fact, a couple of months ago, U.S. had intensified efforts for a peaceful solution. One remarkable U.S. endeavour was the multi-stage plan drafted by Reagan administration. The plan proposed first the withdrawal of PLO forces out of range of Israeli settlements and simultaneous Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon. Then, Syrian forces would pull back to allow free presidential elections. Lastly, all foreign forces would completely withdraw from the country. Nevertheless this proposal was turned down by Sharon on the grounds that it should first be Syria pulling back its forces.[54] It seems obvious that Israel had already made up its mind and was not so eager to step back.

Besides the debates on whether the half-hearted American stance was a green light or not, the shooting of the Israeli Ambassador Shlomo Argov in London on June 3, 1982 was sufficiently provocative for Israeli rulers. Not even checking whether PLO committed that, the incident gave them the reason they had been seeking for to launch the assault. On June 6 the three-pronged attack into Lebanon started. In a few days, the Israeli army reached outskirts of Beirut.

Israel seemed not to satisfy with this quick advance. Despite Begin's statements that the war was not targeting Syria, anti-aircraft missiles of Syria in Bekaa along with 60 fighter jets wiped out in a few days by Israeli Air Force.[55] These raids against Syrian forces were probably aimed to drag Syrians into the war. Moreover, a news item in Israeli daily Davar on June I3, I983 brought to light the testimony of an Israeli officer concerning orders given to the IDF as the invasion began: "Member of the Knesset Amnon Rubinstein yesterday revealed an eyewitness account by an Israeli officer according to which clear

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[53] Schiff, *The Green Light*, pp.81

[54] Schiff, *Dealing with Syria,* pp.106

[55] Rabil, *Embattled Neighbours*, pp.66

orders were given from the first day to try and get the Syrians into the war, and to reach the Beirut-Damascus road by the second day.[56] When Moscow appeared to be intervening, Reagan forces a cease-fire on Israel.[57]

The code of the operation "Peace for Galilee" actually implied the objective of pushing PLO forces 40 kilometres north from the border so as to protect settlements in Galilee. However IDF had gone far beyond its stated goal which surprised the U.S. in particular. Reagan sent Habib to the region and voted in favour of the UNSC Resolution 509 calling on Israel to "withdraw its military forces forthwith and unconditionally"[58] Meanwhile, Secretary of State Haig quickly recanted Washington's support for that resolution as "no longer adequate to the needs of the situation."[59] According to unnamed officials, "despite Washington's unhappiness with Israel's use of overwhelming force, the U.S. shared Israel's view that there could not and should not be a return to the situation that existed before the invasion."[60]

Following the evacuation of the PLO from Beirut, when the negotiations between Israel and Lebanon began, Syria was still weak enough to be amenable to a settlement more favourable to Jerusalem and Washington. Then Foreign Minister Abdel Halim Khaddam visited Washington three times in late 1982. Syria's one demand was that its interests in Lebanon not be overlooked. However, the Americans overlooked Syria. Damascus's military weakness was one reason. But more important was Washington's mistaken belief that the Saudis could, as they promised, deliver a Syrian agreement to leave Lebanon as soon as Israel promised to depart. After his brother President Bashir Gemayel was assassinated, new Lebanese President Amin Gemayel supported this assessment. Damascus was taken for granted.[61]

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[56] News item from Davar, June 13, 1983 cited from Peri, Yoram, "Israel in Lebanon-One year Later", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 13, No.1, 1983, pp.190-196

[57] Schiff, *Dealing with Syria*, 104-105

[58] United Nations Security Council Resolution 509, adopted on 6 June 1982.

[59] Washington Post, 15 June 1982 cited from Joe Stork and Jim Paul, *The War in Lebanon,* MERIP Reports, No: 108/109, 1982, pp.3-7, 59-61

[60] New York Times, 12 June 1982 cited from Stork and Paul, MERIP Reports.

[61] Schiff, *Dealing with Syria*, pp.105

Lebanese President Bashir Gemayel was assassinated in September 1982. Then Israeli troops along with Lebanese Forces entered West Beirut and massacred 2000 unarmed Palestinians in Shatila and Sabra camps. These massacres caused a multinational force including US, French, British and Italian soldiers to return to Beirut.[62]

Through time American actions or its failure to put an end to the aggravating situation led to an understanding that it aligned itself with Israel and Christian forces and lost neutrality. Syria supported by Soviets, the Shia, the Druze and the PLO were all viewed forces against Israel and the US.[63] The two fighting camps gradually started to emerge. That would later on lead to the attacks against American embassy and barracks in Beirut.

2.2.6 Israeli – Lebanese Peace Agreement

The growing number of casualties and Sabra-Shatila massacres created a harsh opposition in Israel domestically buffeting the government. Israeli rulers felt obliged to exit Lebanon and sought to make an agreement with the Lebanese via U.S. mediation. The negotiations culminated in the May 17 Agreement. Accordingly, the two countries terminated the state of war between them, agreed that their territories would not be used as a base for hostile activity. Israel was to withdraw from Lebanon.[64] But in a separate addendum to the agreement, Israel incorporated a pledge from the U.S. government to the effect that its withdrawal would be conditional on Syria's and PLO's withdrawal. In short, Israel imposed conditions on Lebanon that spelled disaster for Syria.[65] Asad was quick to reject the agreement. He then, encouraged the forming of a National Salvation Front (NSF) bringing together different Lebanese factions opposing the Amin Gemayel and the agreement.

An intense period of resistance commenced with the U.S. and Israeli military experiencing high fatalities from suicide bombers. The attack on U.S. barracks killing 241

[62] Baylouny, U.S. *Foreign Policy in Lebanon,* pp.317

[63] Shlaim, Avi, "The Impact of U.S. Policy in the Middle East", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol.17, No. 2, Winter 1988.

[64] "Agreement Between Israel and Lebanon, 17 May 1983", Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Foreign+Relations/Israels+Foreign+Relations+since+1947/1982-1984/114+Agreement+between+Israel+and+Lebanon-+17+May+1.htm?DisplayMode=print , accessed on October 15, 2010

[65] Rabil, *Embattled Neighbours*, pp.72

marines forced U.S. to withdraw. Along with the subsequent Israeli withdrawal, a power vacuum emerged which was quickly filled by NSF constituents. Abandoned by the U.S. and faced a strong resistance, Amin Gemayel had no choice but to announce the annulment of the May 17 Agreement. Through a policy of coalition building, military entrenchment and an extension of Soviet-Syrian ties, Asad successfully unravelled the agreement brokered by the US.[66]

Along the course of events in 1984 and 1985, Israel, having deprived of a Maronite backing, faced with an increasing Syrian involvement and weary of Hezbollah's persistent attacks against Israeli positions, continued its pull-back. Israel had lost long-term visions of rooting PLO out of Lebanon and redesigning Lebanese politics. The situation was desperate not only for Israel but also for the Christian community of Lebanon. Having submitted to Syria, Amin Gemayel was accused by the Lebanese Forces to threaten the fate of Maronite community and be a puppet in Syrian hands.[67] The president, torn between domestic and international pressures left the office in 1988. He appointed General Michel Aoun to head an executive cabinet till a president was elected. General Aoun proclaimed a "liberation war" against Syria which was to take a form of an intifada similar to that of Palestinians in the West Bank. Syria responded by shelling the Christian area and imposed on it sea and land blockade. In the escalation period, Lebanese deputies left for Taif in Saudi Arabia. Lebanese deputies along with officials from Saudi Arabia, Algeria and Morocco managed to introduce significant amendments in the constitution. This new version of the constitution came to be known as Taif agreement. General Aoun strongly opposed the agreement and his acts only led to further dissolution of Christian community. On October 13, 1990 Syrian armed forces along with the Lebanese forces under Emile Lahoud launched an all-out attack on Aoun's forces. Within hours, East Beirut, the last bastion of Lebanese opposition to Syria, fell.[68]

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[66] Maoz, Moshe, *Syria and Israel: From War to Peace Making*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995), pp.178-179

[67] Rabil, *Embattled Neighbours*, pp.78

[68] Rabil, Robert, *Syria, The United States and The War On Terror in The Middle East*, (Westport, Praeger Publish, 2006), pp.83

Taif Accord is interesting in the sense that in comparison to the other two attempts at resolving the Lebanese conflict[69], the Taif negotiations were, structurally, the least representative of the actual warring factions in Lebanon. Despite the fact that they included the largest number of Lebanese political figures, they did not include any of the major leaders of militias or parties actually involved in the fighting. Of the 71 surviving members of the 1972 Parliament, 62 – 31 Muslim and 31 Christian deputies – went to Taif in September 1989 to find a formula to end the conflict. Also absent from the negotiating table were the four external powers who were operating on Lebanese soil and whose ouster had been requested on a number of occasions: Syria, Israel, Iran, and the Palestinians, both PLO and non-PLO. Despite this, Taif Accord has been signed by 58 deputies and accepted by Syrians after intense Saudi lobbying.[70]

The mediating committee was composed by Saudi, Moroccan and Algerian foreign ministers, which was formed in 1989 Arab summit meeting in Casablanca. The legitimacy of the mediator, therefore, rested on the fact that it had regional support and the backing of the League of Arab States.[71] Thus the agreement was also significant due to its being a regional (Arab) effort to settle the question.

Taif agreement roughly called for building the armed forces to shoulder their national responsibilities in confronting Israeli aggression, dismantling all militias, implementing UNSC Resolution 425 and taking necessary measures to liberate all Lebanese territory from Israeli occupation. The Accord also asserted that Syrian forces shall assist the legitimate Lebanese forces for two years and two governments shall decide the future of deployments. It was highlighted in the Accord that "Lebanon, with its Arab identity, is tied to all the Arab countries by true fraternal relations. Between Lebanon and Syria there is a special relationship that derives its strength from the roots of blood relationships, history, and joint fraternal interests."[72] This was a reminder to designate where Lebanon should stand.

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[69] These were Geneva and Lausanne Conferences brokered by the Saudis. They did not prove very useful if not totally futile.

[70] Deeb, Mary J. & Deeb, Marius, "Regional Conflict and Regional Solutions: Lebanon", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol:518, 1991, pp.89

[71] Ibid, pp.88

[72] "Taef Agreement", Le Monde Diplomatique, http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/cahier/proche-orient/region-liban-taef-en, accessed on 19 October 2010

By the end of the decade, Syria emerged as the victor on Lebanon arena. All the foreign forces withdrew and the anti-Syrian domestic factions were silenced or made dependant on Syria. On realist grounds, Syria largely owed this to the U.S. decision to assault Iraq. Once Syria expressed support for the Gulf Operation of the U.S. and given Syria's importance in legitimizing this operation in Arab eyes, the U.S. turned a blind eye to the developments in Lebanon thus gave a tacit approval to Syrian actions there.

2.3 THE PEACE PROCESS

The peace processes underway in the Middle East throughout the term from 1970 to 1990 posed great risks at vital Syrian interests in the region, its aspirations of dominating the region and its domestic ideological standing. Syria generally dragged its feet about entering into a peace engagement with Israel and used any means to prevent other Arabs to do that. Syrian view was one of collective unity against Israel that strongly opposed to separate peace deals with Israel. However Syrian administration failed in its attempts to hamper Israeli peace with Egypt and the rapprochement between Jordan and Israel as well that would eventually lead to another deal in 1994.

The United States, on the other hand, having considered this period in Cold War parameters, pursued policies in favour of Israel which was perceived as an agent of anti-Soviet camp in the Middle East. The U.S. played a crucial role in ensuring the existence of Israel forcing regional countries to acknowledge Israel and seek ways to engage in a lucrative peace with it. While Egypt and Jordan seized the opportunity, Syria was left alone. The American efforts to peace generally sidelined Syria leading to its marginalization.

2.3.1 Up to 1979

The new decade in Syria inaugurated with Hafez Asad's capture of power in 1970. The meaning of Asad's rise for the region, whose primary aim at that moment was to regain Golan Heights, reflected itself as the tension in the Arab-Israeli front started to increase. On the Egyptian side, Sadat also needed to legitimize himself by the only possible way of getting Sinai Peninsula back. Sadat, to this end, tried diplomacy first by expelling 15-20.000 Soviet advisors as a diplomatic overture, pursuing UN peace missions and appealed to Washington. Sadat insisted on a quick peace with Israel and sent his National Security Advisor Hafez Ismail to meet Kissinger in February 1973. Egypt made its

proposals focused mainly on an Israeli withdrawal from Sinai. Yet, the Americans seemed indifferent to Ismail's points. Kissinger, who immediately informed the Israeli ambassador in Washington of the Egyptian proposal, defined it as 'far-reaching but one-sided'. He noted that it was not too different from the Egyptian positions that had already led the diplomatic process into a deadlock.[73] Hence, these efforts proved futile as no change in the stiff negotiating posture of Tel Aviv and Washington occurred. Then Sadat had understood that he could only do it through war. He took benefit of the newly-established Cairo-Damascus-Riyadh axis to launch a strike. Commenced on October 6, 1973 the strike brought Syria once again to the front and centre in war and peace in the Middle East.[74]

In the course of the war, Syria received generous Soviet aid which in turn evoked American support to Israel. Thus the two superpowers became implicated despite pre-war pledges not to face off against each other in Third World conflicts. However by so trying to preserve gains of their client states, the U.S. and Soviets came to a dangerous face-off. Only intense U.S. pressures on Israel as well as similar pressure by Moscow on Damascus to disengage from the conflict finally brought the conflagration to an end on October 25 with the acceptance of UNSC Resolution 338.[75]

Asad's main motivators in Yom Kippur War laid on his grand ideology; that is to achieve all-Arab solidarity, if not unity primarily for the sake of carrying out a coordinated struggle to beat Israel. Against this background, 1973 War initially appeared to be a unique act of pan-Arab solidarity and cooperation.[76] However Sadat had limited strategic expectations from this war and when he seemed to attain them, he gave up fighting which naturally infuriated Asad and affected the tone of communication between Cairo and Damascus. Asad had been given a place secondary to Egypt in Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy. What Kissinger had in mind was an Israeli-Egyptian peace deal rather than

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[73] Joseph, Uri Bar, "Last Chance to Avoid War: Sadat's Peace Initiative of February 1973 and its Failure", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 41, No:3, 2006, pp.549

[74] Lesch, David, *The New Lion of Damascus Bashar Asad and Modern Syria*, (London, Yale University Press, 2005), pp.31

[75] Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus Bashar Asad and Modern Syria*, pp.33

[76] Maoz, Moshe, "Syria's Regional Strategic Position vis-a-vis Israel", in Moshe Maoz, Joseph Ginat and Onn Winckler (eds.), *Modern Syria From Ottoman Rule to Pivotal Role in the Middle East*, (Brighton, Sussex Academic Press, 1999), pp.258

paving the way for Syria to get Golan Heights back. Detaching the most powerful and populous Arab country from confronting Israel and thus abandon all hope of a unified Arab coalition was equally crucial for Tel Aviv whereas it would be a nightmare for Asad.[77]

Kissinger's endeavours bore fruit. He first mediated two disengagement agreements which helped build confidence and trust between Egypt and Israel. The process finally brought in the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in March 1979. Obviously, the treaty left Syria alone at the forefront of the military and political struggle with Israel, and damaged its chances of regaining the Golan Heights. Asad succeeded in founding with Iraq an Arab rejectionist front as a counterweight to Sadat's initiative, and thwarted U.S. efforts to widen this initiative to include Jordan and Palestinians. However, rivalry between Bath parties of both countries and Syria's support to Iran in its war against Iraq quickly brought this partnership to an end.[78]

One factor that forced Arab countries to diminish their level of aggressiveness against Israel prior to 1979 Peace Treaty was Israel's –officially undeclared- acquisition of nuclear weapons. Israel's development of nuclear weapons in the late 1960s convinced Nasser that any invasion of Israel within its pre-1967 boundaries would be suicidal. For example, in 1969, according to Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's close friend Mohammed Heikal, Nasser told Muammar al-Qaddafi of Libya that "it was no longer realistic for Arab leaders to seek to liquidate Israel because there was a strong probability that Israel had nuclear weapons".[79] This thinking was also valid for Asad since it has been claimed that during the 1973 October War, Israel's nuclear capability was the reason Syrian forces did not cross into Israeli territory beyond the June 4, 1967 line.[80]

American decision-makers though felt uncomfortable about Israeli nukes since the one circumstance which might call into question American neutralization of a direct Soviet threat would precisely be development of an Israeli nuclear threat directed against Moscow or its allies, did not hesitate to move to strengthen Tel Aviv's conventional

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[77] Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus Bashar Asad and Modern Syria*, pp.35

[78] Zisser, *Asad's Legacy*, pp.11

[79] Heikal, Mohamed, *The Road to Ramadan,* (New York: Quadrangle Press, 1975), pp. 76-77.

[80] Zisser, E., "Syria and The Question of WMD", *MERIA Reports*, Vol.8 No.3, September 2004, pp. 3-4

deterrent.[81] From Kennedy to Reagan, all administrations increasingly became perceptive of Israel as a "strategic asset" that served as to the U.S. national interests in the Middle East.[82]

Ironically, however, the decision to open wide the doors of America's conventional arsenal and to embrace Israel as a "strategic asset" did nothing to prevent the Israelis from acquiring atomic weapons and did much to propel Arab radicals more fully into the Kremlin's orbit. As a result from 1980 on, many U.S. policy makers seemed to regard Israel as a nuclear-armed strategic liability.[83] It is thus straightforward that U.S. officials considered Israeli pursuit for nuclear arms in the framework of Cold War parameters. They hoped it would be effective in stopping Soviet activism in the region but only led more of Arab states to draw into Soviet orbit. Syria, on the other hand had not been strained as Egypt had been from Israeli nuclear weaponry mainly due to the vast support extended by its Soviet patron. Until the breakup of the Soviet Union, Syria had seen itself as enjoying a nuclear counter-deterrent umbrella. Syrian spokesman hinted that a secret clause to the 1980 Syrian-Soviet Treaty of Friendship had promised Moscow's aid if Israel threatened Damascus with nuclear weapons.[84]

2.3.2 Syria and Peace

Syrian policies toward Israel since Asad's rise to power oscillated between two extremes that reflected two sides of the ruler's character. One was an emotional approach that refuses Israel and its right to exist and the other was pragmatist and rational ready to accept tacit understandings with Israel with the utmost target of getting Golan back. Though in Asad's eyes, Israel was an aggressive entity jeopardizing peace in the region; Asad managed to act realistically and refrained from attacking Israel, nor let Syrian soil to be used as a base to raid Israel by any group or organization. Throughout 1970s and 1980s, due to partly his ideological worldview and partly domestic concerns along with

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[81] Dowty, Alan, "Nuclear Proliferation: The Israeli Case", *The International Studies Quarterly,* Vol.22 No.1, 1978, pp.79-120

[82] Blackwill, Robert D. & Slocombe, Walter B., *Israel, A Strategic Asset for The United States*, (Washington, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2011), pp. 1-2.

[83] Little, Douglas, "The Making of A Special Relationship: The United States and Israel 1957-68", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol.25 No.4, 1993, pp.563-585

[84] Feldman, Shai, *Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control in the Middle East*, (Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1997), pp.130

Syria's regional and global isolation and inability to get an acceptable deal with Israel, Asad remained averse to joining the political process. In so doing, he clearly delineated the limits of his pragmatism and moderation on the question of the conflict with Israel.[85] In the course of these two decades, Asad seemed happy with the status quo with Israel. In the absence of regional, international and domestic pressure, Asad did not bother to change his policies. Besides, the domestic environment seemed in favour of his stagnant no-peace policy. Even as late as in early 1990s, the polls conducted among Syrian people indicated that a remarkable majority was still against peace process with Israel.[86]

Despite the fact that Syria kept itself away from any peace process till 1990s, it did not resort to military solutions to force Israel into a peace that is acceptable. Syria and Israel had three agreements via U.S. mediation; one was written and the other two were verbal. The written one, 1974 Disengagement Agreement shaped and mediated by Kissinger's intense efforts, has been successful to date since there has been no direct fighting –except a couple of fire-exchange and limited battles in Lebanon- between the two armies. Thus the agreement provided the necessary ground for a peace. In other words, peace could have been achieved in the path provided by this agreement. However this did not happen and parties showed less interest in a truly negotiated and acceptable peace mainly due to suspicion and lack of trust. This is reflected in the wording of the disengagement deal with exact dates and hours. The very simple character of the 31 May 1974 Disengagement Agreement[87] reflects the mutual suspicion and unremitting hostility in which the relationship between Israel and Syria remains grounded. Although Israel expressed interest in a broader political relationship with Syria prior to the current negotiations, Syria has consistently sought to minimize political relations, preferring instead to comply with only the fewest constraint measures necessary to prevent another war by miscalculation or surprise.[88] In the framework of Agreement, a United Nations

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[85] Zisser, *Asad's Legacy*, pp.103-104

[86] Pipes, Daniel, "Syria's People May not Want Peace", *The Jewish Exponent*, 25 November 1994, accessed in 22 October 2010 from http://www.danielpipes.org/5764/syrias-people-may-not-want-peace

[87] "Separation of Forces between Israel and Syria, May 31, 1974", Israel Minister of Foreign Affairs, http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Peace+Process/Guide+to+the+Peace+Process/Israel-Syria+Separation+of+Forces+Agreement+-+1974.htm, accessed on October 23, 2010

[88] Mandell, Brian S., "Getting the Peaceekeeping in Principal Rivals: Anticipating an Israeli-Syrian Peace Treaty", *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol.40 No.2, 1996, pp.251-252

Disengagement Force (UNDOF) had been constituted to observe and supervise the process and the U.S. on an informal basis, provides the results of its own surveillance to both parties and UN force. To date, UNDOF's success is best explained by the disengagement agreement's limited mandate, by its ease of implementation, and by the limited expectations of the parties. Both sides continue to fear unintended escalation and thus exercise the necessary political control to keep the Golan quiet. Because the disengagement agreement contains no vaguely worded clauses on such crucial issues as sovereignty, there is little incentive for the parties to disrupt the status quo. The UNDOF has done a credible job of war prevention and has provided reassurance to parties separated by only a few kilometres.[89]

Ironically, the reasons for the effectiveness of the UNDOF peacekeeping and verification regime explain in many ways why Israel and Syria have been unable either to generate additional confidence-building momentum or to expand the domain of political cooperation. Although the disengagement agreement has been easy to implement, it has stretched neither the parties nor the United Nations to do more. Israel and Syria have not fostered direct communications between the sides by setting up joint liaison committees, like those set up by Egypt and Israel. In the absence of direct U.S. participation on the ground, the parties have not had the opportunity to develop a set of interlocking peacekeeping and verification responsibilities that would serve to strengthen new norms of conflict management. The requirement to renew the UNDOF mandate every 6 months has only reinforced the limited expectations of the parties, undermining incentives for longer term confidence-building efforts. In many ways, UNDOF's success has created a comfortable status quo, leaving the parties with few expectations about next steps in the peace-building process. Although fully recognizing that third parties cannot want peace more than the parties themselves, this situation has only served to keep the rivals' motivation focused on loss aversion and on reducing the risks of war rather than on the potential gains and benefits of cooperation.[90]

The verbal agreements or "understandings" were the arrangements made under U.S. mediation over Lebanon in 1976 following the Syrian incursion into that country, widely known as the red-line agreement and the agreement forced by President Reagan in 1982

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[89]Ibid, pp.252

[90] Ibid, pp.252

following Israeli attack on Lebanon and Syrian positions. The former deal aimed at maintaining a balance between Israeli and Syrian meddling into Lebanon such that Syria would not endanger Israeli territory by deploying its missiles in Bekaa Valley in exchange for tacit Israeli recognition of its dominant position in Lebanon. This understanding between two countries kept obeyed until Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Then the Syrians introduced missiles into Bekaa. In the course of Israeli withdrawal, a new level of understanding (the second deal), again by American mediation, was reached between the two parties. Hence, the bilateral standings of the two states managed to create an acceptable balance between them as well as displaying their capacity to abide by the agreements they made underscoring the fact that in case a peace is attained between them, it will be respected.

It is vague whether Syria and Israel will ever sign a peace treaty anytime soon. In fact, the debate about Syria's commitment to peace has never ceased since 1974. People like Daniel Pipes and Barry Rubin[91] do not think of any possibility whereas others like Raymond Hinnebusch and Patrick Seale[92] believed Syria's intentions that peace was its strategic choice. For the first group, Syria has traditionally held accountable for being an enemy of peace. However to claim such proposition, one needs to evaluate first what sort of a peace the Syrian rulers have in mind. The peace in Syrians' minds has been conceived of in terms of a comprehensive option, thus universally satisfying Arab needs and ambitions[93] as well as Syrian ones.

As early as 1974, Hafez Asad stated that "We may now say as we have always said that peace should be based on complete withdrawal from the lands occupied in 1967 and on the full restoration of the rights of the Palestinian people".[94] In 1974 he announced Syria's acceptance of UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, which call for a comprehensive Arab-Israeli political settlement, under which Israel would return lands captured in the 1967 war in exchange for a guaranteed peace. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, in meetings with U.S. officials such as Henry Kissinger, Cyrus Vance, Zbigniew

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[91] Pipes, "Syria's People May not Want Peace" ; and Rubin, Barry *The Truth about Syria*, (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 84-85

[92] Drysdale, Alasdair & Hinnebusch, Raymond, *Syria and the Middle East Peace Process*, (New York, Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1991), pp.6; and Seale, *Asad of Syria*.

[93] Quilliam, Neil, *Syria and the New World Order*, (Reading UK, Garnet Publishing, 1999), pp.176

[94] Seale, *Asad of Syria*, pp.256

Brzezinski, and Jimmy Carter, Asad reiterated his commitment to ending the military conflict and gradually moving toward a full peace settlement. This would be followed by the eventual normalization of diplomatic and economic relations after Israel completely withdrew from the Golan Heights and reached a settlement with the Palestinians. In that event, Asad promised the Americans, he would agree to a general demilitarization of the Golan Heights in an effort to reassure Israel about its security.[95]

In line with this, Asad had long insisted, as conditions for an international peace conference, on a united Arab delegation so Israel could not divide the Arabs, on UN sponsorship which would make UN 242/338 the basis of a settlement and mobilize global pressures on Israel, on a Soviet-American role in breaking deadlocks and on prior Israeli commitment to the principle of full withdrawal.[96] Syria, from early 1970s on, had been willing to attend an international conference if it was based on the land-for-peace formula contained in Resolutions. However for the U.S. this was not agreeable because an international conference would have incorporated the Soviet Union which would have elevated the status of the latter in the peace process and particularly in the Middle East [97] at a time Kissinger had convinced Soviet foreign minister Gromyko to keep away from Israeli-Syrian negotiations.

1974 Disengagement Agreement was also significant in the sense that it started a period of rapprochement between Syria and the US. Syria immediately after took the decision of resuming diplomatic relations with the US. In August 1974 Syrian foreign minister Abdel Halim Khaddam visited Washington and senators from the U.S. visited Syria. In one of those visits, Senator McGovern remarked: "Whatever the drift of their (Syrians) thinking toward Israel, there is a desire for good relations with the United States. Like other Arabs, they exhibit no great affection for the Soviets who supply them with military equipment. A non-Soviet communist diplomat contended that if Israel returned the Golan Heights, Syria might lose no time in packing off its Soviet advisors". The U.S. administration was quick to respond Syrian overtures via two loans amounting to 58 million dollars. The rapprochement carried on under Ford and Carter administrations. Especially Carter, in his

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[95] Slater, *Lost Opportunities for Peace in the Arab-Israeli Conflict, pp. 94*

[96] Ehteshami A., & Hinnebusch, R., *Syria and Iran: Middle Powers in a Penetrated Regional System*, (London, Routledge, 1997), pp.158

[97] Quilliam, *Syria and the New World Order*, pp.181

quest for idealism, agreed with Khaddam on reconvening Geneva Conference. (Syria was excluded from the first one in December 1973) President Carter's desire to include Soviet Union was also Syria's gain in the process. Then on October 1, 1977, the U.S. and Soviet Union issued a joint statement which was a more balanced stance that paved the way for Camp David and the subsequent peace between Israel and Egypt. [98]

Syria's polarisation gained pace in early 1980s in the aftermath of the Egypt-Israel peace coupled with the election of Reagan whose policies were concentrated on fighting communism. Syria chose to pursuit strategic parity with Israel depended on Soviet support. The structural determinants of the region and the international environment pushed Syria to embrace tactical rejectionism and a Treaty of Friendship with the Soviets. [99]

Asad insisted that until Israel was serious about peace, the United States stopped pursuing separate peace deals and the Arabs had a credible bargaining hand, peace negotiations could only weaken and divide Arabs, lead to a strengthened Israeli position to dominate the Arab world. In line with this thinking, Asad was determined to head off partial deals that excluded Syria and Palestinian's rights. Against this background, he rejected the 1981 Fahd Plan for the sake of single reason that time was not ripe yet and Israel was unprepared to make real concessions. [100] Despite this stance, Asad displayed that he is committed to peace by joining the 1982 Arab states Fez Declaration which called for a peaceful settlement with Israel based on the principles of Resolutions 242 and 338. [101] Asad also formally signed onto Casablanca resolution in which the PLO stated its willingness to accept Israel in return for a Palestinian state. In late 1980s, Asad indicated to a number of U.S. delegations his readiness to make peace with Israel under the right circumstances. [102]

By mid 1980s, Asad attempted to take advantage of Arafat's weak position in the PLO following its expulsion from Beirut. A parallel effort by the U.S. however was more

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[98] Rabil, *Embattled Neighbours*, pp.60-64

[99] Quilliam, *Syria and the New World Order*, pp.182

[100] Drysdale & Hinnebusch, *Syria and the Middle East Peace Process*, pp.130-131

[101] Slater, *Lost Opportunities for Peace in the Arab-Israeli Conflict,* pp.94

[102] Drysdale and Hinnebusch, *Syria and the Middle East Peace Process*, pp. 143

effective and Washington along with Tel Aviv successfully exploited Arafat's desperation. Arafat chose to negotiate and placed himself in the moderate Arab line. In 1988, PLO recognized Israel, accepted UN Resolutions 242 and 338 and renounced terrorism. In so doing, PLO had been added to the growing list of Arab entities seemed to striking out their own peace agreements with Israel.[103] Through the end of the decade, Syria's isolation worsened. The moderate Arab camp was expanded and around this consensus Egypt managed to reassemble itself in Arab affairs again. Syria had been partially successful in impeding a Camp David consensus rising in the Arab world, yet time was against his efforts. Another event, the end of Iran-Iraq war in 1989 that ended with an Iraqi advantage, also meant bad news for Syria. After war Iraq, looking for a central place in regional politics, did not forget Syrian support for Iran and searched ways to punish Syria, especially in Lebanon. Baghdad also drew Jordan deeper into its orbit by way of economic incentives. The outcome was increasing regional exclusion of Syria. [104]

In addition to Syria's worsening regional status towards the late 1980s, Soviet policy toward the Middle East has undergone a major shift, the many effects of which have been magnified by the Soviet Union's sharply declining global power and growing preoccupation with its severe internal problems. Syria was one of the most affected. Moreover, Moscow has sought to cooperate constructively to solve Middle East crisis. Thus, Middle East has ceased to be a zone of confrontation for superpowers.[105] The late Soviet ruler Gorbachev distanced the Soviet Union from the Syrian stance toward Israel. In April 1987 he publicly told Assad that "the absence of relations between the USSR and Israel cannot be considered normal."[106] In the same visit, Gorbachev also asserted to Asad that "the reliance of Syria on military force in settling the Arab-Israeli conflict has completely lost its credibility" and pointed out that Moscow would no longer support Syria's doctrine of strategic parity and urged Asad to seek a "balance of interests" within a political settlement in the Middle East.[107]

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[103] Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus Bashar Asad and Modern Syria*, pp.51-52

[104] Ibid, pp.52-53

[105] Drysdale and Hinnebusch, *Syria and the Middle East Peace Process*, pp.149

[106] Pravda, April 25, 1987 quoted in Pipes, D., *Damascus Courts the West: Syrian Politics, 1989-1991*, (Washington D.C., The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1991), pp.15

[107] Maoz, M., "Changes in Syria's Regional Strategic Position vis-a-vis Israel", pp.266

One more impact on Syria that deeply affected its policy-making in the second half of 1980s came from economics. Syria's three main sources of income were Arab transfers, workers' remittances from abroad and oil revenues. Arab transfers were amounted to $ 1.8 billion in 1981 whereas during 1986-88 they were about $ 500 million annually. This was accompanied with low remittances and low oil prices. Inflation soared over 100 percent in 1986 and 1987, unemployment raised and GNP per capita decreased from $1670 in 1982 to $890 in 1989. The Syrians recognized that it is not possible to continue with strategic balance policy due to its heavy financial costs.[108] With long electricity and water shortages, the conditions in the country came at a point that "for the first time since coming to power in 1970, President Asad and his regime were threatened by a loss of legitimacy as the result of economic rather than political problems."[109]

These three factors in mid and late 1980s; Syria's regional isolation while others were seeking to find ways for peace, Soviet withdrawal which led to the end of Cold War rivalry in the region and economic difficulties Syria had to face, forced the country to change its policies dramatically. Consequently, Asad publicly referred to the importance of Egypt in the Arab arena and that Syrian-Egyptian cooperation had always been compatible with the interests of Arab world.[110] Syria also began to improve relations with Saudi Arabia and United States as well while containing its ties with Iran. In November 1990 Asad met President Bush in Geneva after which Syrian decision to participate in the Gulf War was made.

