



*To My Wife, Nagihan*

**FOURTY FIVE YEARS OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY  
TOWARDS SYRIA:  
UNDER THE SHADOW OF  
UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS**

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**July 2005**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **FOURTY FIVE YEARS OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS SYRIA: UNDER THE SHADOW OF UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS**

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This thesis analyzes the Turkish-Syrian relations between 1945 and 1990 and examines whether there was an influence of the Soviet Union or not in relations between both states. Although Turkish foreign policy was accepted as pro-western oriented policy by academic environment, it can be said that Turkey was partly influenced by the Soviet Union in its policy towards Syria.

Turkey established relations with Syria and Middle Eastern states in varying approaches, and adopted these approaches in order to be in harmony with the West. However, the Soviet Union was important in Turkish foreign policy towards Syria because Syria was a Soviet advocate in the Middle East and was supported widely by the Soviet Union. Although the opinion of the Turkish foreign policy was stemmed from the Soviet Union was widespread, Turkey used the Soviet menace for its domestic and international interests. On the contrary, especially in post-1960 policies, Turkey improved its relations with the Soviet Union while it established rapprochement with Arab states in order to keep its national interests.

Keywords: Turkish Foreign Policy, Turkey, Syria, the Soviet Union, The Middle East

## ÖZET

### TÜRK DIŞ POLİTİKASINDA SURİYE’NİN KIRKBEŞ YILI: SOVYET SOSYALİST CUMHURİYETLER BİRLİĞİ’NİN GÖLGESİNDE

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Bu tezde Türkiye-Suriye ilişkilerinin 1945 ila 1990 yılları arası incelenecek ve iki ülke arasındaki ilişkilere Sovyetler Birliği’nin etkisi olup olmadığı sorgulanacaktır. Her ne kadar akademik çevrelerde Türkiye’nin dış politikasında batı yanlısı bir tutum izlediği genel kabul görmüşse de Türkiye’nin Suriye’ye karşı izlediği politikalarda Sovyetler Birliği’nden kısmen etkilendiği de söylenebilir.

Türkiye değişen yönelimlerle Suriye ve Ortadoğu devletleri ile ilişkiler kurmuş, bu değişen yönelimlerin çoğunluğunu batı ile uyum içinde olmak için tatbik etmiştir. Ama Suriye’nin Ortadoğu’da Sovyet taraftarı bir devlet olması ve Sovyetler Birliği’nden geniş destek bulmasından dolayı, Türkiye Suriye’ye karşı izlediği dış politikalarda Sovyetler Birliği her zaman önemli bir yer tutmuştur. Türk dış politikaların Sovyet tehdidinden kaynaklandığı fikri yaygın olsa da gerçekte Türkiye Sovyet tehdidini kendisi iç ve dış politika amaçları için kullanmıştır. Aksine, özellikle 1960 sonrası politikalarda, Türkiye kendi ulusal çıkarları korumak için Arap ülkeleri yakınlaşma tesis ederken, Sovyetler Birliği ile olan ilişkilerini de geliştirmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk Dış Politikası, Türkiye, Suriye, Sovyetler Birliği, Ortadoğu

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>ASALA</b>	Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia
<b>CENTO</b>	Central Treaty Organization
<b>CP</b>	Communist Party
<b>CPSU</b>	Communist Party of Soviet Union
<b>DKP/SHB</b>	Revolutionary Communist Party/Armed Popular Corporations
<b>GAP</b>	Southeastern Anatolian Project
<b>MEC</b>	Middle East Command
<b>MEDO</b>	Middle Eastern Defense Organization
<b>MLSPB</b>	Marxist Leninist Armed Propaganda Force
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>PKK</b>	Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan / Kurdish Workers' Party
<b>PLO</b>	Palestinian Liberation Organization
<b>RDF</b>	Rapid Deployment Force
<b>THKP/C</b>	People's Liberation Party-Front of Turkey
<b>TIKKO</b>	Turkish Workers' and Peasants' Liberation Army
<b>TKP/M-L</b>	Turkish Communist Party/Marxist-Leninist
<b>UAR</b>	United Arab Republic
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>USA</b>	United States of America
<b>USSR</b>	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

## **INTRODUCTION**

Turkey's relations with Arab world were rarely discussed and took limited place in Turkish foreign relations. This might be because of historical reasons and Turkey's way to contemporary world that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk drew. Indeed, from the establishing of the newly founded Turkish Republic, Turkey had little interests towards the Middle East. The Hatay issue was an exception in Turkish foreign policy. However, with the end of World War II and changing balances in the Middle East, Turkey had to apply a different way in its foreign policy. Because of growing Soviet influence in all over the world, as well as in the Middle East, Turkey's foreign policy integrated and cooperated with the West against the Soviet threat and in Middle Eastern affairs.

Syria had played a crucial role from the end of World War II in Middle Eastern affairs with Egypt. Indeed the phrase "Peace did not become fact without Egypt in the Middle East; War did not become fact without Syria either" realized through the years. Actually Syria, which had disputes with its neighbors from its gaining independence, was almost in every war and conflict in the Middle East. This was because of policies and desires, maybe sometimes wrong calculations, of Syrian politicians and statesmen.

Turkish foreign policy towards Syria was not different from policy towards Arab world. Although Turkey had a declivitous policy towards Syria, it was the same policy that Turkey followed towards Arab world. While Turkey had established good relationship with Syria in some tenure, its relations worsened in other periods. The

relationship between Syria and Turkey worsened in the 1950s that might be led to a war. At the same time the relations came to a friendlier atmosphere during the 1970s.

Although the relationship can be influenced by historical reasons, either side influenced from international powers and their interests. While Turkey was aligned with the West because of its policy of establishing good relations with the West and securing itself from Soviet threat, Syria took side next to the Soviet Union because of seeing the West as imperialist states and supporter of Israel.

This thesis will inquire how Union of Soviet Socialist Republics affected the relationship between Syria and Turkey and Turkish foreign policy towards Syria? At the same time, this study examines how the Soviets influenced the Middle East relations in general and Syrian relations in private, while Turkey followed a western-oriented policy in its relations?

It has been long argued that Syria, which seemed to be a Soviet 'client' in the Middle East throughout the post-World War II, followed a policy of supporting Soviet interests in the Middle East. Syria took helps and aid from the Soviet Union in its way of supporting Soviet interests. However, with the help of Soviet supports, Syria was a danger to the Middle East peace and created an unstable situation in the Middle East. Sometimes Syrian active policy, which mostly adopted by Hafez Assad, even caused Syria isolated from Arab world.

On the other side, Turkey had a western-oriented foreign policy towards the Middle East. Although the policy fluctuated throughout the post-World War II years, it had little change and deviation from its main origin. The pro-active policy that Turkey followed the 1950s caused isolation from Arab world, in which Turkey saw harms in its national interests in the following years. The isolation and lack of Arab support in international arena led Turkey search for a new orientation in its foreign

policy. The orientation included rapprochement with Arab world and improving relations with the Soviet Union.

Another objective of the study was that if Turkey realized its foreign policy towards Syria because of Soviet menace or not. While I explained whether a Soviet menace was in real or not, I will also examine Syrian support to terrorist organizations towards Turkey and Syrian stance in water disputes.

This thesis comprises in two part and six chapters. In the first part, I tried to explain the relations between Syria and the Soviet Union from the end of World War II to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In order to explain the relationship, I use cases studies between Syria and the Soviet Union, and also Soviet attitude in Syrian bilateral conflicts and disputes with its neighbors. Chapter I includes the 1945-1964 period and some case studies that were milestones in the relations. I tried to put in this chapter Soviet hesitation in getting into Middle Eastern affairs and Nikita Khrushchev's intentions of being an authority in the Middle East by using diplomacy. Chapter II includes cases studies and relations between 1964 and 1982. This chapter will examine the Soviet foreign policy under Leonid Brezhnev and two main approaches that Brezhnev used. Chapter III includes cases of the 1982-1990 tenure in relations. The last three presidents and their attitude, which was taken into account as more defensive than their predecessor, towards the Middle East and Syria will be studied in this chapter.

In the second part of the thesis, I tried to explain the relations between Syria and Turkey. As in the first part, I also use case studies in order to explain relations between Syria and Turkey. Like the first part, the second part divided into three chapters. Chapter IV explains relations between 1945 and 1960. Turkey's involvement in Middle Eastern affairs and its reflections are put forward in this

chapter that Adnan Menderes played a crucial role during the era. Chapter V looked to the relations of the 1960-1980 tenure. The changing policy of Turkey towards the Middle East because of international and domestic reasons includes rapprochement with the Arab world and establishing good relations with the Soviet Union are the main aims of this chapter. Chapter VI argues relations from the 1980 *coup d'état* to 1990. Following the *coup d'état* and becoming Turgut Özal as Prime Minister, Turkey followed a more activist policy in the Middle East than the last two decades, while pointing out Syrian support for terrorism and its stance in water disputes. This chapter will argue on these subjects.

Consequently, Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East and Syria was far from Soviet fear. However the foreign policy was adopted in the line of Turkey's national and international interests. Indeed Turkey had to take its side with the Soviet Union and Arabs as well as Syria because of taking no support from its western allies in some international crisis that Turkey faced. Nonetheless Turkey did not change completely its main attitude in foreign relations towards the contemporary world.

**PART A:**  
**RELATIONS BETWEEN USSR AND SYRIA**

**CHAPTER I:**  
**‘ACTIVE DIPLOMACY’ IN RELATIONS**

**1.1. A Short History of Syria**

In 1914, after nearly 400 years under a province of the Ottoman Empire, the Middle East was at the height of change, conflict, and war. The Middle East is a strategic region that the Great Powers had interests. With the beginning of World War I, having strong and ambitious interests towards oil-rich region, the Great Powers did not bring cohesion to the region but divisiveness.

Following rebellions against it and defeat in its Arab provinces, the army of the Ottoman Empire in Damascus vacated the city. Faysal, the son of Serif Hussein, who commanded the Arab forces, entered Damascus in October 1918. Having controlled nearly whole of Syria except the coastal strip where French forces were present, the period of *de facto* independence was beginning.<sup>1</sup> However France, according to the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which was signed by Britain and France in May 1916, captured Damascus on July 24, 1920, and took over the government. The League of Nations accepted the governance of Syria under French Mandate on July 24, 1922. Although Syria had a mandate government, rebellious movements had just

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<sup>1</sup> Zeine N. Zeine. 1977. *The Struggle for Arab Independence, Western Diplomacy and the Rise and Fall of Faisal's Kingdom in Syria*. New York: Caravan Books, pp.10-11 cited in Mehmet Akif Okur. 2004. "Fransız Manda Yönetimi Döneminde Suriye."(Syria under the French Mandate Administration Era.) In Türel Yılmaz and Mehmet Şahin (eds.) 2004. *Ortadoğu Siyasetinde Suriye* (Syria in the Middle East Politics). Ankara: Platin. pp.5-6.



begun after the mandate decree until 1927. However, from 1927 to 1939, politics gained importance in Syria. Several political formations worked for Syria's independence.

With the beginning of World War II, Syria was again on the war scene. France was under the occupation of Germany, thus this situation had weakened and lessened French predominance in the French mandate states as in Syria. The National Block came to power after the 1943 elections, and Shukri al-Quwatli was elected as president of Syria. By using the weak position of France, many main administrative offices were taken away from French control. After these developments, Syria was recognized as a sovereign state, despite French opposition, by the USSR in July 1944, by the USA in September and one year after them, Britain. After several confrontations between Syrian and French forces, a UN resolution in February 1946 was accepted on calling France to evacuate. The French government agreed on the resolution and all French troops left Syrian soil by April 15, 1946. On April 17, Syria gained independence and celebrated this event as the Evacuation Day, which is officially accepted as a national holiday.<sup>2</sup>

Independence did not bring stability to Syria; Syria's politics witnessed much violent behavior and sudden changes. Being unhappy about government policy and administration, some people who were effective on the political scene, especially the army officers started the period of *coup d'états*. Respectively, the coup of General Husni Zaim in March 1949, Colonel Sami el-Hinnawi in September 1949, Colonel Adip el-Shishakli in December 1949, and Colonel Faysal el-Atasi in February 1954.<sup>3</sup> The unstable situation of Syria continued with five different regimes during the

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<sup>2</sup> Information was available in the internet on <http://countrystudies.us/syria>. Accessed on February 27, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Selahattin İbas. 2004. Türkiye-Suriye İlişkilerinin Tarihi (The History of the Turkish-Syrian Relations). In Türel Yılmaz and Mehmet Şahin (eds.) op.cit. p.48. For more information George Lenczowski. 1953. *The Middle East in World Affairs*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. pp. 231-258.

period, 1955-1970: Shukri al-Quwatli (August 1955-February 1958), Gamal abd al-Nasser - united under the United Arab Republic (February 1958-September 1961), unstable military rule (September 1961-March 1963), Right-wing Ba'ath regime of Colonel Lu'ay al-Atasi and General Amin al-Hafiz (March 1963-February 1966), the Left-Wing Ba'ath regime of President Nur al-Din al-Atasi and General Salah Jadid (February 1966-November 1970).<sup>4</sup> In the coup of Salah Jadid, Hafiz Assad played an important role in the success of the coup and Jadid recognized Assad as his potential rival from then on. This struggle for power between Assad and Jadid ended in November 1970 and resulted in Assad's victory. General Hafiz al-Assad seemed to bring Syria more stability when compared to his predecessors.<sup>5</sup>

## **1.2. USSR's Policy towards Syria under Joseph Stalin**

The Middle Eastern states were subjected to the imperialist forces, especially Great Britain and France for nearly fifty years, Syria included. It will not be wrong to say almost all of the nations in the Middle East had bitter relations with both imperialist states. On the other hand, the Soviet Union had little interest towards the Middle East, because the USSR had more concern over other states, especially the East European states. Thus the Soviet Union had a very good chance in having influence over the Middle East, since the Middle Eastern states had no experience of Russian imperialism and had no common borders with it.