2.4 ROGUE STATE ATTRIBUTES

Since Asad's rise to power in Syria in 1970, Syria could not help but perceived the United States as just another colonial power that seeks to exert its dominance on Syria and the region. Israel as well, was hardly something else than a Western agent. This bias coupled with the notion of Syria as "the beating heart of Arab nationalism", made it all harder for Syria to engage in an accommodative style and seek to establish sustainable relations

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[108] Gilbert, Gad G. & Winckler, Onn, "The Economic Factor of the Arab-Israeli Peace Process: The Cases of Egypt, Jordan and Syria", in Elie Podeh and Asher Kaufman (eds.), *Arab-Jewish Relations From Conflict to Resolution?,* (Brighton, Sussex Academic Press, 2005), pp.195-196

[109] Perthes, Volker, "The Syrian Economy in the 1980s", *The Middle East Journal*, Vol.46 No.1, pp.37

[110] Maoz, *Changes in Syria's Regional Strategic Position vis-a-vis Israel*, pp.267

either with the U.S. or Israel. Syria thus resisted U.S. efforts to stabilize the region which were largely regarded to aid Israel; it employed means that the United States considers threatening to regional and international security. The most problematic of these from a U.S. perspective are Syria's support for terrorism and its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction.[111]

2.4.1 Syria and the Sanctions

Since 1979, Syria has appeared regularly on a list of countries identified by the U.S. State Department as sponsors of international terrorism. Syria has long supported anti-Israeli terrorist groups, notably by providing safe haven for radical Palestinian groups and by supplying the Lebanese Shiite Muslim militia Hezbollah and allowing it to conduct raids against Israeli targets from Hezbollah bases in southern Lebanon. Syria maintains that the Palestinian organizations and Hezbollah are engaged in a legitimate resistance activity against occupation rather than terrorism.[112]

Prepared annually by the State Department, the "state sponsors of terrorism" list identifies those countries that repeatedly have provided support for acts of international terrorism. Syria's inclusion into the list in 1979 was a cornerstone in bilateral relations. Following its appearance on the list, two acts; The International Security Assistance and Arms Export Control Act of 1976 which required termination of foreign assistance to countries that aid or abet international terrorism and The Export Administration Act of 1979 which required the Secretary of Commerce and the Secretary of State to notify Congress before licensing export of goods or technology valued at more than $7 million to countries determined to have supported acts of international terrorism, became operative for Syria. The state sponsor of terrorism list is a by-product of these two laws.[113]

Prior to 1990, other sanctions came into effect applied against Syria as well. First, the International Emergency Economic Powers Act enacted in 1977. It enabled the President with broad powers pursuant to a declaration of a national emergency with respect to a threat "which has its source in whole or substantial part outside the United States, to the

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[111] Leverett, *Inheriting Syria,*pp.10

[112] Prados, Alfred & Sharp, Jeremy , "Syria: Political Conditions and Relations with the United States after the Iraq War", *CRS Report for Congress*, 2005, pp. 17

[113] Sharp, Jeremy, "Syria: Background and U.S. Relations", *CRS Repost for Congress*, April 2010, pp.11

national security, foreign policy, or economy of the United States." These powers include the ability to seize foreign assets under U.S. jurisdiction, to prohibit any transactions in foreign exchange, to prohibit payments between financial institutions involving foreign currency, and to prohibit the import or export of foreign currency. Second, the Omnibus Diplomatic Security and Antiterrorism Act of 1986 to prohibit export of items on the munitions list to countries determined to be supportive of international terrorism, thus banning any U.S. military equipment sales to Syria. Moreover, Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1986 was enacted to deny foreign tax credits on income or war profits from countries identified by the Secretary of State as supporting international terrorism. The Anti-Terrorism and Arms Export Control Amendments Act of 1989 amended sections of the Export Administration Act to impose a congressional notification and licensing requirement for export of goods or technology, irrespective of dollar value, to countries on the terrorism list, if such exports could contribute to their military capability or enhance their ability to support terrorism. Section 4 of this Act also prescribed conditions for removing a country from the terrorism list: prior notification by the President to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the chairmen of two specified committees of the Senate. In conjunction with the requisite notification, the President must certify that the country has met several conditions that clearly indicate it is no longer involved in supporting terrorist activity. (In some cases, certification must be provided 45 days in advance of removal of a country from the terrorist list). These sanctions and acts were general ones, not especially prescribed for Syria, but applicable to any state involving in international terrorism activities.

In addition to general sanctions mentioned, specific provisions in foreign assistance appropriations enacted in 1981 have barred Syria by name from receiving U.S. aid.[114] Furthermore, in 1986 based on information that Syria was developing chemical weapons in cooperation with Iran, U.S. banned export to Syria of eight chemicals that might be used to produce mustard and nerve gases. European Union also followed in U.S. footprints and introduced some restrictions to Syria. In October 1986 European Commission announced plans to cut agricultural export subsidies to Syria. EC foreign ministers in November 1986 approved limited sanctions package against Syria that banned new arm sales but allowed existing contracts to be honoured; package also

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[114] Sharp, "Syria: Background and U.S. Relations", pp.11-12

imposed diplomatic sanctions, including ban on high-level visits, review of embassy and consular personnel, tightened security measures with respect to Syrian Arab Airlines. European sanctions were viewed as largely symbolic since they did not ban arms deliveries under contracts that had already been signed, and since Syria gotten most of its arms from Soviet Union.[115] In fact, the sanctions on economy and agriculture imposed by the European Community proved more effective. In 1987, for example, there emerged reports alleging Syrian diplomats lobbying quietly in European states and institutions to begin anew subsidized wheat.[116] What is more, faced to increasing European pressure, a pragmatic Asad withdrew support from Abu Nidal Organization in 1987.[117]

Effectiveness of U.S. sanctions, on the other hand, has been vague. Until 1990, Syria's main arms supplier was the Soviets and the volume of trade and economic activity between the U.S. and Syria was very low.

2.4.2 Terrorist vs. Freedom Fighter

There is an ongoing worldwide debate over the definition of terrorism. A terrorist for one state could be a guerrilla or a freedom fighter for the other. That is what usually happens between Syria and the U.S. Historically, the Asad regime has provided various levels of support to an array of terrorist organizations, including the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the Japanese Red Army in addition to a range of secular and Islamist Palestinian rejectionists and Lebanese Hezbollah, all of these were labelled as groups seeking to get their usurped rights back. Actually the main receiver of Syrian sponsoring has traditionally been Palestinian factions that aimed to fight Israel. The regime has consistently viewed its connections to these groups as sources of leverage and pressure for pursuing a range of strategic and tactical goals, mostly in the Arab-Israeli arena.[118] In an interview, Hafez Asad told that "since the beginning of the Palestinian question,

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[115] Washington Post, 11 November 1986, quoted in Peterson Institute, Washington, http://www.petersoninstitute.org/research/topics/sanctions/syria.cfm, accessed on October 26, 2010

[116] New York Times, 31 March 1987, quoted in Peterson Institute, Washington http://www.petersoninstitute.org/research/topics/sanctions/syria.cfm, accessed on October 26, 2010

[117] Taşdemir, Fatma, *Uluslararası Terörizme Karşı Devletlerin Kuvvete Başvurma Yetkisi*, (Ankara, USAK Yayınları, 2006), pp.52

[118] Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, pp.10

Syrian territory has been open to all Palestinian organizations, but they have been allowed to engage only in the struggle against Israel for the restoration of their usurped rights; they have never been allowed to engage in any other activities."[119]

Despite the Syrian support to these militant groups, Syria was keen on not to involve in an act of terrorism directly. According to the U.S. State Department's 2003 annual report on global terrorism, "The Syrian government has not been implicated directly in an act of terrorism since 1986" although an ongoing UN investigation into the February 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri continued to examine Syrian involvement. Syrian intelligence was lastly implicated in an abortive attempt to place a bomb on an El Al airliner in London in 1986. In what is now referred to as the "Hindawi Affair," the convicted Syrian operative was Nezar Hindawi, a Jordanian of Palestinian origin who gave his pregnant girlfriend a bomb to take on board an El Al jet at Heathrow airport. When the plot failed, Hindawi was given refuge in the Syrian Embassy in London before turning himself in. During his trial in England, British court concluded that Hindawi came from Damascus to London with a bogus Syrian passport identifying him as a government official that he travelled in the company of a Syrian airline crew, and that he had fled to the Syrian Embassy to meet with the Syrian Ambassador after the bomb plot was uncovered. In addition, Scotland Yard maintained that Hindawi had been an agent of the chief of Syrian Air Force intelligence.[120] In the aftermath, UK broke diplomatic ties with Syria and U.S. recalled its ambassador. In another bombing event, this time successful in West German, the court concluded that officials at Syrian embassy in East Berlin had provided bomb that two Arab terrorists exploded at German-Arab Social Club in West Berlin in March 1986. West German government imposed series of diplomatic and economic sanctions against Syria, including suspension of development aid, $73 million in low-interest loans.[121] Hafez Asad explicitly denied responsibility regarding these two incidents and interestingly alleged for the first one that Syria would

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[119] Bradlee, B., Hogland, J., Randall, J. & Kerbitte, S., "Interview with Hafez Asad: Terrorism and anti-Syria Campaign", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol.15 No.4, pp.6

[120] Sharp, "Syria: Background and U.S. Relations", pp.9

[121] Washinton Post, 28 November 1986, quoted in Peterson Institute, Washington http://www.petersoninstitute.org/research/topics/sanctions/syria.cfm, accessed on October 26, 2010

have been able to keep the accused person in hiding for a long time, had there been a connection with Syria.[122]

These incidents were widely regarded as direct Syrian involvement in terrorist activity. Yet, real threat (or leverage) posed by Syria to regional security emanated from its indirect support to terrorist groups. Originally, Syria's involvement in international terrorism began in a serious way in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when Asad used his intelligence apparatus to build contacts and extend operational guidance and support to a variety of radical Palestinian groups that defined themselves in opposition to Yasser Arafat's PLO and its interest in a diplomatic settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; Asad even brought these groups together in 1984 in a Damascus-based coalition of secular nationalist factions. This was the so-called National Salvation Front; participating groups included George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Ahmad Jibril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, Fatah dissidents under Abu Musa, and Nayif Hawatmeh's Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which broke away from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in 1969. Syria used these groups as proxies to carry out terrorist attacks, in the region and abroad, not only against Israeli targets but also against Jordanian and PLO targets. Damascus sponsored these attacks for a variety of tactical aims, all supporting Asad's overarching strategic goals of pressing for a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement and preventing Syria's diplomatic marginalization. By providing indirect support, Damascus sought to derive tactical leverage from its ties to terrorist organizations, particularly in the Arab-Israeli arena, but also hopes to minimize the risks of international "blowback" from specific terrorist operations.[123] These tactical aims included undercutting Arafat's standing as the preeminent Palestinian leader, pressing Jordan's King Hussein and Arafat not to conduct direct talks with Israel, and limiting support for Jordanian-PLO cooperation. Asad's regime also developed links to terrorist organizations in Lebanon—both Palestinian and indigenous Lebanese groups, including Hezbollah—to carry out attacks against Lebanese, Israeli, and Western targets in Lebanon following Israel's 1982 invasion. [124]

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[122] Bradlee, Hogland, Randall & Kerbitte, "Interview with Hafez Asad", pp.6

[123] Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, pp.12

[124] Ibid, pp.11

However Syria's relation with militant groups was not a one-way partnership. In case they rendered necessary, Syrian rulers managed to restrict the activities of these groups and cooperated with Westerners in accordance with Syrian interests. One of the earlier examples was a secret understanding reached between Syria and Israel after 1974 Disengagement Agreement through U.S. mediation. Assad agreed to prevent the Palestinians from conducting terrorist activities from Syrian territory on the Golan Heights. The PLO's relations with Syria were strained after this commitment became known and after the Syrians, despite serious Palestinian complaints, effectively ended most guerrilla activities from the Golan Heights.[125] Moreover, Syria played an important role in facilitating the release of American hostages hijacked by Shia militia. Syria also cooperated with Italy and the U.S. in the crisis of a hijacked Italian cruise ship.[126]

Throughout 1980s, Syrians became instrumental in preventing the activities of Shia extremists, such as kidnapping of foreigners in Beirut. The terrorism issue which damaged relations severely between Syria and the US, ironically, became the point where the two countries cooperated. President first George Bush made it public that Syria was assisting the United States in its efforts to release the hostages.[127] Syria's ties to these terrorist groups, that created trouble internationally for the country, paved the way for closer relations with American administrations. Consequently however, these improvements in relations were cyclical and provisional that did not translate into real benefits.

The U.S. Administrations has maintained a belief in Syria's key regional role and its capacity to influence events. Yet, while the administrations have been closer to the Syrian position, Congress has always supported Israeli views. This formed the basis of Washington's ambivalent attitude toward Damascus.[128] This explains in part the reason why American Embassy has never been totally closed down and relations –though at times in the absence of an American Ambassador- has been retained. Lack of a common

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[125] Schiff, *Dealing with Syria*, pp. 97

[126] Rabil, *Syria, The United States and The War On Terror in The Middle East*, pp. 76

[127] "Situation in Lebanon", Hearing Before Subcommittee on International Operations of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives, July 1989 quoted in Rabil, *Embattled Neighbours*, pp.86

[128] Rabil, *Syria, The United States and The War On Terror in The Middle East*, pp. 77

behaviour of U.S. institutions toward Syria asserted itself in a situation of ambivalence and a policy handicapped with oscillations.

2.4.3 Weapons of Mass Destruction Capabilities

Washington has for many years been concerned about Syria's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) capabilities. The heart of Syria's WMD posture is its indigenous chemical warfare (CW) program. Hafiz al-Asad's quest for a CW capability began before the 1973 war, when Egypt transferred munitions filled with mustard agent to Syria; these munitions were not used during the course of the war. Following the 1973 war, Syria began to develop an indigenous CW program, with the assistance from a range of countries, including India, North Korea, and the Soviet Union (and subsequently Russia). These efforts intensified during the 1980s and included the production and weaponization of both blister (mustard) and nerve (sarin) agents.[129]

Regarding the missile capacity of Syria, since the beginning of the 1970s, even before the Yom Kippur War, the Syrians equipped themselves with Frog surface-to-surface missiles with a 70km range. The Syrians fired these missiles, designed for tactical use on the battlefield, during the war at targets deep in Israeli territory. In one case they missed the mark (an Israeli airfield) and hit a civilian settlement in northern Israel, and Israel retaliated by striking targets inside Damascus. Following the war, the Syrians procured from the Soviet Union around 200 Scud-B surface-to-surface missiles whose range was 280km. These missiles provided Syria for the first time with the ability to strike civilian targets in Israel's heartland. After the 1982 war in Lebanon, and as part of the effort to achieve strategic parity with Israel, the Syrians procured SS-21 surface-to-surface missiles. This is an advanced tactical missile with a range of about 80km.[130]

Syria's desire to eliminate the advantage Israel derives from its possession of nuclear weapons is part of an overall strategy to find a way to obtain a future conventional military victory. At a minimum, Syria looks to chemical weapons as a way to achieve deterrence vis-à-vis Israel, given the latter's current conventional military superiority.[131] U.S. government assessments have concluded that the Asad regime's efforts to develop

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[129] Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, pp.13

[130] Zisser, *Syria and The Question of WMD*, pp. 4

[131] Ibid, pp.3

WMD capabilities are focused on the achievement of a "strategic deterrent based on ballistic missiles and chemical warfare capabilities, as the ultimate guarantor of regime survival."[132]

There is no evidence that Syria has seriously pursued (from 1970 to 1990) a nuclear weapons capability, however it retains an interest in nuclear technology and has a small Chinese-supplied research reactor[133] which was bought from China in early 1990s.

2.5 CONCLUSION

The period from Hafez Asad's rise to power to Gulf War had been one of relative stability for Syria that paved the way for playing a more pronounced regional role. Whereas pre-Hafez Syria had been deeply stuck in domestic rivalries and disagreements, the country under Hafez rule quickly asserted itself as a regional arbiter and a key country whose wish could not be disregarded.

In Lebanon, after fierce struggle with Israel and the U.S., Syria emerged victorious and had its will accepted by other parties. Asad with patient policies of wisely using Syria's connections in Lebanon proved his strategic ability on the ground. The advantage he managed to retain in Lebanon would later on make Syria the dominant power in this country throughout 1990s. On the Arab-Israeli front, however it is debatable whether Syria was equally successful as it was in Lebanon. In early 1970s, Asad, as other Arab leaders, acknowledged the impossibility that Israel could not be liquidated. The only way remained in the eyes of Syrian rulers was creating a unified Arab front so as to get a peace deal that is acceptable to all Arabs. Against this background, Syria, while declaring its determination to related UN Resolutions, worked hard to gather Arabs under one flag to challenge Israel. When these Syrian efforts collapsed with Egyptian peace deal and the following rapprochements of PLO and Jordan to Israel, Syria increasingly became isolated as the only country confronting Israel. The third issue, rogue state attributes of Syria, also made a deep impact on Asad's policies who struggled to get the maximum out of his support to terrorism while also urging not to be held responsible internationally. This policy mix aimed generally to bring leverage and respect to Damascus policies.

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[132] Feldman, *Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control in the Middle East*, pp.67-68

[133] "Proliferation: Threat and Response", *The Department of Defense*, January 2001 accessed http://www.fas.org/irp/threat/prolif00.pdf, accessed on October 29, 2010

The relations with the United States in this period had ups and downs, far from being stable and open to dialogue. The nature of the relations was mostly defined over third parties, which created a vacuum of communication between Syria and the U.S. One reason for this lied at American perception of the region in the framework of Cold War parameters. As Israel gradually became a more important strategic asset in American calculations, policies supportive of Israel disregarding the Arab states were put into effect, consequently pushing them into the hands of Soviet Union. Syria in fact, was winning from this Cold War situation since it received vast support from Soviets, particularly in military terms. This provided the necessary pretext for keeping the status quo afoot.

The policies in the defined period had shown that Syria's leading foreign policy targets are domination in Lebanon and confronting Israel. These two issues are also deeply ingrained in Syrian society with an ideological support. Support to terror, on the other hand, was not a target but an instrument at the disposal of Syrian rulers which they took benefit in case their regional policies were jeopardized.

There had been incidents, by the way, in which the U.S. mediating became instrumental in sustaining agreements between Israel and Syria. In Lebanon, the two sides established rules via U.S. mediation and these rules were abided by cautiously such that both parties refrained from a direct confrontation. Moreover, Syria played an important role in rescuing foreigners from terrorist organizations it had connections with. In these examples, Syrian and U.S. officials worked closely and this collaboration brought fruits. That became evident in a couple of events when Syrian decision-makers withdrew their support from terrorist organizations. Syria's fight against PLO in 1976 invasion of Lebanon and the subsequent ban executed to PLO fighters to attack Israel from Golan Heights are crucial examples underscoring the fact that Syria is a rational player that sought to maximize its returns and protect its interests in the region. Equally significant was the withdrawal of Syrian support from Abu Nidal organization when faced to increasing pressure from European states. This is noteworthy since it indicated the success of a carrot-stick policy on Syria when the economic burden was grave enough.

The collaboration on the other hand, lacked a real basis to flourish on. The two countries seemed to be cooperating cyclically in case cooperation proved beneficial. Though at times relations defined over conflicts helped create a climate of understanding between

the two countries, these conflicts that remained unsolved prevented parties to further develop and institutionalize their relations.

CHAPTER 3

UPWARD TREND IN SYRIA-U.S. RELATIONS THROUGHOUT THE 1990s

3.1 FROM GULF WAR TO ASAD'S PASS AWAY

The second half of the 1980s was not very pleasant for Syria owing to its increasing international and regional isolation. The stepping down of the Soviets from the scene coupled with the domestic economic crisis Syria suffered in late 1980s, ultimately gave an end to Syrian policy of strategic parity with Israel. Moreover, support given to Iran against Iraq in their eight-year long war led to Syria's isolation in the Arab world and Iraqi animosity against Syria. Lastly, the U.S. efforts from 1987 to 1990, to "break the status quo that was not working between Arabs and Israelis" and to mediate a political process that would include Israel, Jordan and Palestinians[134] undermined Syrian urge to form a unified Arab stance in a peace process. Likewise, in December 1988, PLO announced its acceptance of UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338, recognition of Israel's right to exist and renounced terrorism, then the U.S. began to enter into a substantive dialogue with the PLO[135], an act perceived by the Syrians as a further blow to dissolute its long-desired Arab front.

In this worsening strategic environment, Syria desperately sought for a way out. As one Western official pointed out; "The Syrians are in a bind because they cannot get their influence felt, they cannot assume that they can manipulate the Palestinians, and they can no longer say that their alliance with Iran gives them a role in the gulf as brokers. It's an uphill struggle." As has often been the case in the Middle East's shifting alliances, few would cast Syria's decline as necessarily permanent. "Something will happen that Assad can use to turn the situation in his favour," the official said, speaking in return for

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[134] "Documents and Source Material", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol.18 No.2, 1989, pp. 223-224

[135] "Documents and Source Material", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol.18 No.3, 1989, pp. 184

anonymity. "He's cunning, he's opportunistic. So he's waiting for something to happen."[136]

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait presented this opportunity. This invasion not only had been a direct violation of a sovereignty of an independent state but also a threat to Gulf security and oil flow, two issues deemed crucial in U.S. regional policies.[137] The international community swiftly reacted to Iraqi move by adopting a series of UNSC Resolutions. From 2 August to 30 November 1990, twelve resolutions had been adopted[138], the latest of which was the Resolution 678 on November 30, 1990 permitting UN members to use all necessary means including the use of force if Iraq did not withdraw from Kuwait in fifteen days.

Arab League, as well, in its Cairo meetings on August 3 and 10, reacted to Iraqi aggression placing itself in full confirmation of UN Resolutions. Saddam, on the other hand, tried to link the solution of the Gulf crisis to the settlement of other issues in the Middle East. In his statement where he painted an Islamic and Arabist picture, he justified his act as assistance to Kuwaiti people and proposed Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territories and Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in exchange for Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait. Moreover, he asked for immediate pull-out of American forces in Saudi Arabia to be replaced by Arab forces whose nationalities would be jointly determined by Iraq and Saudi Arabia, with one condition that Egypt –depicted as an agent of US- be excluded.[139]

These moves of Saddam Hussein to handle issues altogether only led to further Arab participation in the anti-Iraq coalition and made easier for the U.S. to drag Egypt and Syria in its heels. Corollary to this, U.S. reordered its priorities in the region at least for a while. This entailed a rapprochement with Syria, keeping Israel out of the conflict and supporting an international conference to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict once Kuwait was

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[136] Cowell, Alan, *Syrian Isolation Among Arabs Seen,* New York Times, 26 September 1988

[137] Rabil, Robert, *Syria and The United States, and The War on Terror in the Middle East*, (Westport, Greenwood Publishing, 2006), pp. 87

[138] These resolutions were 660, 661, 662, 664, 665, 666, 667,669, 670, 674, 677 and 678.

[139] "Documents and Source Material", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol.20 No.2, 1991, pp. 179-180

liberated.[140] Syria's regional role had once again come to the forefront. Secretary of State James Baker told that Syria's role in the multinational effort was very important and he answered a question, asking whether Syrian support to terrorism would be disregarded in exchange for its support that it was important to cooperate with a major Arab country sharing the same goals with the US.[141]

Asad, against this background participated in the coalition forces that would drive Iraq out of Kuwait. But Asad's contribution to the coalition was limited such that coalition planes were not allowed to traverse Syrian air space and Syrian soldiers took no part in offensive actions against Iraq. Foreign Minister Faruq Sharaa announced that Syrian forces based in Saudi Arabia would under no circumstance enter Iraq or participate in an offensive against Iraq.[142]

Despite this Syrian reserve, Damascus' support proved very beneficial for a couple of reasons. First of all, Syria helped creating an Arab anti-Iraq stance which led to the consolidation of Syria-Egypt-Saudi Arabia axis. This became the main Arab component in the U.S. led coalition. Secondly, Syria's involvements gave legitimacy in the Arab eyes and ensured Arab participation in the effort. Lastly, Syria also played a very important role in preventing Iran from helping Iraq at a time the latter courted the former through peace proposals and release of prisoners. Syria took benefit of its special relation with Iran in ensuring that no support would be given to Iraq. Iran, while staying in the anti-coalition group, promised to comply with UNSC Resolutions.[143] The leverage Asad provided for the coalition forces in general and the U.S. in particular was obviously immense. Asad, knowing his importance noted that "Syria is the cover of US" in this battle.[144]

Syria's divergence from its long-adopted path of anti-Americanism was remarkable. However the root cause of this transformation was not the Gulf Crisis; rather the shift

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[140] Rabil, *Syria and The United States,* pp.87-88

[141] Department of State, *American Foreign Policy: Current Documents 1990,* (Washington DC., Government Printing Office, 1991), pp.623 cited from Rabil, *Syria and the United States,* pp.88

[142] Pipes, Daniel, *Damascus Courts the West: Syrian Politics 1989-1991, (*Washington D.C., The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1991), pp.21

[143] Zisser, *Asad's Legacy: Syria in Transition*, pp.55-56

[144] Pipes, *Damascus Courts the West,* pp.24

began in late 1980s when the country's isolation in all levels -regional and international- climaxed. The crisis only presented an opportunity, though a very important one, which enabled Syrian rulers to expedite the process. This shift in political choices was outwardly manifested to the rest of the world through Syria's participation in the US-led coalition. Syrian participation also broke the taboos since Syria and other Arab states were aligned with the U.S. and Israeli objectives against an Arab state.[145]

Throughout the decade, the region faced the new political environment brought by the collapse of Cold War duality and the new strategic climate emerged in the aftermath of the subsequent Gulf crisis. Under these circumstances where the U.S. rose as the ultimate global power, Syrian policies have been vastly shaped by the new realities on the ground. In other words, Syrian positions and US-Syrian relations over Lebanon, Israel and peace process and terrorism issue have been greatly affected.

3.2 THE LEBANON ARENA

Iraq, following the war with Iran, turned its attention in its dealings with Syria which supported Iran during the war. The tone of communication between the two states was clearly indicating how they felt for each other. Damascus labelled Iraqi government as a "fascist regime" whereas Baghdad denounced Asad as "a slave of charlatans".[146] Nevertheless, this animosity should be read in the broader context of rivalry for regional and inter-Arab leadership and surge of hegemony. Saddam's plans for hegemony required a strike on Syria and neutralization of Israel.[147]

Iraq, to this end, increased its support to anti-Syrian Lebanese groups, particularly to Michel Aoun, Maronite General who vowed to liberate Lebanon from Syria. Iraq's joining in the arms deliveries race to Lebanon coupled with the political turbulence, strongly aroused fears of another civil war in the country.[148] The U.S. urged Iraq to halt arms delivery on the grounds that it would only result in a more intense clash between the

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[145] Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus Bashar Asad and Modern Syria*, pp.53-54

[146] Pipes, *Damascus Courts the West,* pp. 20-21

[147] Zisser, *Asad's Legacy,* pp. 53

[148] Hijazi, Ihsan, "For Lebanese, New Chaos, Old Fears", *New York Times*, 4 September 1988

parties and provoke Syria to tighten its grip. However U.S. efforts bore no fruit as Iraq continued its transfer of arms.[149]

The consequent intensification in fighting led to the Syrian shelling of Beirut which aroused a wave of reactions against Syria internationally.[150] Syria's isolation in the inter Arab arena was evident in May 1989 and May 1990 Arab summits. In the first one, Syria resisted at its position in Lebanon despite an overwhelming disapproval by almost all Arab states. Syria did not even participate in the second summit.[151] The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 reshuffled the cards in the region. Syrian alignment with the U.S. apparently gave room to Syria in Lebanon. In October 1990, Lebanese President Elias Hrawi officially asked Syrian military help to oust General Aoun. As a result of increasing Syrian offensive to Aoun's positions, Aoun surrendered and took refuge in the French Embassy.[152]

3.2.1 U.S. Green Light

It had been widely maintained that Syria had received a green light from the U.S. before ousting Aoun that led to its emergence of the sole power broker in Lebanon.[153] As to Washington, Lebanon's days as a key state playing an independent role as window to the Arab world and link between East and West were over. Lebanon was then regarded as the sick man of the Middle East, and the U.S. would rather entrust the Arabs with its care: from the American perspective, the Syrians had the muscle to keep the place in order, and the Saudis and Kuwaitis had the funds to help it revive.[154]

The Syrian step may even have been discussed –if only in a general and vague manner- with James Baker during his visit to Damascus in September 1990. Thus, after the Syrian attack on Michel Aoun, the American ambassador in Syria announced that Washington

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[149] Hijazi, Ihsan, "Halt Arms to Beirut Christians, U.S. Urges Iraq", *New York Times*, 25 June 1989

[150] Cowell, Alan, "Syria Holds Talks To Bolster Allies In Lebanon Strife", *New York Times*, 16 Aug 1989

[151] Ibrahim, Youssef, "Arab Conference Is Split By Syria", *New York Times*, 26 May 1989

[152] "Lebanese General Seeking Exile As Syria Tightens Grip on Beirut", *New York Times*, 15 October 1990

[153] Salem, Paul, "Superpowers and Small States: an Overview of American-Lebanese Relations", *Beirut Review*, Vol. 5, Spring 1993

[154] Ibid.

supported the implementation of Taif Accord and that the Syrian step was meant to enable the Lebanese government to extend its sovereignty throughout Lebanese territory.[155] Hence, it is deductible that the U.S. had yielded to Asad's demand for total hegemony over Lebanon as a price for bringing Syria into the anti-Iraq coalition.[156]

However, this line of thinking had been totally rejected by the U.S. administration. In a press statement on October 27, 1990, it was asserted that the U.S. strongly supported the unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Lebanon and urged the disbandment of all militias and the removal of all foreign forces from Lebanon so that the process of national reconciliation could proceed. President Bush and U.S. officials also made the same point in press conferences.[157] Daniel Pipes also rejected the reasoning that Syrian act was approved by the US. He proposed that the U.S. would attack Iraq with or without Syrian support; that the administration knew it could play no roles in Lebanon anymore; and that at a time America focused on Persian Gulf, Asad only took benefit of his exquisite sense of timing.[158] Lastly, Secretary of State Baker, later stated that "no hint (green light) was sent to Asad but Asad managed to take advantage of the power vacuum in Lebanon"[159].

The truth is, however, probably somewhere between them. The Bush administration did not give a full green light nor a red one. The U.S. preferred to monitor the events, did not prevent Syrians from acting since they were invited by the Lebanese officials and after the incursion was over, welcomed the stability brought in and expressed hope in a peaceful Lebanon. Secretary of State James Baker, in his testimony to Foreign Affairs Committee asserted:

> *We've condemned violence in Lebanon for a long time. Most recently, we argued against that in President Bush's meeting on the 29th of September with the Prime Minister of Lebanon in New York, so suggestions that somehow we've given a green light for this are wrong. That's not the case. I*

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[155] Zisser, *Asad's Legacy,* pp. 57-66

[156] Rabil, *Syria and The United States,* pp.84

[157] George Bush Presidential Library, Public Papers October-November 1990, http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu , accessed on November 15, 2010

[158] Pipes, *Damascus Courts the West,* pp. 26-27

[159] Pipes, Daniel, "Interview with James Baker III: Looking Back on the Middle East", *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol.1, No.3, (Sep.1994)

> *do think we should recognize that Syria was there at the request of the legitimate Government of Lebanon, a government that we recognize and a government that we support.*[160]

Whatever the case, the tacit or reluctant approval (or lack of disapproval) of Syrian action in Lebanon expressed American and by extension Israeli recognition of Syria's hegemony in Lebanon.[161] The U.S. one way or the other acquiesced to Syrian dominance in Lebanon. Asad's long-desired aim of completely taking control of Lebanon achieved. The collapse of Michel Aoun's forces and formation of a new Lebanon under Syrian hegemony paved the way for the implementation of Taif Accord.

3.2.2 Taif Accord and Afterwards

In October 1989, chiefly inspired by Saudi Arabia and the Arab League, deputies from Lebanese parliament assembled in Taif where they concluded the National Reconciliation Accord. Aimed at forming the basis of "second Republic of Lebanon", the Accord proposed a fairer balance of power between different sects, premised mainly on a reduction of Maronite paramountcy vis-a-vis others.[162]

The Accord also got profound support from the US. A presidential statement made the U.S. backing explicit as follows: "The President welcomes the news that the conference of Lebanese Parliamentarians in Taif has resulted in an agreement for national reconciliation in Lebanon. We commend the Arab League's Tripartite Committee for its important role in facilitating this agreement. The President congratulates the Lebanese Deputies for their courage and statesmanship, which have yielded an extraordinary opportunity to bring lasting peace to Lebanon. This is the first step toward restoration of a sovereign, unified, and independent Lebanon, free of all foreign forces. The President calls upon all concerned in Lebanon and in the international community to join the United States in supporting the process of peace and reconciliation launched by the Taif agreement."

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[160] Friedman, Thomas L., "U.S. Says It Sent No Signals To Expel Lebanese General"*, New York Times*, 28 October 1990

[161] Zisser, *Asad's Legacy,* pp. 57

[162] Hirst, David, *Beware of the Small States-Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East,* (Nation Books Publishing, New York, 2010), pp.211

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The Taif Accord states that the Chamber of Deputies (Parliament) will have 108 seats, (nine more than in the previous system) divided equally between Christians and Muslims. The speaker of the chamber will hold the post for the life of the parliament, rather than for one year, as under the former system. The President will appoint the prime minister after consulting with the speaker of the Parliament. According to the Accord, within two years the Lebanese and Syrian governments would decide on the redeployment of Syrian forces to Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. The National Assembly increased the power of the Sunni prime minister by decreasing the power of the Maronite president.[163]

However there had been harsh critics to Taif agreement. A major one is the lack of a wider representation of Lebanese factions in the negotiations. Shia groups were represented insufficiently whereas the Druze community were not at all. Apart from extending the term of Speaker of Parliament, the Accord failed to address the needs of the Shia and Druze.[164]

An important clause of the agreement stated that the Syrian forces would assist the forces of the legitimate Lebanese government to spread the authority of the State of Lebanon within a set period of no more than two years. At the end of this period, the two governments — the Syrian Government and the Lebanese National Accord Government — shall decide to redeploy the Syrian forces in Al-Biq'a area from Dahr al-Baydar to the Hammana-al-Mudayrij-'Ayn Darah line, and if necessary, at other points to be determined by a joint Lebanese-Syrian military committee. This clause had been seen as a bulwark to Lebanese independence since it predicted a protracted Syrian military existence in the country. Thus after years of bloody civil war, The Lebanese war had been transformed into a battle between Syria and its local proxies versus vast majorities of Lebanese population.[165]

Syrian occupation was facilitated by the inertia of the war-wearied people of Lebanon. The agreement had been only partially implemented: provisions of Syrian withdrawal to Bekaa had been disregarded while wide-ranging measures had been taken to bolster

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[163] "Taef Agreement", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 22 October 1989

[164] Saseen, Sandra M., "The Taif Accord and Lebanon's Struggle to Regain its Sovereignty", *International Law Review*, Vol.6 No.1, pp.68-69

[165] Malik, Habib, *Between Damascus and Jerusalem-Lebanon and Middle East Peace,* (Washington D.C., The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000), pp.23

"privileged relations" between the two countries. In other words, Taif Accord had been systematically Syrianized and the de-facto occupation turned out to be de-jure annexation. The Syrianized Taif undermined Christian political influence without fulfilling Muslims aspirations. Naturally, Damascus managed to be the centre of ultimate resort in case of a political impasse.[166]

3.2.3 Treaties and Agreements

One step to bolster privileged Syrian-Lebanese relations was the Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination signed in May 1991. The Treaty, in the preamble, underscored kinship, historical and brotherly ties, Article 1 called for the highest level of cooperation and coordination in political, economic, security, cultural areas. Article 3 asserted that security of both parties was interdependent and that "... Syria, desiring to ensure the security, independence and unity of Lebanon and harmony among its citizens, shall not permit any action which threatens the security, independence or sovereignty of Lebanon" while Article 5 foresaw an almost common foreign policy. The Treaty also required the formation of committees and a supreme council to coordinate all policy issues from security and foreign policy to economic and social matters.[167]

The Treaty had been followed by several agreements that helped Syria contain Lebanon tighter. In August 1991 two countries concluded a defence and security agreement allowing Syria to intervene into Lebanese internal affairs. The agreement stipulated "prohibition of all organized activities in the military, security, political and media realms harming and damaging the other country." This was a move to liquidate Lebanese civil society. Syria, as the hegemonic state, would be able to cut down any opposition to its dominance in the country.[168]

In subsequent agreements, restrictions on land travel between the countries were removed, duties were lowered, Syrian doctors were given job opportunities in Lebanon, tourism and telecommunication agreements were signed and coinciding with signing of

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[166] Malik, *Between Damascus and Jerusalem-Lebanon and Middle East Peace,* pp.23-24

[167] "Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination Between The Syrian Arab Republic and The Lebanese Republic", *United Nations Treaty Collection Web Site*, 22 May 1991 http://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%201675/v1675.pdf, accessed November 10, 2010

[168] Rabil, *Embattled Neighbours,* pp.129

Oslo Accords, four more agreements concluded on agriculture, healthcare, creation of an economic zone and free movement of goods and people. The work of joint committees also led to further integration of economies and security of two neighbours. Electricity and water resources started to be managed jointly, entry procedures at borders were simplified, educational and cultural agreements were also made and joint films, plays were produced. Even a postal agreement had been made which put Syrian postal administration in charge of distributing mail within two countries. These agreements were all obviously to Syria's benefit and in line with its interest to solidify its control over Lebanon. The speed which these documents devised and legislated was another source of concern.[169]

The flood of agreements continued till the end of decade, some of which were made on tourism and farm production in late 1999s. All of these aimed at establishing a single country with a united economy and harmonized foreign and security policies. Interestingly, in the social and economic cooperation agreement of 1993, Lebanon was labelled as a *qutr* (province or region) for the first time, a Bathi referral denoting that all Arab states were only provinces in a potentially united Arab nation, with the added implication here that Lebanon was a province of Syria.[170]

3.2.4 Confronting Israel on Lebanon

The Israeli-Syrian agenda traditionally has been defined by other issues such as the ongoing indirect confrontation in Lebanon in case of a lack of negotiation between parties. Throughout the 1980s, the struggle for Lebanon defined Syrian-Israeli confrontation. In 1977, Syria heavily bombarded Christian parts of Beirut to prevent an Israeli impact on Christian community of Lebanon. Yet a similar step, the creation of a self-declared "security zone" at the South of Lebanon, was also taken by Israel in 1978. In 1981 a direct clash between the two parties occurred when Syria moved surface to air missiles to Bekaa Valley, an open violation of red-line agreement, in response to Israel's shooting of two Syrian helicopters. In June 1982, Operation Peace for Galilee was launched to root out Palestinian groups and Syrian impact in South Lebanon. By July 1983 Syria gathered its allies under the banner of National Salvation Front. The power

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[169] Malik, *Between Damascus and Jerusalem,* pp.34-38

[170] Rabil, *Embattled Neighbours,* pp.129

struggle on Lebanon kept its pace till the end of decade. Taif Accord of 1989 made Syrian dominance explicit to all parties interested.

The Gulf War and the ensuing peace climate mitigated the violence in and around Lebanon. Yet, emergence of Hezbollah has been another concern. In early 1990s, Hezbollah with probable Syrian support made several incursions to Israeli forces. After the signing of Oslo Agreement which torpedoed Syrian prospects of a comprehensive settlement, Syria recruited its proxy in Lebanon to put pressure on Israel.[171]

The "understandings" of May 1996 following Operation Grapes of Wrath and the comparatively effective functioning of the monitoring committee composed of Syria, Lebanon, Israel, U.S. and France mitigated but did not totally ousted the impact of the fighting and casualties inside the "security zone" as self-declared by Israel in south Lebanon. Daily confrontations between Israel and Hezbollah continued without interruption.[172]

Early in his tenure Netanyahu raised the idea of "Lebanon first," based on a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon, preferably in concert with Syria but without it if needed. Yet, any Israeli withdrawal struck Damascus as a bad idea. Lebanon was important to serve as a means of pressure on Israel to return to the negotiating table on Asad's terms. Damascus was also worried by the prospect of an uncontrolled deterioration if Israel withdrew. The conflict in south Lebanon had been unfolding along patterns that had become familiar, almost predictable, for well over a decade. An Israeli return to the international border without a resolution of the underlying dispute would be construed as an Israeli defeat and as a Syrian achievement, but the conflict could soon get out of hand and expose Syria to the risk of entanglement with an Israeli government it could not fathom. The fear and threat of a Syrian-Israeli military confrontation came to the fore in the summer of 1996. Following Netanyahu's harsh anti-Syrian rhetoric in June, the Syrian chief of staff Hikmat Shihabi resorted to threatening language by alluding to the possibility that Syria would choose a "military option" if the diplomatic stalemate continued. Shihabi's statement generated a wave of speculations and counter

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[171] Salloukh, Bassel, "Syria and Lebanon: A Brotherhood Transformed", *Middle East Report*, Vol. 35, Fall 2005, pp.19

[172] Eisenberg, Laura Zittrain, "Israel's Lebanon Policy", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol.1 No.3, September 1997

statements in Israel. Next came a redeployment of some Syrian units from the Beirut area to the Bekaa Valley. As far as can be ascertained, this was a move conducted in a Syrian-Lebanese context, the implementation of a long-standing scheme to move some Syrian units away from urban areas in the aftermath of the Lebanese elections. This tension dissipated quite soon, but its impact registered. Both sides were evidently suspicious of each other and the possibility of a military confrontation, whether unintended or deliberately planned, became a significant component of their relationship.[173]

3.3 THE PEACE PROCESS

The peace between Egypt and Israel in 1979 had created an aura of engagement among Israel and the Arab states, yet expectations were broken after a few years following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Later on, in midst 1980s, some favourable signs such as Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, improvement of inter-Arab relations and Reagan's re-election to Presidency with a landslide victory giving him more room to act freely arose that paved the way for a mutual understanding and consensus, the momentum towards peace gathered once again reproducing hopes for a comprehensive peace settlement. Active American inclusion had breed expectations for a regional peace.[174]

On the other hand, what made peace negotiations possible between Syria and Israel was the change in the late 1980s due to shifts in regional strategic environment; Asad's decision to participate in the anti-Iraqi coalition and his willingness to come to Madrid. Both countries, having been included into the Middle East Peace Process, found a point of convergence in their perceptions of each other. Asad's new motto "peace is our strategic choice" was reflective of these regional changes.[175] By adopting this line in compliance with regional developments, he managed to gain a lot when the time seemed hard for Syria.

Did Asad genuinely adopt the path to peace with Israel or did he only wish to divert the international attention from his policies and pretend as a peace-maker? In other words, was the negotiations process truly a missed opportunity or not?

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[173] Rabinovich, Itamar, *The Brink of Peace: The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations,* (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1998), pp. 260-261.

[174] El Reedy, El Sayed Abdel Raouf, "New Opportunity for Peace in the Middle East", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 482, pp.11-18

[175] Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus Bashar Asad and Modern Syria*, pp.154-157

This is still a matter of debate since an acceptable answer to all is hard to find. The term "missed opportunities" was stuck to the tongues of Middle East analysts. Critics of Israeli regional politics put the blame on Israel[176] whereas some others point to the Arabs' actions.[177] Besides this political rather than academic discussion, the peace negotiations of 1992-1996 between Israel and Syria, though unsuccessful in the end, had far-reaching consequences for the two countries, the region and the international arena.

3.3.1 Strategic Background for Syria Prior to the Talks

On the part of Syria, the Gulf War on Iraq was an important asset. The U.S. reordered its policies toward Syria to convince this country to participate in its effort. Syria's support to coalition powers created a positive image for this country. U.S. Secretary of State James Baker emphasizing the need for face-to-face dialogue with Syrian officials, made a visit to Damascus in September 1990.[178] The visit was signalling a rapprochement between two countries as the Secretary of State singled out that Syria had been put on terrorist list without any justification.[179] Later on in November 1990, Asad and Bush met in Geneva where they talked the situation in Kuwait, the necessity of implementing Taif Accord in Lebanon. Bush also appreciated Syria's support regarding the release of hostages in Lebanon.[180]

Syria brilliantly took benefit of the Gulf War and mended fences with the US. The U.S. on the other hand needed Syria for the Gulf War and Lebanon crisis. Two countries easily reached to their final positions. On the international level, Syria's burgeoning relations with the sole superpower made it feasible in the eyes of Syrian rulers to enter into a peace process with Israel. Additionally, the American president this time was much more credible for Arabs than his predecessors.[181]

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[176] Pappe, Ilan, "The Process That Never Was: Missed Opportunities in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict 1948-2000", in Elie Podeh and Asher Kaufman (eds.), *Arab-Jewish Relations-From Conflict to Resolution?* (Brighton, Sussex Academy Press, 2005)

[177] Karsh, Efraim, *Fabricating Israeli History: The New Historians*, (Oregon, Frank Cass, 2000)

[178] U.S. Department of State, *American Foreign Policy Current Documents 1990,* (Washington DC, Government Printing Office, 1991), pp.622-23

[179] Ibid, pp. 626

[180] Ibid, pp. 627

[181] Rabil, *Embattled Neighbours, Syria, Israel and Lebanon,* pp.96

On the regional level, the aftermath of the Gulf War witnessed the repositioning of all regional Arab states in accordance with the US. The notion of Pan-Arabism once again proved meaningless and the Arabs' pursuit for their own interests dominated the regional politics. Moreover, Syria's regional impact had lost ground while the U.S. entered into the regional politics as an indispensible player. U.S. made bilateral security arrangements with the Gulf States which terminated the importance of Damascus Declaration.[182] The U.S. thus grabbed the chance of forcing Syria for a peace with Israel. Moreover, it was quite certain for Asad that his policy of strategic parity did not bear fruit and following the Gulf War it was impossible to turn back to this policy. The only option left to retrieve the occupied lands and to prevent international isolation (or to grant Western aid and finance) was through a peace process.[183]

A critical setback in Asad's mind was undoubtedly Lebanon. Lebanon was Asad's masterpiece on which he patiently worked for two decades. One of fundamental Syrian aims on Lebanon was to keep its military presence there to enforce its political aims. However, Syrian presence in Lebanon was somehow related with Israeli invasion in the south. As long as the Israeli administrations maintain forces in Southern Lebanon, Syria could use this as an excuse for its dominance in the country. A peace between Syria and Israel would highly likely to lead an Israeli-Lebanese peace. Then, without Israeli combatants on Lebanese soil, would that be possible for Syria to resist international pressure asking for the removal of Syrian army and intelligence from Lebanon? This was probably Asad's most challenging dilemma; a peace agreement with Israel which would secure economic and diplomatic benefits but undermining Syrian position in Lebanon which would diminish its regional role.[184] Yet, the Syrian leader announced his policy of "strategic choice for peace". Whether this choice a genuine one or not? This is still a matter of debate.

One group of experts believe that Asad's "choice" was not a target to be achieved; it was rather a manipulation in the face of growing U.S. impact in the region, a tactic to conceal his own weaknesses. Syria was dissatisfied with the status-quo but it would be worse in

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[182] Damascus Declaration was an agreement between Egypt-Syria and the Gulf States following the Gulf War with a security role for the former two in exchange for financial stakes.

[183] Rabil, *Embattled Neighbours, Syria, Israel and Lebanon,* pp.97-98

[184] Pollack, Kenneth, "Peace and Syrian Dilemma", *Washington Institute for Near East Policy,* No: 109, October 1996

case of a peace. A bilateral peace with Israel (and if coupled with a comprehensive peace deal) would serve nothing to Syrian interests but only increase Israel's legitimacy and power as well as the U.S. regional role. This would lead to the sway of Lebanon from Syrian hands, push Syria ahead to cut off its relations with different Palestinian parties, thus decrease its impact on Arab-Israel conflict and no economic or political gains were able to fill in the gap these strategic costs would make.[185] Some harsher comments allege that even Asad's participation in the Madrid process was only due to the U.S. force majeure not because of an effort to solve Arab-Israeli conflict. To serve his need of befriending the US, he ordered his proxy Hezbollah to release six American hostages and as the Madrid process unleashed Hezbollah restarted its deadly attacks against Israel provoking this country to retaliate. Elections in Israel brought Rabin to power who had a peace deal with Syria in his mind, nevertheless this was a danger for Asad since he terribly needed the conflict with Israel to protect his regional and domestic legitimacy.[186]

On the other hand, there is a wider group of academics who is of the opinion that Syria truly sought for a peace during four years of Rabin's government. That is because Asad had no alternative in an environment where Soviets were dismantling, cold war rivalries were over, Syria was militarily and economically weak with respect to Israel, yet it desperately wanted the Golan Heights back. At such conditions, Syria stuck to "peace for land" vision and chose to work out diplomacy.[187] Despite the fear that the circumstances would enable Americans and Israelis to enforce a peace with undesired consequences, the Syrian government, under American pressure, expressed readiness to engage in negotiations with Israel.[188] Additional factors were also on the field for Syria. First, it seemed conceivable for the first time since 1967 to regain Golan. Second, the current American Administration under George Bush was not only pushing Syria but also Israel thus Syrian leaders began to view this administration as a possible ally[189] –at least a neutral mediator- that could help parties obtain a balanced agreement. Third, the Arab

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[185] Rubin, *The Truth About Syria,* pp. 106

[186] Deeb, Marius, *Syria's Terrorist War on Lebanon and the Peace Process*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, pp. 183-184

[187] Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus Bashar Asad and Modern Syria,* pp.144

[188] Baker, James A. & DeFrank Thomas M., *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War and Peace, 1989-1992*, (New York, Putnam, 1995), pp. 487

[189] The American attitude toward Israel's demand for financial compensation following the fall of Saddam's missiles on Israeli territory probably had a positive impact on the Syrian rulers.

opinion concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict had considerably changed in a way that now more Arab people ask for a settlement of the conflict.[190] Hence the regional and international circumstances coupled with Syria's expectations from the peace process made it possible for Syria to attend such a process.

It was obvious that Asad wanted peace but it should be "honourable". He would not accept a deal before some specifics were made clear. These specifics mainly revolved around the return of Golan Heights, security arrangements and a slow pace of accommodation between the two countries. Syrian peace proposal could be perceived a partial (or a conditional) peace for a full withdrawal. Rabin, via the U.S. Secretary of State Baker, asked Asad for a full peace in exchange of full withdrawal, however this attempt to reach a breakthrough in relations failed since Asad -despite his positive attitude- rejected a speedy normalization between two sides.[191] On the other hand, in Asad's strategic calculation, peace was needed. Asad clearly had a vision and hope of regaining Golan back and mending fences with the US. This could only be done via negotiations with Israel. Syria wanted to negotiate and helped tighten the gap between the parties[192]. Hence the rhetorical argument that "Asad's failure to conclude a deal with Rabin was his strategy of continuing the process rather than concluding it"[193] is incapable of explaining the situation.

Likewise the argument that "Asad wanted a peace for the country's economic prosperity or to satisfy domestic politics or the escape international pressure" is also flaw with defects. First of all, Syria had no meaningful internal opposition or control mechanism to limit the actions of its President. Asad's moves were never constrained by the pressure of a volatile, democratic domestic environment. The sole organized opposition –Muslim Brotherhood- was effectively silenced and prohibited. Hence the proposition that Asad's march to peace was related with internal politics is groundless.[194] Furthermore, having all

[190] Zisser, *Asad's Legacy*, pp.104-105

[191] Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace: The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations,* pp.235-236

[192] Syrian desire to keep the process alive later on had been substantiated by the negotiations of 1999 and 2006.

[193] Pipes, Daniel, *Syria Beyond The Peace Process*, (Washington D.C., The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1996), pp. 92-93

[194] Hinnebusch, Raymond, "Does Syria Want Peace? Syrian Policy in the Syrian-Israeli Peace Negotiations"*, Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 1, (Summer, 1996), pp. 42-46

the propaganda and broadcasting facilities under their control, Syrian leaders had no difficulty to convince the people that they were doing the right thing. This propaganda machine exploited people's sentiments for many years regarding crucial issues like Lebanon, Gulf War, Arab-Israeli conflict and support to fanatic organizations such that Syria was standing at highly moral grounds but the outer world was trying to prevent Syria from behaving as such. In addition, Syrian public opinion also seemed in line with the peace efforts. Tired of years of conflict while the other Arabs chose to make their own peace, Syrian people had increasingly involved into the thought of making a deal with Israel.[195]

As per to the allegation that Syria's one of most important incentives that lead the negotiations with Israel was economics, it is hard to prove historically that Asad had ever given vital foreign policy decisions with respect to economics. Asad was no man of economics. Corruption, crony capitalism, unequal division of wealth, and the slow and cautious pace of liberalization were not as a high priority for Asad as the domestic political stability in a highly unstable region.[196] There is no capitalist class in the country able to form an interest group and following the Gulf War, at least for a while financial flow from Gulf States had been secured.[197]

In addition, the alleged (and exaggerated) impact of the international pressure[198] on Syria to engage in peace initiatives was limited. Syrian administration was already eager to start talks. Syria's start of negotiations with Israel was signalling an important sway from its long-adopted stance. For years, Syria insisted on no bilateral-direct talks with Israel and no talks before Israeli commitment to full withdrawal. The policy change was in play because of the international developments on course, a phenomenon explained as "strategic choice for peace" by the Syrian leader.

3.3.2 Madrid Peace Conference and Road to Bilateral Talks

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[195] Hinnebucsh, *Does Syria Want Peace?,* pp. 47

[196] Seale, Patrick & Butler, Linda, "Asad's Regional Strategy and the Challenge from Netanyahu", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol.26, No.1, (Summer 1996), pp. 41

[197] Hinnebucsh, *Does Syria Want Peace?,* pp. 46

[198] Leverett, *Inheriting Syria,* pp.7

It had cost considerable effort to the U.S. to convene the Madrid Peace Conference. Madrid effort was important in the sense that the U.S. for the first time took benefit of its ability to act in the region without traditional Soviet considerations. This new self-proclaiming tone of U.S. policy towards the region displayed itself in the words of President Bush on March 6, 1991 addressed to the Congress: "*A comprehensive peace must be grounded in the UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of territory for peace... The time has come to put an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict*".[199] Yet, the U.S. confidence was not enough to convince the parties to come to table. "The window of opportunity" as singled out by the then U.S. Secretary of State, James Baker, was placed on highly delicate balances. Both Israel and Syria was afraid of an undesired peace deal that would be shaped as a result of American pressure.[200] The US, as part of its role as mediator, had to make written promises/assurances.

However these assurances somehow seemed contradictory. Syria was assured that the conference and talks would be based on UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338, U.S. was committed to the land for peace principle, the object of the conference was bilateral talks within two days and multilateral talks in two weeks, U.S. intended to work actively towards a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and would do everything it could to keep the two-track process going in that direction. Israel, on the other hand, was given the guarantee that the negotiations would be direct, U.S. had no intention of bringing about a dialogue between Israel and the PLO or negotiations between them, the opening conference would have no impact on decision-making, Israel had its own interpretation of UNSC Resolution 242, U.S. reconfirms previous president Gerald Ford's written commitment that Golan Heights were very important on Israel's security and U.S. would be ready to give its own guarantees to any border agreed upon between Israel and Syria. Moreover, Shamir in a letter to Baker on 28 October 1991, just two days before the conference, asserted that Israel was not bound by the promises made by the U.S. in its letters of assurances.[201]

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[199] "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Cessation of the Persian Gulf Conflict", George Bush Presidential Library, 6 March 1991, http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu, accessed on December 1, 2010

[200] Zisser, *Asad's Legacy,* pp.102-104

[201] "The Madrid Conference", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp.120-121

One can conclude from these self-contradictory assurances that U.S. cared in the first place about convening this conference, and probably aimed to make parties sit down around the same table where it can better use its capabilities to urge them for taking steps ahead. Syria, on the other hand, as evident from the letter it took from US, had known from the very start that the conference would ultimately partition into bilateral talks indicating the fact that Syria had a genuine change of mind and heart towards a peace with Israel. Moreover, aware of the risk of bilateral talks brought to the fore by the conference, Asad knew that Syria had no other option but to engage in peace at the time. Besides, he had also seen benefits that he could reap from the upcoming process. This clearly did not mean to abandon Syria's goals but only to change the means to achieve them. What Asad had in mind was to maximise territorial recovery and minimise normalization of relations and security concessions.[202] Among the expected benefits of a peace process for Syria were the possibility of recovering Golan Heights, having a better relation with the U.S. and economic benefits from the U.S. and the EU.

Bearing these in mind and probably still expecting more from a united Arab front, Syria together with Egypt made a call for an international conference. Then came the joint US-Soviet letter of invitation to peace talks in Madrid. Israel, unwilling to attend a regional peace conference, later on accepted to attain due to U.S. pressure, aforementioned assurances and concessions.[203] It is also noteworthy that the change of mind of the Syrian administration regarding peace also helped Israelis to make their final decision of entering into Madrid Conference. Their motivation was that with sincere Syrian involvement or at least without Syrian hindrance, the peace talks might have given results.[204]

3.3.3 Around a Table

The opening ceremony of the Madrid Conference was a multilateral gathering with Israel and Arab states on the one side, and international players and the United Nations on the other. However the main target of the negotiations was bilateral talks between Israel and

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[202] Hinnebusch, *Revolution from Above*, pp. 157

[203] It is important to note that Israel had no other options in the face of new conditions dictated by the post-Gulf war and the ongoing intifada.

[204] Yariv, Aharon, *War in the Gulf: Implications for Israel*, (Boulder, Westview Press, 1992), pp. 385-390

the subsequent Arab parties. As President George Bush spelled out in his inaugural speech; *"The real work will not happen here in the plenary session, but in direct bilateral negotiations."* When the process broke into bilateral talks, one party emerged was the Palestinian camp whose negotiations with Israel led to the Oslo process and the other was the Syrian-Lebanese one. Syria urged Lebanon to stay with itself.[205] Syrian-Israeli track stayed with no progress for a while due to Shamir's government in Israel. In fact, Shamir's closing remarks of the Madrid Conference were far from being heartening. He purported that; *"The ancient Jewish community in Syria has been exposed to cruel expression, torture and discrimination of the worst kind...Syria is home to a host of terrorist organizations that spread violence and death to all kinds of innocent targets".* [206] Shamir's words signalled a very uncompromising attitude.

The change that brought momentum to the talks was the election of Yitzhak Rabin as the prime minister. The first round of talks was concluded before August 24 of 1992. Then, starting with the sixth meeting from August 24 to December 17 of 1992 in Washington, negotiations were intensified between the parties. Just prior to August 24 meeting, Itamar Rabinovich was appointed the head of Israeli delegation for negotiations with Syria[207]. Rabinovich reports that at the end of that meeting, the Syrian delegation presented a document titled "Draft Declaration of Principles" consisted of a separate introductory page and a three-pages of principles. The introductory page was somehow an unexpected development for the Israelis since it was a commitment to the comprehensive solution of the conflict. The comprehensiveness issue was also apparent at the draft principles. Yet, the main problem was the insistent Syrian pursuit for a clear-cut commitment to full Israeli withdrawal in exchange for some vague expressions that would hardly be interpreted as a sound base for peace. Syrians in their draft principles list asserted that the negotiations rested on UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of land for peace, dismantling of all Israeli settlements in exchange for the termination of all claims and

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[205] Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus Bashar Asad and Modern Syria,* pp. 145-146

[206] "The Madrid Conference", pp.120-121

[207] Rabinovich wrote his famous book on the negotiations; "The Brink of Peace: The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations" which was deemed as the most comprehensive and a balanced account of the talks from 1992 to 1996. In fact there is not any equivalent work on the negotiations for the mentioned term. Thus this thesis, as any other writing on the Syrian-Israeli peace talks, heavily borrowed from his book.

states of belligerency. No satisfactory reference to issues like security, bilateral relations crucial to Israel was made.[208]

Syrian delegation put forth a "glorified nonbelligerency" for full withdrawal with a vague emphasis to Palestinian cause and without indicating that Syria and Israel were two peacemaking parties. The document signified the Syrian perception of peace. Yet, it was a step forward substantiating that Syrian side wanted negotiations by delivering a document outlining their initial position.[209]

After this first round of talks, two parties continued meetings since December 17. Then, until the spring of 1993, talks were suspended mainly due to the presidential elections in the US. Then came the Israeli non-paper in which "territorial dimension" was added with a clear linkage between withdrawal and establishment of secure and recognized borders.