After World War II, Joseph Stalin shaped the foreign policy of USSR. In Stalin's view, the world was divided into two main camps: communist and anti-communist. Stalin thought the others, the Third World, neutral states. Stalin tried to

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<sup>4</sup> Information was available in the internet on <http://countrystudies.us/syria>. Accessed on in February 27, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> R.D.Mclaurin, Don Peretz, and Lewis W.Snider. 1982. *Middle East Foreign Policy: Issues and Processes*. New York: Praeger Publishers. pp.242-243.

spread communism to East European states than elsewhere. In other words, Stalin's interest in the Middle East was especially towards the USSR's periphery - Turkey and Iran – and he tried to influence these states by considering the other states in the Middle East,<sup>6</sup> despite having a great chance of affecting the Middle Eastern states.

According to Stalin's way of thinking, the Soviet press called the Third World state leaders, such as Nasser, Shishakli, and Nehru, "lackeys of the imperialists." Since Pedro Ramet summarized the traditional aims of great powers in the Middle East as "to exclude its rivals from the area, to promote its foreign policy interests broadly, and to assure itself of the resources and strategic position essential to its security,"<sup>7</sup> Stalin applied a foreign policy in the Middle East to decrease the influence of main imperialist states, especially Britain's, and to exclude its rivals from the region,<sup>8</sup> rather than to have influence on the Middle Eastern states. Indeed Stalin avoided direct interference into the area, for example he rejected the request of King Farouk on ousting Britain from Egypt, because, according to Nikita Khrushchev, Stalin thought that the Middle East or Near East was Britain's 'sphere of influence' and the USSR "couldn't go sticking our nose into Egypt's affairs."<sup>9</sup> The strategy in recognition of Israel in 1948 and military and diplomatic support to Israel during the Arab-Israeli conflict from 1947 to 1949 was mainly Stalin's hope that Israel would become a socialist state and caused Britain lose its military positions in the Middle East by waning Britain's positions.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Mark A. Heler. 1992. *The Dynamics of Soviet Policy in the Middle East*. Jerusalem: Tel Aviv University. p.22.

<sup>7</sup> Pedro Ramet. 1990. *The Soviet-Syrian Relationship Since 1955: A Troubled Alliance*. Boulder: Westview Press. p.3.

<sup>8</sup> Galia Golan. 1990. *Soviet Policies in the Middle East*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.10.

<sup>9</sup> Strobe Talbott. (ed. and trans.) 1970. *Khrushchev Remembers*. Boston: Little Brown. p.431 cited in Mark A. Heler. op. cit. p.23.

<sup>10</sup> Talal Nizameddin. 1998. *Russia and the Middle East: Towards a New Foreign Policy*. London: Hurst & Company. p.18.

In sum, it can be said that the position of the USSR in the Middle East and of course in Syria was one of low profile in Stalin's era because of Stalin's giving less priority to relations with the Middle Eastern states.

### **1.3. USSR- Syria under Nikita Khrushchev: 'Active Diplomacy'**

With the death of Stalin, Khrushchev became the President of the USSR. Khrushchev made fundamental changes in foreign relations towards the Middle East and also Syria. Khrushchev's worldviews was different from Stalin's. He thought that the world was divided into three main camps: "the socialist bloc, the capitalist bloc, and the Third World." He wanted to make the other countries communist so as to speak the same language. In order to make them, especially the Third World, communist, the main tactics that Khrushchev used were economic and military aid and political support.<sup>11</sup>

Khrushchev tried to extend Soviet supremacy by using communism everywhere in the world at a rapid pace. However, since Khrushchev saw himself the leader of the international communist movement, he had difficulties and obstacles in his policies towards the Middle East and in Syria on its own communist parties. Because some states, e.g. Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, saw their own communists as a threat to their regime.

Nonetheless, with the overthrow of the Shishakli dictatorship in Syria in early 1954, the new Syrian government, which were notably the Ba'ath party, seemed to be very pro-Russian and Leftists. Thus the new government made alliance and cooperation with the USSR possible. To show their good intentions towards the USSR, one of their initial policies was the recall of the communist leader Khalid

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<sup>11</sup> Galia Golan. op. cit. p.9.

Bakdash from exile, who was elected to Parliament and became an important figure for the next few years.<sup>12</sup>

While good intentions were shown to the USSR, Khrushchev, despite opposition from Molotov and Kaganovich, decided to enter the Middle East intensively. In early 1955, the first arms shipment of MIG-15 was sent to Syria by Czechoslovakia with technicians and training personnel,<sup>13</sup> at a total cost of £100 million.<sup>14</sup> In March 1955, Molotov reacted to Turkish and Iraqi concentration near the Syrian border in order to force Syria to join the Baghdad Pact and stated that the USSR was ready to “aid in any form whatsoever for the purpose of safeguarding Syria’s independence and sovereignty.”<sup>15</sup> The USSR, in order to show its support to Syria, signed a Trade and Payments Agreement in November 1955, and also in late 1955 the legations were mutually upgraded to full-fledged embassies.<sup>16</sup> The improving relations gave its fruits first with similar reaction that was given to the Eisenhower Doctrine by Syria and the USSR, both claiming that the doctrine was an intervention to the internal affairs of Middle Eastern states.<sup>17</sup>

In 1957 came, Syria was the ripest state in the Middle East to become communist. Thus Syria gained the special interest of Moscow between 1954 and 1957. As some examples of developing relations were given above, 1956 was the year of improved relations: in February Syria received Soviet arms, in August Syria

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<sup>12</sup> Charles B. McLane. 1973. *Soviet-Middle East Relations*. London: Central Asian Research Centre. p.90.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Mangold. 1977. “The Soviet-Syrian Military Relationship, 1955-77.” *Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies*. p.28 cited in Pedro Ramet. op. cit. p.16.

<sup>14</sup> Talal Nizameddin. op. cit. p.23.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Mangold. 1977. “The Soviet-Syrian Military Relationship, 1955-77.” *Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies*. p.26 cited in Pedro Ramet. op. cit. p.15.

<sup>16</sup> Pedro Ramet. op. cit. pp.16-17.

<sup>17</sup> Fahir Armaoğlu. 1989. *Filistin Meselesi ve Arab-İsrail Savaşları (1948–1988) (The Palestinian Question and The Arab-Israeli Wars (1948–1988))*. Ankara: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları. p.203.

and the USSR signed an agreement on cultural, scientific, and athletic cooperation,<sup>18</sup> and President Quwatli visited the USSR in October 1956. In 1957, the Soviet Union sent a huge amount of military and economic aid to Syria where some writers gave the amount of \$98 million<sup>19</sup> and the others gave the number \$579 million, in return for economic and technical agreement.<sup>20</sup>

The period 1961-1966 comprised Syrian political instability. There were eight coups before the leftist Ba'ath party, which was led by Nur al-din al-Atasi and General Salah Jadid, came to power. The USSR treated these coups differently, based on their being progressive or conservative. However the USSR recognized all the regimes officially and tried to continue good relationship between states. However, the Soviets treated the coups, especially Rightist Ba'ath as negative, even some radio programs, writers and newspapers criticized the Rightist Ba'ath regime and its policies.<sup>21</sup>

### **1.3.1. The 1957 Crisis**

The crisis began between Syria and Turkey in 1955 when Turkish and Iraqi troops concentrated on the Syrian border, and the USSR declared to aid Syria to guard its independence and sovereignty.<sup>22</sup> Indeed the reason for this crisis was to force Syria to join the Baghdad Pact, which was formed by 'Northern Tier' states - Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan, Iran, - and Britain. The USA joined the pact later as an

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<sup>18</sup> Pedro Ramet. op. cit. p.20.

<sup>19</sup> A. Grigoryev. 1968. *Soviet Union – Friend of the Arab Peoples*. Moscow. p.45, cited in Charles B. Mclane. op. cit. p.90.

<sup>20</sup> Patrick Seale. 1965. *The Struggle for Syria*. London: Oxford University Press for RIIA. pp.289-302, cited in Efraim Karsh. 1988. *The Soviet Union and Syria*. London: Royal Institute of International Affairs. p.4.

<sup>21</sup> For example some documents cited in Charles B. Mclane. op. cit. p.90: Radio Moscow, 11 April, 1963 which cited in Laquer, *The Struggle for the Middle East*. (...), p.86; Georgiy Mirskiy article in *New Times*, No.34 (28 August), 1963, p.13; and *Pravda*, 5 March, 1964.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Mangold. 1977. "The Soviet-Syrian Military Relationship, 1955-77." *Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies*. p.26 cited in Pedro Ramet. op. cit. p.15.

observer. The purpose of the pact was to form a strategic alliance against foreign powers, i.e. the USSR. Because the USSR had been pressuring these states on several occasions, e.g. territorial demand from Turkey and joint defense rights on the Straits. Sharing similar worries like Turkey, all the members of pact members in the Middle East like Iraq were “anxious to retain a strategic link with the western powers; it as more aware of the proximity of Russia than were other Arab countries.”<sup>23</sup>

Syria, which was not aware of Russian danger like the other Baghdad Pact members, had been developing its relations with the USSR. In return, its relations were strained with neighbors – Turkey and Iraq. Since Turkey and Iraq were members of the Baghdad Pact, they felt uncomfortable about the development of relations between Syria and the USSR like a credit agreement on economic and technical fields, which was signed between Syria and the USSR, which was a clear attempt of the Soviets growing support to Syria.<sup>24</sup> While the tight relations between Syria and the USSR were developing, the USA “feared that Syria was becoming a Soviet satellite, and nervously contacted its allies in the region.”<sup>25</sup>

As a result, Turkey, which increased its forces from 32.000 to 50.000 and put together contingency plans for intervening in Syria with Iraq,<sup>26</sup> made some military maneuvers and concentrations on the border; however this gave to the Soviets a chance publicly to support Syria by putting pressure on Turkey. The USSR shielded Syria against Turkey and Iraq. Turkey was threatened by war if a supposed Turkish plan to invade Syria was put into practice, and the Soviets declared that “any

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<sup>23</sup> Albert Hourani. 1991. *A History of the Arab Peoples*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. p.363.

<sup>24</sup> A. Grigoryev. 1968. *Soviet Union – Friend of the Arab Peoples*. Moscow. p.45, cited in Charles B. McLane. op. cit. p.90; and Patrick Seale. 1965. *The Struggle for Syria*. London: Oxford University Press for RIIA. pp.289-302, cited in Efraim Karsh. op. cit. p.4.

<sup>25</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower. 1965. *White House Years: Waging Peace, 1956-1961*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co. pp.196-203 cited in Pedro Ramet. op. cit. p.23.

<sup>26</sup> Undersecretary of State. October 14, 1957. *Memorandum for the Secretary (Department of State)*. Washington, D.C.: Undersecretary of State. cited in Pedro Ramet. op. cit. p.23.

aggression against Syria would not remain limited to this area alone.” Tirana Radio quoted the Soviet Minister of Defense Marshal G.K. Zhukov that if a possible war between Syria and Turkey began, “the Soviet Union will not remain with its arms folded. We are all ready to strike at any military adventure organized by the United States near our southern borders.”<sup>27</sup> Moreover an attempt which was an indication of Soviet support to Syria took place just as the crisis was continuing: a small naval fleet paid an official visit to Syria which happened for the first time in the history of the USSR during a Middle Eastern or even a Third World crisis.<sup>28</sup>

### **1.3.2. The United Arab Republic (1958-1961)**

After the return of Syrian communist leader Khalid Bakdash from exile in 1954, the situation for Syrian communists improved parallel to improving relations with the USSR. However Ba’ath Party members who were motivated by Arab nationalism were uncomfortable about the growing influence of Syrian communists.<sup>29</sup>

Despite developing relations with Moscow, the unity of Syria and Egypt under the name of the United Arab Republic surprised and also frustrated Soviet leadership. On this occasion, the Soviet Union did not support unification between Syria and Egypt. Because this development was a defeat of Arab communism against Arab nationalism, which was espoused by Nasser, and it was a defeat for the USSR, since Khrushchev saw himself as the leader of communists all around the world.

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<sup>27</sup> J. M. MacKintosh. 1962. *Strategy and Tactics of Soviet Foreign Policy*. London: Oxford University Press. p.229 cited in Alvin Z. Rubinstein. 1988. *Moscow’s Third World Strategy*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. p.130.

<sup>28</sup> Efraim Karsh. op. cit. p.3.

<sup>29</sup> Galia Golan. op. cit. p.142.



Also from another point of view, this unification deteriorated the Soviet Union's hand and in contrast improved Nasser hand.<sup>30</sup>

Yet, the USSR's response was unemotional and calm to the union of Syria and Egypt, because Moscow did not want to pull down the bridges which had built between the USSR and these states and "chose to continue to protect Soviet interests in the Middle East through cooperation with, not opposition to, Cairo,"<sup>31</sup> including Syria. Consequently "the Soviets saw no alternative but to accept this development 'with seeming good grace', and to acquiesce, 'but not without bitter recrimination, in the prompt extension of Nasser's anti-communism to Syria'."<sup>32</sup> When Syria disunited from the United Arab Republic, diplomatic relations were restored and the Soviet embassy was again opened in Damascus.

### **1.3.3. Summary of the Khrushchev Period**

As a summary of the Khrushchev era, the position of the USSR in the Middle East was generally better than when Khrushchev first came to power. If we compare the Stalin and Khrushchev eras, we have to say that the Soviet position in the Middle East was better than its predecessor, because the latter did not view nationalism as a negative issue and had decided to use it to advantage.

Following the overthrow of the Iraqi government in 1958, the Baghdad Pact, which was accepted by the USSR as a threat to the Soviet interests, was dissolved. Of course ties with Syria strengthened with support against Turkey and Iraq's threat to Damascus. Not only support which was given to Syria in the 1957 crisis

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<sup>30</sup> Talal Nizameddin. op. cit. p.23.

<sup>31</sup> Oles Smolansky. 1974. *The Soviet Union and the Arab East Under Khrushchev*. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press. p.80 cited in Nicolai N. Petro and Alvin Z. Rubinstein. 1996. *Russian Foreign Policy: From Empire to Nation State*. New York: Longman. p.248.

<sup>32</sup> Arnold L. Horelick. 1972. "Soviet Policy in the Middle East." In P.Y. Hammond and S.S.Alexander (eds.) *Political Dynamics in the Middle East*. New York: American Elsevier. p.574 cited in Efraim Karsh. 1990. *Soviet Policy towards Syria since 1970*. London: Macmillan. p.5.

strengthened Moscow's position, but also military and economic aid which was given to Syria, as well as the other states in the Middle East, strengthened Moscow's position.

The union of Syria and Egypt in 1958 interrupted the improving relations between Syria and USSR. After splitting up of the UAR, Soviet-Syrian relations between 1961 and 1963 were not as warm as in the 'halcyon' days of 1957. Since moderate and conservative politicians governed Syria, Damascus distanced its relations with the USSR, even though Syria needed aid to stabilize its economy and strengthen its position against unity supporters. With the coup, which was carried out on March 28, 1962, by General Zahr al-Din, the relations improved again.<sup>33</sup> One of the examples for improving relations was USSR's veto of the UN Resolution, submitted by the US and Britain, on condemning Syria because of continuing conflicts between Syria and Israel near the border.<sup>34</sup>

In conclusion, the USSR was taken as an important and main factor in Middle Eastern affairs by the end of the Khrushchev era; however, the USSR was not a dominant state over the Middle Eastern states, neither was it dominant in Syria. The reasons were prohibition of the communist parties and imprisonment of communists and also having united with Egypt. Therefore, despite military and economic aid from the USSR to Syria, Syria had sometimes maintained and executed its actions both domestically and in foreign policy apart from the Soviet Union, as well as other states in the Middle East.

Nonetheless, Khrushchev's energetic policy was criticized for being unrealistic because it required huge amount of resources to sustain. By adopting active foreign policy towards the Middle East, Khrushchev "plunged the Soviet

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<sup>33</sup> Pedro Ramet. op. cit. pp.31-33.

<sup>34</sup> Türel Yılmaz. 2004. *Uluslararası Politikada Ortadoğu: Birinci Dünya Savaşı'ndan 2000'e*. (The Middle East in International Policy: From the World War I to 2000). Ankara: Akçağ. pp.147-148.

Union into the thick of regional politics lying far beyond Moscow's traditional security belt."<sup>35</sup>

Stalin did not want to enter the Middle East. He rather wanted to influence the Western Europe and the so-called Northern Tier states, Turkey and Iran. However, Khrushchev changed the Soviet foreign policy towards the Middle East. Khrushchev decided to enter Middle East by using active diplomacy.

Khrushchev tried to influence Middle Eastern states by giving them economical and military aid besides diplomatic support. Syria was one of his aims to enter in the Middle East. He did not hesitate to threaten Turkey on the 1957 Syrian-Turkish crisis.

However Moscow seemed to be in mire by supporting Syria that domestically opened for change and was internationally problem maker in the next twenty years.

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<sup>35</sup> R.K. Ramazani. 1990. "Soviet Foreign Policy and Revolutionary Iran, Continuity and Change." In Hafeez Malik (ed.) *Domestic Determinants of Soviet Foreign Policy*. London. p.220 cited in Talal Nizameddin. op. cit. p.25.

## **CHAPTER II: CHANGES IN POLICY (1964-1991)**

While the USSR had the policy of spreading Soviet power gradually toward the rest of the world, the new President Leonid Brezhnev and the new Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin concentrated the state's energy and source intensely toward the Middle East in order to become the dominant power. Because the Middle East has very important naval routes in Soviet military perceptions, this made the region a valuable area for the Soviet military. Thus the USSR tried to get some rights in Syria, Egypt, and other Middle East states. As a result, the USSR had accessed to an air and a naval base in Egypt, and had port rights in Syria.

Consequently, Brezhnev followed in the way of Khrushchev in order to influence Syrian domestic and foreign relations. He thought like Khrushchev, his predecessor, who once said "We value trade least for economic reasons and most for political purposes."<sup>36</sup> If we look at Soviet efforts to influence by giving huge amount of economic aid in the Middle East and Northern Tier states, we can see that aid became more obvious after 1965.<sup>37</sup> In Soviet-Arab relations, economic and military aid had an important role in addition to political support.

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<sup>36</sup> Alvin Z. Rubinstein. 1990. "Soviet Strategic Interest in the Middle East." In Hafeez Malik. (ed.) *Domestic Determinants of Soviet Foreign Policy*. London. p.220 cited in Talal Nizameddin. op. cit. p.25.

<sup>37</sup> Efraim Karsh. 1990. op. cit. pp.52-56.

## 2.1. Leonid Brezhnev: 'Cautious Detente' and 'Assertive Opportunism'

In 1965, the USSR tried to form an alliance between the Middle Eastern states, mainly of Syria, Egypt, and Iraq. This alliance provided the 'anti-imperialist' forces against, of course, the imperialist block, namely the USA, Israel, and other NATO states. The USSR called Israel 'imperialist' in order to make Arabs link their struggle with the "struggle against imperialism." Another reason of the 'anti-imperialist block' was to impede the conflicts between Arabs by forming the alliance. The Soviet leadership recommended to the other Arab states, especially Egypt, to join together with Syria against the "imperialists" and Israel.

The Soviet Premier Kosygin visited Cairo in May 1966, in order to call for a united front of Arab states "such as the United Arab Republic, Algeria, Iraq, and Syria to confront imperialism and reaction."<sup>38</sup> In November 1966, Egypt and Syria signed a defensive alliance, which was sought by the USSR, and Soviet leaders may have hoped that this would deter any major Israeli attack on Syria, and Egypt.<sup>39</sup>

After the instable years of 1961-1966 in Syria, the new regime of Leftist Ba'athists took over the administration. The Syrian regime, which took power after a *coup d'état* in February 1966 (and Hafiz Assad was one of the active member who took duty in the *coup*), publicized that Syria started a major 'socialist transformation' and developed relations with the USSR. Declarations that the new regime announced pleased Moscow. While the USSR traditionally supported the communist leader and the communist party of Syria, Moscow did not support the communist party to dissolve the power of the left-wing Ba'ath regime that could be an advocate of the

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<sup>38</sup> See the report by Hedrick Smith in *New York Time*, May 18, 1966 cited in Robert O. Freedman. 1991. *Moscow and the Middle East*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.33.

<sup>39</sup> Charles B. McLane. op. cit. p.96.

Soviet Union. For this reason, the Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU) founded party-to-party relations with the leftist Ba'ath party.<sup>40</sup>

Economically, Syria needed finances to build a dam in 1966. The USSR had a chance on affecting Syrian domestic politics by economic aid. However the USSR set three provisions for economic aid according to *Le Monde* (April 12, 1966): “permission for CP chief Khalid Bakdash to return to Syria, inclusion of a communist in the cabinet, and permission for the communist party to publish a daily paper in Damascus.”<sup>41</sup>

As a result, after all the provisions and the return of the communist leader of Syria, Khalid Bakdash, were realized, the USSR gave to Syria a \$132 million loan for construction of the Euphrates Dam.<sup>42</sup> In addition, the Soviet Union provided \$200 million in weapon deliveries.<sup>43</sup>

With this process, Soviet economic aid came totally to \$234 million and military aid came totally to \$327 million between 1955 and 1967. Syria was one of three states in the Arab world, which received economic and military aid till May 1967.<sup>44</sup>

While the relations between the USSR and Syria were growing, Assad was involved in a power struggle with Jadid for leadership and accused Jadid of having “improper contacts with the Soviet embassy, undue economic concessions to Moscow, and collusion with Syrian Communists.” Indeed actions against Syrian Communists took place throughout 1970. However “the Soviets did not hesitate to

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<sup>40</sup> Charles B. Mclane. op. cit. p.90.

<sup>41</sup> Pedro Ramet. op. cit. p.38.

<sup>42</sup> George Lenczowski. 1971. *Soviet Advances in the Middle East*. Washington DC:AEI. p.123 cited in Efraim Karsh. 1990. op. cit. p.52.

<sup>43</sup> Pedro Ramet. op. cit. p.39.

<sup>44</sup> For Mr. Bromley Smith, DD/OCI, From Paul H. Corscadden, SDO/CIA Operations (June 8, 1967), Secret, Declassified October 23, 1980. “Communist Foreign Aid to Arab Countries since 1955.” Cited in Pedro Ramet. op. cit. p.38.

support Assad once his dominance became clear.”<sup>45</sup> With the changing of Syrian leadership, the USSR’s position was questioned. Nonetheless, despite major governmental changes in Syria, it was closely cooperating with the Soviet Union, and the Soviet Union seemed to have established good working relationships with Assad.

## **2.2. Confrontation with Israel**

Israel was the main concern from its establishment for Arab states especially those, which had common border with Israel, such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Jordan. The Arab states caused serious problems to Israel, and the other way round. The war between Egypt and Israel in 1956, the guerilla attacks from Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon were some of them. Although some diplomatic initiatives were taken by global and regional powers until 1966 for reconciling the warring or disputing sides, after this time with the new Syrian regime Israel had more problems with Syria and Egypt. Indeed, the new Syrian regime did not adopt a policy of only a socialist transformation in Syria, and close cooperation with the Soviet Union, but gave military and financial assistance to the Palestinian al-Fatah led by Yasser Arafat, which attacked Israel with guerillas.<sup>46</sup>

The foreign policy of the USSR was divided into two main approaches when tensions were rising between 1966 and 1967:<sup>47</sup>

A pro-war factional grouping, which included Brezhnev, Shelepin, the new chiefs in the defense ministry, and the young generals, who believed that the Arabs could defeat Israel; and an anti-war factional grouping, which included Suslov, Podgorny, Polyansky, and Kosygin,

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<sup>45</sup> R.D.Mclaurin, Don Peretz, and Lewis W.Snider. op. cit. p.265.

<sup>46</sup> Robert O. Freedman. 1991. op. cit. p.40.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Morozow. 1973. *Leonid Breshnev*. Stuttgart: W.Kohlhammer. p.229 cited in Pedro Ramet. op. cit. p.43.

who feared that the Arabs were militarily not prepared for war with Israel.

These differences on the opinions towards Arabs and rising tensions in the Middle East made the Soviet decision makers use the chaos in the Middle East and continuation of no war / no peace situation for Soviet profit.<sup>48</sup>

### **2.2.1. The 1967 June War**

In the beginning of 1967, Israelis retaliated against guerilla attacks to Jordan, which was supported by Syria.<sup>49</sup> However in early April, they decided to strike back directly against the Syrians. The Israeli air force made a raid on the Syrian artillery, which shelled Israeli farmers from the Golan Heights, to silence them and also shot down seven Syrian jets. This defeat, which made the Syrian government lose prestige, and anti-Ba'ath rioting in early May signaled the Syrian Ba'athist government was about to fall. The Soviet leaders, who were worried about the fall down of their main Arab ally in the Middle East and the center of anti-western activity and of course feared for the future of the pro-Soviet government in Syria, gave false information to Egypt that Israel was planning to attack Syria and was concentrating 11-13 brigades on the border.<sup>50</sup> In May 29, 1967, under the light of these developments, the Syrian President Nur al-Din al-Atassi and Foreign Minister Makhus went to Moscow. Nasser, the President of Egypt, ordered the UN troops away from the Israeli-Egyptian border, moved the Egyptian Army to the border, and made an alliance with Jordan to encircle Israel on May 30, 1967.<sup>51</sup> This alliance

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<sup>48</sup> Pedro Ramet. op. cit. p.44.