The talks included a substantial amount of questions directed by each other trying to capture the standing of the other side. At one of these moments, Rabinovich asked his Syrian counterpart Allaf whether the Syrian concept of peace included normalization. The answer was a reference to multilateral platform in which almost no progress was made. The Syrians clearly linked a normalization process with Israel's recognition by the whole Arab world which could have taken for decades. Asad also referred to that in one of his rare public explanations that they sought for a dignified peace with all their rights taken back. In another speech, he said, *"Syria wants a just and comprehensive peace with Israel...We fought with honour, we are waging negotiations with honour and we will establish peace with honour."*[210]

Even if it is doubtful that these statements of Asad contributed to the negotiations, there was, though sluggish, progress underway. First of all, parties started asking hypothetical questions. Moreover Allaf, regarding the issue that a peace would depend on negotiations with other Arab countries, mentioned that no peace could stand on somebody else's feet[211]. Later on Rabin put forth a formula such that "the depth of withdrawal would

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[208] Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace: The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations,* pp. 58-61

[209] Ibid, pp. 65

[210] Zisser, *Asad's Legacy,* pp. 107

[211] This reflected the fact that Syria, despite Asad's public statements, was slowly diverging from its well-known path of Arab solidarity.

reflect the depth of peace" despite Syrians did not respond to that.[212] In 1992 Syria allowed its Jewish community to leave the country. Also Syria was slowly retreating from its commitments to the Palestinians.[213]

This was the picture of the Syrian administration trying to prepare its people for a peace deal. The state-controlled Syrian press gave also a lot of coverage on the Jordanian and Palestinian tracks that possibly aimed to create an aura of peace in the eyes of ordinary people.[214]

On the other hand, the developments of September 1993, namely the Oslo Declaration of Principles, made the living hard for Syrians. The immediate reaction was a harsh accusation of Israeli politics of purposely playing one track against the other. To Syrian leadership, Israel only played with them to contain Syrian moves in the peace process while really aiming at progress on other tracks. Yet the prospects of an Israeli-Syrian peace would blossom by 1994 once again.[215]

During this first phase of bilateral negotiations between Israel and Syria, the role U.S. could have played was heavily downsized by the internal struggle of Administration with Congress. Congress, with its pro-Israeli structure prevented the Bush Administration from effectively engaging into a relation with Syria. It is also noted that the U.S. might have chosen to spend resources more on other tracks, that of PLO and Jordan, since these two supported Iraq in the course of the Gulf War and are in a position of weakness vis-a-vis the U.S. and the Arab states. It would be easier for the U.S. to capitalize on their weakness and pressure them to come to grips with Israel. However, Syria played its cards correct in the war years and was now in such a position of strength it lacked for the previous decades.[216] In addition, Asad's style of conducting negotiations revealed that time was not really a concern for a peace to be achieved. He undertook the process slowly

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[212] This meant Israel took one step forward from its "full peace-full withdrawal" position. However that was probably more of a tactical move since Rabin, after months of negotiations, was quite sure that only full withdrawal could satisfy Syria and that Asad would not go for a partial solution. Hence it is deductible that this step was genuinely taken to draw Syria closer to full peace terms of Israel.

[213] Zisser, *Asad's Legacy,* 108-109

[214] Ibid, pp.109

[215] Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus Bashar Asad and Modern Syria,* pp. 148

[216] Rabil, *Embattled Neighbours, Syria, Israel and Lebanon,* pp.96-97

and very patiently, rendering it impossible in the eyes of the American decision-making to get a result quite soon. That obviously diverted the U.S. attention to other tracks.[217]

When Clinton became President, he concentrated efforts once more on the solution of the Middle East conflict. The Clinton administration gave particular importance to the Israeli-Syrian track since a peace between the two could serve as a key to a comprehensive solution of the Arab-Israeli settlement and to a geopolitical realignment in the Middle East. Anthony Lake, U.S. national security advisor put forth in a lecture delivered at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy in May 1994 that a decisive Israeli-Syrian deal would have allowed Jordan and Lebanon to resolve their differences with Israel and normalization of relations between Israel and Maghreb and Gulf would have followed which would have provoked PLO to come to terms.[218]

It took no much time for Syria to grab the new American Administration's sincere wish to establish a peace. President Clinton on some occasions made public his Administration's dedicated position to UN resolutions 242 and 338 as a basis of a settlement. Clinton also expressed hope that Israel would positively respond to Asad's call for the peace of the brave. Furthermore, Clinton's Secretary of State Christopher had been to Damascus so many times ensuring Syrians of his purpose.

For his first international trip in February, Secretary of State Warren Christopher had chosen Middle East signalling the importance attached by the Clinton Administration to the ongoing peace processes. This trip particularly aimed to give a jump-start to the Syrian-Israeli track. Then a crucial visit by Rabin to Washington took part in mid March. In their meeting, President Clinton made it straightforward that he saw peace with Syria as the key to a comprehensive peace. The U.S. direct effort constituted another step. Ambassador Ed Djerejian, a member of U.S. peace team, conveying a letter of President Clinton alongside made a secret visit to Damascus to update Asad on Rabin's visit. The letter was formulating the establishment of a discreet channel between Syria and Israel.

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[217] Rabil, Robert, "The Ineffective Role of the U.S. in the US-Israeli-Syrian Relationship", *Middle East Journal*, Vol.55, No.3, (Summer, 2001), pp. 422

[218] Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus Bashar Asad and Modern Syria,* pp. 147

Asad responded negatively to this. The bilateral talks continued in Washington but did not bear fruit.[219]

Corollary to this, Rabin made his boldest gambit in the process. He authorized Secretary of State Christopher in August 1993 to explore in a hypothetical way Syria's readiness for a full-fledged peace in case Israel withdrew its forces from Golan Heights. The timing was no coincidence. Israel was shaping a deal with PLO in Oslo and Rabin wanted to be sure if he could still spare resources to the Syrian track. In their meeting with Christopher, Rabin, on the assumption of Asad's demand satisfied, made some points straight; namely whether Syria would be willing to sign a peace treaty without linkage to other tracks, whether Syria was ready for a real peace including all elements of normalization and whether Syria was ready to offer some or all of these elements before the completion of withdrawal. Rabin, also added that completion of withdrawal would take five years. Moreover, he added on that the security arrangements were as important as other issues.[220] Rabinovich, asserting that Rabin widely opened the door for Asad, characterized this moment as "the wings of history could be heard in the room".

Yet, the answer Christopher brought from Damascus was, to Rabin's evaluation, disappointing. Asad was willing for peace vis-a-vis full withdrawal; however there were a lot of buts and ifs. In addition, he would not seem to be using the term "normalization" as Rabin used it and offered a term of six months for withdrawal. He also did not make a clear picture of whether he wanted a linkage with other tracks or not.

Rabin knew that Syria would bargain, but he did not want it to consume much time. He thus focused more on the ongoing talks in Oslo rather than an extremely slowly evolving Syrian track. That for sure did not mean the end of talks but Syrian track lost its initial advantages.[221]

Palestinian-Israeli process had mixed gifts for Syria. The process made it possible for Asad to go on its own talks more freely since Palestinians were on their own route. Yet, it was difficult for Asad to be upstaged by Arafat, a man he despised. Asad was working hard to form a united Arab front and he was so close to achieve that. Arafat's move to

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[219] Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus Bashar Asad and Modern Syria,* pp. 98-103

[220] Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace: The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations,* pp. 104-105

[221] Ibid, pp.80-83

break Asad's own peace plans had to be humiliating for the Syrian leader. The plan Arafat agreed was also a matter of bitterness since it was not covering nationalists Arab demands. Moreover, Rabin's government inability to keep more than one track at bay would have been much more disturbing in the eyes of Syrian officials since their own process had now been seconded. Moreover, Asad probably felt that Israel and the U.S. had double played with him even though Clinton, prior to the signature ceremony of Declaration of Principles in the White House lawn, called Asad and assured him that the U.S. remained committed to an Israeli-Syrian breakthrough as well. In that conversation, Asad expressed readiness to endorse Israel-PLO step, yet he cautioned Clinton that it could not stand alone, but had to be followed by Israeli-Syrian reconciliation. Yet, Asad did not boycott the Oslo Accords and sent the Syrian Ambassador Muallim to attend the ceremony, a move which he felt compelled to do because of his integration into the peace process and his wish not to jeopardize the relations with the US. [222]

Two days prior to the signing ceremony, Clinton talked to Thomas Friedman of New York Times where he stated that the U.S. needed to be a part of the peace process, to create the strongest possible conditions; that Israeli public should be made comfortable with the idea of having peace with Arabs, that each successive day two countries (Syria and Israel) keep talking, that enabled the Government of Israel to engage Syria, that he told Asad to support efforts not immediately rewarding him, and that he assured Asad of his persistent commitment to the peace process.[223]

Rabin, following the signature of Declaration, had a private lunch with Clinton where he spoke out his concern regarding Clinton's view of making Israeli people ready for other breakthroughs. He told the President that he was still committed making peace with Syria, yet there was a limit the Israeli people could carry. Clinton, taking notice of his position, called Asad once again to brief about his talk with Rabin, assured him again of the U.S. and Israel's commitment and asked to prevent rejectionist Palestinian factions based in Damascus to torpedo the process. Towards the end of 1993, nothing concrete regarding the Israeli-Syrian talks was on the balance sheet. Yet, according to Rabinovich, there was

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[222] Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace: The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations,* pp.111-117

[223] "Clinton Says U.S. Backing Is Firm", *New York Times*, 11 September 1993

a stronger American commitment to seek in the earnest a hard step for the Syrian track despite and on top of the Oslo Accords. [224]

3.3.4 From September 1993 to Israel-Jordan Peace Deal

Syrian-Israeli negotiations stopped over Syria's request. Syrian party expressed that they expect nothing from more talks currently. U.S. Secretary of State's Special Middle East Coordinator Dennis Ross visited Israel to convince Israelis for a fresh start with Syria. But it was now Jordan on the table for Israel. Ross searched for the possibility of a reaffirmation of the hypothetical question of August 1993. He could not get it; yet in November Rabin gave the reaffirmation to President Clinton while also claiming that his priorities were the implementation of Oslo process and talks with Jordan. There had been shaped the new U.S. strategy towards Syria: Clinton would tell Asad at their meeting in Geneva in January 1994 about Rabin's reaffirmation which would keep Asad quiet till the completion of Palestinian track, and would then ask Asad for concessions for a facilitation of the talks. Secretary Christopher, shuttling between Jerusalem and Damascus, worked out a new format, entailing the restart of talks at the level of heads of delegations following the Asad-Clinton summit in Geneva and reaching at a concrete base till April 1994. Israeli head of delegation Rabinovich and Rabin, assuming that this summit would provide a new momentum, worked on potential steps to be taken to convince Israeli people; a reaffirmation of the government's decisions of June 19, 1967; an announcement that the Golan Law of 1981 fell short of annexing the Golan; a statement that Israel did not seek or claim sovereignty in the Golan.[225]

The summit was fruitful for Syria since President Clinton described it as "the key to the achievement of enduring and comprehensive peace". He also expressed hope that Asad's "very important statement" would "provoke a positive response in Israel" which put pressure on Israel. For Israel, it was disappointing. What Rabin needed most, an exercise of public diplomacy was again missing in both Asad's and Clinton's remarks. However the Americans perceived the summit as positive creating expectations from the Israeli side. Rabin authorized Deputy Defence Minister Mota Gur to state in the Knesset that a peace deal proposing territorial concessions needed to be submitted to a referendum.

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[224] Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace: The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations*, pp. 119

[225] Ibid, pp.120-128

Rabin by putting the referendum issue to the open sought to provide the administration with a gesture while also calm down the Israeli public. The talks then started again in Washington. The Israeli strategy was open; talking of security issues and not the withdrawal.[226]

This meant that Rabin was following Oslo and Jordan options, but he was only playing time in its dealings with Syria. Aware of this fact, Secretary Christopher asked Rabinovich in February whether Rabin was serious with regard to Syria, why nothing was happening and maybe U.S. should put something on paper. However Rabin's position remained unchanged.[227]

In his March 1994 visit to Washington, Rabin and Clinton had reached an understanding that the U.S. would carry a package of Israeli demands and take from Damascus the Syrian package. American officials, during the period shuttled many times between the two capitals. Asad's response to Rabin's package, as expected, contained elements of an Israeli withdrawal to June 4 lines, time frame for withdrawal unchanged at 6 months, some minor concessions for security arrangements and diplomatic relations announced after the comprehensive settlement. This counter proposal was an expected one-not answering Israeli concerns on timetable, phasing and security issues; yet it was conceived as a first step into a lengthy bargaining process. During May and June, U.S. officials, Secretary Christopher and Special Coordinator Ross, tried to convince parties on a mutual understanding. Many proposals were conveyed but not sufficient for a breakthrough. As of end of July, Rabin and Asad agreed on to restart negotiations between Muallim and Rabinovich. The two delegations discussed issues into each detail; some minor progress was also achieved, regarding the loosening of Syria's position on Lebanon's peace with Israel and security dimension.[228]

Americans barely acquiesced the reformation of this channel; they wanted a higher level and faster dialogue like their own mediation. This was also because Rabin's deposit with Clinton that after the deal with Jordan, Israelis would give full weight to talks with Syria. The American Administration opted for a smooth and quick resolution since Syria in their

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[226] Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace: The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations*, pp. 130-131

[227] Ibid., pp. 135

[228] Ibid,, pp. 121-150

perception was holding the key to overall peace in the region. National Security Advisor to the President, Anthony Lake at a speech in Washington Institute in May 1994, pointed out that "a decisive Syrian-Israeli agreement would allow Jordan and Syria to resolve their differences with Israel and normalization of relations with Maghreb and the Gulf would follow". Moreover, once the American investment in the Israeli-Syrian process was so grave and evident, the superpower's hasty mood could partly be considered a matter of conserving its reputation and charisma.[229]

Meanwhile, some favours were made by Syria. Asad in May 1994 told Patrick Seale that Palestinians were in charge of the Palestinian question.[230] In March 1994, Asad warmly hosted a group of Israeli Arabs headed by a member of Knesset, Abd al-Wahhab Darawsha. This was important in the sense that this group was formerly accused of collaborating with the enemy.[231] However for Israelis the visit was a glaring failure since the group was accepted with Egyptian passports and only via flight from Cairo.[232]

The Operation Accountability against Lebanon's Hizballah was launched later in that year due to worsening situation in South Lebanon. In the meantime, Secretary Christopher had made serious efforts to halt the conflict. He managed to get a cease-fire in which Israel would not fire rockets to South Lebanon whereas Syria would ensure that Hizballah did not take action again. The cease-fire paved the way for his next visit to the region.

3.3.5 Security Issues

Through much of 1995, security issues were on table. By the end of 1994, chiefs of staff of both sides met to discuss the security. As of May 1995, a non-paper agreed upon. Till that time, the discussion around Asad's definition of "equal footing" mixed with a minimalist approach dominated the talks and this was far away from Israeli position. Give and take was underway, yet the gap was wide. Trust was still lacking between the parties. Rabin believed that Asad did not give importance to peace rather he was in the process for the sake of American support whereas Asad started to think that Rabin was of the

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[229] Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace: The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations,* pp. 140-145

[230] Al Wasat, 13 May 1994, quoted from Zisser, *Asad's Legacy,* pp.106

[231] Rabil, *Embattled Neighbours, Syria, Israel and Lebanon,* 102-104

[232] Rabinovich, op.cit., pp. 135

opinion of not concluding a deal with Syria before 1996 elections. Thus time left for a possible breakthrough was limited; it should be done before the end of 1995.[233]

Asad's minimalist approach to security had its own merits; namely investing so much on security would prevent creation of a normal relationship. Moreover Israel was the stronger side having all sorts of military deterrence including its strategic partnership with the US. Israel, on the other side, evaluated the Golan Heights as a security issue. Israel was heavily outnumbered in terms of fighters with respect to Syria and its defence doctrine depended on early warning systems and pre-emptive attacks. Early warning systems were necessary, at least for the initial years of peace, since these systems provide Israel much-needed time to mobilize reserves. The differences were somehow bridged in May and a non-paper was formulated that led to the second round of talks between chiefs of staff. Contrary to their first meeting, this time the gathering was announced. The wave among opponents of peace with Syria thus refreshed, with protests elsewhere.[234] At the end of this round of talks, each party had the clear feeling that a genuine negotiation between the military establishments of each country had begun.[235]

In Israel, support to Rabin regarding the deal with Syria was decreasing. Moreover, some Jewish groups started working to prevent the dispatching of any American peace-keeping presence on the Golan Heights. Rabin, on many instances tried to work out public diplomacy aiming at preparing Israeli and international public for a possible withdrawal; however Asad and his colleagues would not really help Rabin. They did not abandon the rhetoric despite Asad's declared commitment to peace process. This rhetoric obviously did not help win the hearts of Israeli people and Jewish community elsewhere.[236] Furthermore the process was full of public diplomacy accidents. An example was the incident known as "Shtauber episode" in which a commentary written by General Shtauber critical of the non-paper on security leaked to the media. This played into the hands of Israeli opposition. Another case was the Asad's interview he granted to Egyptian daily Al-Ahram where he said there was no progress in the process, that the security talks collapsed and that he believed they (Israelis) wanted a dark future for Arabs.

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[233] Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace: The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations*, pp.163-164

[234] Ibid, pp.178-180

[235] Ibid, pp. 185

[236] Ibid, pp. 165-166

3.3.6 After Rabin

On November 4, 1995 Rabin was assassinated. Having different tools at their disposal, Peres and Rabin had their struggle over the method especially regarding Syria. Rabin kept Peres away from the Syrian track till his death. Following Rabin's assassination, Peres as the new Prime Minister, stepped to refresh the process and aimed to conclude a peace deal before the upcoming elections. Peres excessively believed that financial aid, economic development and cooperation would provide better keys to stimulate Syrian sentiments towards peace. Moreover he was comparatively softer than Rabin on the security arrangements and withdrawal timetable. All important was Peres' perception that Syria could supply the necessary leverage for a comprehensive solution. But he also added some more headlines to the negotiation agenda namely; the water issue, cessation of terrorism and public diplomacy. Given this initial stance of Peres, which was regarded positive, the U.S. also gave full support to the revival of the process.[237]

As a result of intensive American diplomacy, the talks at Wye Plantation began on December 27, 1995. The first round of talks was very much alike the previous ones. The issue of economic development and cooperation was regarded positively by the Syrians with concerns explained over Israel's economic superiority and that it can dominate Syrian economy. There had also been developments on the normalization and interface issues. Establishment of diplomatic relations, lift of boycotts and free movement of people and goods were accepted by Syria in principle. Yet, regarding the issues at the core, withdrawal (the line, the duration, phases) and security (demilitarized zones, early warning systems and so on), no improvement was achieved. The following visit by Christopher to the region had been a venue where he tried to flourish hopes. He alleged of developments in the talks; comprehensiveness issue was now regarded as a key to further progress, a sense was created that peace needed to have an economic side, a timeline was accepted and technique of working with a broader group of experts was established.[238]

Second round of talks started on January 24 with the inclusion of military officials. The talks were largely around security issues which bore no fruit. The last and third round of Wye talks started on February 28, on the eve of Peres' announcement that the elections

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[237] Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace: The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations,* pp. 204-207

[238] Ibid., pp. 210-216

would be held at the end of May. Asad and the US, on the assumption that Peres would win, continued the talks. However, the tragic bus-bombing events in Jerusalem just 3 days prior to talks stamped its mark on the negotiations and created an expectation at the Israeli side that a condemnation from the Syrian side should be made. Syria did express the condolences yet failed to denounce the bombings. This made the Israelis stop talking and return home. More tragically, the activities of Hezbollah at the South Lebanon were regaining pace again, that pushed Peres to launch Operation Grapes of Wrath on April 2. A cease-fire was arranged by the U.S. mediation. In addition a monitoring system was established to screen the responsibilities of each contracting sides. Israel, Syria, US, Lebanon and upon Syria's request France were parties to the deal. This agreement was concluded by Netanyahu on July 12 after the elections. This happened to be the last direct contact between Syria and Israel during their 4 years of negotiating.[239]

3.3.7 Netanyahu Period

Election of Netanyahu government slowed down the pace of Arab-Israeli peace talks. Regarding Syria, he made his position straight that Israel would talk to Syria without preconditions, a phenomenon reverse to Syrian desire that the talks should be resumed where they were left off. Additionally in the new government's plan, it was worded that "The Government views the Golan Heights as essential to security of the state and its water resources. Retaining the Israeli sovereignty of Golan will be the basis for an arrangement with Syria".[240] There would not be a single Syrian reading this and without concluding the impossibility of having an agreement with this Israeli government. Moreover, he blamed Syria of its support to terrorism on many occasions; one of which was the press statement he and President Clinton delivered in a visit to Washington; *"...the first item on my agenda would be the cessation of all terrorist activity from Syrian controlled Lebanon and other groups based in Syria. It is peculiar to have peace talks*

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[239] Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace: The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations*, pp. 228-234

[240] "Address in the Knesset by President Weizman on the occasion of the opening of the 14th Knesset", Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 17 June 1996, http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Foreign%20Relations/Israels%20Foreign%20Relations%20since%20 1947/1996- 1997/2%20Address%20in%20the%20Knesset%20by%20President%20Weizman%20on%20t, accessed on December 2, 2011

that are progressing while you have a terror campaign parallel to it."[241] In addition Clinton's second term was not as hopeful as the first term for Syria due to the fact that the American Administration started to focus more on supporting the Palestinian track.

Netanyahu in July 1997 made such an offer that the depth of withdrawal would reflect the depth of security arrangements. This was pretty similar to Rabin's offer that depth of withdrawal would reflect the depth of peace. The offer was rejected by Asad.[242]

On August 12, 1997, Asad addressed second time to a group of Israeli Arabs. This time, Syria invited them. This was seen as a Syrian move to build its own constituency within Israel. Asad spoke of the "positive climate" the Labor Party's 1992 election victory had generated, and the positive role it had played under the administrations of Rabin and Peres whereas after Netanyahu came to power, all progress in the peace process came to a halt. Acknowledging the fact different parties in a democracy could have very diverse approaches to politics[243] Asad said to his guests;

> *Netanyahu wants to take us backwards. He makes bizarre statements, such as proposing peace-for-peace or peace-for-security and then declaring that he supports UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 but only in accordance with his own interpretation of them, which rejects what was achieved at the negotiations (held between Syria and Israel between 1991 and 1996).*

According to Arab Democratic Party MK Abdelwahhab Darawsheh, Assad gave a detailed account of the course those negotiations took, and indicated that there was a possibility under the Labor government for progress to be made because there was a better basis, until Netanyahu came and stopped everything. [244]

Yet, it was revealed by Haaretz correspondent Ze'ev Schiff that in late 1998, Netanyahu held secret meetings mediated by Ron Lauder, American businessman and Netanyahu's close friend. According to Schiff, in these meetings, Netanyahu expressed his readiness

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[241] "President Clinton News Conference With Prime Minister Netanyahu", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel Web Site, 9 July 1996

[242] Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace: The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations,* pp. 259

[243] Rabinovich, op.cit., pp. 264

[244] "Assad Wooing Israeli Peace Camp", *Mideast Mirror,* 13 August 1997

for a full withdrawal, but refrained from doing it in a written or public way. Syrians quickly denied these talks whereas people close to Netanyahu confirmed it while also presenting it as an Israeli success.[245]

It is important to note that even under Netanyahu government, the existence of contacts attested to the will of both sides to keep negotiating. Furthermore, Netanyahu's approach toward Syria indicated that he had seen a stake in concluding a peace with Syria, yet he could not make the move since the Golan Heights were regarded as a crucial part of Israeli defence.[246]

3.3.8 Barak Government

The May 1999 elections brought Ehud Barak Government to power. It had been argued that Barak had a vision of "constructive dynamism of simultaneity" which would compel Palestinians to move forward because the Syrians do, which in turn will compel Syrians to move because the Palestinians do. Barak's timetable foresees a framework agreement for permanent status in February; a Syrian-Israeli joint statement in spring; an Israel-Lebanon understanding on border security arrangements in summer; orderly Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon; a Syrian-Israeli treaty; and a comprehensive agreement for Israeli-Palestinian permanent status agreements in September, followed by a single national referendum in which Barak presents both the comprehensive agreement for permanent status and the Syrian-Israeli treaty as a package deal, ending the Arab-Israeli conflict as we know it.[247]

Things did not work out that smooth for sure. Talks, that started under U.S. sponsorship in mid-December 1999 in Washington where Barak and Syrian Foreign Minister Shara met, came to a stalemate when the Syrian demand to have a presence on the eastern shore of Sea of Galilee was rejected by Israelis. Two parties even -allegedly- agreed in principle that the line of June 4 could be the future border signifying the fact that the respective

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[245] "Netanyahu Reportedly Sends Messages To Syria on Golan Withdrawal", *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 9 September 1997

[246] Zisser, *Asad's Legacy,* pp.122-123

[247] Satloff, Robert, "Syria-Israel Negotiations: Implications and Prospects", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, No. 233, December 1999

positions of each side were at all times closest not to mention the U.S. efforts; yet the conditions were not ripe enough to reach what they sought to.[248]

It was also reported that in January 2000, a draft peace agreement had been prepared and presented by Clinton Administration setting forth the areas of agreement and disagreement. This draft foresaw that Golan Heights would be returned to Syria in a demilitarized fashion; relations in economic, diplomatic areas would be fully normalized; Israeli forces –close to Syrian border-would be limited; early warning facilities at Mount Hermon would be run by the U.S. and France.[249] However the boundary issue, whether the international border of 1923 or 4 June 1967 border would be determined, could not be resolved at the end of the day.

This result was mainly due to the pressure on Barak Government from domestic environs. Facing continued domestic resistance to Israeli withdrawal from the Golan and contemplating an agreement with the Palestinians that would require extensive withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza, Barak chose not to risk putting both issues simultaneously (as did Rabin), to a referendum. The Clinton administration continued to try to broker an agreement, but it was unwilling to put any real pressure on Barak. When Clinton told Asad that Barak could not take the political risk of agreeing to a return to the June 1967 line, "a deal that seemed ripe for the making" collapsed.[250]

In the spring of 2000, Barak ended Israel's negotiations with Syria somehow in an unexpected way. It was reflected in Israeli media that according to subsequent Israeli reports Barak acted unilaterally, without consulting his cabinet and army officials and that the 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 last year is borne by Barak, not Hafez Assad. General Staff officers were willing to assent to Assad's demand that Israel withdraw from the northeast shoreline of Lake Tiberias, and they believed that Barak's intransigent refusal to comply

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[248] Zisser, *Asad's Legacy*, pp. 125

[249] Haaretz, 13   January 2000

[250] Quandt, William B., "Clinton and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*", Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Winter 2001), p. 30

with the Syrian demand reflected a triumph of passing domestic political considerations over permanent security needs."[251]

3.3.9 An Overall Outlook of Peace Process during 1990s

Through the period 1992-1996, basics for a Syrian-Israeli peace were laid, yet limited progress was made. Before all else, it was the first process of direct peace talks between two belligerent neighbours since the foundation of Israel. The process, though ended with no tangible result, enabled the parties to apprehend their perception of peace and their priorities.

What was terribly missing was the lack of trust. Both Asad and Rabin, deep in their reluctance and ambiguity, felt no confidence of each other. This led to a process of harsh bargaining, moving with very small, nervous steps. Both parties expected from the other first to put forth the necessary concession. Syrians waited for a commitment of withdrawal for so long whereas Israelis refrained from giving such commitment before issues regarded important for Israel were settled.

No confidence building measures were deeply discussed. This was yet another ditch in the talks. Public diplomacy was not effectively taken benefit of by the leaders; on the contrary on some occasions, it was used to undermine the process. The parties and leaders did not seek to address the respective community of the other.

In the following Netanyahu Government, the contacts under the counter kept on, yet the efforts of two sides and that of the U.S. were far from being sufficient to open up a peace perspective. Netanyahu was a "security-first" minded leader extensively limiting his country's options regarding a peace. Barak Government, on the other hand, first seemed to agree at terms closer to Syrian expectations, particularly concerning security issues; however Barak could not take hold of domestic pressures and gave up.

The peace process between Syria and Israel from 1992 to late 1999 failed. It could be alleged that two main indigenous issues were responsible for this failure. The first one, on the Syrian side, Asad's extremely careful and cautious negotiating style that could take very tiny incremental steps only after thinking thoroughly in a time-consuming way made the whole process harder. It was in fact hard for Israelis –whose hurry for peace was

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[251] Oren, Amir, "IDF to Tell Sharon to Show Restraint This Month", *Ha'aretz*, 9 March 2001

understandable- to sustain talks for so long with a single party of the conflict[252]. Syria was probably considered the first choice due to the fact that it could be a key to a comprehensive peace. This was also strongly supported by the US. Yet, given Syrian taste in negotiations, Israel preferred to focus on the second best choice.

The second issue was the democratic processes on the Israeli side. The elections, public pressure, opposition, media and other mechanisms that were all part of a democratic system slowed down the Israeli politicians to go for a breakthrough with Syria. While Rabin could not press two peace packages at the same time, Barak drew back from a peace agreement due to domestic political pressure. Moreover, a law foreseeing a referendum for any peace agreement containing territorial concessions was enacted again due to domestic politics.

Thus, one can conclude that codes of two very diverse regimes, a dictatorial regime with an experience of extreme instability on the one hand and a parliamentarian democracy on the other, did not match even under dedicated U.S. support. Syria and Israel, having different domestic politics and diverse set of values and aims in their foreign policies, could not engage each other in a constructive manner. Practically, they did not urge to understand each other. An example in case was the dialogue between Rabinovich and Allaf at one moment of negotiations. Allaf asked about a comment made in the radio station Voice of Israel and Rabinovich answered; "You may find it hard to believe, but Voice of Israel is not a state radio and the news editor is sovereign to play up or down whatever he receives from different wire services". "You are right" Allaf replied, "I find it hard to believe."[253]

3.4 ROGUE STATE ATTRIBUTES

3.4.1 Syria as a State Sponsor of Terrorism

Syria has long been described as one of the world's most active state sponsors of terrorism and a staunch supporter of radical groups. However, this support is complex, reflecting Damascus's desire to both exploit terrorist groups and limit them. Damascus has empowered the Palestinian cause and constrained it, encouraged radicals in Lebanon

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[252] Zisser, *Asad's Legacy,* pp.119

[253] Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace: The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations,* pp. 72

and crushed them, and demonstrated considerable care and variance in how it uses terrorist groups. In many ways, Syria represents an ''antagonistic'' sponsor of terrorism, helping many particular groups become stronger but also working to control them and subordinate their overall cause to Syrian domestic and geopolitical goals.[254]

The list of Syrian links to terrorist organizations is quite long. Over the years, Damascus has assisted a range of secular left-wing Palestinian groups, such as Fatah, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Abu Musa group, al-Saiqa, the Abu Nidal Organization (ANO), Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine–General Command (PFLP-GC), and various defectors from Fatah.

Syria also has provided room and other forms of assistance to Palestinian Islamist groups such as the Palestine Islamic Jihad and HAMAS. In addition to supporting Palestinian groups active against Israel, Damascus gave sanctuary to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which sought a Kurdistan independent from Turkey. In the 1980s, Syria also provided facilities and allowed training of the Japanese Red Army Faction (JRA), the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA), and the Pakistani al Zulfikar. Syria allows Iran to arm and train Hezbollah as both a terrorist group and a guerrilla movement, and gives Hezbollah sanctuary in Lebanon which Syria dominates, for its guerrilla campaign. Hezbollah, in addition to attacking Israel directly, also trains and supports several Palestinian groups.[255]

While the U.S. critic of Syrian support to terrorist organizations continued, Iraqi invasion of Kuwait that ensued the U.S. willingness to lure Syria into the coalition, led to a different interpretation of the thorny issue of terrorism that previously seemed to halt the relations between two countries. Baker's definition of terrorism was abruptly similar to Asad's when the two met in Damascus on September 14, 1990. Baker argued that the U.S. considered any violent act outside the occupied territory was a terrorist act but that they could not consider the legitimate right of struggling against occupation forces as terrorism. Baker further stated that Syria so far had been put on the terrorist list without

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[254] Byman, Daniel, *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism,* (New York, Cambridge Press, 2005), pp. 117-118

[255] Rubin, *The Transformation of Palestinian Politics*, (Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 146

any justification and the blame put on Syria was done for political objectives rather than an objective situation.[256] The change of tone and ingredient of the American position was colossal. This statement, clearing Syria from many of its previous sins, was also signalling the extent the American administration could go in case of an emergence of a more profitable option- the alliance against Iraq.

Yet, despite Baker's strong arguments, there was no sign of removing Syria from the terrorist list. Rather many believed that the U.S. as a reward to Syria's involvement in its anti-Iraq campaign let this country to enjoy its hegemony on Lebanon[257] rather than removing this county from its sponsors list without justification.

American official public documentation was also supportive of Syrian support to terrorism. "Patterns of Global Terrorism" reports issued by the State Department from 1993 to 1999 highlighted that Syria had been continuing to provide safe heaven and support to anti-Israeli Palestinian rejectionist factions based in Syria and South Lebanon. The reports on the other hand acknowledged that Syria had been instrumental in preventing the acts of some terrorist groups and continuing to restrain the activity of some groups. Moreover there had been no evidence, as the reports maintained, that Syrian officials had been directly involved in planning or executing international terrorism since 1986.[258]

However, the American attitude against Syria with regard to terrorism was bound to Syrian desire to keep negotiations alive. On April 26, 1996 following intense exchange of fire between Israel and Hezbollah, U.S. Secretary Christopher had managed to broker an understanding between Israel, Syria, Lebanon and Hezbollah as well. The one page understanding declared that Israel would not fire at civilian targets on Lebanese territory and in return armed groups within Lebanon would not carry out attacks against Israel.[259] Yet, then the U.S. Coordinator for Counterterrorism Ambassador Philip Wilcox pointed out in a press conference on April 30, 1996 that Syrian government kept permitting

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[256] Rabil, *Syria, The United States and The War On Terror in The Middle East*, pp. 88-89

[257] Pipes, *Damascus Courts the West: Syrian Politics 1989-1991,* pp. 4

[258] U.S. State Department, *Patterns of Global Terrorism Report*, accessed in 1 September 2011 http://www.state.gov/www/global/terrorism/ and

[259] Erlanger, Steven, "Mideast Accord: The Overview; Israel Lebanon Agree To Halt Border Shellings: A Safeguard For Civilians", *The New York Times,* 27 April 1996

weapons import through Damascus to Hezbollah while also making efforts to restrain terrorist acts in South Lebanon. [260]

3.4.2 Terrorism As a Tool

It is a widely accepted fact that Syria has been using terrorist methods as a policy tool to steer its foreign relations. As a country on U.S. state-sponsors list, Syria supported terrorist groups against Turkey, Palestinian Authority, Lebanon and Israel. Support to terrorism has been a method of self-protection and gaining leverage for Syria. Syria helped terrorists to push the neighbouring countries act according to its will. On the other hand, due to geopolitical realities on ground and in case prospects of a better outcome emerged, Syria was instrumental to prevent these organizations from spoiling its position[261]. One key example of that was the role played by Hafez Asad regarding the release of hostages of an airplane to Beirut in June 1985[262] and the release of six American hostages held by Hezbollah in 1991[263].

Apparently, the Syrian inclusion to terrorism has been two sided. Throughout 1990s Syrian backed terrorist groups were active particularly at times the peace talks lose momentum. In 1990-93, there had been a few incidents against Israel carried out by Hamas and Islamic Jihad and only one against Lebanon; a car bombing killing the Minister of Defence of this country. However in 1994-2000 there are more than 35 incidents by the groups mentioned killing at least 185 in Israel.[264] The figures –though indirectly- point out to Syrian control over/cooperation with terrorist organizations and how effectively it had the power to tailor their activities. Syria while keeping Palestinian front quiet during its negotiations period, could not do so regarding Lebanese front in which Hezbollah was the main player. Hezbollah in October 1991 unleashed an attack

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[260] "Special Briefing by U.S. Coordinator for Counterterrorism Ambassador Philip C. Wilcox", *Department of State*, 30 April 1996, http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/arms/cterror_briefing/960430cterror.html, accessed on December 11, 2010

[261] Satloff, Robert, "The Path to Peace", *Foreign Policy,* No.100, (Autumn 1995), pp. 109-115

[262] Simon, Jeffrey, "Misunderstanding Terrorism", *Foreign Policy,* No. 67, (Summer 1987), pp. 104-120

[263] Deeb, *Syria's Terrorist War on Lebanon and the Peace Process,* pp.183

[264] "Major Palestinian Terror Attacks Since Oslo", http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Terrorism/TerrorAttacks.html, accessed on December 10, 2010

against Israeli targets while U.S. was sponsoring the peace conference in Madrid in which Syria was also a participant.

Some comments regarding Hezbollah activity asserted that Syria was behind the attacks and the Syrian unwillingness of a peace process was responsible[265]. Yet, another loser from a potential peace in Middle East, Iran, needs to be addressed here. It is widely accepted that Iran has been the main supplier of Hezbollah both materially and ideologically. Within same days of Madrid Conference, a parallel conference was convened in Tehran with the participation of radical anti-Israeli groups. The decision made in the conference was to support Palestinian resistance, to unite radical organizations under a high level committee, to continue the resistance under Iranian leadership[266]. Iran obviously did not spare this precious moment where its ideological and strategic interests overlapped. With Iranian support, Hezbollah immediately started its offense against Israel.[267] Another important parameter that activated Hezbollah besides Iranian objection to peace process was the Party's own evaluation of the involvement of Lebanon and Syria in the regional peace talks. The diplomatic activity concerning Israel was a total opposition and rejection. In an attempt to stop the process, Leader of the organization Hasan Nasrallah organized demonstrations and protests all over Lebanon. He presented the movement's position on the matter in such an intolerant style that "Islam cannot live in coexistence with the Jews." Furthermore, Hezbollah deputy Secretary Naim Qassem stated that the peace conference was "a great danger to the Islamic nation and its problems" and that "only a rifle can liberate the lands and eradicate the enemy." Accordingly, Hezbollah gave rise to its activities against Israel in an attempt to thwart the continuance of the talks[268].

Thus with respect to controlling Palestinian rejectionist groups, namely Hamas and Islamic Jihad, Syria proved to be an effective arbiter whereas regarding Hezbollah it failed to do so. This was partly due to the dominance of Syria in the decision-making

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[265] Deeb, *Syria's Terrorist War on Lebanon and the Peace Process,* pp.184-5

[266] Rekhess, Elie, "The Terrorist Connection-Iran, the Islamic Jihad and Hamas", *Justice*, Vol. 5, (May 1995), p.4

[267] Karmon, Ely, "Counterterrorism Policy: Why Iran Starts and Stops Terrorism", *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol.5, No.4, (December 1998)

[268] Azani, Eitan, *Hezbollah: The Story of the Party of God,* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp.159-160

mechanisms of the former two whose headquarters were settled in Damascus. On the other hand Hezbollah was a more independent organization supported by Shia masses of Lebanon and Iran. Syria, faced with this joint   backlash, could not move against the will of its allies but to watch them act.[269]

The interaction between Syria and terrorist groups is one reason why peace with Syria would have implications far beyond a simple bilateral deal. As in the words of former Secretary of State James Baker; "Syria supports terrorism, permits drug trafficking, and much more that we don't like, but there are other very significant differences between it and rogue states like Iran, Iraq, and Libya. Syria is important because there won't be peace between Arabs and Israel until Israel and Syria make peace... Yes, the Syrians engage in rejectionist radical-type behaviour such as building up their arsenal, hostile policies toward their neighbours, terrorism, drug trafficking, and so forth, but the scope and nature of it has really not been anything like what we've seen from Iran and Iraq"[270].

3.5 CONCLUSION

U.S.-Syria interaction during the last decade of 20th century was shaped around the post Cold war parameters. The U.S. operation against Iraq effectively marked the end of bipolar Cold war struggle and the U.S. emerged as the sole super power. Syria managed to quickly adapt itself to the shifting strategic conditions and extend its support to the U.S. against Iraq.

The ensuing peace process, designed wisely by the U.S. diplomats both as a comprehensive and bilateral style, reaffirmed U.S. new position as the power in charge. Syria and Israel for four consecutive years between 1992 and 1996 talked to reach a basis of peace. The process collapsed with no tangible results. Later on, in 1999, the new elected Barak government showed interest to engage in talks initially, but could not do so in the face of reverse public opinion. In the overall, the peace process between Syria and Israel, though beneficial for both sides to grasp an understanding of each other, failed to materialize.

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[269] One sign to support this line of thinking is that even after Operation Accountability in 1993 and Grapes of Wrath in 1996, Syria did not abandon the talks with Israel.

[270] "Interview with James Baker III", *Middle East Quarterly,* Vol.1, No.3, (September, 1994)

During the talks, Syria and the U.S. engaged each other and the positions of two countries converged. This rapprochement displayed itself in the tone of addressing the other side. Especially regarding the Syrian quality of sponsoring terrorist activity, the U.S. officials, reflecting the stance of Administration, considerably adopted a more accommodative discourse. Yet, the U.S. official documentation, this time reflecting the stance of the Senate mainly, did not change its long-adopted path of labelling Syria as a state sponsor.

In the final analysis the accommodation between the two countries that started and sustained along the peace process in 1990s did not translate into a concrete partnership. The experience in early 2000s and the ensuing U.S. led war on terrorism would definitely prove that later. Again, as it was the case in the previous 20 years prior to the Gulf War, lack of direct, sound bilateral relations prevented carving any hardcore cooperation. Thus, the rapprochement of 1990s remained cyclical.

CHAPTER 4

BACK TO CRISIS IN SYRIA-U.S. RELATIONS: THE 2000s

4.1 OUTSET PRIOR TO BASHAR'S MARCH TO POWER

Hafez Asad died on June 10, 2000 remarking the end of an era in the Middle East history. Following a swift domestic process and regulation of laws accordingly, Bashar Asad has been elected President of Syria.

Bashar Asad's succession and consolidation of power was the common denominator the domestic establishment came to terms on, a decision made not to jeopardize Syria's hard-won stability. When Hafez died, Syrian rulers agreed on Bashar as their choice. As an Asad assuring Alawis, he would not betray his father's heritage, and he was not seen as a threat to them. Yet he was popular with the public, seen as an uncorrupted modernizer, especially among the younger generation. He had displayed a style combining continuity and reforms[271].

Hafez Asad left his son a fairly well managed political heritage with amicable relations with the West, a dominant position in Lebanon, a strategic relationship with Iran and Hezbollah and a southern foe that he engaged with to find a solution. Yet, just prior to his death, the winds in the region started to blow adversely for Syria once again[272].

4.2 SHIFTING STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

Bashar faced pretty hard foreign policy problems in the first years of his Presidency. First of all, just prior to his assumption of power, Syrian-Israeli peace talks failed in March 2000 and the eruption of the second Palestinian intifada made the environment harder for Bashar Asad to deal with. Later on, Barak Government in Israel withdrew its troops from Lebanon on May 24, 2000. The swift withdrawal was watched by UN observers who

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[271] Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, pp. 55

[272] Leverett, *Inheriting Syria,* pp. 99-100

granted Israel with the approval of its fulfilment of UNSC Resolution 425.[273] Bashar immediately had to deal with the consequences of the failure in 2000 of the Syrian-Israeli peace process and Israeli withdrawal. The Turkish-Israeli alliance that potentially threatened Damascus was also worth dealing. At the same time, the fragmentation of the Arab world made it harder to mobilize Pan-Arab political support or financing for Syria's policies. Moreover, with its old Soviet patron long gone and the American Administration turning aggressive following 9/11, Syria lost the ability to manoeuvre between rival global superpowers and lacked a super power protector. Worse, Syria's military position was deteriorating. After the 1990s collapse of its Soviet arms supplier, it faced the degradation of its deterrent force. Losing its deterrence vis-a-vis the enemy, Syria concentrated efforts to pursuit its war with lower costs. Non-conventional methods recruited through organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah, an important element Bashar inherited from his father, appeared as a non-conventional way of exerting power on Israel.[274]

A watershed event, Bashar needed to face little more than a year after his inauguration was the September 11 attacks and the ensuing U.S. led global war on terror that had a dramatic impact on Syria's strategic environment. The elevated importance of terrorism and "rogue regimes" in U.S. foreign policy heightened tensions between Damascus and Washington over Syria's status as a state sponsor of terrorism and its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction.[275]

September 11, 2001 had been a cornerstone for the region and Syria. The Syrian TV did not interrupt its daily broadcasting on the day of attacks. Moreover, scenes of the fall of Baghdad were never shown on the Syrian TV partly reflecting Syrian Administration's difficulty to read the changing regional situation and its resentment to Iraq's invasion as well.[276]

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[273] "Security Council Endorses Secretary-General's Conclusion On Israeli Withdrawal From Lebanon As of 16 June 2000", *UN Press Release*, http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2000/20000618.sc6878.doc.html, accessed on June 24, 2011

[274] Hinnebusch, "Syrian Foreign Policy under Bashar al Asad", *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, Vol 1. No.1, (July 2009), pp. 14

[275] Leverett, , *Inheriting Syria,* pp. 101-102

[276] Zisser, Eyal, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al Asad and the First Years in Power*, (London, I.B. Tauris, 2007), pp. 125

Bashar Asad, as a response to this worsening situation tried to construct alternative alliances at the regional and the international levels so as to lower pressures on Syria and find access to external resources. He sought to improve relations within the region and particularly with Turkey and at the global level he sought for an opening to Europe and displayed a more dedicated stance toward Euro-Mediterranean partnership. Yet his efforts prior to the War on Iraq in 2004 made no real benefit, yet Asad's motivation to defend Iraq and flourish relations with it brought Syria a serious conflict with the US. Paradoxically, pressure by the U.S. and other Westerners on a couple of issues pushed Bashar Asad to stick more to its relations with Iran and to steer from his initial West-centric foreign policy path. Syria ended up with Iran in an axis of resistance locked in a struggle for the Middle East with the U.S. and its regional allies.[277]

4.2.1 U.S. Invasion of Iraq

The most significant source of confrontation in U.S.-Syria relations throughout the first decade of 2000s was absolutely the U.S. decision to invade Iraq. At the UN and in the Arab League, Syrian diplomacy worked to form a coalition against to no avail. Bashar Asad publicly accused Washington when, in an interview on the eve of the war with al-Safir (on March 27, 2003), he condemned the coalition's flagrant aggression as illegal and immoral. He further stated that the U.S. was a super-power capable of conquering a relatively small country, but... the U.S. and Britain would not be able to control all of Iraq… and there would be Arab popular resistance which had already begun.[278]

However Syria acted within its limits and was keen not to deviate from international legitimacy founded by UNSC Resolution 1441 mandating the renewal of United Nations weapons inspections in Iraq. Syria's SANA Agency, in a move to justify Syrian affirmative vote for the Resolution, stated that *"voting with the resolution in the Security Council will keep the region away from premeditated designs of a military strike on Iraq that would benefit Israel and enemies of Arab nation."* While Arab media in different countries criticized Syria for voting in favour of the resolution, Syria, as was explicit in

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[277] Hinnebusch, "Syrian Foreign Policy under Bashar al Asad", pp. 15-16

[278] Strindberg, Anders, "Syria under Pressure", *Journal of Palestine Studies,* Vol.33, No.4, (Summer, 2004), pp. 55

SANA's comment, probably thought of depriving Bush Administration of an excuse for a war.[279]

Despite critics defining Bashar Asad's statements regarding the invasion of Iraq as defiant and that he had to follow the path his father did in 1990, the situation on the ground simply indicated a totally different set of circumstances in 2003 than in 1990. There were some incentives for Syria to acquiesce the invasion in early 1990s. First of all, in 1990, Iraq was the aggressor against another Arab state which made things easier for Syria since the state ideology has been formed around Arab nationalism. But in 2003, an Arab state was the victim of aggression by an imperialist power. Secondly, there was no U.S. commitment to a peace process in 2003 compared to 1990. And last but not least; Bashar, as a President still in the process of power consolidation, could not risk explicitly moving against the will of Syrian people. [280]

In reaction to Syrian inability to support its case, the U.S. accused Syria to be on the wrong side in the war against terror. The neo-cons in the Bush Administration seized the opportunity to depict Syria as a U.S. foe. Secretary of State Colin Powell, when he visited Damascus on May 2003 immediately after the completion of invasion of Iraq, demanded from Syria to end support for Palestinian militants, dismantle Hezbollah, withdraw from Lebanon and cooperate in the occupation of Iraq. The U.S. government was not negotiating and it was a "take or leave" package. Syrian government did not accept such demand without a sufficient *quid pro quo*. The regime, believing that the U.S. would not resort to military force against Syria which could only extend current chaos in Iraq and which does not have oil to compensate its loss, did not follow suit but tried steer a middle way over Iraq. Thus under U.S. threat Syria backed away from overt support for the resistance in Iraq. Furthermore Syria made incremental but significant concessions to appease Washington: borders with Iraq were tightened, Hezbollah was encouraged to stop its campaign against Israeli forces, Bashar Asad made signals to cooperate with Ruling Council in Iraq established by the U.S.[281]

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[279] "How the World's Press Reacted", *Guardian*, 10 November 2002

[280] Hinnebusch, "Defying the Hegemon: Syria and the Iraq War", Delivery made at conference of the European Consortium on Political Research, Budapest, (September 2005)

[281] Zisser, Eyal, "Syria, the United States and Iraq: Two Years After the Fall of Saddam Hussein", *The Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol.9, No.3, (September 2005)

Bashar's attempt to restart the peace negotiations with Israel was rejected by Israelis on the basis of Bush Administration's policies. It was reported in a Crisis Group report that in private talks with Israeli officials, they cited Washington's position as a principal reason not to respond to Bashar. As cited from one of those officials; *"We can afford to ignore U.S. preferences on some issues but not on issues that are defined as central to U.S. foreign policy. Isolating and pressuring Syria has become one such issue"*[282]. Equally important was the Bush Administration's devaluation of the basic traditional goals of U.S. Middle East policy, namely; regional stability and the peace process, correspondingly devalued the "cards" by which Syria could promise to deliver or obstruct these goals.[283]

4.3 THE LEBANON ARENA

Syria's role in Lebanon was an issue of serious contention between itself and the West (the U.S. and France in the first place), as well as pro-Western states such as Saudi Arabia. Syria's urge to defend its position in Lebanon was seen as obstructive by those states; whereas for Damascus, it has permanent security, political and economic stakes in Lebanon, other than the ideological element that Lebanon has been a detached part of Greater Syria.[284] Bashar Asad was fully aware of these Syrian stakes over Lebanon. As early as 1997, he inherited the Lebanon file from Vice President Abd al Halim Khaddam and started making periodic visits to meet various top Lebanese officials.[285]

Immediately after Israeli unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon, the international pressure on Syria over Lebanon started to remount. That became one of the very first tests Bashar Asad faced only weeks before he stepped to power. Having announced in 1998, its readiness to withdraw from Lebanon in exchange for a secure border in line with the UN Security Council Resolution 425, Israel was responded by Syria that this (a secure border) was not guaranteed. Israel's intention of withdrawing came into being following Barak's government replacement of the office in Israel. Israeli forces with no pre-condition

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[282] "Restarting Israeli-Syrian Negotiations", *Crisis Group Middle East Report,* No.63, (April 2007), pp. 5

[283] Hinnebusch, "Defying the Hegemon: Syria and the Iraq War"

[284] El Hokayem, Emile, "Hizballah and Syria: Outgrowing the Proxy Relationship", *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol.30, No.2, Spring 2007, pp.42

[285] Eyal Zisser, *Asad's Legacy*, pp. 145

completed withdrawal on May 24, 2000. Israel nonetheless expressed its aspiration to see calm and tranquillity on its northern border and that the Lebanese government was fully responsible for its sovereign territory, and accountable for events taking place within its realm.[286] The Israeli move naturally led to the questioning of the other foreign military existence in the country. The pressure on Syria intensified.

This pressure was well reflected in the words Ehud Barak uttered after Israeli withdrawal; *From now on, government of Lebanon is accountable for what takes place within its territory, Lebanese and Syrian governments are responsible for preventing acts of terror or aggression against Israel, which is from today deployed within its borders".[287]*

Besides statements by the Israeli officials, an important component of this pressure was from within Lebanon. The growing willingness of the Lebanese to challenge Syrian hegemony openly started to undermine Syrian presence in the country. Lebanese journalists cracked the wall of silence and a public campaign of criticizing the existence of foreign (that is Syrian) forces had been given rise in the press. Starting from April 2001, thousands of university students throughout the country have participated in dozens of major protests against the Syrian occupation. Lebanese human rights groups have launched vibrant public campaigns on issues like the illegal detention of hundreds of Lebanese in Syrian prisons, a reality that was once untouchable.[288] In one of the public demonstrations against Syria in Beirut in August 2001, 150 members of the Christian oppositionists were arrested.[289] The demonstrations continued since the Syrian forces pulled out of the country in April 2005.

Groups of NGOs in the U.S. and elsewhere also urged U.S. foreign policy to take a bolder stance against Syrian existence in Lebanon. In one noteworthy study named as *"Ending Syria's Occupation in Lebanon: The U.S. Role"*, prepared by the Middle East Forum

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[286] Bentsur, Eytan, *Op-ed Article on Israel's Withdrawal From Lebanon,* Web site of Israeli MFA, 25 May 2000, accessed http://www.mfa.gov.il

[287] *Israel Completes Pull Out from Lebanon,* Web site of Israeli MFA, 24 May 2000

[288] Gambill, Gary C., "Is Syria Losing Control of Lebanon", *The Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2001, pp.41

[289] "Freedom in the World - Lebanon (2002)", *Freedom House*, 18 December 2001, http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/473c53d3c.html, accessed on June 26, 2011

Lebanon Study Group[290], put forth the reasons why the U.S. policy makers need to care about Lebanon, the strategic value of the country to the U.S. interests, costs of protracted Syrian invasion of Lebanon in the fields of economics, human rights and democracy and lastly policy proposals for the U.S. government. The report was signed by 32 prominent figures (mainly neoconservatives), including Jesse Helms, Republican chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at the time, Richard Perle, former assistant secretary of defence for International Security Policy and resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, Michael Rubin, fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy and lecturer at Yale University, Ziad Abdelnour, a New York-based international investment banker and financier and president of the United States Committee for a Free Lebanon, Elliott Abrams, former assistant secretary of state and president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center. The core of the policy proposals to the U.S. was laid as such; "A*ll U.S. actions taken on behalf of Lebanon must aim to salvage the country's precious U.S. freedoms and anchor its regained sovereignty. Ultimately, this can only be achieved when all foreign forces, especially the Syrian army and intelligence units, quit Lebanon."*

In line with the Israeli and international pressure coupled with the reaction from Lebanese people, a major assault to Damascus originated from the U.S.-France alliance that aimed to deprive Syria of its sphere of influence on its neighbour. The two allies co-sponsored attempts to undermine Syria's role in Lebanon. Their unprecedented use of international institutions, UN Security Council in particular, against Syria had been disturbing for Damascus. A number of resolutions were adopted by the Security Council in this period. Probably the most important of these was Resolution 1559 adopted on September 2, 2004 calling on Syria to withdraw from Lebanon and for the disarmament of Hezbollah. Pro-Syrian Lebanese government protested the Resolution labelling it as interference in its sovereign domestic affairs. Lebanese government further stated that it (Syrian presence in Lebanon) was a bilateral matter with no implications for international peace and security.[291]

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[290] Pipes, Daniel & Abdelnour, Ziad, "Ending Syria's Occupation in Lebanon: The U.S. Role", *Middle East Forum,* (May, 2000), http://www.meforum.org/research/lsg.php#, accessed on June 30, 2011

[291] Hinnebusch, *What Does Syria Want*, Presentation made at the Center for Naval Analysis and Forum du Futur, France,
http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/intrel/media/Hinnebusch%20CentNavAnal%20WhatSyriaWants.pdf, accessed June 20, 2011

The public pressure in Lebanon coupled with political pressure from the U.S. and elsewhere against Syrian military and intelligence presence did hardly matter to Syrian Government since September 11, 2001. September 11 attacks and the ensuing U.S. call to fight terrorism presented frictions between the U.S. and -interestingly- government of Lebanon. Right after 9/11 attacks, U.S. ambassador to Lebanon Vincent Battle spoke to Lebanese officials regarding the steps Lebanese government could take to satisfy Washington's call for anti-terrorism cooperation. The primary demand was to "seize terrorists, prosecute them and hand over or expel those who are wanted", a Lebanese government source later told Agence France Presse. Battle was apparently not impressed with the reaction of his hosts, thus he later publicly accused the Lebanese government of hosting terrorist organizations.[292]

National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice also made remarks on the issue. She told press that to survive economically, Lebanon needed to integrate into the international community which now depended on compliance to U.S. demands.[293]

The American pressure on Lebanon was of no avail. The Lebanese government would not start a battle against Hezbollah nor would it carelessly go against the will of its boss as explicitly as demanded by the U.S. officials.

The ensuing U.S. invasion of Iraq set a hard scene for Syria. The Syrian approach to the events unfolding at an incredible pace in its surroundings was not very welcoming. Though Syria took steps to contribute to U.S. effort to fight against terrorism and even if President Bush himself appreciated Syria for some positive positions[294], a bunch of neoconservatives together with Israeli officials perceiving of Syria as the most intransigent and extremist of the Arab states and of Israel's neighbours, raised the idea that Syria and Iran should also be dealt with following Iraq. Israeli PM Sharon said that the U.S. should disarm Syria. This line of thinking echoed also by the leading neoconservative Frank Gaffney in one of his articles in Washington Times in a style that

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[292] "Beirut Faces Problems in Answering U.S. Anti-terrorism Demands", *Agence France Presse,* 19 September 2001

[293] Hirst, *Beware Of Small States Lebanon Battleground Of The Middle East,* pp.294

[294] Harik, Judith Palmer, *Hezbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism,* (London, I.B. Tauris, 2007) pp.184

the U.S. should use whatever techniques are necessary -including military force- to effect behaviour and/or regime change in Damascus.[295]

4.2.1 Hariri and Getting Syria Out of Lebanon

As Bashar Asad assumed increasing responsibility for the Lebanon file over the course of 1998, he targeted groups that had long-standing ties with Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri. Bashar's pursuit of these targets also had the effect of undercutting Hariri, whose removal from power had become a Syrian objective besides Hariri's good relations with the "old guard" in Damascus.[296] As a result, Hariri was ousted and General Emile Lahoud was installed President and Selim al Hoss as the new prime minister to reform the country. The initial public support to Lahoud/Hoss administration was based on their fight against corruption policy. Yet when the investigations on corruption seemed to reveal connections to General Gazi Kanaan, the head of Syrian intelligence in Lebanon, Syria intervened the process and investigations halted which in turn markedly diminished public support. In 2000 elections, Hariri was re-elected in the midst of a severe economic crisis in the country.[297]

The idea of getting Syria out of Lebanon originally began to be spelled out in Lebanon in mid 1990s. The Maronite archbishop Nasrallah Sfeir spoke to an Arab channel in May 1997 where he stated that Syrian troops had been in Syria for too long and this was a benefit neither for Lebanon nor for Syria.[298]

Maronite pressure rendered ineffective till it was supported by Sunnis through Hariri. The idea particularly started to take root in early 2000s emanating from increasing Syrian interference in the country's internal affairs. U.S. reacted via Congress, as part of its conventional "against-Syria" role, took benefit of the situation and enacted the "Syrian Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Act" in 2003. This was a strongly worded Act which had a comprehensive scope covering almost any thorny issue between Syria and the U.S. particularly; Syrian existence in Lebanon and Syrian support to terrorism. The

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[295] Hirst, *Beware Of Small States Lebanon Battleground Of The Middle East,* pp.287.

[296] Leverett, Inheriting Syria, pp.100

[297] Gambill, Gary C. & Abdelnour, Ziad K., "Rafiq Hariri: Prime Minister of Lebanon", *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin,* Vol.3, No.7, July 2001

[298] "Chronology for Palestinians in Lebanon", *Minorities at Risk Project,* 2004, http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/469f38b42.html, accessed on June 28, 2011

Act was a remarkable sign of the U.S. policy in the making against Syria. Yet it should be noted that the Act, which was adopted in the wake of U.S. invasion of Iraq, was a product of Syrian-American tensions on Iraq rather than a pure evaluation of Syrian-Lebanese frictions or Lebanese people's expectations from the U.S.[299] Likewise, the Act without European support was not effective enough to disengage Asad from his path. The American pressure to enforce its policies with no real military backing and/or without wide international support would never work in Syria.[300]

The Syrian President's reaction on the other hand, to increasing demands from Lebanon, U.S. and elsewhere was made explicit in the words he used while defending his country's policies. In an interview to Italian daily Corriere Della Sera in February 2002, he said;

> *We don't build our relations with Lebanon on the basis of the military presence. The relation has much more important sides to it than this. But the military presence in Lebanon had something to do with the civil war that was taking place in the seventies. And this was upon the request, the official request from the Lebanese...Certainly, the presence is a temporary one, but I think the actual act of re-deployment is subject to a military factor and the conditions that influence this military element particularly the South of Lebanon and the Israeli situation. These steps are always done in direct coordination between the leaderships of the two armies.*[301]

In October 2004, speaking at the Syrian Expatriates Conference Bashar stressed that Syria and Lebanon were comparatively the most stable countries in the region despite all conditions; and that if they wanted to practice hegemony then why they had been withdrawing their forces in stages for the last five years.[302]

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[299] Hirst, *Beware Of Small States Lebanon Battleground Of The Middle East,* pp. 299-300

[300] Ross, Dennis, "U.S. Policy Toward a Weak Assad", *The Washington Quarterly,* Vol. 28, No.3, 2005, pp. 96.

[301] "Syria: Italian paper interviews Al-Asad on Iraq, Israel, other issues", *Corriere Della Sera,* 17 February 2002

[302] "Syrian leader blasts UN Lebanon ruling, says Iraq situation catastrophic", *Syrian TV*, 9 October 2004

Bashar Asad's tone was reflective of his growing concern regarding the situation inside Lebanon and the increasing international pressure as well which ultimately led to withdrawal of his army.