<sup>49</sup> Türel Yılmaz. op. cit. pp.165-166.

<sup>50</sup> Galia Golan. op. cit. p.58.

<sup>51</sup> Türel Yılmaz. op. cit. pp.149-121.



pleased the Soviets because of their efforts on founding an 'anti-imperialist' front against the imperialist states.

Since Israelis knew that they would be attacked within a few days, they decided to strike before hand. Beginning on the morning of June 5, 1967 and ending on June 10, 1967, the Israelis defeated the armies of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan and captured the Sinai Peninsula, the Jordanian section of the West Bank of the Jordan River, and the Golan Heights in Syria<sup>52</sup> in six days, that's why the war is called 'The Six-day War'.

Syria hoped that the USSR would help Syria and the other Arab countries would do the same politically and especially militarily, however, the USSR only cut its diplomatic relations with Israel. This lack of Soviet support hurt the USSR's prestige. Becoming aware of dangers of loosing prestige, the USSR made moves for gaining its prestige again, such as rebuilding the armies of Syria and Egypt and offering Soviet weapons to Jordan. The USSR also took advantage of the military weakness of Syria's army and its diplomatic isolation, because after having its diplomatic relations broken with the United States and Britain, Syria had nowhere to turn to get modern weapon systems and economic aid except the USSR.

After the war, Arab states put into practice of oil embargo to the United States, Britain, and West Germany. This policy was the one which the USSR supported. However, with initiatives of the conservative Arab states to terminate it, the Arab summit conference assembled in Khartoum in August 1967, one which Syria boycotted. Thus Syria was left out of the subsidy arrangement which was applied by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Libya. The other consequence of the war was the end of 'anti-imperialist' front that the USSR tried to impose.

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<sup>52</sup> Alvin Z. Rubinstein. 1992. *Soviet Foreign policy Since World War II: Imperial and Global*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers. p.214.

Although Syria, Egypt, and Jordan were defeated in the Six-day War, Hafiz Assad took advantage of controlling Syria within three years. However, while the USSR seemed to have a certain advantage over influencing Syria, the Syrian communist party obstructed both the Soviet position and their fortune, since the party supported Salah Jadid against Hafiz Assad in the struggle of power. Hafiz Assad criticized Soviet interference in Syrian internal affairs and insufficient weapons which the Soviet supplied. Furthermore, according to the *Jerusalem Post*, Assad had said: “Why should we not boycott the Soviet Union and its supporters inside the country? If we do so, we can force them to review their stand. Either they give us what we want and what is necessary or they will lose our friendship.”<sup>53</sup> Getting this warning, Robert O. Freedman thought that the USSR had kept itself away from the power struggle, which Assad was certainly to win.

The USSR tried to persuade Syria to accept the Soviet backed UN Resolution No.242<sup>54</sup> or to work together with Egypt to solve the Middle East crisis. However it was not a successful initiative, since the Syrian government was not willing to agree on thinking parallel with the USSR. Consequently the USSR had a limited effect on Syria.

### **2.2.2. The 1973 October War**

Syria's foreign relations with the USSR improved by the 1970s, however the USSR was reluctant to get involved in Middle Eastern affairs especially in 1971 and

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<sup>53</sup> *Jerusalem Post*, April 11, 1969, in Lawrence J. Whetten, “Changing Soviet Attitudes Toward Arab Radical Movements,” *New Middle East*, no. 28 (March 1970), p.25 cited in Robert O. Freedman. 1991. op. cit. p.40.

<sup>54</sup> The UN Resolution 242 contained articles which agreed upon by the USSR, US, Egypt, Jordan and Israel. However Syria and the PLO did not accept the resolution. The resolution included Israeli withdrawal from territories occupied in the recent conflict, recognition of Israel and end of state of belligerency and the appointment of a UN representative to mediate a peace agreement.

1972. According to Robert O. Freedman, this may have stemmed from three main factors:<sup>55</sup>

In the first place, the strong US reaction to what was at least tacitly Soviet-supported Syrian invasion of Jordan in September 1970 seems to have indicated to the Soviets that the United States was more willing to take action in the Middle East than it had been in January 1970. Second, the long feared Sino-US entente against the Soviet Union seemed suddenly on the horizon following Kissinger's and Nixon's visits. Finally, the long-delayed strategic arms talks, the centerpiece of Soviet-US détente, were nearing conclusion.

We understand from Soviet reluctance that the USSR did not want to put at risk the advantages of détente by aiding its unpredictable Arab ally since Anwar Sadat expelled the Soviet military troops from Egypt and adopted a different policy from Nasser. However, the USSR gave up the policy of supporting détente as of the beginning of 1973. The reasons are: first of all, the Soviet-Sino conflict, which the Soviets feared at the beginning, did not happen, and secondly, the Nixon administration was in a difficult position with the Watergate scandal. Thus the USSR gave up its policy of risking the advantages of détente, by supporting Egypt and Syria.<sup>56</sup> However Assad declared publicly before the war that he was dissatisfied with Soviets arm policy to Syria.

While the USSR knew about the military coordination between Syria and Egypt, it did not do anything except giving them sufficient amount of weaponry. By joining of Iraq and conservative Arab states Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in the war coalition, what the USSR sought for so long as an 'anti-imperialist' front, had materialized.

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<sup>55</sup> Robert O. Freedman. 1991. *op. cit.* p.49.

<sup>56</sup> Alvin Z. Rubinstein. 1992. *op. cit.* p.216.

The war began on October 6, 1973, and from the first days of war, the Soviet Union supported Syria and Egypt by airlifting and sea lifting weaponry, as well as supporting them in the United Nations diplomatically, and pressured the United States and Israel when the war came to an end. In sum, the USSR took risks, which the Soviets avoided at the very beginning of the Arab-Israeli conflict, by supporting Syria and Egypt, and threatened Israel when Israel went on the offensive. Thus the Soviet Union had a very special “role in starting the war, in feeding it, and in trying to end it,” when Syria and its Arab allies were in a difficult position.<sup>57</sup> Indeed Moscow sent “its biggest air supply operation in the Third World up to that time,” and even Soviet military personnel took some non-combat duties such as operating radar equipment and repairing tanks without approaching the front.<sup>58</sup> However, despite the aid and support, Assad was not pleased with the Soviet proposal in the UN in October 22 and accused the Soviets of neglecting to consult with him at every stage of proposal.<sup>59</sup>

Nevertheless, despite military and diplomatic support given by the USSR, after the war the ‘anti-imperialist front’ collapsed and the Soviet position deteriorated seriously among the Arab states and Syria. Moreover, Syria made crucial moves in order to improve relations with the US and the West. This move was not “the result of Syrian frustration with the Soviet Union,” but because Assad thought that the USSR had little influence over Israel and the US could assist in securing Syria in a possible negotiation with Israel. Although Syria tried to improve relations with the

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<sup>57</sup> John C. Campell. 1978. “The Soviet Union in the Middle East,” *The Middle East Journal* 32(1):2. For a detailed analysis of October War of 1973, Galia Golan. 1977. *Yom Kippur and After: The Soviet Union and the Middle East Crisis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>58</sup> Alvin Z. Rubinstein. 1988. op. cit. pp.145-146.

<sup>59</sup> Galia Golan. op. cit. p.148.

US and the West, Assad believed in “maintenance of strong ties between Moscow and Damascus.”<sup>60</sup>

On the other hand, in order to influence the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Soviet leadership tried to reestablish diplomatic relations with Israel supporting their right to exist, while it took the opposite side by delivering arms to Syria and supporting the war for the Golan Heights. The USSR sent arms including SCUDs, MIG-3s, advanced Soviet tanks, and SAM-6s, which were long-awaited by the Syrians before the October War, and the Soviets increased their military advisers to nearly 3000.<sup>61</sup> In taking this action, the Soviets aimed to strengthen Syria’s hand in the negotiations and in so doing maintain the Soviet position and prevent Syria’s changing sides to the pro-US camp. Indeed Anwar Sadat looked at Washington to regain territory from Israel, thus the USSR changed its supportive policy from Egypt to Syria and Syria became the centerpiece of the Soviet Middle East policy.<sup>62</sup> Even in the Twenty-fifth Party Congress in February 1976, Brezhnev ranked Syria at the head of the list of Arab friends and emphasized, “During the past five-year period we established a good mutual understanding with Syria. We act in concert on many international problems, above all those of the Middle East.”<sup>63</sup>

### **2.3. The “Front of Steadfastness and Confrontation”**

With the initiatives of the United States, Egypt and Israel seemed to sign a peace agreement. In order to protest Anwar Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem in November 1977 and to counter “Washington’s efforts to break the Arab coalition against

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<sup>60</sup> R.D.Mclaurin, Don Peretz, and Lewis W.Snider. op. cit. p.265.

<sup>61</sup> Galia Golan. op. cit. p.148.

<sup>62</sup> Alvin Z. Rubinstein. 1988. op. cit. p.152.

<sup>63</sup> *Pravda*, 25 February 1976; translated in *CDSP* 28, no.8, p.7 cited in Robert O. Freedman. 1991. “The Soviet Union and Syria.” In Moshe Eftar and Jacob Bercovitch (eds.) 1991. *Superpowers and Client States in the Middle East*. London: Routledge. p.153.

Israel,”<sup>64</sup> Syria, Iraq, Libya, Algeria, and South Yemen, as well as the PLO decided to found an organization, the Front of Steadfastness and Confrontation.

After the Camp David announcements, the “Front of Steadfastness and Confrontation” met in Damascus in order to condemn Camp David as ‘illegal’ and confirm the PLO’s right to be the sole representative of the Palestinian people. Another term that satisfied the USSR was that the front decided to “develop and strengthen friendly relations with fraternal states, [and] the Socialist community led by the USSR.”<sup>65</sup> The USSR applied a policy of supporting the coalition at the very beginning of its founding despite some contradictions with specific Soviet ‘desiderata’ because this coalition might be a solid platform to block US influence in the Middle East and the front could be used “as a vehicle for uniting radical Arab states against the West.”<sup>66</sup>

The Soviet Union moved to strengthen its ties with key members of the “Front of Steadfastness and Confrontation” since the Anwar Sadat regime “has excluded Egypt from the arena of the Arab-Israeli conflict.”<sup>67</sup> Meanwhile, Assad visited Moscow in February 1978. The Soviets treated Assad as the spokesman of the ‘progressive Arab camp.’ A \$500 million arms deal was signed between Syria and the USSR.<sup>68</sup> Assad visited Moscow again in October 1978. The result of the meeting was, according to *Pravda*, not only the joint condemnation of Camp David and of attempts “to undermine Soviet-Arab friendship,” but also a Soviet decision to “further strengthen Syria's defense potential.”<sup>69</sup> Also the Soviet Union supported the reconciliation between Syria and Iraq, which started in the late 1970s. While

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<sup>64</sup> Talal Nizameddin. op. cit. p.109.

<sup>65</sup> Leonid Medvenko. October 1978. “Middle East: Fictions and Realities,” *New Times* 40:6 cited in Talal Nizameddin. op. cit. p.255.

<sup>66</sup> Talal Nizameddin. op. cit. p.255.

<sup>67</sup> *Damascus Domestic Service*, February 25, 1978, cited in Efraim Karsh. 1990. op. cit. p.118.

<sup>68</sup> Efraim Karsh. 1990. op. cit. pp.117-118.

<sup>69</sup> *Pravda*, October 7, 1978, cited in Robert O. Freedman. 1991. op. cit. p.62.

supporting the reconciliation between Syria and Iraq, the USSR refused to supply weapons because the Syrian Army was sufficiently armed, and Assad might have started a new war that was not convenient for the USSR.

Consequently the relations between Syria and USSR became hotter. Syria abstained on the resolution of the United Nations that condemned the USSR for intervening in Afghanistan in early January 1980. In a *Moscow Radio* program, Syria was criticized for hardening Soviet situation in the Middle East: “It is Syria which is effectively standing in the way of all attempts to distort the USSR’s policy in the Middle East.”<sup>70</sup>

After straining relations with the Soviets, the “Front of Steadfastness and Confrontation,” which was pioneered by Syria, arranged a meeting in Damascus in mid-January in order to condemn the United States, and divert the attention of Arabs from the invasion of Afghanistan, and support friendship with the USSR. Indeed the communiqué which declared after Gromyko’s visit to Syria at the end of January, pointed out to the activities of Israel in the West Bank and Gaza, in order to divert popular criticism of Soviet invasion in Afghanistan.

#### **2.4. The Friendship and Cooperation Treaty (October 1980)**

In 1980, Syria’s contradictory position in the Arab world became more evident. The Iran-Iraq war broke the Arab world into two pieces. While Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt supported Iraq in the war, Syria and Libya supported Iran. As a result Iraq broke diplomatic relations with Syria and Libya, and the former was isolated from the Arab world because of supporting Iran against Iraq, policies on controlling the PLO and intervention in Lebanon. Moreover, in regard to the Arab-

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<sup>70</sup> *Moscow Radio*, March 14, 1980, *SWB*, SU/6372/A4/3 cited in Karen Dawisha. 1980. “Moscow's Moves in the Direction of the Gulf - So Near and Yet So Far,” *Journal of International Affairs* 34(2):221.