Towards the end of 2004, confrontations between Syrian Government and Hariri heightened when Emile Lahoud's six-year term of Presidency came to an end. The Syrians, despite the availability of pro-Damascus Maronite politicians, went for Lahoud again and pushed for a constitutional amendment which created a wave of protests against Syria headed by Hariri. Bashar made a mistake in assuming that he could handle the West and the Lebanese with a *fait accompli*. However Syria, having been accustomed to have its own way for almost fifteen years in the command of Lebanon, could not do so this time.[303]

The international community, led by the U.S. and France, denounced the attempt for the amendment and the Syrian interference in Lebanese affairs. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559 adopted on September 2, 2004, declared its support for a free and fair presidential election in Lebanon that would be conducted according to Lebanese constitutional rules without foreign interference or influence, called for the immediate withdrawal of all remaining foreign troops (Syrian) and the disarming of all militias (the largest of these being Hezbollah and certain armed Palestinian factions).[304] On the contrary, the next day (September 3), Lebanon parliament voted for 96 over 29 to amend the constitution so that Lahoud could stay on for three more years.

Prior to the constitutional amendment extending Lahoud's term was made, Hariri was summoned to Damascus on August 26 and had a very short meeting with Bashar Asad. This was a crucial meeting. There arose two narratives regarding what happened in the meeting. First narrative put forth by the Syrian Foreign Minister Shara and witness Rustum Ghazali that the meeting took place in a cordial atmosphere and Asad asked Hariri's opinion about extending Lahoud's term. The second narrative by witnesses Marwan Hamadeh, Ghazi Areedi, Walid Jumblatt, Jubran Tueni, Bassem Sabaa, Saad Hariri and a taped conversation between Rafik Hariri and Walid Muallem indicated that

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[303] Harris, William, "Crisis in the Levant: Lebanon at Risk", *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 2007, pp. 37

[304] "United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559 (2004)", adopted on 2 September 2004, http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2004/sc8181.doc.htm, accessed July 1, 2011

President Asad in a very direct and brutal style gave an ultimatum to Hariri and instructed him to go for Lahoud's extension or else he would make him pay the price.[305]

Hariri voted for the amendment and on October 20, he resigned as Prime Minister replaced by pro-Syrian Omar Karami. However a political opposition was being reformed by Maronite, Sunni and Druze populations risking Syria's status. In the months followed, Syria's Lebanese cronies launched a harsh campaign against Hariri, accusing him of corruption, bribery, and serving to imperialists' interests. Syrians were evidently under increasing international pressure and time constraint was also added to Syrians' anxiety as the parliamentary elections of May 2005 in Lebanon drew closer, in which a Hariri victory was assumed. It was also said by those at Syria's orbit that Hariri was aiding the increasingly vocal opposition and collaborating with international decision makers against Syrian military presence in the country.[306]

On February 14, 2005, Hariri's convoy was bombed killing him and 21 others. About a quarter of a million people, including opposition leaders and a host of international figures attended the funeral. Opposition groups supported by the furious public held protests which the authorities failed to prevent. Pressure from the Lebanese people to get swiftly to the bottom of the crime was colossal. The government's weak resolve and inability to provide a serious and satisfactory explanation or investigation rendered it vulnerable. The opposition groups took benefit of the situation and began to unite around calls for open demonstrations and increased pressure on the government to suspend the heads of the security services, allow a UN Security Council investigation, and hold legislative elections free of Syrian interference[307]. More importantly the opposition called for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all Syrian troops and intelligence operatives from Lebanon.[308]

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[305] "Report Of The International Independent Investigation Commission Established Pursuant To Security Council Resolution 1595 (2005)" (also known as "Mehlis Report"), paragraph 27, http://www.un.org/news/dh/docs/mehlisreport, accessed July 5, 2011

[306] Safa, Oussama, "Lebanon Springs Forward", *Journal of Democracy,* Vol. 17, No.1, January 2006, pp. 29-30

[307] "Record Protest Held in Beirut", BBC, 14 March 2005, (It was also reported that the protests was reported to be the biggest in Middle East history with roughly one million participants).

[308] Safa, op.cit., pp. 31

UN Security Council swiftly responded to Hariri's assassination and the Lebanese public demands. The resolution 1595 unanimously adopted by the Council decided to set up an investigation commission to assist the Lebanese authorities in their investigation and that the Commission should enjoy the full cooperation of the Lebanese authorities, including full access to all documentary, testimonial and physical information and evidence in their possession that the Commission deems relevant to the inquiry; should enjoy freedom of movement throughout the Lebanese territory, including access to all sites and facilities that the Commission deems relevant to the inquiry and be provided with the facilities necessary to perform its functions, and be granted, as well as its premises, staff and equipment, the privileges and immunities to which they are entitled under the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations.[309]

The resolution was demanding. The full indictment of the commission released as late as mid August 2011 put forth that Hezbollah was involved in the suicide.[310]

In the light of the findings and evidence collected, the UN Investigation Commission concluded that there was converging evidence pointing at both Lebanese and Syrian involvement in the terrorist act; that after having interviewed witnesses and suspects in the Syrian Arab Republic and establishing that many leads pointed directly towards Syrian security officials as being involved with the assassination, it was incumbent upon Syria to clarify a considerable part of the unresolved questions; and that Syrian authorities tried to mislead the investigation by giving false or inaccurate statements.[311] It is deductible from the reports issued and the reality on the ground that Syria seemed to have a share in this venture that drove the last nail in the coffin of Syrian presence in Lebanon.

The immediate U.S. reaction against the Hariri suicide was also harsh and accusing Syria directly (even if there were no explicit signs of Syrian responsibility at the time being). Right after Hariri's killing U.S. withdrew its ambassador from Damascus.

The Syrian military following Hariri's death withdrew from Lebanon. The American evaluation of Syria's situation after the assassination and UNSC Resolution 1559 and

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[309] "United Nations Security Council Resolution 1595 (2005)", adopted on 7 April 2005, http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2005/sc8353.doc.htm, accessed on July 1, 2011

[310] Bakri, Nada, "Indictment in Hariri Assassination Is Published", *New York Times*, 17 August 2011

[311] "Mehlis Report", para. 203-209

1595 was such that the country found itself in profound international pressure and as a result Syrian units stationed in Lebanon withdrew after almost 30 years. Sensing the country's international isolation, the Syrians strengthened their relations with Iran and radical Palestinians groups based in Damascus, and cracked down on any signs of internal dissent. During the July-August 2006 conflict in Lebanon between Israel and Hezbollah, Syria placed its military forces on alert but did not intervene directly on behalf of its Hezbollah ally.[312]

Besides international pressure on Syria, there were other effective factors involved, namely; Israel's withdrawal from South Lebanon in May 2000; the deterioration in relations between Damascus and Washington with the start of the war in Iraq in the spring of 2003; and the passing away of Hafiz Asad in June 2000.[313]

4.2.2 2006 July War

Hezbollah, created in 1982, had an ever growing role and influence on the Lebanese scene. It became a major linchpin of resistance against Israeli occupation of Lebanon. The party's leadership succeeded, thanks to Syrian and Iranian help, in creating a large network of institutions to answer the various social and humanitarian needs of the desperate population of Southern Lebanon. In early 2000s, Hezbollah turned into a strong political power with considerable military and social capabilities in its behest. Capitulating on its social base, on July 12, 2006 Hezbollah killed eight Israeli soldiers and kidnapped two. Israel launched a harsh retaliation.

There are several factors to explain the events that led to the summer 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, namely; the internal situation in Lebanon following the assassination of Hariri, the emergence of Iran as a major player following the U.S. war in Iraq, the U.S. administration's inability to implement the global war on terror mainly due to the uncontrollable situation in Iraq and Afghanistan.[314]

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[312] "Background Note: Syria", *U.S. Department of State,*
http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3580.htm, accessed on July 1, 2011

[313] Zisser, *Commanding Syria,* pp. 173

[314] Irani, George, "1975-2008:Pulling Lebanon Together", *European Institute of Mediterranean,* pp.16

In addition to those cited, one of the main factors that motivated Hezbollah to carry out raids that eventually provoked Israel into the battle again, was Syrian meddling. Syria has been regarded as an indirect actor in the Israel-Hezbollah in July 2006 war.[315] By giving rise to Hezbollah attacks, besides harming Israel, Syria, on the international scene aimed at signalling to the outsiders that its withdrawal from Lebanon did not lead to stability of South Lebanon and North Israel as well as the hard won stability of the Lebanese government. By unilaterally taking Lebanon into a conflict with Israel, Hezbollah sought to stage a coup d'état against the anti-Syrian and anti-Hezbollah parliamentary and government majority which opposes the group's military adventurism[316].

The obvious merge of interests between Syria and Hezbollah (and Iran as well) stood behind Hezbollah's attacks. It was mentioned by Steven Cook, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations that the conflict represented a way for Syria to reassert its insidious influence in Lebanon. Syria's forced withdrawal from Lebanon after nearly thirty years of occupation, the isolation of pro-Syrian Lebanese President Emile Lahoud, and the election of an anti-Syrian Lebanese parliament have all played a role to loosen Syria's grip on its smaller neighbour. But by supporting Hezbollah actions which would invite Israeli counter attack, Damascus had allowed Israel to destabilize Lebanon, which in turn allowed Syrian influence to grow again.[317]

Israeli officials failed to mention the said regional dynamics behind the crisis. The first statement made by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert explicitly put forth responsibility of the Lebanese government of which Hezbollah was a member. Tzipi Livni, Minister of Foreign Affairs, said that Hezbollah was a terrorist organization and a part of the Lebanese government; Lebanese government failed to dismantle Hezbollah from government which led to the crisis.[318]

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[315] Fletcher, Holy, "State Sponsor: Syria", *Council on Foreign Relations,* available at: http://www.cfr.org/syria/state-sponsor-syria/p9368#p4, accessed on July 15, 2011

[316] Young, Michael, "Israel's Invasion, Syria's War", *The New York Times,* 14 July 2006

[317] Pan, Esther, "Syria, Iran and the Middle East Conflict", *Council on Foreign Relations,* http://www.cfr.org/iran/syria-iran-mideast-conflict/p11122, accessed July 15, 2011

[318] "The Second Lebanon War", *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 12 July 2006, http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Modern+History/Israel+wars/Hizbullah+attack+in+northern+Israel+and+Israels+response+12-Jul-2006.htm, accessed July 9, 2011

This Israeli attitude that held Lebanese Government accountable for what happened nonetheless played into the hands of Syria. The Bush Administration was far better in reading out this regional power brokering. The Administration has repeatedly stated its unequivocal support for Israel during this time of crisis, and President Bush has charged that "the root cause of the problem is Hezbollah... And parts of those terrorist attacks are inspired by nation states, like Syria and Iran."[319] The ensuing international consensus on the need to intervene the ongoing situation in South Lebanon led to the Security Council Resolution 1701.

Unanimously adopted, Resolution 1701 emphasized the need for an end to violence and the need to urgently address the causes that have given rise to the crisis, including the unconditional release of the abducted Israeli soldiers. The text encouraged the efforts aimed at urgently settling the issue of the Lebanese prisoners detained in Israel. It also called for Israel and Lebanon to support a long-term solution based on, among others, full respect for the Blue Line by both parties; full implementation of the relevant provisions of the Taif Accords; no foreign forces in Lebanon without the consent of its Government; no sales or supply of arms and related material to Lebanon except as authorized by its Government; and provision to the United Nations of all remaining maps of landmines in Lebanon in Israel's possession.

The resolution welcomed the 7 August 2006 decision of the Lebanese Government to deploy 15,000 armed troops in Southern Lebanon, extended the term and mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) through the end of August 2007. In addition to carrying out its original mandate under Resolutions 425 and 426 (1978), UNIFIL would also monitor the cessation of hostilities; and extend its assistance to help ensure humanitarian access to civilian populations and the voluntary and safe return of displaced persons.

The resolution further stated that all States should take the necessary measures to prevent, by their nationals or from their territories or using their flag vessels or aircrafts, the sale or supply to any entity or individual in Lebanon of arms and related materiel of all types, including weapons and ammunition, military vehicles and equipment, paramilitary equipment, and spare parts for the aforementioned, whether or not originating in their

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[319] Omestad, Thomas, "An Impulse for Intrigue", *U.S. News and World Report,* 23 July 2006

territories; and the provision to any entity or individual in Lebanon of any technical training or assistance related to the provision, manufacture or maintenance.[320]

Mainly in line with Israeli demands, the Resolution straightforwardly labelled Syrian assistance to Hezbollah as undesired. President Bush, following the submission of Resolution 1701 warned Syria once more against resupplying Hezbollah.[321]

4.2.3 American-French Cooperation

An important factor created in the immediate wake of Hariri suicide that made a remarkable impact on Syria in the context of Lebanon was the emerging alliance on regional affairs between the U.S. and France. Despite the general belief that the U.S. and France (or European Union) were generally parties of a silent rivalry regarding Middle East affairs[322], Israeli withdrawal in 2000, September 11 attacks, Hariri suicide in 2005 and the Israel-Hezbollah war in 2006 had been cornerstones of an emerging alliance between the U.S. and France.

Following Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, there was a significant convergence of views between the two countries. In the wake of Israel's withdrawal from South Lebanon in May 2000, the United States and France (as well as the United Nations and most Western countries) explicitly stated that the Israeli withdrawal represented full compliance with UNSC Resolution 425. Both capitals also deemed that the Lebanese authorities had to act in accordance with their national interest.[323]

The tragic events of 9/11 have created a wave of support among the French people and government to the U.S. and its stated goal of fighting against terrorism. Chirac was the first leader to visit White House after the attacks. French made a tough contribution to the ensuing Afghanistan mission. France together with the U.S. spearheaded the efforts of

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[320] "United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006)", adopted on 11 August 2006, http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/sc8808.doc.htm, accessed July 21, 2011

[321] Rutenberg, Jim, "Bush Defends U.S. Handling of Lebanese Conflict, Asserting That Hezbollah Is the Loser", *The New York Times,* 15 August 2006

[322] Zank, Wolfgang, "Cooperation or Silent Rivalry, U.S. Policy and the European Union Neighbourhood Policy in the Mediterranean: The Case of Egypt", *Center for Comparative Integration Studies,* pp.1-2

[323] Baroudi, Sami & Salamney, Imad, "US-French Collaboration on Lebanon: How Syria's Role in Lebanon and the Middle East Contributed to a French-U.S. Convergence", *The Middle East Journal,* Vol. 65, No.3, (Summer, 2011), pp.401

passing the Resolution 1373 from the Security Council which called UN members to prevent and suppress financing of terrorist acts. During Bush's May 2002 visit to France, Chirac reiterated the need for concerted international efforts to combat international terrorism, noting that *"leaders from across the world must pay great attention to this issue, and be determined to eradicate terrorism."*[324]

Though French government as well as many others labelled U.S. invasion of Iraq as placed on shaky legal ground, following the invasion, Syrian conduct with Lebanon served a further unique opportunity for the U.S. and France to act in cooperation. The more accommodating French stance on Syria altered diversely in the face of Hariri's worsening situation in Lebanon vis-à-vis Syria. By 2004, both France and the U.S. had come to the conclusion that Syria was destabilizing Lebanon through protecting Hezbollah and providing it with political and military support; facilitating the flow of weapons and radical elements to the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, thus helping turn the latter into "secure inlands" of which the Lebanese authorities could not hinder; undermining the authority of Prime Minister Hariri who was perceived in the West as a pragmatic leader; and interfering with the constitutional process in Lebanon to ensure the renewal of the term of pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud.[325] The French-U.S. initiative led to the UNSC Resolution 1559. US-French coalition went on after Hariri assassination. One week after the assassination, Chirac met President Bush at Brussels. After the meeting, he highlighted the areas of agreement with the United States as the formation of an international investigation team for Hariri's killing, getting Syrian military and intelligence units out of Lebanon and holding June elections in Lebanon without Syrian intervention and subject to international monitoring. [326] As an immediate result of that meeting, on April 2005, UNSC Resolution 1595 was adopted. In April 26, 2005 Syria

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[324] "President Bush Meets with French President Chirac", *White House Archives*, 26 May 2002, available at: http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/05/20020526-2.html, accessed July 17, 2011

[325] Baroudi & Salamney, "US-French Collaboration on Lebanon", pp.400-403

[326] "Joint Statement by President Bush and President Chirac on Lebanon", *White House Archives,* 21 February 2005, http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2005/02/20050221-1.html, accessed July 17, 2011

formally notified to the United Nations that it had withdrawn all of its forces from Lebanon.[327]

The cooperation between two powers resulted in the adoption of more resolutions, namely; Resolution 1636 on October 2005, 1644 on December 2005 and 1686 on June 2006. These resolutions were mainly adopted to help Hariri Commission work in a better environment.[328]

Upon the demands of the newly founded Siniora Government in Lebanon, the U.S.-French coalition moved on once more to activate UNSC for adopting 3 consecutive Resolutions. Resolution 1680 which strongly encouraged the Government of Syria to respond positively to the request made by the Government of Lebanon to delineate their common border, especially in those areas where the border is uncertain or disputed and to establish full diplomatic relations and representation. Resolutions 1664 and 1686 were also important in providing additional impetus to the work of the Commission. France and the U.S. jointly kept their support to Siniora government and the March 14 coalition. On Prime Minister Siniora's April 18, 2006 visit to Washington, President Bush made this support explicit stating that the U.S. strongly supported a free, independent and sovereign Lebanon.[329] Bush was obviously referring to "a Lebanon free, independent and sovereign from Syria".

On the other hand, this international assistance to Lebanese government and to March 14 coalition exacerbated the internal divisions by releasing another round of mutual accusations among the conflicting parties. The Syrian backed groups in Beirut did not react very harshly nor attempted to topple the regime at first. The Israel-Hezbollah war of 2006 had been a cornerstone for the Syrian-backed opposition. The opposition declared Hezbollah (and thus themselves) to be the triumphant of the war and raised their voices. Yet, swift international reaction took shape in the form of UNSC Resolution 1701 in August 2006. The resolution due to French demands did not explicitly ask for the

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[327] "Syria's Withdrawal From Lebanon 'Historic Day' for Middle East, Special Envoy Terje Roed-Larsen Tells Security Council", *UN Press Release,*
http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2005/sc8372.doc.htm, accessed on July 21, 2011

[328] Texts of resolutions are available at http://daccessdds.un.org/

[329] "President Bush Welcomes Prime Minister Siniora of Lebanon to the White House", *White House Archives,* 18 April 2006, http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/04/20060418-2.html, accessed July 17, 2011

disarmament of Hezbollah which would be a task impossible for the fragile Lebanese government. The deployment of Lebanese army and strengthening of the UNIFIL as foreseen by the Resolution was developments against Hezbollah's will; yet weary of fighting to a strong army, the Party accepted resolution 1701. Siniora government managed a complicated crisis in the best way possible; but, a militarily wedged Hezbollah turned back to the Lebanese political arena with an unprecedented campaign to bring down the government. Backed strongly by Syria, Hezbollah formed the National Opposition with the participation of President Lahoud, Speaker of Parliament Berri and Aoun.[330]

The campaign had clearly resulted in the decline in the power of March 14 coalition and hence the impact of the U.S. (as well as that of France) lowered. In addition, President Bush's uncompromising attitude towards Bashar Asad and Syria further alienated the U.S. from domestic Lebanese politics. In late 2007, Bush told reporters that he had long lost his patience on Asad because he housed Hamas, facilitated Hezbollah, let suiciders go to Iraq and destabilized Lebanon[331]. In addition to that, in May 2008 the Siniora Government's attempt to shut down communication network of Hezbollah and relocate the Shiite chief of security at the Beirut airport triggered a military response from Hezbollah. Overnight Hezbollah took over the Sunni parts of Beirut. Thanks to initiatives by the Arab League and Qatar in particular, another civil war was prevented and protagonists of Lebanon was convened at Doha. The ensuing Doha agreement accepted by all parties stipulated that Michel Suleiman would be the President and the 1/3 plus 1 members of the new government to be formed would be selected from the opposition. The agreement was supported by the U.S. which actually lost a significant part of its leverage on Lebanon after the move of Hezbollah onto Beirut. May 2008 events proved Hezbollah's superiority. Cards were reshuffled once more as anti-Hezbollah groups tried to protect themselves from Hezbollah's growing power. Jumblatt, for instance, as a member of March 14 coalition acted to mend the fences with Hezbollah and Amal. Outsiders as well, particularly France, took notice of the situation on the ground, thus

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[330] Baroudi & Salamney, "US-French Collaboration on Lebanon", pp. 413-414

[331] "Bush Loses Patience with Syria", *BBC,* 20 December 2007

adapted themselves with a view to create more cordial relations with Lebanese opposition and Syria.[332]

U.S. under Bush Administration kept its hawkish stance against Lebanese opposition and Syria. Prior to his stepping down from Presidency, Bush issued notices of continuation of executive orders that restrict Syrian leaders financially and in terms of travelling. These orders labelled Syrian actions as an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy and economy of the U.S. Obama Administration on the other hand chose a more tolerant path toward Syria. After a couple of months Obama took office, in March 2009 it was alleged that two senior U.S. officials travelled to Damascus to find out commons with Syrian counterparts as part of the new administration's engagement policy.[333] Robert Ford was nominated U.S. Ambassador to Damascus in the following months, a post that was vacant since the assassination of Hariri in 2005[334]. Ford started his job in Damascus in January 2011 and following the latest domestic uprising in Syria, the Embassy was shut down in February 2012.[335]

4.3 THE PEACE PROCESS

Ehud Barak, former chief of staff of IDF, elected as Prime Minister in May 1999. Barak's election was seen as an opportunity for peace negotiations to resume. Expectations were high that he would be a leader like his close friend Rabin. In the election campaign and when he presented his government for approval in the Knesset, he suggested that the pursuit of peace would have a central place in his tenure. In June 1999, Barak and Asad exchanged compliments via media. Barak later on declared his interest in resuming

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[332] Baroudi & Salamney, "US-French Collaboration on Lebanon", pp. 417-418

[333] Schenker, David, "The Obama Administration Reaches Out to Syria: Implications for Israel", *Jerusalem Issue Briefs*,Vol. 8, No:23, March 2009

[334] MacAskill, Ewen, "U.S: Appoints first Ambassador to Damascus since 2005", *Guardian*, 17 February 2010

[335] "Information Note", *U.S. Embassy in Damascus*, http://damascus.usembassy.gov, accessed May 18, 2012

substantive talks with Damascus.[336] Barak's election was welcomed by both the U.S. and Syrian administrations.[337]

Following the formation of the new government in Israel, efforts concentrated to help Syrians and Israelis resume negotiations. President Clinton took diplomatic initiatives to that end. Barak visited Washington in July 1999 to talk regarding the resumption of peace negotiations. In the following days, President Clinton sent a letter to Asad, urging him to seize the moment of opportunity for peace negotiations with Israel.[338]

The main discussion prior to the negotiations was identifying "the point left off". The two sides had been unable to agree on the basis to start talking. Syria demanded from Barak government to express its allegiance to Rabin's deposit, namely; the commitment to withdraw to June 4, 1967 lines. Barak did not accept such commitment. While Syria delineated this as a base to restart negotiations, Israelis expected to hear from Syria on a host of other questions like water, Lebanon, terrorism, security arrangements, early warning system, the opening of borders and the setting up of embassies. As usual, it was upon the United States to bridge the gap between the parties. On November 5, 1999 the State Department spokesman James Rubin stated that; *"The U.S. only conveys, from one party to another, what we are authorized to convey. We don't commit further than we're authorized to commit; we don't commit less than we're authorized to commit."* Israel swiftly capitalized on Rubin's statement such that the U.S. position only confirmed what Prime Minister Barak had said on a number of occasions and Israel had never given any commitment to withdraw to this line or that line and that the territorial issue should be a part of negotiations, not a prerequisite to them.[339]

Throughout the process (from early July 1999 to December 1999) before parties agreed to resume negotiations, a number of unofficial and diplomatic missions took place to accommodate positions of Syrians and Israelis; one of which was carried out by Asad's

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[336] Reich, Bernard, "Israel's Quest for Peace", *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Vol.13, No.2, (Spring 2002), pp.75-80

[337] Kessler, Martha Neff, "Syria, Israel and the Middle East Peace Process: Past success and Final Challenges", *Middle East Policy,* Vol.7, No.2, pp. 69-70

[338] "Clinton Prods the Syrians", *The New York Times*, 27 July 1999

[339] Seale, Patrick, "The Syrian-Israeli Negotiations: Who is Telling The Truth?", *Journal of Palestine Studies,* Vol.29, No.2, Winter 2000, pp.65

biographer Patrick Seale, who carried messages back and forth between two neighbours.[340]

An important moment in U.S. efforts to arrange the resumption of talks was Clinton-Barak meeting in Istanbul at the margins of OSCE Summit in November 1999. Regarding the meeting, National Security Advisor of the President Samuel Berger told journalists that;

> *President Clinton and Prime Minister Barak spoke about both tracks of the peace process...I was once again impressed by the determination and seriousness of purpose of the Prime Minister...We continue to try to resume negotiations between the Syrians and Israelis...We will continue to do so (keep in contact with both sides) to find an avenue to get negotiations re-initiated between the two.[341]*

This meeting was followed by Secretary of State Albright's meeting with Asad in Damascus in early December. Finally President Clinton announced on December 9, 1999 that Syrian-Israeli negotiations were to resume where they left off and on the basis of all previous negotiations between Syria and Israel, and with the United States.[342]

An important milestone in the process that created an aura of goodwill and higher expectations from negotiations was the statement made by Prime Minister Barak at the Knesset just hours before negotiations. Though he refused allegiance to any commitment; he acknowledged that any peace deal with Syria would include a painful withdrawal and the changing of the existing border; the scope of which would depend on the depth of the peace and the quality of security arrangements. He also conceded that Israel had not erased any promises of the past made by Rabin, Peres, and Netanyahu.[343]

4.3.1 Washington Talks

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[340] Ibid, pp. 66

[341] "Press Briefing by National Security Advisor Samuel Berger", *White House Archives,* 17 November 1999, http://clinton6.nara.gov/1999/11/1999-11-17-briefing-by-nsa-sandy-berger-on-meeting-with-pm-barak.html, accessed July 21, 2011

[342] Perlez, Jane, "Israel and Syria to Reopen Talks, Clinton Reports", *The New York Times,* 9 December 1999

[343] Orme, William, "Israel Lawmakers Closely Approve Talks with Syria", *The New York Times,* 14 December 1999

The negotiations, involving Israeli Prime Minister Barak and Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Shara, were finally resumed in Washington D.C. on 15 –16 December 1999 and in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, from January 3-10, 2000.

Prior to first round of negotiations, a background briefing was held in the White House on December 14, by two senior officials (names were not mentioned) regarding the trilateral meeting. The officials mainly raised points such that this was the first meeting between parties at a political level which proved their determination; Syrian track and Palestinian track were not to be sacrificed at the expense of the other and the U.S. would not try to structure any one of those tracks artificially; the U.S. had a facilitating role in the process rather than a mediating one; there was no doubt that over the last few months each side had reached a level of some confidence about the direction of negotiations and the negotiations would start where they left off; there arose no demands of financial aid or peacekeeping force from any party for the time being and in case an aid is demanded from Syria it would depend its relation with the terrorist organizations.[344] The officials cleared U.S. position on negotiations and their statements actually referred to the immaturity of the incoming talks.

After the talks ended up, President Clinton made a statement on December 16, underlining the courageous and persevere attitude of both sides and said that we were witnessing a new beginning in a tough series of upcoming talks.[345] Later on the day, Secretary Albright answered journalists' questions with the same positive tone used by Clinton.[346]

Actually the U.S. officials very eagerly, even desperately, worked to succeed before Clinton's term ended in January 2001.[347] Yet it was pretty challenging to bring together two sides at such senior level after they did not talk to one another for almost 4 years.

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[344] "Background Briefing by Senior Officials on Syrian-Israeli Peace Talks", *White House Archives,* 14 December 1999, http://clinton6.nara.gov/1999/12/1999-12-14-background-briefing-on-israel-and-syria-meetings.html, accessed on July 24, 2011

[345] "Statement by the President", *White House Archives*, 16 December 1999, http://clinton6.nara.gov/1999/12/1999-12-16-statement-by-the-president-on-middle-east-peace.html, accessed on July 24, 2011

[346] "Press Briefing by the Secretary of State Madeleine Albright", *White House Archives,* 16 December 1999, accessed http://clinton6.nara.gov/1999/12/1999-12-16-press-briefing-by-madeleine-albright-on-middle-east-peace.html, accessed on July 24, 2011

[347] Rubin, *The Truth About Syria,* pp. 117.

Washington talks put forth a time frame and rules of negotiations on the substantive issues that had long divided two countries.[348] Hence the meeting was mainly built on testing the intent and solemnity of the other for both sides. Agreeing on the meeting at a second round of talks in January 3-10, 2000, both sides obviously considered the other as determinant and willing to go for a peace deal; and thus, the first round of talks in Washington could well be regarded as successful.

4.3.2 Shepherdstown Talks

The location chosen for the second convention was Shepherdstown, a venue about 40 minutes of drive from Washington.

Talks in Shepherdstown initially focused on sequence. Israel demanded that security should be addressed first while Syria insisted before all on talking about the conditions of Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. The negotiations stalled a couple of times because of procedural problems and what should come first. Upon failure of two sides on reaching a compromise, U.S. proposed to set up four technical committees to address simultaneously the main issues of contention: border/withdrawal, security arrangements, water, and normalization of relations. Although this arrangement saved the day, the question of priority arose again. Only the committees on normalization of relations and security arrangements ever met. The other two committees, border/withdrawal and water, did not convene because the Israelis wanted to know first the extent of Syria's willingness to agree to security arrangements, such as the scope of demilitarized zones and establishment of an early warning stations, before discussing Syria's demand for full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. From Syrian point of view, negotiating any other issue such as water rights, normalization of relations, and the nature of peace and future relations were pointless until they knew whether Israel was willing to fully withdraw from the entire Golan Heights. Therefore, the whole new process came to another deadlock.[349]

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[348] Soltaninejad, Ahmed, "The Syrian-Israeli Peace Process and the United States: From Hope to Impasse 1991-2000", *Faculteit Politieke Sociale Wetenschappen, Universiteit Gent,* June 2004, pp. 162.

[349] Soltaninejad, "The Syrian-Israeli Peace Process and the United States", pp. 163-164.