Israeli conflict, Assad was in a difficult position in early 1980, because the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty left Syria in a weakened position against Israel. Also internal problems caused by the Muslim Brotherhood were the main concerns that Assad had to face in domestic affairs.<sup>71</sup> Karen Dawisha wrote,

The shifts in inter-Arab alliances and the growth of American reliance on a military presence in the Gulf as an alternative to a comprehensive political solution to the Palestinian problem increased Syria's isolation and forced Assad closer to Moscow.<sup>72</sup>

Consequently, Syria had to sign a Friendship and Cooperation Treaty with the USSR in October 1980. This treaty, which showed Moscow's importance to the Arab world, gave the Soviet Union a stronger foothold in Syria. Brezhnev pointed out the importance of the treaty,<sup>73</sup>

The task of the Soviet-Syrian treaty is to help improve the situation in the Near East and establish there a real and just peace. This treaty has no other objectives and it is not directed against third countries. This is a treaty in the name of peace, not in the name of war.

Despite being considered as a victory for the USSR, Assad was unwilling to sign the treaty, which he resisted for nearly ten years.<sup>74</sup> However, isolation both abroad and domestic made Assad sign the treaty. On the other hand, Assad sought to keep flexible in his relationship with the USSR. According to Robert O. Freedman, Assad wanted to show to the USSR that "Syria was not as isolated as either its friends or foes may have thought,"<sup>75</sup> by signing a "unity" agreement with Libya before signing the treaty with Moscow. Indeed, this "unity" agreement bore fruit.

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<sup>71</sup> Galia Golan. *op. cit.* p.148.

<sup>72</sup> Karen Dawisha. 1980 . *op. cit.* 34(2):232-233.

<sup>73</sup> TASS, October 8, 1980 cited in Efraim Karsh. 1990. *op. cit.* p.127.

<sup>74</sup> Efraim Karsh. 1988. *op. cit.* pp.47-48 and Pedro Ramet. 1990. *op. cit.* pp.91-92.

<sup>75</sup> Robert O. Freedman. 1991. *op. cit.* p.92.



Gaddafi paid \$1 billion to Moscow in September 1980 for Syrian debts of arms purchase.<sup>76</sup>

Nonetheless, there were disagreements between the 'allies'. One of them was the Syrian support to Iran in the Iran-Iraq war, while the USSR was neutral. However, Syria still endorsed the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, and stressed that the USSR was needed in the Middle Eastern problems. In Assad's visit of October 1980, military assistance was discussed in order to strengthen Syria's defense capability. As a result, Syria got long-range missiles, T-72 tanks and MIG-25 airplanes; the USSR got rights to use the harbors of Lazkiye and Tartus as military bases.<sup>77</sup>

Yet, for Moscow, military aid might cause a number of problems in the Soviet foreign policy towards the Middle East. Firstly, Assad, who was worn out by internal and external difficulties, might have the intention to create an international crisis with Israel, or one of his Arab adversaries, and then drag the USSR into the crisis. Secondly, Assad might cause problems for the Soviets in its Middle Eastern policy when Soviet policy was already in a state of confusion because of the Iran-Iraq war. Since Assad followed a policy, which put the Soviets in a difficult position, independence from Moscow on a number of occasions in the past, he might do so again.<sup>78</sup>

However, after signing the treaty, in the following years Syrians still complained that the USSR did not provide support and arms supplies that they wanted. After the annexation of the Golan Heights, in January 1982, Syrian Foreign Minister, Abdul Khaddam, visited Moscow in order to obtain a security treaty like

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<sup>76</sup> Karen Dawisha. 1982. "The Correlation of Forces and Soviet Policy in the Middle East." In Adeed Dawisha, and Karen Dawisha (eds.) 1982. *The Soviet Union in the Middle East: Policies and Perspectives*. New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers Inc. p.155.

<sup>77</sup> Abdullah Manaz. November 2003. "Dünden Bugüne Suriye," *Stradigma*, 10:.....

<sup>78</sup> Robert O. Freedman. 1991. op. cit. p.93.

the USA and Israel had. The Soviet leadership resisted the quest, because of Syria's intention to drag the USSR in an unwanted adventure. Moscow discouraged Syria's desire to be a closer ally.<sup>79</sup>

## **2.5. The Syria-Jordan Crisis (November 1980)**

After the Sinai II accord between Egypt and Israel was signed, Syrians "concluded that Egypt was no longer an active factor in the confrontation with Israel." From then on, Syria and Jordan relations improved noticeably. The 'firmest' and 'quietest' alliance between Syria and Jordan lasted until 1980.<sup>80</sup> The Jordan crisis in November 1980 was one of the events of Assad's decision to apply a different policy from that of the Soviets foreign policy. These turns and changing policies of Assad always hampered the aim of 'anti-imperialist front' in the Middle East that the USSR wanted for so long.

The crisis occurred after the Arab summit in Amman. Syria boycotted the summit, with Libya, Algeria, and South Yemen that supported Iran in the war, and also pressured PLO, and Lebanon not to participate in the summit, fearing a final decision that would condemn Syria for supporting Iran.

However in the aftermath of the summit, the Syrian army concentrated on Jordan's border in order to neutralize the Muslim Brotherhood, which was supported by Jordan and made raids against the Syrian regime as Damascus claimed. However the main reason was probably Jordan's support of Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War politically and economically contrary to Syria's position of

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<sup>79</sup> Robert O. Freedman. 1991. op. cit. pp.127-128.

<sup>80</sup> R.D.Mclaurin, Don Peretz, and Lewis W.Snider. op. cit. pp.269-270.

supporting Iran. Thus relations between Syria and Jordan, which had been a close ally of Syria from 1973 to 1979, cooled significantly.<sup>81</sup>

Assad, in order to show Jordan that the USSR supported his policy, chose the time of Vasili Kuznetzov visit to Damascus for the finalized Soviet-Syrian treaty. Once again, Assad wanted to drag the USSR into the crisis in the Middle East. However, Kuznetzov made a speech in Damascus stressing the importance of Soviet-Syrian treaty for "eliminating hotbeds of dangerous tension in the Near East," and calling for the peaceful solution of problems between Arab countries.<sup>82</sup> "By emphasizing the peaceful nature of the treaty at the peak of the crisis, the USSR prevented Syria from sheltering behind the treaty,"<sup>83</sup> thus Syria's hand was weakened by peaceful declarations against Jordan.

However, the Soviet attitude during the crisis was nearly neutral, though this confrontation ended the rapprochement between the USSR and Jordan. Moreover, King Hussein postponed his visit to Moscow and said in an interview on December 2, 1980 that he requested from the USA arms supplies in order to resist the Soviet backed Syrian army and added that he put aside the intentions on receiving the arms supplies from Moscow.<sup>84</sup>

## **2.6. The Syrian Missile Crisis (April 1981)**

In the early days of April 1981, Syria attacked Phalangist positions near Beirut and Zahle. While Syrian attacks near Zahle escalated, Israel shot down two Syrian transport helicopters, which were involved in the operation, in order to pressure Syria to loosen its siege of the Christian town of Zahle. For this reason, Syria deployed

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<sup>81</sup> R.D.Mclaurin, Don Peretz, and Lewis W.Snider. op. cit. p.265.

<sup>82</sup> *Pravda*, December 3, 1980, cited in Robert O. Freedman. 1991. op. cit. p.94.

<sup>83</sup> Efraim Karsh. 1990. op. cit. p.130.

<sup>84</sup> Pranay B. Gupte, New York Times, December 2, 1980, cited in Robert O. Freedman. 1991. op. cit. p.94.

surface-to-air missiles batteries into Lebanon near Zahle. Menachem Begin, Israeli Prime Minister, declared that if the missiles were not withdrawn into Syria, Israel would destroy them.<sup>85</sup>

Like in other crises, the USSR was caught by surprise with Assad's decision to move missiles into Lebanon. Assad decided by himself without consulting the USSR, although there was an article in the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation about consulting each other in case of breaking peace and about the security environment. Moreover the US sought for support of the USSR in the peace-making process, and this showed that the USSR was still an important actor in the Middle East. On the other hand, "the USSR sought to discredit America's suitability to play the role of impartial mediator between Israel and Syria."<sup>86</sup> Thus the Soviets emphasized that Syria's policy in the crisis is a "purely defensive measure....[which]falls short of threatening Israel's security in any way." In addition to verbal support from the USSR, the Soviets sent their Mediterranean squadron to the Lebanese coast, signed a Soviet-Syrian agreement on economic and technical cooperation on May 14, increased military support for Syria and put on practice an joint amphibious practice on July 6-7, 1981.<sup>87</sup>

On the other hand, the USSR did not want to be dragged in an unwanted war between Syria and Israel, although Syria was a close ally of Moscow. The USSR also did not want Syria's involvement in a war against Israel that might cause the collapse of the Syrian regime. Thus, due to the advantages and dangers, Moscow carried out the dualist policy. On the one hand Moscow tried to damage the reputation of US

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<sup>85</sup> Efraim Karsh. 1990. op. cit. p.130. There was a rumor which was about a tacit agreement between Israel and Syria made in 1976. The agreement contained the articles that Israel would not interfere with the Syrian invasion of Lebanon, so long as no SAM missiles were moved into Lebanon and no Syrian forces were sent to South Lebanon.

<sup>86</sup> Efraim Karsh. 1988. op. cit. p.57.

<sup>87</sup> Efraim Karsh. 1988. op. cit. pp.58-59.

meditation efforts, and on the other hand the USSR tried decreasing the possibility of war between Syria and Israel.<sup>88</sup>

## **2.7. The Syria-PLO Crisis**

The Palestinians resistance movements got strong after the defeat of regular Arab armies by Israel. While they were getting bigger, they had conflicts with each other about getting recruits, funds, and prestige. But, at the beginning of the 1960s, the USSR kept a low profile on the Palestinian resistance movements or mainly the guerrilla organizations. But Syria and Egypt strongly supported the Palestinian organizations. From mid-1969, the Soviet interest increased after the death of Nasser, and the USSR decided to get involved in guerrilla organizations.

The conflicts between Palestinian guerrilla organizations made them form a united organization that was named the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).<sup>89</sup> Syria supported the Palestinian Liberation Organization at the beginning. Because Assad's main aim was to control the PLO through whose help he would become the leader of Arab nations.

With the interest of the USSR in guerrilla organizations, the PLO was more important on Moscow's Middle East policy. From then on, the USSR tried to tighten its relations with the PLO, but Moscow hesitated on recognizing and bridging diplomatic relations with the PLO since it was considered as a terrorist organization all over the world, and because the PLO defended the idea of liquidation of Israel

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<sup>88</sup> Robert O. Freedman. 1991. op. cit. pp.106-108.

<sup>89</sup> "The PLO was founded on June 2, 1964. The first executive committee was formed on August 9, with Ahmad Shuqeiri as its leader. At the Palestinian National Congress in Cairo on February 3, 1969 Arafat was appointed PLO leader. The PLO includes Fatah, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF), the Arab Liberation Front (ALF), the Popular Struggle Front (PSF) as well as other minor groups. All are devoted to what they called armed resistance to either Zionism or Israeli occupation, using methods which included attacks on civilians and guerrilla warfare against Israel." In [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian\\_Liberation\\_Organization#History](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_Liberation_Organization#History). Accessed on the date of April 20, 2005.

which was never accepted by the US and Israel. For this reason, Yasser Arafat, who was the head of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) after the death of Ahmed Shukeiry, was invited to Moscow in February 1970 by the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Organization in order to not to be invited by the Soviet government. However, after Arafat was treated in China with great respect with a high-level reception the very next month, the USSR made the Middle East communist parties found a guerrilla organization, Ansar, in order to influence the PLO. But Ansar was not able to influence the PLO from the inside.<sup>90</sup>

The conflict between the PLO's leader Yasser Arafat and Syria's president Hafiz Assad was one of the serious concerns of the USSR. Syria under the Jadid regime had supported the Palestinian Resistance Movement in the way of supplying arms and other facilities. However, after the *coup* of Assad in 1970, Syrian policy on the Palestinian issue changed. Assad began to put some restrictions over the Palestinians and political activities of the movement in Syria. Assad also put restrictions on guerrilla operations undertaken by the PLA which had to be approved by the Syrian army command. Both leaders tried to exert influence over Palestinian peoples in Lebanon and Syria and tried to be the 'legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.'<sup>91</sup>

The crisis between Assad and Arafat was evident in the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1976. The Syrian involvement in civil war created a very serious problem for Soviet diplomacy when battles between Syrian and PLO forces took place in July 1976. Since both Syria and PLO were the allies of the USSR, the USSR did not take sides in the war. As a result, both sides complained about the Soviet policy, lack of aid and support. This two-handed policy of Moscow did not put out

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<sup>90</sup> Robert O. Freedman. 1991. op. cit. pp.44-45.

<sup>91</sup> R.D.Mclaurin, Don Peretz, and Lewis W.Snider. op. cit. p.277.

the fire between the PLO, which was an adjunct of Soviet policy, and Syria, which was a key component in the Middle East, especially after Egypt became closer to the US. However, at the time of invasion of Lebanon, while Arafat clashed with Assad, the latter also made public declarations of support to the Palestinians as its patron state did. But the Soviet criticism increased on Syria's treatment of the PLO and Arafat after Syrian intervention in Lebanon, and the Soviets even accused Syria of "stabbing the PLO at the back."<sup>92</sup> Brezhnev sent two letters to Assad on Syrian actions towards the PLO emphasizing that "the Syrian leadership should take all possible measures to end its military operations against the [Palestinian] Resistance and Lebanese National Movement."<sup>93</sup> Moreover, Hafiz Assad used leftist and Islamist groups in the PLO in order to weaken Arafat's position. Despite USSR's suggestions, Assad did not give up of controlling the PLO from inside. In 1983, Assad supported Fatah, one of the most important of the PLO's numerous factions, in organizing a rebel movement against Arafat in order to force him out of Lebanon, to control the PLO but not to get the PLO out of the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>94</sup>

The USSR's vested interest in Syria-PLO conflict was a *rapprochement* between the sides instead of choosing one of them. In any case, Moscow chose Syria in the confrontation between Assad and Arafat, since Syria was the main Arab state opposing US diplomacy in the Middle East and allowing Moscow to use the Syrian naval and air force facilities as well. The other reason was that the PLO became distant from the USSR and Syria's orbit because of supporting the US proposal on solving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

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<sup>92</sup> *Pravda*, July 16, 1976 cited in Iliana Kass. 1979. "Moscow and the Lebanese Triangle," *The Middle East Journal* 33(2):175.

<sup>93</sup> Adeed Dawisha.1982. "The Soviet Union in the Arab Wold: The Limits to Superpower Influence." In Adeed Dawisha, and Karen Dawisha (eds.) op. cit. 18.

<sup>94</sup> Gary C. Gambill. April 2004. "Syria's Foreign Relations: The Palestinian Authority," *Middle East Intelligence Buletin* 3(4):2-3.

## 2.8. Syria in Lebanon

After the PLO was ousted from Jordan because of its threat to King Hussein's regime, it settled in Lebanon in the 1970s. The settlement complicated Lebanon's interior dynamics. Accordingly, in 1976 the Lebanon Civil War took place. It was between the Christians and Muslims and Palestinians over power politics. The war became more complex when Syria got involved militarily in June in order to aid the Christians and end the civil war.<sup>95</sup> However there were no formal diplomatic relations between Syria and Lebanon until 1976 and Lebanon stayed neutral in Arab-Israeli conflict. Thus, "Syria's main interest in dragging Lebanon into the Arab-Israeli confrontation," was the real aim of Hafiz Assad who thought that the Lebanese army was too weak to hold the Lebanese-Israeli border and the border "constituted a dangerously soft underbelly in the Arab defenses."<sup>96</sup>

The Syrian intervention in Lebanon in 1976 pleased and benefited Moscow at the beginning of the crisis, because of growing Syrian influence and possibility of *rapprochement* between the PLO and Syria. However, later, the USSR demanded from Syria to end the occupation of Lebanon as mentioned above. On the contrary, Assad warned Moscow on reducing Soviet influence in Syria and improving relations with the US if Soviet pressure on Syria lasted. One of Assad's main aims in threatening the USSR on reducing Soviet influence was not only getting support economically and military but also;<sup>97</sup>

Assad opted to maintain a good dialogue with the US mainly as a potential instrument in his confrontation with Israel. Indeed, beyond

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<sup>95</sup> Şatlık Amanov. 2004. "Hafiz Esad Dönemi Suriye Dış Politikası."(Syrian Foreign Policy of Hafiz Assad Period.) In Türel Yılmaz and Mehmet Şahin (eds.) op. cit. p.216.

<sup>96</sup> Ilana Kass. Spring 1979. op. cit. 33(2):165.

<sup>97</sup> Christos Iacovou. July 2002. "Syria's New Role," *Perihelion* (European Rim Policy and Investment Council), in the internet <http://www.erpac.org/perihelion/articles2002/july/syria.htm>. Accessed on March 15, 2005.



his intention to use the US as a counterweight to Soviet demands and as source of technological and economic assistance, Assad essentially endeavored to weaken American support for Israel, or alternatively to use US influence over Israel to advance Syrian interests.

Indeed the Soviets did not like some policies of Assad, such as “intervening in Lebanon, trying to emasculate and control the PLO, flirting with the West.”<sup>98</sup>

The occupation and intervening in Lebanon’s domestic affairs lasted six years and this lasting intervention made Syria isolated from the Arab world. However, while the Soviets took risks in the 1973 War, in 1982 Moscow was unwilling to take risks because of the United States’ increasing power. The USSR even did not do anything except sending new arms after Israel destroyed 29 Soviet-built SAM sites and over 80 Syrian MIGs.<sup>99</sup> Syrians wanted support by the Soviet Union in any way due to the treaty of Friendship and Cooperation; however the Soviet Union indicated, “their treaty did not require them to protect Syrian forces outside Syrian territory.”<sup>100</sup> This lack of Soviet support in the Lebanon crisis of 1982 was explained by the western analysts in three ways:<sup>101</sup>

One group of analysts attributed the Soviet hesitancy to the succession crisis and former Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev's deteriorating health. Another group pointed to Soviet logistical difficulties in the conflict, and Soviet unwillingness to deploy troops abroad in the face of significant opposition. Others contended that Moscow was preoccupied with the continuing crises in Poland and Afghanistan, the strategic arms negotiations, and efforts to

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<sup>98</sup> John C. Campbell. Winter 1978. “The Soviet Union and the Middle East,” *The Middle East Journal* 32(1):9.

<sup>99</sup> Jonathan R. Adelman and Deborah Anne Palmieri. 1989. *The Dynamics of Soviet Foreign Policy*. New York: Harper & Row. p.203.

<sup>100</sup> Carol R. Saivetz and Sylvia Woodby. 1985. *Soviet-Third World Relations*. Boulder: Westview Press. p.81.

<sup>101</sup> Robert O. Freedman. 1991. op. cit. p.136.

encourage nuclear freeze forces both in the United States and Western Europe.

Israel also hesitated in the conflict with Syria in Lebanon in 1982. Since Syria signed the Friendship and Cooperation Treaty with the USSR in 1980, and the Soviets attempted to reload Syria's losses of over estimated eighty planes in Lebanon in order to signal "Israel not to carry the war to Syria,"<sup>102</sup> Israel had some drawbacks on going into armed conflict with Syria. For this reason, Israel preferred to sign a cease-fire agreement with Syria in Bekaa not because of Syrian danger but for fear of Soviet interference. With this agreement Assad left the PLO alone against Israel.<sup>103</sup>

Brezhnev used the same instruments as his predecessor, Khrushchev, did. They were economic and military support. However, despite support was given to Syria, Syria was far away of defending Soviet interests in the Middle East. Indeed Brezhnev was careful in détente period especially from the beginning of the 1970s he left the détente.

From the 1970s, Brezhnev adopted foreign policy in a more opportunistic way that he tried to use the Middle East conflicts for Moscow's benefits. However, while using conflicts for its benefits, Syria sometimes caused problems for Moscow that left it in a difficult situation.

Hafiz Assad did not always do what the Soviet Union thought. On the contrary, he wanted to drag Moscow into the conflict with Syria. However in the 1980s, Syria did not find the Soviet Union in every conflict that it caused. Mikhail

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<sup>102</sup> Nicolai N. Petro and Alvin Z. Rubinstein. op. cit. p.252.

<sup>103</sup> İrfan Acar. 1989. *Lübnan Bunalımı ve Filistin Sorunu* (The Lebanon Crisis and The Palestinian Problem). Ankara: TTK Yayınları. pp.93-95.

Gorbachev applied a different foreign policy than his predecessors that can be summarized as defensive and peaceful approach.

**CHAPTER III:**  
**DEFENSIVE PERIOD (1982-1991)**

**3.1. The Transition Period**

In the transition period, there were two presidents in charge, Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko. However these elderly leaders had a short tenure of twenty-eight months. Yuri Andropov and his successor Konstantin Chernenko could influence Soviet foreign policy in the Middle East minimum.

**3.1.1. Yuri Andropov**

Andropov had to support Syria diplomatically and politically support. Soviet reliability in the Middle East was in question then and even Libya made comments on insufficient Soviet support, the poor performance and quality of the Soviet weaponry, and the United States began to control the diplomatic initiative in the region by establishing the ‘Central Command’ to watch over its Rapid Deployment Force (RDF). In military terms, the Soviets sent SAM-5 missiles to Syria in order to show that Soviet support to Syria continued and increased.<sup>104</sup> Andropov had to give Syria new weapon systems, because indeed Andropov’s general attitude towards Syria was positive in comparison to other Third World ‘self-declared Leninist states,’ thus “he proved to be one of the most ardent advocates of the Syrian connection.” Although Andropov was “skeptical of the claims of self-declared Leninist states in

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<sup>104</sup> Robert O. Freedman. 1991b. op. cit. p.175.

the Third World and loath to undertake new financial or other commitments,” Syria was to this exception in his general rule.<sup>105</sup>

The USSR proposed a new peace plan, for which the Arabs showed no support since the main allies of the Soviets were little influence over the Arab summit. Even the USSR’s main allies, Syria, Libya, and the PLO, were in conflict with each other, like Hafiz Assad and Kaddafi were in conflict with Arafat, because Arafat was flirting with the Reagan Plan.<sup>106</sup> Assad, after Soviet weaponry arrived, used the situation to improve his political position in the Middle East and in Lebanon. Assad, supported by Libya and Iran, claimed not only to end the Israeli occupation in Lebanon, but also the ouster of Saddam Hussein. Knowing Assad’s policy of dragging the USSR into an unwanted war, the USSR did not allow Syria to decide when the missiles would be used.

In March 1983, the USSR put forward its foreign policy towards the Middle East in an aggressive but limited mood. By warning Israel not to attack Syria, but without mentioning the Soviet- Syrian treaty, and claiming that Israel was ‘playing with fire,’ the USSR sought to rebuild its position in the Middle East.<sup>107</sup> Nonetheless the Soviet Foreign Minister, Andrei Gromyko, stated that the policy of the USSR in Lebanon was in support of “the withdrawal all the foreign troops from the territory of Lebanon, all of them. Syria is in favor of this,” and added “We do not share the point of view of extremist Arab circles that Israel should be eliminated. This is an unrealistic and unjust point of view.” This statement showed that the USSR did not want to alienate its main ally Syria, and supported the existence of Israel, as well as the Arab-Israeli conflict resolution in a political way. However, the USSR and Syria did not accept the withdrawal agreement between Lebanon and Israel agreed upon in principle

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<sup>105</sup> Pedro Ramet. *op. cit.* p.162.

<sup>106</sup> Robert O. Freedman. 1991a. *op. cit.* pp.148-149.

<sup>107</sup> Robert O. Freedman. 1991a. *op. cit.* p.153.

on May 6, 1983, which was an attempt of the US. The reason was that the Soviets did not want the US to diplomatically benefit from this agreement.<sup>108</sup> Syria was trying to make its hand strong in the political arena and was looking for support from Moscow according to the treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. Khaddam, Syrian foreign minister, stated that, in case of a war between Syria and Israel, "We believe that the USSR will fulfill its commitments in accordance with the [Soviet-Syrian] treaty."<sup>109</sup> Nonetheless the USSR was unwilling to be involved in a war in Lebanon.

### **3.1.1.1. Confrontation with the U.S.A. in Lebanon (September 1983)**

As of the end of August 1983, a new crisis began: warfare between the Lebanese government and the Shiites. The conflict was small in scale, but it escalated rapidly. While the conflict was escalating, Syria did not feel comfortable with threatening the US clients because the US battleship, *New Jersey*, was sailing in the neighborhood.

The USSR reacted to the crisis very carefully. The government made a statement in *Pravda* that the Soviet Union was 'deeply concerned' about the probable intervention of the US in Lebanon. But there was a change from the earlier policy of the USSR in that there was no mention of withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon, while the Soviets did not threaten the US. Indeed when Syrian positions were under fire by the US, the USSR did not do anything except to alarm its southern troops and warned Syria "not to provoke the United States" when Syrian forces in Lebanon fired on US planes.<sup>110</sup> On the other hand, the USSR benefited from, and also was content with, the confrontation between the US and an Arab state, Syria.

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<sup>108</sup> Robert O. Freedman. 1991a. op. cit. pp.154-157.

<sup>109</sup> Reuters report, *New York Times*, May 11, 1983, cited in Robert O. Freedman. 1991a. p.158.

<sup>110</sup> Galia Golan. 1990. op. cit. p.138.