To keep sides around the table the U.S. prepared a draft peace treaty submitted to both sides. Office of the Press Secretary stated that;

> *During President Clinton's meeting with Prime Minister Barak and Foreign Minister Shara, he presented to the two delegations (on January 7) an American-drafted working document. This working document provides a summary of the issues to be decided and the differences between the parties. It is designed as a procedural tool to focus the substantive discussions and to help bridge the differences that now exist.*[350]

Even though the document was confidential, it was leaked to Haaretz on January 13, 2000. The draft peace agreement labelled also as "Clinton Plan" included Syrian and Israeli proposal as well as the issues already accepted. Many issues like the determination of boundaries, establishment of security arrangements and sharing of water were referred to be elaborated in an Annex[351] attached to the draft agreement. Yet some points on which both parties allegedly agreed were as follows[352];

- Establishing full diplomatic and consular relations, including the exchange of resident ambassadors,

- Early warning capabilities, including an early warning ground station on Mt. Hermon (details of which was determined in the Annex),

- Commitment to refrain from cooperating with any third party in a hostile alliance of a military character and to ensure that territory under its control was not to be used by any military force of a third party (including their equipment and armaments) in circumstances that would adversely affect the security of the other Party;

- Commitment to refrain from organizing, instigating, inciting, assisting or participating in any acts or threats of violence against the other Party, its citizens or their property

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[350] "Statement By the Press Secretary", *White House Archives*, 7 January 2000, http://clinton6.nara.gov/2000/01/2000-01-07-statement-by-the-press-secretary.html, accessed on July 25, 2011

[351] The Annex probably had never been written down and was subject to more negotiation. However in case an Annex existed, it had not been accessible through open resources.

[352] Kurtzer, Daniel C. & Lasensky, Scott B., "Negotiating Arab-Israeli Peace: American Leadership in the Middle East", *United States Institute of Peace,* 2008, pp. 139-145

wherever located, and to take effective measures to ensure that no such acts occur from, or are supported by individuals on, its territory or territory under its control; in this regard, without prejudice to the basic rights of freedom of expression and association,

- Commitment to take necessary and effective measures to prevent the entry, presence and operation in its territory of any group or organization, and their infrastructure, which threatened the security of the other Party by the use of, or incitement to the use of, violent means,

- Recognition of mutuality of interest in honourable and good neighbourly relations based on mutual respect and for this purpose will promote beneficial bilateral economic and trade relations including by enabling the free and unimpeded flow of people, goods and services between the two countries;

- Removing all discriminatory barriers to normal economic relations, terminate economic boycotts directed at the other Party,

- Repealing all discriminatory legislation, and cooperate in terminating boycotts against either Party by third parties; promoting relations between them in the sphere of transportation and in this regard, opening and maintaining roads and international border crossings between the two countries, cooperating in the development of rail links, granting normal access to its ports for vessels and cargoes of the other or vessels or cargoes destined for or coming from that Party, and entering into normal civil aviation relations; establishing normal postal, telephone, telex, data facsimile, wireless and cable communications and television relay services by cable, radio and satellite between them on a non-discriminatory basis in accordance with relevant international conventions and regulations; promoting cooperation in the field of tourism in order to facilitate and encourage mutual tourism and tourism from third countries.

The amount of work was still a lot. However just by looking at the points two belligerent parties agreed on, one could talk about the existence of a serious reason to keep negotiations alive. On the other hand it is also deductible from what two sides accepted that Syria had been the main side that gave some concessions particularly with respect to its adopted position in talks along 1990s. Throughout 1990s negotiations Syria refused the creation of diplomatic ties and was keen not to integrate with Israel economically since Israeli economy was much greater and could harm Syrian business-holders. In

addition, in 1990s there were no reports openly indicating Syrian acquiescence to refrain from collaborating with a third party against the other; that is Palestinian factions based in Damascus and also Hezbollah of Lebanon. Hence the document generally was more favourable to Israel since Syria agreed to normalize its relations with Israel to a large extent while the latter did not commit to withdraw fully from the occupied territories. Syria also significantly changed its previous position on security issues, allowing early warning stations to be established on Mt. Hermon.[353]

Most important of all, the document revealed Israeli success in delaying discussion of borders (and talking first on security and other aspects of bilateral relations) and winning concessions on normal relations and an early-warning station. Corollary to this, the leakage of draft peace agreement did not help the negotiations; it rather torpedoed the process due to Syrian anger over this leak (which was presented in the Arab World and elsewhere that Syria was giving big concessions).[354]

Syrian media announced on January 16, 2000 that for the talks to resume Israel needed to make its withdrawal from the Golan Heights to the June 4 line the first order of business. A statement followed by Secretary Albright indicated that the approaches of two sides to the next round differed and as a result there was going to be a delay.[355] Talks scheduled to resume on January 19, 2000 were "postponed indefinitely."

According to U.S. sources, a breakthrough was pretty close in Shepherdstown. At a point, the Syrians agreed that Israel would retain a 10 meter wide strip around Lake Tiberias and later even a 50 meter-wide strip provided the June 4, 1967 line should be the basis for negotiations. Barak declined and the talks were suspended by Syria.[356]

4.3.3 Geneva Meeting

President Clinton met President Asad in Geneva on March 26, 2000. In that last effort to save the peace process between two officially belligerent neighbours, Clinton presented Asad with a proposal on behalf of Prime Minister Barak, based on the latter's readiness in

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[353] Soltaninejad, "The Syrian-Israeli Peace Process and the United States", pp. 166

[354] Migdalovitz, Carol, *The Middle East Peace Talks*, Report of the Congressional Research Service, 18 May 2006, pp. 11

[355] Perlez, Jane, "Israel and Syria Postponing Talks", *The U.S. Reports,* 18 January 2000

[356] Clinton, Bill, *My Life*, (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), pp.884-886

principle to accept the June 4 line as the future border between Israel and Syria with the sole exception that sovereignty of the entire north-eastern shore of Sea of Galilee would retain to Israel[357] plus a 400 meter wide strip on the coast as compared to the 10 meter wide strip of the international boundary (of 1923). Clinton probably thought that this offer could have been worth considering for Syrians since in Shepherdstown talks Syrians agreed to a 50 meter wide strip around Sea of Galilee to be retained by Israel provided that June 4 line should be the basis for negotiations.[358]

Israeli Prime Minister, on his part probably evaluated as a red line that Israeli presence on the shore of Galilee should have been secured and Syria's return to the shore which would grant it littoral rights in accordance with the international law should have been prevented. Barak may have also thought about having more room to manoeuvre on the border issue. One further possibility to explain Barak's action could be that he believed Asad's adherence to June 4 line was a matter of prestige and that accepting the line in principle could encourage Asad to take a more tolerant position on its actual demarcation.[359]

Hoping to find some flexibility in the attitudes of two sides and get them back to negotiating, U.S. team this time worked hard on Israel to take the aforementioned proposal. Defining Barak's proposal as a "respectable offer", President Clinton expected from Syrians same flexibility they had shown in Shepherdstown. However the meeting he had with Asad was a full stop to the peace process. As Clinton worded down in his autobiography;

> *It was a small meeting: ...After some pleasant small talk, I asked Dennis to spread out the maps I had studied carefully in preparing for our talks. Compared with his stated position at Shepherdstown, Barak was now willing to accept less land around the lake, though he still wanted a lot, 400 meters; fewer people at the listening station; and a quicker withdrawal period. Asad*

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[357] Lancater, John, "Galilee Issue Stalled Talks with Syrian, Assad Wants Border at Shoreline", *The Washington Post,* 29 March 2000

[358] Maoz, Moshe, *Can Israel and Syria Reach Peace: Obstacles, Lessons and Prospects*, (Houston, Rice University, March 2005, pp.19

[359] Zisser, Eyal, "The Israel-Syria Negotiations: What Went Wrong?", *Orient,* Vol. 42, No. 2, 2001, pp. 237-238

didn't want me even to finish the presentation. He became agitated and, contradicting the Syrian position at Shepherdstown, said that he would never cede any of the land, which he wanted to be able to sit on the shore of the lake and put his feet in the water. We tried for two hours to get some traction with the Syrians, all to no avail. The Israeli rebuff in Shepherdstown and the leak of the working document in the Israeli press had embarrassed Assad and destroyed his fragile trust. And his health had deteriorated even more than I knew. Barak had made a respectable offer. If it had come at Shepherdstown, an agreement might have emerged. Now, Asad's first priority was his son's succession, and he had obviously decided that a new round of negotiations, no matter how it came out, could put that at risk. In less than four years, I had seen the prospects of peace between Israel and Syria dashed three times: by terror in Israel and Peres's defeat in 1996, by the Israeli rebuff of Syrian overtures at Shepherdstown, and by Assad's preoccupation with his own mortality. After we parted in Geneva, I never saw Assad again.[360]

Barak on the other hand stated in an interview to Haaretz;

We had reason to think that the Syrians understood that Israeli sovereignty over the waters included a strip of ten or thirty or seventy meters. However, at the meeting in Geneva it became clear that Asad was not prepared to accept even that. Clinton told me that already at the beginning of the meeting he had told Asad that Israel expected to control the shore, and Asad immediately reacted sharply. In other words Syrians were not prepared for this. Clinton then said to Shara "Listen we understood differently" and Shara stammered.[361]

Barak refused to go back on his initial commitment to Syria and the U.S. regarding the June 4 line probably due to negative public opinion in Israel. Neither Barak nor Asad

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[360] Clinton, *My Life*, pp.831-832

[361] "Interview with Ehud Barak", *Haaretz*, 19 May 2000, cited from Zisser, "Israeli-Syrian Peace Negotiations: A Missed Opportunity? The Middle East Peace Process, Vision versus Reality", in (eds.) Joseph Ginat, Edward Perkins & Edwin Corr, (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), pp.236

accepted a compromise proposal presented by Patrick Seale in April 2000 that foresaw Syrian access for swimming and fishing to the Sea and the area as a joint tourism location for Syrians, Israelis and foreigners under UN security supervision.[362]

Following the Clinton-Asad meeting in Geneva, the White House Press Secretary, Joe Lockhart announced that it was impossible to predict when those talks might resume since significant differences remained and from the position of the United States... it was not worthwhile to have meetings for meetings' sake.[363]

Two days later, in Clinton's first public comment on the process after the meeting, he said *"The ball is in his (Asad's) court now."*[364] Within the same day, Barak declared that Asad removed his mask and not ready to make the sort of decisions necessary for peace[365].

These statements effectively gave an end to the peace talks of late 1999-early 2000 between Syria and Israel.

4.3.4 Psychological Factor

Public opinion constituted to be an important factor deeply influencing the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations throughout 1990s and in 2000. In the democratic state of Israel, any leader would need a majority support for a peace agreement with the "fierce" Syrian enemy, by convincing this majority that Syria had changed and no longer posed a threat to Israel. That was probably the reason Barak before engaging into talks with Syria publicly promised to put any peace deal with Syria on a referendum.[366]

Obviously Barak made ups and downs in the process reflecting his obsession with the opinion polls. Clinton also pointed to that as such;

> *The Syrians came to Shepherdstown in a positive and flexible frame of mind,*
> *eager to make an agreement. By contrast, Barak, who had pushed hard for*

[362] Zisser, "The Israel-Syria Negotiations: What Went Wrong", pp.239

[363] "Press Briefing by Joe Lockhart", *White House Archives,* 26 March 2000, http://clinton6.nara.gov/2000/03/2000-03-26-press-briefing-by-joe-lockhart.html, accessed on July 26, 2011

[364] Perlez, Jane, "Clinton Says Next Move for Peace is Asad's", *The New York Times*, 29 March 2000

[365] Harman, Danna, "Barak: Asad Not Ready for Peace", *Jerusalem Post,* 28 March 2000

[366] Maoz, *Can Israel and Syria Reach Peace,* pp.22

the talks, decided, apparently on the basis of polling data, that he needed to slow-walk the process for a few days in order to convince the Israeli public that he was being a tough negotiator. He wanted to use my good relationship with Shara and Assad to keep the Syrians happy while he said as little as possible during his self-imposed waiting period. I was, to put it mildly, disappointed. If Barak had dealt with the Syrians before or if he had given U.S. some advance notice, it might have been manageable... Barak had not been in politics long and I thought he had gotten some very bad advice. In foreign affairs, polls are often useless; people hire leaders to win for them, and it's the results that matter...As hard as I tried, I couldn't change Barak's mind...[By the fifth day of the summit] Barak had still not authorized anyone on his team to accept June 4, no matter what the Syrians offered.[367]

Barak's dilemma was also valid for Asad, though in a less painful way. In authoritarian Syria, a leader like Hafez Asad would prefer not to risk his legitimacy by making peace with the Israeli "foe" without achieving a national-strategic gain after years of feeding the hatred against Israel. This kind of barrier, particularly on the Syrian side, cannot be abolished over a short time, as Asad himself admitted in 1974: *"The Syrian difficulty is that people who have been nurtured over twenty-six years on hatred [towards Israel] cannot be swayed overnight by changing our course."[368]*

4.3.5 Overall Evaluation of Peace Process in 1999-2000

The failure of the attempt to attain an Israeli–Syrian peace agreement at the start of 2000 marked the end of the Israeli–Syrian talks that were conducted during the 1990s. Although both sides had reached to a certain threshold, they could not finalize their action with the intended goal. It became evident after talks that their effort was still not ripe enough to conclude the process.

The failure of the parties to solve the border issue seemed to be at the centre. Facing continued domestic resistance to Israeli withdrawal from the Golan and contemplating an agreement with the Palestinians that would require extensive withdrawal from the West

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[367] Clinton, *My Life,* pp.886-887

[368] Maoz, *Can Israel and Syria Reach Peace,* pp.22

Bank and Gaza, Barak was obviously unwilling to risk putting both issues simultaneously, to the test of a national referendum.[369]

Yet, it would not be a sound analysis to attribute this failure to differences of opinion over the future border line, i.e. their inability to resolve the conflict over several hundred meters along the north-eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. If that would be the case, one could reasonably predict that both countries would sooner or later work to bridge this gap. However, this approach could not face what the failure of the talks revealed: an absence of readiness in both parties to pay the price for peace. The Syrians refused to adopt a "peace policy," refrained from displaying a cordial message of peace to the Israeli public which was necessary for the Israeli government to keep up with the process. The Israeli government on the other hand, avoided responding to Syrians' demand for a full withdrawal to the June 4 line apparently because of public opposition to that. Such a withdrawal would mean the return of the Syrians to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.[370]

The American mediation could as well be criticized since the huge gap between the sides filled with mistrust accumulated throughout years of conflict on many issues could not have been bridged with a modest good-offices or facilitation effort. That partially depended on Israel's unwillingness to accept a dominant global power into the process which could drew the negotiations to an undesired point for Israel. Aiming to secure a looser U.S. engagement into the process, Barak publicly criticized the U.S. for becoming too involved (regarding talks with Palestinians) acting as judge and arbitrator. Clinton restated that the U.S. sought only to help parties reach agreement, not to impose its views. Yet, an important factor that led to a moderate U.S. position in talks could well be found in President Clinton's character. To many, Clinton had a charismatic, intelligent person who could impress his visitors and easily gain their support. This ability to reach out to people was clearly an advantage for Clinton while also his inability to take firm stands with either party, especially the politically potent Israelis. Clinton would find it hard at times he needed to intervene to draw a firm line.[371]

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[369] Slater, Jerome, "Lost Opportunities for Peace in the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Israel and Syria, 1948-2001", *International Security,* Vol.27, No.1, pp.99

[370] Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, pp. 149

[371] Quandt, William B., "Clinton and The Arab-Israeli Conflict: The Limits of Incrementalism", *Journal of Palestine Studies,* Vol.30, No.2, pp. 37

4.3.6 After Hafez Asad

Hafez Asad could not manage to sign a peace agreement with Israel in his lifetime. Yet starting from mid 2000s, events like; Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon, the outbreak of the second intifada in Palestine, Sharon's election as Prime Minister in Israel and George W. Bush's election in the U.S. that led to a neo-con era in U.S. politics and the U.S. invasion of Iraq unfolded very rapidly that gave a break to peace process in the Middle East. Obviously Bashar Asad, as the new ruler of Syria who first needed to consolidate his power inside the country, took a time out. A new momentum on the peace process had to wait since Bashar totally secured his position in the country.[372]

4.3.7 George W. Bush and the Peace Process

The election of George W. Bush as the U.S. President had its reflections on the Middle East and Syria as well. The 9/11 attacks only eight months after his election became a central focus for the Bush Administration. The administration in response to the attacks identified a need for an activist, pre-emptive policy "defending the United States, the American people, and American interests at home and abroad" by identifying and destroying the threat before it reaches its borders. In pursuit of its foreign policy goals, the administration has attempted a dramatic reshaping of the vision of the Middle East. References to the "new" or "greater" Middle East now include countries far outside the traditional lines of the region, including those in West Africa, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia. The administration argued that this region is defined not by cultural or religious characteristics but by a lack of democracy; hence a grand strategy is needed to execute reform.[373]

The immediate impact of this line of thinking reflected itself in the increasing cooperation among security services, ousting of Taliban in Afghanistan and the occupation of Iraq.

Iraq war created a vacuum of power in the region that led to a Turkish and Iranian effort to fill it. The post-Iraq war policies of the U.S. in the region deepened this vacuum while the Bush Administration failed to reach its aims of introducing democracy in the region.

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[372] Miller, Reuben, "The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations", *Mediterranean Quarterly,* Vol.11, No.4, pp. 135

[373] Stewart, Dona, "The Greater Middle East and Reform in the Bush Administration's Ideological Imagination", *Geographical Review,* Vol.95, No.3, (July, 2005), pp.400

As the focus of American attention shifted, both tracks of the peace process were left unattended. The new regional geopolitics brought hardships for Syria as well. Syria, while being isolated and threatened by the Bush Administration on the one side, and experiencing a difficult domestic transition under Bashar Assad on the other, sought to improve relations with Turkey after 2000. That was significant for Syria since stronger links to Turkey presented a viable way out from its sole dependence on Iran and an opening to reach out to the West. Turkey's good relations with Syria, along with its cordial cooperation with Israel immediately gave rise to the idea of Turkish facilitator role in settling Israeli-Syrian conflict.[374]

4.3.8 Turkey's Facilitator Role

Bashar Asad paid an official visit to Ankara where he asked PM Erdoğan whether Turkey wish to be a mediator between Syria and Israel in 2004. The message, carried to then Undersecretary of Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs Alon Liel by the Turkish Ambassador in Tel Aviv, refused by the Israeli side. The negative response was attributed by some to the U.S. policy of isolating Syria. Turkey was willing to start a process between the two sides however terminated its efforts in September 2004 due to Israeli unwillingness to the process. Between September 2004-July 2006 Alon Liel and American businessman of Syrian descent Ibrahim Suleyman met via Swiss mediation eight times with the condition that no document would be signed at the end referring to the unofficial nature of the talks. The problem, according to Suleyman was Israeli reservation to carry out the process to the official level. Suleyman believed that the American pressure on Israel was accountable not to start a peace process.[375]

After the fall of Swiss effort, the communication between Syria and Israel via Turkey took again its centrality in the process. Turkey's initiatives that started as early as 2004 did not bear fruit till 2008 (probably due to continuing American pressure). Four rounds of indirect talks were conducted in Istanbul in 2008. Turkey actively sought for bridging

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[374] Altunışık, Meliha & Çuhadar, Esra, "Turkey's Search for a Third Party Role in Arab–Israeli Conflicts: A Neutral Facilitator or a Principal Power Mediator?", *Mediterranean Politics,* Vol.15, No.3, (2010), pp. 373-375

[375] Süer, Berna, "Suriye-İsrail Barış Görüşmeleri: Olgunlaşma Teorisi Perspektifinden Bir Analiz", *Ortadoğu Etütleri,* Cilt 3, No.2, (Ocak 2012), ORSAM, pp.246

the gap between the parties including presenting offers to each side and lobbying in the U.S. and the EU.[376]

On April 17, 2008, Prime Minister Olmert confirmed that the two sides had been in contact and, on April 24, President Bashar Asad revealed in an interview to Qatari daily Al Watan that PM Erdoğan had informed him about Israel's reported readiness for a full withdrawal from the Golan Heights in return for a peace agreement. Asad added that Turkish mediation had intensified after the aggression against Lebanon in 2006 (Israel-Hezbollah war of 2006). Asad stressed that there would be no direct negotiations, only those through Turkey, direct talks would require a U.S. sponsor and that Syria might discuss with the next U.S. administration because this one has no vision or a will for the peace process.[377]

On May 21, Israel, Syria, and Turkey simultaneously announced that Israel and Syria had indeed launched peace talks mediated by Turkey. The aim was to reach "common ground" in the framework of principles of Madrid Conference on issues between the two parties (relating to issues of withdrawal, security arrangements, water, and normal peaceful relations). [378]

Bush Administration paid lip service in a move to reveal its support to this initiative in contrast to rooted U.S. policy of actively encouraging Israel and Arab parties for a peace. U.S. State Department deputy spokesman Tom Casey has said that neither party has formally requested the United States to become directly involved; *"If Syria and Israel came to us, we would certainly consider the request."* In an interview, Syrian ambassador to Washington, Imad Moustapha, said Damascus believed the U.S. was the only country that could realistically deliver a peace deal between the two countries and that Israel's trust in the U.S. would make Washington central to actually implementing any peace agreement. Mr. Moustapha added that peace between Syria and Israel could be achieved, but it required full U.S. commitment and Syria was genuine in its desire to have the best relationship with Washington. U.S. reluctance fuelled criticism in both Washington and Jerusalem that the Bush Administration's hard line on Syria was undercutting Israel while

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[376] Altunışık & Çuhadar, "Turkey's Search for a Third Party Role in Arab–Israeli Conflicts", pp.381

[377] "Syrian President Confirms Turkey's Mediation between Syria and Israel", *BBC*, 24 April 2008

[378] "Israel-Syria Confirm Peace Talks", BBC, 21 May 2008

ceding leadership in the Middle East to a third country which is currently brokering the dialogue. Daniel Levy, a former Israeli peace negotiator based at New America Foundation in Washington said that; *"It is not unusual for an American administration to avoid urging reluctant parties into peace negotiations, but it's unprecedented for the U.S. not to get behind and encourage a peace negotiation once it's been launched."* U.S. officials said the Bush Administration placed a priority on supporting Palestinian-Israeli peace talks in a bid to reach a comprehensive agreement before President Bush left the office in January. They added that they considered the Israel-Syria track as too undeveloped to embrace aggressively. [379]

The initiative obviously appeared contrary to the Bush Administration's policy of isolating Syria. However it would not be easy to publicly refuse a peace attempt which led Secretary Rice to state later on; *"We would welcome any steps that might lead to a comprehensive peace in the Middle East ... We are working very hard on the Palestinian track. It doesn't mean that the U.S. would not support other tracks."*

White House spokeswoman Dana Perino also elaborated that;

> *What we hope is that this is a forum to address various concerns that we all share about Syria—the United States, Israel, and many others—in regard to Syria's support for Hamas and Hezbollah (and) the training and funding of terrorists that belong to these organizations ... We believe it could help U.S. to further isolate Iran...*

On June 5, Secretary Rice, following a meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs Ali Babacan in Washington, thanked Turkey for sponsoring the indirect talks.[380]

On September 4, President Asad disclosed at a meeting with Turkish PM Erdoğan, French President Sarkozy and Qatari PM Al-Thani in Damascus that his representatives had transmitted proposals or principles for peace to serve as a basis for direct talks with Israel to Turkish mediators, but would wait for Israel's response before holding direct talks. He repeated that direct talks also await a new U.S. Administration and stressed that *"Syria has no interest in relinquishing its ties with Hezbollah."* He added that future

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[379] Solomon, Jay, "Syria Seeks U.S. Role in Talks", *The Wall Street Journal,* 31 May 2008

[380] Migdalovitz, Carol, *Israeli-Arab Negotiations: Background, Conflicts, and U.S. Policy*, Report of the Congressional Research Service, 29 January 2000, pp.40

negotiations depend on the next Israeli prime minister's commitment to pursuing peace. A fifth round of indirect talks was postponed ostensibly due to the resignation of Olmert's chief of staff who was negotiator with Syria. The Turkish government announced that Israel had requested a delay due to technical and legal problems.[381]

It has also been a debate within Israeli institutions whether Syria was serious about its intention of concluding a peace with Israel. Ma'ariv reported that the Israeli intelligence community had been busy trying to ascertain whether the Syrians were serious about their peace declarations or merely interested in the talks as part of their attempt to improve their international status while having no real intention to reach an agreement with Israel. According to one view, promoted by Mossad head Me'ir Dagan, the Syrians did not truly intend to make a peace agreement. The IDF Intelligence Branch, however, had a different approach. Over a lengthy period of time, there were disputes on this issue within the IDF intelligence officers. Nevertheless, ahead of 2009, the view that was gaining strength was that there were real chances of attaining true peace with Syria. According to the dominant approach (which was also taking into account the increasing impact of Jihadist groups in Syria that was setting a challenge for the regime), the Syrians would be willing to sign a peace accord, but they would most likely refuse to sign it unless the return to the 1967 lines is guaranteed (a precondition on which father Asad insisted in the past) and unless an "American umbrella" for the agreement was guaranteed and granted generous economic aid. Moreover the analysts asserted that Syria would be willing to cool down its relations with Iran as the price of an accord.[382]

However, following the Israeli operation "Cast Lead" against Hamas, Turkey officially ended its efforts to mediate talks which were already under suspension due to Israel's domestic political turmoil and national election on February 10, 2009.

President Bashar Asad told to a visiting U.S. congressional delegation in early 2009 that Syria was willing to resume indirect talks with Israel through U.S. mediation, based on common interests and mutual respect. A group of academics from the U.S., also hosted by Asad, concluded that continued importance of America to Syria was obvious and as

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[381] Keinon, Herb, "Frustrated Israel watches Syria Break Out of Isolation", *Jerusalem Post,* 5 September 2008

[382] Israeli military intelligence estimates Syrian peace intentions serious, BBC Worldwide Monitoring, released 24 October 2008

much as Asad liked to emphasize the part Turkey had played in the indirect talks and his own strong relationship with Istanbul, he did not see that channel as replacing the American role.[383]

Turkish officials, on some occasions, stated willingness to restart the negotiations under Turkish auspices.[384] Yet these efforts did not help bring two sides get together.

4.3.9 Evaluation of Turkish Facilitation/Mediation Effort

It is hard to find a definition for Turkey's drive for engaging parties with a view to create peace. It could be read as "facilitative mediation", in which Turkey refrained from pressuring sides and relied on its impartiality. Turkey lacked enormous hard power instruments in which it could have reinforced its mediation as neutral power mediation.[385]

Besides theoretical framework of defining Turkey's initiative to settle problems between Israel and Syria, there were practical challenges on the ground for Turkey that emerged in commencing the process, maintaining the process and when the talks halted resuming the process. Some significant challenges could be enlisted as the Bush Administration's policy of isolating and punishing Syria mainly due to its actions regarding Iraq; parties', especially Israel's, hesitancy to accept a greater role for Turkey in the region (and the questions of whether Turkey would be an honest broker or would only pursue its own interests); expectations (particularly that of Syria) in the upcoming elections in the U.S. of a Democrat Administration which could lead the process more effectively including financial support.[386]

Yet, in the overall picture, Turkey's initiative could be regarded as an effort to help create a prospect for peace in the region. The uniqueness of this initiative derives from its place of origin since that was the first regional urge to help settle Israeli-Syrian dispute.

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[383] Krieger, Hilary Leila, "Asad Ready to Resume Indirect Talks", *The Jerusalem Post,* 1 February 2009

[384] Croft, Adrian, "Turkey Offers to Resume Israel-Syria Mediation", *Reuters,* 29 January 2010

[385] Altunışık & Çuhadar, "Turkey's Search for a Third Party Role in Arab–Israeli Conflicts", pp. 379

[386] Ibid, pp.378

4.4 ROGUE STATE ATTRIBUTES

Throughout the first decade of 2000s, most decisive factor leading to the decline of US-Syrian relations, was obviously the rise of Bush Administration and the "neo-con" circles who had been advocating the use of hard power options against rogue states and state sponsors of terrorism.

An early neo-con work was a report named as *Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm*[387] plainly set forth the neo-con perception toward Syria. Released in 1996 and prepared by prominent neo-cons, including Richard Perle, James Colbert, Charles Fairbanks, Jr., Douglas Feith, Robert Loewenberg, David Wurmser and Meyrav Wurmser, the report was submitted to Israeli government as a policy proposal. It offered some unusual proposals to the new Netanyahu government, the first of which was to terminate the "peace for land" approach and gave rise to security measures. Policy options regarding Syria the report exposed included striking Syria's illegal financing in Lebanon (over drugs dealing), creating a parallel Israeli proxy that would attack Syrian soil from Lebanon to reveal that Syrian territory is not immune from attacks, striking Syrian military targets in Lebanon and in case this proved insufficient, targets in Syria as well, and moving to contain Syria by drawing the attention to its weapons of mass destruction program. Another aim set in the report was the necessity to broaden the base of support in the U.S. Congress on missile defence issues.[388]

As an exemplary case of neo-con pressure on Syria, Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security John Bolton during a hearing before the House International Relations Committee, talked about U.S. concerns of Syrian weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program. Bolton repeated charges that Syria was developing nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons; he accused Damascus of possessing one of the most advanced Arab state chemical weapons capabilities (with no reference to the fact that chemical stock of Syria was purely reflecting the defensive deterrent of the country against Israel) and continuing to develop an offensive biological weapons capability. He

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[387] Report was prepared by The Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies in 1996. The report was severely criticized by academics elsewhere. For more information check Grant F. Smith (editor), *Neocon Middle East Policy: The Clean Break Plan Damage Assesment*, Institute for Research, 2005.