In sum, the USSR behavior was very cautious in the crisis in order not to escalate the confrontation to a superpower confrontation. Syria complained about the lack of Soviet support during the crisis. However after the cease-fire, the USSR, in order to lessen Syrian discontent with the lack of Soviet support, sent off modern SS-21 ground-to-ground missiles. At the same time, the USSR carried out the policy of decreasing its military relationship with Syria in order to avoid a possible war between the US and Syria in a probable breakdown of cease-fire. Under these circumstances, on the third anniversary of the Soviet-Syrian treaty the relationship was at low ebb.<sup>111</sup>

Nonetheless, while the USSR tried to decrease its probable involvement in and after the crisis, Assad attacked Arafat and his supporters in Tripoli in December 1983. This dangerous policy raised the possibility of a US and Syrian confrontation again. Assad planned to crackdown on Arafat's forces simultaneously with the visit of Khaddam to Moscow. Assad wanted to show that Moscow supported his policy on Lebanon. However Moscow did not please with Assad's policy on the PLO, because it wanted to see the PLO as an independent actor in the Middle East rather than as part of the Syrian Army, but "the USSR was unwilling to offer Arafat anything more than verbal support."<sup>112</sup> Thus Assad made his Soviet ally support Syria. In order to prove to the world that the USSR was supporting Syria, Assad and other government members made comments to the media such as "the possibility of a Soviet-American confrontation if a new war broke out," and "the USSR would never to allow Syria to be defeated."<sup>113</sup> In spite of making these comments, Syria could not get more than moral support against the US from the USSR. The crisis ended with the withdrawal

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<sup>111</sup> Robert O. Freedman. 1991. "The Soviet Union and Syria." In Moshe Eftar and Jacob Bercovitch (eds.) op. cit. p.182-183.

<sup>112</sup> Carol R. Saivetz and Sylvia Woodby. op. cit. p.81.

<sup>113</sup> Robert O. Freedman. 1991a. op. cit. pp.174-176.

of the US troops from Lebanon, after 250 US marines were killed in a car bomb attack on their residence.

### **3.1.2. Konstantin Chernenko**

The USSR was in a good position when Konstantin Chernenko came to power. Because the US and Western troops had left Lebanon, the Lebanese-Israeli agreement failed and the Reagan Plan was shelved. Thus Chernenko had a chance to re-make policy with Lebanon Crisis, less dependent on Syria. Indeed Chernenko put in practice the new Middle East policy beyond the pro-Soviet camp.

Hafiz Assad was dissatisfied with Chernenko's policy and he was doubtful "the USSR's readiness to maintain its extensive military support of Syria." In March 1984, Geidar Aliyev made a visit to Syria to reassure Assad. However Assad expected more than such phrases of support his main ally. Assad paid a visit to the USSR on October 15, 1984, four years after the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was signed. Assad was successful in increasing economic and military aid to Syria at this visit. According to *Foreign Report*, Assad requested a moratorium on Syria's military debt that the Soviets ignored.<sup>114</sup>

During his visit, Assad was told that the Soviets would withdraw their personals in air defense units from Syria, and leave the SA-5 batteries to Syrians. This seemed like a Syrian achievement, but in real it was an attempt to express Moscow's unwillingness to meet risks on behalf of Syria.<sup>115</sup> Syrians made no direct

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<sup>114</sup> *Radio Moscow in English*, October 17, 1984 and *Foreign report* (London), November 22, 1984, p.8 cited in Efraim Karsh. 1988. op. cit. pp.81-83.

<sup>115</sup> *New York Times*, January 26, 1986 and *Jane's Defense Weekly*, May 11, 25, 1984 cited in Efraim Karsh. 1988. op. cit. p.83.



criticism of the Soviet unwillingness, but they made attempts for diversifying their weapons resources through buying French or other Western arms.<sup>116</sup>

### **3.2. Gorbachev Period: ‘Defensive’**

At the beginning of 1985, problems in the USSR became evident. Mikhail Gorbachev, who took power in March 1985, identified the problems as economic, social and foreign relations. Thus Mikhail Gorbachev stated repeatedly that he intended to change the direction of Soviet foreign policy, mainly in the Third World.<sup>117</sup>

In order to divert resources from military needs to civilian needs, he had to get a ‘respite’ in the arms race. So he had to persuade the US, Europe and NATO that the ‘Soviet threat’ was diminished. However, efforts to convince the US and others did not exactly begin start of Gorbachev’s tenure. Indeed, he sent to Afghanistan fresh powers and intensified the Soviet interest, moreover he sent to Libya SAM-5 missiles during his first year in office.<sup>118</sup> Since the 27<sup>th</sup> party congress in 1986, Gorbachev thought that “a resolution of the war in Afghanistan might pave the way for increased efforts to settle other regional conflicts, including those in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf,”<sup>119</sup> and expressed this openly.

By the beginning of 1987, Gorbachev put into practice the ‘new thinking’ in Soviet foreign policy, which had five major principles. Gorbachev pointed out to “a need to abandon.....the ‘zero-sum game’ approach to the Third World,” “the ‘balance of interests’ which would take into account the legitimate interests of the

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<sup>116</sup> Mustafa Talas’s interview with *Liberation* (Paris), November 30, 1984 cited in Efraim Karsh. 1988. op. cit. p.84.

<sup>117</sup> Melvin A. Goodman. 1990. *Gorbachev and Soviet Policy in the Third World*. Washington D.C., The Institute for National Strategic Studies. p.5.

<sup>118</sup> Robert O. Freedman. 1991a. op. cit. pp.205-206.

<sup>119</sup> Melvin A. Goodman. op. cit. p.8.

USSR, the US, and regional states,” “reliance should be placed on political means for the resolution of regional conflicts,” and “there will be no possible detente in US-Soviet relations if there is no settlement of the most serious regional conflicts especially in the Middle East” because of organic ties between regional conflicts and superpower confrontation.<sup>120</sup>

The worsening situation in the Middle East was becoming very important for Moscow with the growing domestic, economic and social problems. These made Gorbachev apply a more peaceful policy toward the region. Indeed three central problems for Moscow which caused its influence to diminish were: the Hussein-Arafat agreement, which could be related to the Reagan plan and allowed Egypt to be reintegrated into the Arab world that the USSR had not wanted so far, and the Iran-Iraq war, which could strengthen the US position in the Middle East, compounded by events in Lebanon that still caused problems for Moscow. Contrary to the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation articles, “Assad frequently moved to create political and military crises without appearing to consult with the USSR in advance, thus frequently presenting Moscow with a *fait accompli*.”<sup>121</sup>

The USSR tried to influence the Middle Eastern states by proposing its new peace process. The Soviet Union had to show that its influence was still continuing in the Middle East and make efforts to end the conflict in Persian Gulf, because the prolongation of war weakening the Soviet position in the Middle East. Moreover the United States strengthened its position and seemed to win the zero-sum game in the Middle East if the war continued.

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<sup>120</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev. 1987. *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World*. New York: Harper and Row. cited in Robert O. Freedman. 1991a. op. cit. p.206.

<sup>121</sup> Robert O. Freedman. 1991b. “The Soviet Union and Syria.” In Moshe Eftar and Jacob Bercovitch (eds.) op. cit. p.195.

### 3.2.1. USSR's Attitude towards Syrian-Lebanon- the PLO Relations

USSR was critical about the 'heavy involvement' of Syria in Lebanon from the beginning of its intervention. However, this critical manner did not allow the Soviets change their attitude toward Syria especially at the beginning of the Gorbachev era. Although Gorbachev gave signs of supporting Syria, he tried to change the Soviet policy toward the Middle East and Syria in the following years. Nonetheless he "refrained from acknowledging Syrian domination of Lebanon" as his predecessors did, thus Moscow hesitated to associate with Syria in Lebanon because of independent Syrian actions in Lebanon.<sup>122</sup>

However, the USSR looked to benefit from developments in Lebanon. Indeed Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, which was announced in January 1985 and ended in June 1985, was taken by the USSR "as a victory for 'Lebanese patriotic forces,' as well as for its major Arab ally, Syria."<sup>123</sup> The USSR was also pleased with decreasing in the possibility that the crisis between Syria and Israel might expand into a superpower confrontation.

Moscow's approval of Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon did not last long since Moscow had to choose between one of two allies, Syria and the PLO, which were still in conflict with each other in Lebanon. Syria still supported the militia groups against Arafat in Lebanon and wanted unification under Syrian influence. The Syrian-supported Shiite militia, Amal, attacked Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut in the early days of June 1985, which was referred to by Arafat as "the second

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<sup>122</sup> Galia Golan. op. cit. p.278.

<sup>123</sup> *Pravda*, January 16, 1985 and Dmitry Volsky, "Behind the Prospective Israeli Pull-out from Southern Lebanon," *New Times*, no.5 (1985), pp.14-15, cited in Robert O. Freedman. 1991a. op. cit. p.209.

massacres of Sabra and Satilla.”<sup>124</sup> As in 1976, in the Lebanon civil war, and in the 1983 confrontation between Syria and the PLO, Gorbachev had a difficult choice like his predecessors had. In sum, like his predecessors, Gorbachev chose to be neutral and called for an immediate cease-fire, but Syria was criticized in the Arab world.

In order to look for support from the Soviet Union, in his unscheduled visit to Moscow in June 1985, Assad wanted from Moscow “to coordinate their response to King Hussein’s search for support for an international conference that would include a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation... to ease Soviet-Syrian tensions over Syria’s support of Palestinian opposition to Arafat’s leadership and over its policy in Lebanon; and to discuss increased arm deliveries.”<sup>125</sup>

However Syria worsened the situation in the Middle East for the USSR by attacking Palestinian refugee camps in the following years. Syria did not attack camps itself, but Syrian-supported Amal besieged the camps as in 1985, in order to prevent Palestinian military existence, from October 1986 to April 1987 for six months. Assad again visited Moscow at the end of these developments. Gorbachev announced in the dinner speech that the USSR was “saddened by the disunity, friction, and conflicts in the Arab world which are vigorously exploited by imperialist and their henchmen.”<sup>126</sup> Assad pointed out Syrian support for Arab solidarity and Palestinian problems without giving any signals for conciliation with the PLO. The other problems that were taken up in the visit were the Iran-Iraq War, Arab-Israeli conflict and military aid. On the Iran-Iraq War, the USSR sought initiatives from Assad on ending the war, but Assad only mentioned his displeasure

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<sup>124</sup> Arafat was quoted on Rabat (Morocco) Domestic Service in Arabic, August 7, 1985 (*Foreign Broadcast Information Service: Middle East and South Asia*, August 8, 1985, p.A-4), cited in Robert O. Freedman. 1991a. op. cit. p.209.

<sup>125</sup> Alvin Z. Rubinstein. 1988. op. cit. p.285.

<sup>126</sup> *Pravda*, April 25, 1987 (FBIS:USSR, April 28, 1987, p.H-8) cited in Robert O. Freedman. 1991a. op. cit. p.263.

about the war. On Arab-Israeli conflict, Assad pointed out the increase in US military aid, and underlined Israel's will to occupy Arab territories but resisted an international conference. Assad might have wanted to affect Gorbachev for an increase in military aid to Syria. In any case, during the dinner speech by Gorbachev, the USSR was still concerned with Syria's defense capability at a proper level. This visit bore fruit in the next few months because the USSR gave to Syria two squadrons (24) of MIG-29s.<sup>127</sup>

### **3.2.2. Soviet Policy towards Terrorist Activities**

In a new crisis, Syrian-backed Shiite militia, Amal, hijacked an American TWA plane in the late of June 1985, created a known problem that the USSR got used to: dilemma in aiding Syria. During the crisis, Gorbachev invited Hafiz Assad to Moscow which was taken by Syrian side as demonstrating the Soviet support to Syria on the Middle Eastern problems as well as with the PLO. Releasing hostages solved the crisis. The Syria factor was evident in the peaceful solution that Moscow was so pleased. Because Syria avoided being in a possible confrontation with the US with the solution, and also Syria's prestige among the Arab states increased.<sup>128</sup>

The USSR was troubled with kidnapping of its three diplomats and one embassy doctor in Beirut on September 30. The kidnappers, who called themselves the Islamic Liberation Organization, wanted from the USSR to force Syria to stop attacks on Tripoli. The kidnap ended with the murder of one of the hostages and Syria's halt of its attacks on Tripoli. Despite USSR's condemnation of terrorist

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<sup>127</sup> *Washington Post*, September 20, 1987, cited in Robert O. Freedman. 1991a. op. cit. pp.264-265.

<sup>128</sup> Robert O. Freedman. 1991a. op. cit. pp.210-211.

activities as ‘criminal,’ in the UN Resolution of December 9,<sup>129</sup> four months later, two of its clients, especially Syria and Libya, were accused of terrorist activities by the US and were threatened with a counter attack by the US, which the USSR did not want. Even the president of the US, Reagan, declared, after the second attack on Libya, that the US was suspicious of Syria’s involvement in terrorist incidents, and if there was ‘irrefutable evidence’ about Syria’s involvement, the US should attack.<sup>130</sup> The US also accused the USSR of not doing enough about terrorist activities.

All these events took place when Gorbachev looked for peaceful solutions in the regional and worldwide problems and thus USSR did not support terrorism. Moreover Gorbachev discouraged Syria from supporting terrorism. Thus, because of not being sure about Soviet support, Assad condemned terrorism and added that Syria had intention to work together against terrorism.<sup>131</sup>

### **3.2.3. Israel in Soviet-Syrian Relations**

Due to Gorbachev’s peaceful approach, Moscow desired to renew its relations with Israel. However Soviet clients responded to this approach in a negative manner, especially Syria. This negative manner forced the Soviet bureaucrats to declare that the USSR would not restore its ties with Israel till Israel gave the Golan Heights back to Syria. However, the USSR made attempts to restore its relations with Israel whether Israel’s desire to include the Soviets in the Middle East peace process.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Robert O. Freedman. 1991a. op. cit. pp.221-222.