[388] Hirst, *Beware Of Small States Lebanon Battleground Of The Middle East,* pp.280 and Vest, Jason, "The Men from JINSA and CSP", *The Nation*, 2 September 2002

also warned that Syria's nuclear research and development program, as well as its civil nuclear cooperation with Russia, could enable a nuclear weapons program (even though CIA rejected this); and that there was a risk of transfer of Syrian chemical weaponry to terrorist hands.[389] Bolton, on another occasion also added that Syria was a candidate to be added to the "axis of evil" list.[390]

The increasing neo-con tone in the Congress following the elections and a greater number of Israeli lobby linked Congressmen led to the preparation of economic sanctions against Syria, under the so-called Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act (SALSA), which the executive initially opposed but later accepted. For the neo-cons, Syria was a threat to Israel rather than a partner in the peace process and a potential Syrian-Israeli deal in which Israel would have to concede the Golan was undesired. As U.S.-Syrian disagreements increased (mainly over Iraq), so did the influence of the neo-cons eclipsed that of moderates who wanted to pursue better relations with Syria. After 9/11 President Bush announced that all states that did not stand with the U.S. in the war on terror were foes. [391]

Syria never wanted to be an explicit American foe, so tried to take a middle ground. Syria while criticizing the bombing of Afghanistan and Washington's designation of labelling Palestinian militants and Hezbollah as terrorists, supported U.S. war on al-Qaida with valuable intelligence assistance, including allowing a team of FBI investigators to set up a liaison office in Aleppo as well as giving way to CIA to work inside the country. Syrian military intelligence officers supplied as to one U.S. diplomat "massive amounts of incredibly valuable material" that involved bank statements and phone records. Syrian intelligence also arrested several individuals believed to have links to al-Qaida and provided early information regarding an attack to U.S. installations in Bahrain. Clearly, Washington did not find Syrian efforts sufficient. The neo-con establishment in Washington concentrated efforts to paint Syria as a threat under the new doctrine such that Syria had been a state that both supported "terrorism" and had WMDs, thus

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[389] Bolton, John, "Iran and Syria: Next Steps", Statement before the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives,
http://commdocs.house.gov/committees/intlrel/hfa89406.000/hfa89406_0f.htm, accessed October 3, 2011

[390] Gardner, Frank, "Who is who in the Axis of Evil?", *BBC News,* 20 December 2003

[391] Hinnebucsh, "Syrian Foreign Policy under Bashar", pp.17

constituted a direct threat to the U.S. and was subject to suffer a preventive war. The document on authorization for sanctions to Syria that was signed by President Bush proposed that Syria posed an "extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy and economy of the United States". Yet, a satisfactory answer to the question asking how Syria posed an extraordinary threat to U.S. security was not given. Syria, Hezbollah, and the Palestinian groups under Syrian influence-including Hamas and Islamic Jihad- have denounced al-Qaida and the 9/11 attacks. Syria and its affiliates pointed out on many occasions that their struggle was not against the United States, but against Israel and its occupation of Arab/Muslim land. Syrian officials, point to Israel's influence in Washington when answering why Syria set a threat to the U.S. A senior Syrian official asserted; *"We find that our strictly bilateral relations with the United States almost always run smoothly, but that Israel and its cheerleaders in Washington... keep on throwing spanners in the works".*[392]

A ranking Western diplomat in Damascus argued that the

> *Syrians certainly have no nuclear weapons, nor the capabilities or intentions of developing them. They have no biological capabilities. They do have some antiquated stock of chemical agents but nothing that could inflict any damage on a potential enemy. The whole issue is a storm in a tea cup.*

While it was impossible for the Syrians to stop the U.S. juggernaut, they were pretty aware of the fact that the strategic environment was not as favourable for the U.S. as the situation prior to the launch of war against Iraq.[393]

4.4.1 Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act

Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act enacted on December 12, 2003, put forth the framework of U.S. handling of "undesired" Syrian actions. The first part of the Act stated that Syria should bear responsibility for attacks committed by terrorist groups with facilities in Syria, or bases in parts of Lebanon occupied by Syria; the U.S. would work to deny Syria the ability to support acts of international terrorism and efforts to develop or acquire weapons of mass destruction; the Secretary of State

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[392] Strindberg, *Syria under Pressure*, pp. 61-62

[393] Ibid, pp. 63

would continue to list Syria as a state sponsor of terrorism until Syria ended its support for terrorism and came into full compliance with U.S. laws relating to terrorism and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1373; the full restoration of Lebanon's sovereignty, political independence, and territorial integrity were in the national security interests of the United States; Syria was in violation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 520 through its continued occupation of Lebanese territory; Syria's obligation to withdraw from Lebanon was not conditioned upon progress in the Israeli-Syrian or Israeli-Lebanese peace process but derived from Security Council Resolution 520; Syria's acquisition of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs threatened the security of the Middle East and the national security interests of the United States; Syria would be held accountable for any harm to Coalition armed forces or to any United States citizen in Iraq if the government of Syria was found to be responsible due to its facilitation of terrorist activities and its shipments of military supplies to Iraq; and the United States would not provide any assistance to Syria and would oppose multilateral assistance to Syria until Syria ended all support for terrorism, withdrew its armed forces from Lebanon, and halted the development and deployment of weapons of mass destruction as well as medium- and long-range surface-to-surface ballistic missiles.

The second part of the Act stated that until the President determined that Syria had met all the described requirements, he should prohibit the export a number of items to Syria and the Secretary of State was directed to issue annual reports on Syria's compliance with United States demands, Syria's relationship to terrorist attacks affecting the United States and the United States' efforts against terrorist groups supported by Syria.[394]

The Act could be considered as a by-product of Syrian intransigence and its opposition against the U.S. existence in Iraq. According to Zisser, even those in Washington who are moderate in criticizing Bashar Asad were taken aback by the Syrian ruler's explicit contra-policies on Iraq; a position his father Hafez Asad would have never taken that risk a direct confrontation with the U.S. The U.S. gave a sharp reaction to Syrian political stance and alleged support to Iraqi insurgency.[395]

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[394] The Act is accessible from Library of Congress Global Legal Information Network (www.glin.gov)

[395] Zisser, E., "Syria and the United States: Bad Habits Die Hard", *Middle East Quarterly,* Vol.10, No.3, pp. 30-31

4.4.2 Israeli air strike to Syria

It was reported that on September 6, 2007 Israeli aircrafts entered Syrian airspace and fired on a nuclear facility under construction along the Euphrates River near the city of Dar az Zawr in north-eastern Syria. Some U.S. officials accused Syria of clandestinely constructing a reactor with North Korean assistance.[396]

Syria immediately acknowledged the attack, asserting that it was against an unused military building. Syria did not respond militarily while President Asad stated to BBC that; *"Retaliation does not mean missile for missile and bomb for bomb... We have our means to retaliate, maybe politically, maybe in other ways. But we have the right to retaliate in different means."* Syria also denied any nuclear ties to North Korea. Israel on the other hand made a statement only after a month confirming that it carried out a strike on a Syrian military installation.[397]

The Bush Administration kept silent regarding the strike for seven months till April 24, 2008. The Administration releasing a video and photos concluded that Syria was building a nuclear facility with the help of North Korea. The information was supplied by the CIA director, Michael Hayden, in a briefing he gave to members of the Senate and House armed services, intelligence and foreign affairs committees. Hayden asserted that his weapon specialists found the evidence compelling. Yet not all Congressmen seemed satisfied by the explanation provided by the Administration. House Representative Gary Ackerman for instance, questioned the timing of the release of the video and speculated that this was the same method of selective use of information that led the U.S. to war in Iraq. Moreover many others reminded of the Bush Administration's dissemination of "proofs" of Iraq's nuclear weapons to Security Council members before the invasion of Iraq.[398]

It is widely accepted that Syria has a chemical weapons stock worth mentioning. Building a chemical weapons capacity (or the poor man's nukes) for Syria is the easiest and cheapest way to gain leverage vis-à-vis the alleged nuclear armament Israel has. It is

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[396] Sharp, Jeremy M., *Syria: Background and U.S. Relations*, Report of the Congressional Research Service, 26 February 2008, pp. 12

[397] "Israel Admits Air Strike on Syria", *BBC News*, 2 October 2007

[398] MacAskill, Ewan, "U.S. Claims North Korean link to Israeli Bombing of Syria", *Guardian*, 24 April 2008

obviously not a match for nuclear arms, but it creates a certain level of deterrence. On the other hand, Syria would prefer a WMD free region and it exposed its willingness on some occasions, as in April 2003, as a member of the Security Council Syria submitted on behalf of 22 Arab League countries a draft resolution that aimed at turning the Middle East into a WMD free zone. The draft resolution was never put to a vote because it failed to gain enough support. While Russia, China and Pakistan agreed, the U.S. refused to support the draft.[399] The U.S. disinterest in Syria's draft led many to think that the sole superpower was exposing double standards again, that Washington's aim was to force Syria unilaterally to abandon its chemical stock (via acts like SALSA and other means of international pressure) whereas Israel's alleged nuclear capabilities were not to be discussed.[400]

Barack Obama renewed sanctions on Syria in 2009 and 2010. He also adopted the same wording that regarded Syria as an "extraordinary threat to U.S. national security, foreign policy and economy, due to its continuing support to terrorist organizations and pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and missile programmes".[401]

4.4.3 Country Reports on Terrorism

"Country Reports on Terrorism"[402], annual reports issued by the U.S. State Department since 1995 and submitted to the Congress, strives to explain the development of terrorist patterns with all its aspects. Syria has been traditionally placed under state sponsors of terrorism.

The part regarding Syria of the reports issued in 2000-2011 commonly pointed out that;

- Syria has provided a safe haven as well as political support to Palestinian militant factions like Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command; Syrian

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[399] "The Security Council's Role in Disarmament and Arms Control: Nuclear Weapons, Non-Proliferation and Weapons of Mass Destruction", *Security Council Report*, 1 September 2009, pp.31, http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/cross-cutting-report/lookup-c-glKWLeMTIsG-b-5405331.php, accessed on October 20, 2011

[400] Hinnebucsh, *Syrian Foreign Policy under Bashar*, pp.17

[401] "Obama Renews Syria Sanctions", *Aljazeera*, 4 May 2010

[402] Prior to 2004 these reports were named as "Patterns of Global Terrorism Report".

Administration often stated that it used its influence to contain activities of Palestinian factions,

- Syria has been providing political and material (weapons) support to its proxy Hezbollah,

- Syria has kept its close relations with another state sponsor, Iran, and become the main route of supply of weapons from Iran to Hezbollah,

- Besides U.S. sanctions on Syrian banks, the vast black market economy has enabled terrorist groups to easily finance their activities,

- Syria has contributed to the fight against Al Qaida by sharing intelligence, yet withdrew its support after 2004,

- Syria has increased its monitoring activities at Iraqi border and managed to an extent to restrict the use of Syrian soil for passages to Iraq.

An immediate result following by the examination of "Country Reports on Terrorism" is that the groups supported by Syria are an important means for pursuing its foreign policy priorities. Unable to challenge its number one foe, Israel, neither on battle ground nor on international fora, Syria defends its interests through applying terrorist pressure on Israel.

4.5 CONCLUSION

First decade of the 21st century proved to be challenging for Syria. The inexperienced new Leader of the country faced international pressure on almost all fronts. Events unfolded in this term pushed Bashar Asad to take hard decisions, probably the most important of which was withdrawal from Lebanon.

Withdrawal of Israel from Lebanon in 2000, 9/11 attacks and the ensuing U.S. invasion of Iraq combined with the international pressure on Syria regarding its presence in Lebanon and its support to Palestinian and Lebanese militancy were the main developments shaping Syrian decisions throughout the period.

The American-Syrian relations under Bush Administration failed to make progress. The political priorities of the Bush Administration toward the Middle East significantly varied from those of previous governments. Middle East peace process for Syria was an aim and

at the same time a device to establish better relations with the U.S. There was obviously no room for the Middle East peace process on U.S. regional standing under Bush. The policies spearheaded by neo-cons did not help stabilize relations between the U.S. and Syria.

U.S. enforced Syria to act in accordance to its will on all issues of concern between the two, namely; Syrian military and intelligence presence in Lebanon, Syrian support to Hezbollah and other Palestinian factions that carry out operations on Israel, Syrian ignorance (or inability) to prevent fighters pass to Iraq from Syria, Syria's relations with Iran, and Syria's stock of chemical weapons of mass destruction. Of all these issues, only regarding Lebanon, the U.S. policy, which was supported by international players and Lebanese people as well, proved to be productive (though Syria still remained the most important power broker in Lebanon and its intelligence apparatus was believed to be active there). On other fronts, U.S.' threatening style did not bear fruit. American pressure regarding Syrian support to Hezbollah and Palestinian factions rather led Syria to work more closely with Iran; and it did slightly work to curb Syrian support to Iraqi insurgency as the annual Country Reports on Terrorism indicated.

The fact that U.S. policies toward Syria only worked well on Lebanon indicated that the bilateral dynamic between the U.S. and Syria was not ripe enough to activate each other to cooperate on regional matters and that it proved more efficient for the U.S. to rely on international consensus while concentrating efforts to engage Syria.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The nature of relations between Syria and the U.S. has been unique and hard to conceptualize. Yet some points emerged as the backbone of Syrian-American dealings within the period from Hafez Asad's consolidation of power in 1970 to the domestic uprisings that started as of March 2011. These points will be dealt as follows.

5.1 NATURE OF BILATERAL RELATIONS

Unstable and weak bilateral relations between Syria and the U.S. had been characterized by rapid oscillations, from open dialogue and a spirit of cooperation to animosity and almost armed conflagration. Over Lebanon for example, the U.S. worked to prevent Syrian dominant position till the Gulf war in 1990. U.S. Administration while not explicitly endorsing Syrian dominance over its neighbour turned a blind eye to that following Syria's limited but critical support to anti-Iraq coalition. Actually, Syrian-American dealings in the first and second war against Iraq in 1990 and in 2003 revealed the extent of Syrian-U.S. marginalization. Moreover, the United States, due to undesired actions of Syrian government, withdrew its Ambassador to Damascus a couple of times and in case of better atmosphere sent a new Ambassador to Syrian capital. This oscillation was, above all, the result of diverse global policies pursued by different U.S. administrations. Relations defined by Cold War parameters before 1990 when Syria was a Soviet ally were not amicable. Under President Bush and Clinton in 1990s, the U.S. policy toward Syria was more in favour due to Syrian support to war in Iraq and the ensuing peace process. Yet, in most of the first decade of 2000s, neo-con policies coupled with an inexperienced ruler in Syria gave way to the polarization of relations once more.

The U.S. Administrations, whether hawkish or dovish toward Syria, have generally maintained a belief in Syria's key regional role and its capacity to influence events. Thus, the administrations have usually been closer to Syrian positions. The Congress on the other hand, has traditionally supported Israeli (or anti-Syrian) views. This formed an important basis for Washington's ambivalent attitude toward Damascus. When Syria is

the subject, lack of a common behaviour of U.S. institutions asserted itself in a situation of ambivalence and a policy handicapped with oscillations.

The relations in bilateral sense lacked a sound economic, investment, social, cultural and humanitarian background to flourish. This drove the relationship to a sole political level. Developing bonds on issues parallel to politics would have been instrumental - particularly for Syria- to reach mutual understandings on a spectrum of various matters of common interest.

An important aspect of relations between the two counties could be defined as their dealings and struggle over the third countries or issues. The U.S. and Syria usually faced each other in the context of third parties/issues like the struggle over Lebanon, Syria-Iran ties, U.S. invasion of Iraq, Syrian-Israeli relations and so on. The critiques from both sides addressing the other only widened their alienation. Syrian support to militant Palestinian factions and Hezbollah has been the only bilateral issue of which the two sides could directly handle, yet the issue was only talked within the context of peace negotiations; again no bilateral engagement between the parties but talks in the context of third parties.

5.2 ISRAEL AND THE PEACE PROCESS AT THE CORE OF DIALOGUE

This thesis aimed to examine United States-Syria relations on three different vectors; struggle over Lebanon, peace process between Syria and Israel, rogue state attributes of Syria.

As outlined above, throughout 1970-2011 the only time frames which the U.S. and Syrian officials could get into a sincere dialogue were during their involvement in the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations. The peace process or to put it better Syrian-Israeli relations stood at the core of relations between Syria and the U.S. Two factors contributed to that result; one originated from Syrian policies, and the other from American handling.

From Syrian rulers' point of view, the all of the above foreign policy aim was doubtlessly regaining Golan Heights. This constituted the fundamental aim that was personally shaped by Hafez Asad. After ensuring his rule over the country, Asad systematically bridged the gap between Syria's goals and means. He first of all, calibrated the level of antagonism of the Syrian public to acceptable levels so that the country no more needed

to dedicate itself to the overblown target of liberating Palestine or achieving Arab unity. To attain the goal of returning Golan back, Syria heavily invested on alliance with the Soviets to keep up its "strategic parity with Israel" objective. The level of deterrence Syrian army obtained considerably cleared the risks of further military confrontation between Israel and Syria that resulted in the transformation of the conflict into a political one. Another crucial point in Hafez's policy of recruiting means against Israel was creating links with a wide range of governments and non-governmental organizations, like Russia, Iran, Hezbollah and Palestinian factions.[403]

Syrian rulers did not refrain from using any bilateral and multilateral relation to gain leverage in the struggle against Israel. During the course of the Cold War, Syria's alliance with the Soviets played an effective role in maintaining a balance with Israel under the notion of strategic parity. From late 1980s onwards this notion collapsed mainly due to dramatic Soviet withdrawal from the Middle East.

In the face of increasing imbalance with Israel, Syria this time turned its direction to a partnership with Iran. Syria also gave weight to supporting rejectionist Palestinian factions and Hezbollah as well, in order to exploit these organizations' capabilities to its own benefit. Syria used these groups as proxies to carry out terrorist attacks, in the region and abroad, not only against Israeli targets but also against Jordanian and PLO targets. Damascus sponsored these attacks for a variety of tactical aims, all supporting Asad's overarching strategic goals of pressing for a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement and preventing Syria's diplomatic marginalization. By providing "indirect" support, Damascus sought to derive tactical leverage from its ties to militant organizations in the Arab-Israeli arena, while also keep the international blowback from these activities at a low.[404]

Lebanon has been a major stage for Syrian backed organizations to carry out strikes against Israel and a further area of indirect confrontation between the two. In addition to armed conflagration, political struggle was also an important part of rivalry over Lebanon. Syria, by way of both its military existence on the ground and its political

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[403] Hinnebucsh, *Syrian Foreign Policy under Bashar al-Asad*, pp. 9

[404] Leverett, *Inheriting Syria: Bashar's Trial by Fire*, pp.12

impact exploited its unprecedented status in Lebanon to force, to deter and to terrorize its number one enemy.

In early 2000s, Syria started to improve relations with Turkey following its decision to exile PKK terrorist components within its territory. Urged by a reflex he inherited from his father, Bashar Asad sought to benefit from the burgeoning relations with Turkey and as early as 2004 he asked Turkish officials to mediate in starting over a peace process with Israel. In a move to capitalize on Turkish-Israeli alliance that had long disturbed Syria, Bashar Asad aimed to use its relation with a regional power as an instrument. Yet this time the instrument was not of a rogue or threatening attribute that would pressurize Israel to take some steps in accordance with Syria's will.

The Syrian type of engaging with Israel directly had its impact on U.S. policies towards Syria. While Syrian attitudes like its desire to align itself with the peace process and inhibiting the activities of militant organizations contributed to the positive image of Syria in the US, its support to organizations that used terrorist methods, its resistance against a non-comprehensive peace, its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and means of delivery were detested. Apparently, the way Syria picked to somehow balance Israel was disliked in Washington and led to acts like "Syrian Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Act".

In addition to mentioned Syrian policies that led to the rapprochement and polarization of U.S.-Syrian relations at times, the U.S. handling of the situation was also worth noting.

Israel has traditionally been the most important ally of the U.S. in the region. The U.S. placed the issue of security of Israel, an asset to Soviet influence, at the very centre of its regional policies. This policy was loathed and actively resisted by the Arab states particularly in the course of the Cold War. Yet in the face of Israeli superiority on the battle ground, Arab leaders were wise enough to see their incapability to follow this antagonizing stance with Israel and the U.S. For the part of U.S., on the other hand, security of Israel could only be sustained by a peace process. The peace process emerged as an optimal solution seemingly serving to the interests of all parties included.

U.S. rendered the Middle East Peace Process as the cornerstone of its regional policies. An Israel in peace with its neighbours as well as the Palestinians would stabilize intra regional affairs; expand U.S. influence and Western values, and lower U.S. costs of

keeping up security of Israel. Camp David, for instance, as the first concrete step to regional peace, had effectively brought major benefits; Israel was secured, Arabs' ability for collective action was crippled, Soviets were marginalized, and the road to Madrid/Oslo peace process was inaugurated. U.S. peace team concentrated efforts to find acceptable way-outs. Prior to Madrid Conference, the U.S. accomplishment of winning over Syrians and Israelis by adding a "comprehensive" element in the conference along with face-to-face framework was impressive. The Madrid Plan envisaged loosely parallel bilateral negotiations between Israel and its Arab antagonists and also a multilateral dimension involving the countries of the Middle East and some Western countries. The process upon Israeli appeals drew in U.S.-friendly countries like Saudi Arabia which could encourage Arab parties to bilateral talks. The Madrid process in short was designed for developing a centrifugal momentum to create a peaceful Middle East with Israel playing a central role in it.

The U.S. desire to ensure Israel's security and as a result its urge for the peace process, reflects the centrality of Israel in U.S. regional policies. Essentially the assertive U.S. policy in favour of Israel made this country a part of the Middle East and ensured its existence. Despite views on the contrary like that of Kermit Roosevelt who maintained in 1948; "Almost all Americans with diplomatic, educational, missionary or business experience in the Middle East protest fervently that support of political Zionism is directly contrary to our national interests as well as the common justice", dedicated supporters of Israel in the U.S. finally persuaded U.S. people and officials that Israel might be something other than a burden on the U.S. national interests. [405]

That stance inevitably estranged Syrian leaders from the U.S. or at least caused them to act prudently in U.S.-driven processes. However, particularly in the immediate wake of the dissolution of Soviets, Damascus had to accept the new reality on the ground. Washington's unique ties with Israel, though despised originally, were tolerated by making a recalculation that they could as well be beneficent and necessary in carving the peace process.

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[405] Hudson, Michael C., "To Play the Hegemon: Fifty Years of U.S. Policy toward the Middle East", *Middle East Journal,* Vol. 50, No.3, (Summer, 1996), pp. 335-336

All in all, Israel had a central place both in the Syrian policy making apparatus and U.S. regional inclination which fixed Israel and the peace process at the core of U.S.-Syria relations.

For the peace process, the period 1992-1996 was important in laying down the basics for a Syrian-Israeli peace. Progress on the other hand was limited. The talks itself was crucial since this was the first process of direct peace talks between two belligerent neighbours since the foundation of Israel. The process, though ended with no tangible result, enabled the parties to apprehend their perception of peace and their priorities.

In the following Netanyahu Government, the contacts under the counter kept on, yet the efforts of two sides and that of the U.S. were far from being sufficient to open up a peace perspective. Netanyahu was a "security-first" minded leader extensively limiting his country's options regarding a peace. Barak Government, on the other hand, first seemed to agree at terms closer to Syrian expectations, particularly concerning security issues; however Barak could not take hold of domestic pressures and gave up.

The peace talks between Syria and Israel in 1990s failed. It could be alleged that two main indigenous issues were responsible for this failure. The first one was Asad's extremely careful and cautious negotiating style that took tiny incremental steps only after thinking thoroughly in a time-consuming way. It was in fact hard for Israelis –whose hurry for peace was understandable- to sustain talks for so long with a single party of the conflict[406]. Yet, given Syrian style of negotiating, Israel had to prefer to focus on the second best choice(s). On the other hand there were suspicions regarding Israeli intentions of concluding a peace with Syria. Syrian track was in fact pursued as a result of strong U.S. support that was due to the U.S. belief that Syria held the key to a comprehensive peace. For Israel, there was a collateral value of pursuing talks with Syria. That value was the intention of preventing Syria from supporting militancy in and around Israel so as to protect the whole peace process from derailing. Thus, the Syrian hesitancy to take bolder and faster steps coupled with the Israeli need to hold Syria at bay for the sake of whole process transformed the Israeli willingness to conclude a peace with Syria into a "just keep talking" mode.

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[406] Zisser, *Asad's Legacy,* pp.119.

The second issue was the democratic processes in Israel. The elections, public pressure, opposition, media and other mechanisms that were all part of a democratic system slowed down the Israeli politicians to go for a breakthrough with Syria. Rabin could not press two peace packages at the same time; Barak drew back from a peace agreement due to domestic political pressure; and lately Olmert attacked Gaza Strip in line with the expectations of Israeli electorate prior to elections at the expense of ongoing talks.[407] Barak pushed for the enacting of a law foreseeing a referendum for any peace agreement containing territorial concessions due to domestic politics which, given the general Israeli public unwillingness to give back Golan Heights, was hammering the last ditch of a peace prospect with Syria.

Throughout the negotiations, both face-to-face and via mediatory, what was terribly missing was the lack of trust. Both sides, deep in their reluctance and ambiguity, felt no confidence of each other. This led to a process of harsh bargaining, moving delicately with very small, nervous steps. Both parties expected from the other first to put forth the necessary concession to move forward. Syrians waited for a commitment of withdrawal for long, whereas Israelis refrained from giving such commitment before issues regarded important for Israel were settled. When badly needed, no confidence building measures were deeply discussed. This was another deficiency in the talks.

Public diplomacy was not effectively taken benefit of by the leaders; on the contrary on some occasions, it was used to undermine the process. The parties and leaders did not seek to address the respective community of the other. In fact the process could be a precedent of a public diplomacy disaster.

Thus, one can conclude that codes of two very diverse regimes, a dictatorial regime with an experience of extreme instability on the one hand and a parliamentarian democracy on the other, did not match even under U.S. support. Syria and Israel, having different domestic politics and diverse set of values and aims in their foreign policies, could not engage each other in a constructive manner. Practically, they did not urge to understand each other.

5.3 SAVING LEBANON WITH INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

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[407] The tragic side of the story is that Rabin was killed, Barak and Olmert could not be re-elected.

The U.S., especially regarding Syrian existence in Lebanon, failed to impose its will on Syrian government by its own. The U.S. critique regarding Lebanon, only mattered when coupled with French support and the ensuing UNSC resolutions. The U.S. inability without international support is corollary to the lack of depth and spirit of cooperation between the U.S. and Syria.

Moreover, the same pattern is also acceptable regarding Syrian support to militant organizations. The U.S. placed Syria on its state sponsors list and has been applying sanctions to Syria for years which hardly affected Syrian actions. Again; when the European countries, which Syria had more economic relations with, applied restrictions due to Syrian actions that they deemed harmful, Damascus compromised at least partially and rearranged its backing to militant organizations.

Thus it follows that the U.S. capacity to force Syria behave in accordance with the its will is limited and that U.S. as a stick on the Lebanese front and terrorism issue has been effective only with international (European in particular) support; i.e. efforts to affect change in Syrian attitude have proved fruitful when the Syrian administration loses the ability to take benefit of the gap between the U.S. and the European powers.[408]

5.4 TERRORISM TOOL

Syria has long been described by the U.S. as an active state sponsor of terrorism and a staunch supporter of radical groups. However, this support is complex, reflecting Damascus's desire to both exploit terrorist groups and limit them. Damascus has empowered the Palestinian groups and radicals in Lebanon and also limited them with considerable care. In many ways, Syria represents an ''antagonistic'' sponsor of terrorism, helping many particular groups become stronger but also working to control them and subordinate their overall cause to Syrian domestic and geopolitical goals.[409] In case of necessity, Syrian rulers managed to restrict the activities of these groups and cooperated with Westerners in accordance with Syrian interests. One of the earlier examples was a secret understanding reached between Syria and Israel after 1974

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[408] Yet, this postulate has considerably changed for Syria under harsh domestic conflict. The late plan devised by ex-Secretary General Kofi Annan (as of April 2012) and supported by the U.S. and European powers to figure out a way to calm the situation in the country seems ineffective in forcing the Syrian army to withdraw from cities.

[409] Byman, *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism*, pp. 117-118

Disengagement Agreement through U.S. mediation. Assad agreed to prevent the Palestinians from conducting terrorist activities from Syrian territory. Moreover, Syria played an important role in facilitating the release of American hostages hijacked by Shia militia. Syria also cooperated with Italy and the U.S. in the crisis of a hijacked Italian cruise ship. President George Bush made it public that Syria was assisting the United States in its efforts to release the hostages.[410] Lately, Syria shared intelligence with the U.S. following 9/11 attacks, an action that was commended by the late Bush.

It goes without saying that Syria's ties to these terrorist groups, that created trouble internationally for the country, paved the way for closer relations with American administrations time to time. Consequently however, these improvements in relations were cyclical and provisional that did not translate into real benefits. While Syrian favours did not help boost relations and the U.S. critic of Syrian support to militant organizations continued, Iraqi invasion of Kuwait that ensued the U.S. willingness to lure Syria into the coalition, led to a different interpretation of the thorny issue of terrorism that previously seemed to halt the relations between two countries. Secretary Baker's definition of terrorism was peculiarly similar to Asad's when the two met in Damascus on September 14, 1990. Baker argued that the U.S. considered any violent act outside the occupied territory was a terrorist act but that they could not consider the legitimate right of struggling against occupation forces as terrorism. Baker further stated that Syria so far had been put on the terrorist list without any justification and the blame put on Syria was done for political objectives rather than an objective situation.[411] The change of tone and ingredient of the American position was colossal. This statement, clearing Syria from many of its previous sins, was also signalling the extent the American administration could go in case of an emergence of a more profitable option- the alliance against Iraq.[412] Yet, despite Baker's strong arguments, there was no sign of removing Syria from the terrorist list. Rather many believed that the U.S. as a reward to Syria's involvement in its

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[410] Situation in Lebanon, Hearing Before Subcommittee on International Operations of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives, July 1989 cited from Rabil, *Embattled Neighbours*, pp.86

[411] Rabil, *Embattled Neighbours*, pp. 88-89

[412] Thus one can conclude that not only for Syria but also for the U.S., terrorism has been a tool/tactic to forward its foreign policy.

anti-Iraq campaign let this country to enjoy its hegemony on Lebanon[413] rather than removing this county from its sponsors list without justification.

Obviously, while Syrian support to militant groups prevents relations from being institutionalized (due to sanctions in effect), it does not stop two countries to work together and enjoy the moment in case of a situation where cooperation works for both.

5.5 LATEST DOMESTIC UPRISINGS IN SYRIA AND A FORECAST[414]

The wave of "Arab Spring" reached Syria on March 2011. The domestic protests were harshly crushed by the Syrian army. Thousands of people were killed; many others fled and sought refuge in the neighbouring countries. The Syrian regime, as was perpetrated in Hama in 1980, resort to military force to suppress the demonstrations.

United Nations and Arab League co-sponsored a process aiming at cessation of violence. Ex-Secretary General Kofi Annan was designated to lead the talks between the international community under the UNSC and Syria. A UN observer force is expected to be deployed soon. The process is currently under development and its future is still vague.

It would be pretty hard to forecast the future developments. It seems that the international pressure along April-May of 2012, once again proved capable on Syria since the Syrian army lately started to relocate its soldiers and tanks out of cities. Yet the worsening situation caused the Army to invade the cities back again.

The future of the regime depends on the strength of the coalition formed by the Alawite, Druze and Sunni bourgeoisie. Current circumstances point to a lengthy and painful process of transition of the ruling power to the hands of those ruled to date.

So far, the experts on Syria has linked domestic change in Syria would have been possible only after a peace deal with Israel, and that was considered as one of major reasons for the Syrian administration to take reluctant steps in the process. On the other hand, it turns out that a peace agreement with Israel does not anymore stay at the core of Syrian domestic politics. The internal developments in Syria now show that there is a

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[413] Pipes, *Damascus Courts the West,* pp. 4

[414] As of 30 May 2012

strong push for change from within the Syrian society. The future of the country remains to be seen, and thus prospects to have peace with Israel should also wait.

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NEWSPAPERS

BBC Summary of World Broadcasts

APPENDIX
TEZ FOTOKOPİSİ İZİN FORMU

ENSTİTÜ

Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü ☐

Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü ☒ **X**

Uygulamalı Matematik Enstitüsü ☐

Enformatik Enstitüsü ☐

Deniz Bilimleri Enstitüsü ☐

YAZARIN

Soyadı : Tığrak
Adı   : Fatih
Bölümü : Orta Doğu Araştırmaları

TEZİN ADI (İngilizce) :

Conflict and Cooperation: The United States-Syria Relations Through 1970-2011

TEZİN TÜRÜ : Yüksek Lisans ☒ **X**   Doktora ☐

1.   Tezimin tamamı dünya çapında erişime açılsın ve   kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla tezimin bir kısmı veya tamamının fotokopisi alınsın. ☒ **X**

2.   Tezimin tamamı yalnızca Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi kullancılarının erişimine açılsın. (Bu seçenekle tezinizin fotokopisi ya da elektronik kopyası Kütüphane aracılığı ile ODTÜ dışına dağıtılmayacaktır.) ☐

3.   Tezim bir (1) yıl süreyle erişime kapalı olsun. (Bu seçenekle tezinizin fotokopisi ya da elektronik kopyası Kütüphane aracılığı ile ODTÜ dışına dağıtılmayacaktır.) ☐

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