<sup>130</sup> Gerald M. Boyd, *New York Times*, April 24, 1986, cited in Robert O. Freedman. 1991a. op. cit. p.240.

<sup>131</sup> *Jerusalem Post*, May 29, 1986, cited in Robert O. Freedman. 1991a. op. cit. p.242.

<sup>132</sup> Robert O. Freedman. 1991a. op. cit. p.216.

However at the last days of 1985, Syria faced with another missile crisis against Israel that bothered the USSR. Hafiz Assad, moved SA-2 surface-to-air missiles batteries near the border of Lebanon and SAM missiles into Lebanon. Although the USSR declared that Syria's movement had a defensive in nature, Moscow was concerned about a possible war between Syria and Israel, which might drag the superpowers in. Thus, in order to show not wanted to take side in the conflict, the USSR withdrew its personnel, who taught Syrian soldiers on SAM batteries.<sup>133</sup>

During the whole year of 1988, the USSR announced and declared several times of the message that was about to find our political solutions in the regional conflicts in the nuclear age which was first said by Gorbachev to Assad in the 1987 meeting. Having supported the policy of political solutions, the USSR had attempts on developing the relations between the USSR-Egypt, and the USSR-Israel. However this policy was not welcomed by Syria, because Syria had problems with Egypt, the PLO, and Iraq. Syrian was displeased with Soviet developing relations with Egypt, the PLO and Iraq which harmed Soviet's long-wanted Arab unity - in which the Soviet call for an 'anti-imperialist basis' in the past was changed by Gorbachev as 'constructive and realistic basis,' - and also had a negative policy towards Israel which might be changed into possible Syria-Israel war by Syria.

Thus Syria claimed that, despite improving relations between the USSR and Israel, Israel had still armed in a strongly manner and Syria had to obtain more in balancing the power. Despite several reports on important arms deals between the USSR and Syria<sup>134</sup> after the Lebanon war, some of the arm deliveries to Syria

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<sup>133</sup> Robert O. Freedman. 1991a. op. cit. p.226.

<sup>134</sup> *Davar* (Tel Aviv) on July 11, 1988 reported that Moscow was sending Sukhoi-24 ground attack bombers to Syria (*FBIS:NESEA*, July 11, 1988, p.25); *Jerusalem Post* on July 6, 1988 cited from

delayed. Because of not having all the weapons that Syria wanted from the USSR, Syria was reported on a possible deal with China on M-9 missiles.<sup>135</sup>

#### **3.2.4. Disintegration of the USSR and Relations with Syria**

Coming to end of the USSR, Gorbachev administration showed their intentions on relinquish the Soviet hands over the Third world especially in military meaning. For example; at the beginning of 1989, the USSR withdrew its troops in Afghanistan. With the withdrawal of troops, the USSR pulled back his hands over the Third World by means of active military presence and the USSR waited for improvements in Soviet-US Relations and Soviet-Middle Eastern states relations which might take the presence of the USSR in Afghanistan as a threat (e.g. Iran).

The USSR plan on Syria was clear: Gorbachev and Shevardnadze plan to steer “Syria in the direction of a negotiated settlement with Israel but with a greater commitment than ever before.” For this reason, the USSR ambassador to Damascus, Aleksander Zotov, stated that the USSR did not support Syrian demands on ‘strategic parity’ with Israel.<sup>136</sup> Moreover, in Assad’s visit to Moscow in April 1987, Gorbachev pointed out that “the absence of Soviet relations with Israel was abnormal” and against Assad demands on ‘strategic parity he added “the reliance on military force has completely lost its credibility as a way of solving the Middle East conflict” which means a new military action against Israel would not be supported by the USSR.<sup>137</sup> Indeed, in Soviet-Syria military deliveries, falling from the average of

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Israeli Foreign Ministry sources that Moscow was sending SS-21 ground-to-ground missiles; *Al-Itihad* (Abu Dhabi) (cited in *FBIS:USSR*, August 19,1988, p.18) reported SU-24 and MIG-29 sale, cited in Robert O. Freedman. 1991a. op. cit. pp.300-301.

<sup>135</sup> *FBIS:NESEA*, June 7, 1978, p.1. cited in Robert O. Freedman. 1991a. op. cit. p.301.

<sup>136</sup> Talal Nizameddin. op. cit. p.52.

<sup>137</sup> Galia Golan. op. cit. p.280.



\$2.3 billion per year to less than \$1 billion per year in 1985-89 tenure<sup>138</sup> was very important sign of the decreasing Soviet support to Syria and peaceful approach of Soviet policy in the Middle East. Syria's debt to the USSR was reached to a \$16.5 billion that Syria had difficulty in paying.

The USSR's Foreign Minister, Shevardnadze, paid a visit to the Middle Eastern states in February 1989, after the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, in order to show changes in the USSR's foreign policy and continuous supportive policy towards to the Arab states. Syria was his first stop that he might show Syria as the main ally for the USSR in the Middle East. He also repeated parallel statements, like Gorbachev in meeting with Assad in Moscow in 1987, which was about a conflict had to be solved in peacefully and politically way in the nuclear age that means the USSR did not support Syria in a possible war, which made Syrian leader not happy.<sup>139</sup> Furthermore, Shevardnadze called Syrian's attention to 'more arms' did not mean 'greater security' and in July 1989, the first deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Bessmertnykh told Arab League leaders to stop violence in Lebanon by pressing Syria.<sup>140</sup>

The Soviet Union did not have power to endure its influence not only in Syria but also all over the world. Gorbachev knew that the Soviet Union had to have 'New Thinking' in its foreign relations. Indeed this new approach necessitated peace rather than war, so Gorbachev wanted to show whole world that the Soviet Union was not a threat anymore.

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<sup>138</sup> Galia Golan. op. cit. p.279.

<sup>139</sup> Robert O. Freedman. 1991a. op. cit. pp.313-314.

<sup>140</sup> Galia Golan. op cit. p.279.

Thus he did not support Syrian aggressive stance and gave little support militarily and economically. Actually the Soviet Union could not do more than this because of its poor economy. As a result Gorbachev adopted the Soviet foreign policy with a more defense approach. Syria took its part from this approach by not taking economical and weaponry support that Assad hoped.

**PART B:**  
**RELATIONS BETWEEN TURKEY AND SYRIA**

**CHAPTER IV:**  
**TURKEY'S WESTERN ALIGNMENT (1945-1960)**

**4.1. Turkish Foreign Policy towards Syria**

Turkish Foreign Policy towards Syria is parallel with Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Middle East or towards Arab states. In this case, before explaining Turkish Foreign Policy towards Syria, it is best to investigate the factors that have affected relations between Turkey and Syria privately but between Turkey and the Arab Middle East in general.

The factors can be summarized in three heading as follows:<sup>141</sup>

- a. The Historical Aspect
- b. The Western Influence
- c. The Soviet Influence

**4.1.1. The Historical Aspect**

The historical aspect that has affected relations between Turkey and Syria did not come from the birth of the Republic of Turkey but the Ottoman Empire. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, great powers were interested in the lands of the empire in North Africa

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<sup>141</sup> Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *Türkiye'nin Arap Orta Doğu'suna Karşı Politikası(1945-1970)*(The Policy of Turkey towards the Arab Middle East(1945-1970)). Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayınları. p.v. However, in addition to these three topics Kürkçüoğlu added the Cyprus issue also.

and later in the Middle East. The intentions of great powers to carve Ottoman territory resulted in the loss of Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt by France and Britain respectively.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire had to establish generally close relations with Germany against Britain and France because of the strong desires of Britain and France to dominate and occupy the Middle East region. Indeed, during World War I, both states signed the Sykes-Picot Agreement in order to divide up the region. Moreover Britain and France encouraged the Arabs to declare independence from the Ottoman Empire and had them revolt against the empire. However the main goal of Britain and France was not founding independent states in the Middle East but rather founding new states under their ‘mandate’ as agreed in the San Remo Conference by both sides.<sup>142</sup>

Because of being rebelled against and stabbed in the back by the Arabs, relations between Turkey and Arab states declined and became cold and distant. The other important factor was the new republic’s desire to advance to the level of the contemporary world. As Atatürk declared;

Turkey embarked on a path which led it away from its past, and from the Arab countries with which its past had been so closely connected: that of re-creating society on the basis of national solidarity, a rigid separation of state and religion, and a deliberate attempt to turn away from the Middle Eastern world and become part of Europe.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. Ibid. pp.2-6.

<sup>143</sup> Albert Hourani.1991. *A History of the Arab Peoples*. Cambridge: The Belknap Pres of Harvard University Press. p.319.

The abolishment of caliphate by Turkey is regarded as one of the reasons of enmity of Arabs against Turkey by some authors but the Arabs did not react to the abolishment decision seriously.<sup>144</sup>

#### **4.1.2. The Western Influence**

The new Republic of Turkey under Atatürk routed itself to the contemporary world in every aspect, i.e. economically, culturally, and diplomatically. After signing the Treaty of Lausanne, Turkey was advancing towards the West more rapidly. This integration with the western world moved Turkey away from the Arabs and therefore Ankara avoided showing interest in the independence movements in the Middle East. Because any support to the independence movements in the Middle East could impede Turkey's relations with the contemporary world.

Turkey had had good relations with the West since it was founded. After France accepted to give independence back to Syria in 1936, Turkey refused to leave the Sancak<sup>145</sup> under Syrian administration. After several discussions between Turkey and France, Ankara did not agree with France on the Sancak issue. The League of Nations, to which France and Turkey referred the Sancak issue, accepted the Sancak as a separate entity (*'entite distincte'*)<sup>146</sup> in 1937. France and Turkey guaranteed the

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<sup>144</sup> Mehmet Gönlübol and Cem Sar. 1996. "1919-1939 Yılları Arasında Türk Dış Politikası." (Turkish Foreign Policy between 1919-1939.) In Mehmet Gönlübol (ed.) 1996. *Olaylarla Türk Dış Politikası (1919-1995)*.(Turkish Foreign Policy with Events (1919-1995)) (9th ed.) Ankara: Siyasal Kitabevi. p.91.

<sup>145</sup> Sancak formally named as "The Sanjak of Alexandretta." After the decision of the League of Nations, Sancak named itself as "Hatay," or "The Republic of Hatay."

<sup>146</sup> "Entite distincte" means being independent in domestic affairs but dependent in foreign affairs to Syria. George Lenczowski. 1953. *The Middle East in World Affairs*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. pp. 133-134.

territorial integrity of the Sancak. Hatay, which the Sancak named itself after decision of the League of Nations, decided unification with Turkey in 1939.<sup>147</sup>

Until 1939, although the coldness in relations was generally psychological, after unification with Hatay the coldness became more evident. Then the enmity between two sides became solid and made the relations more distant. In addition to the decision of unification of Hatay, the alignment of Turkey with the West was more evident after the World War II. The USSR's demands from Turkey of some rights, considering the revision of the Montreux Convention and territorial demands from eastern Turkey,<sup>148</sup> made Turkey become closer to the West. As Turkey became closer to the west, due to the Arab attitude towards imperialistic states, the Arabs hesitated to establish good relations with Turkey.

#### **4.1.3. The Soviet Influence**

The USSR supported the new Turkish liberation movement, which was then led by Mustafa Kemal Pasha and his friends, in the last days of the Ottoman Empire against the imperialistic states. Even, while the War of National Liberation was going on, the USSR and Turkey signed the Treaty of Friendship on March 16, 1921. After the Republic of Turkey was founded, the USSR established a good relationship and supported Turkey. On December 17, 1925, Turkey and the USSR signed the Neutrality and Nonaggression Treaty. However, after World War II, the USSR under Stalin made attempts to put Turkey under pressure through some Soviet claims.<sup>149</sup> These attempts along with other reasons such as fear of military and diplomatic

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<sup>147</sup> Sabahattin Elibol and Zekai Arıkan. 1994. *Türkiye-Suriye İlişkilerinin Dünü, Bugünü, Yarını* (Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow of Turkish-Syrian Relations.) İstanbul: Harp Akademileri Yayınları. pp.30-33.

<sup>148</sup> Kamuran Gürün. 1983. *Dış İlişkiler ve Türk Politikası*. (Foreign Relations and Turkish Policy.) Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayınları. pp.134-198.

<sup>149</sup> Kamuran Gürün. 1983. *Ibid.* pp.150-198.

isolation and concerns about membership in every Western organization made Turkey align itself with the West. After the death of Stalin, the USSR under Khrushchev tried to influence and align with the Middle Eastern states. Thus, from 1955, the USSR emerged as a factor, affecting Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Middle East in a negative and direct way.<sup>150</sup>

With Khrushchev's initiatives, the Middle Eastern states, especially Egypt, built contacts with the USSR in a friendly atmosphere and became closer with the Soviets. On the other side, having close relations with the West, especially with the USA, after World War II, Turkey chose its position on the western side because;

In an emerging bipolar international system, neutrality could no longer guarantee the security and integrity of the Turkish state. Taking the new geo-strategic context into account, the deep rooted suspicious against the West had to be overcome.<sup>151</sup>

#### **4.2. Turkish Foreign Policy towards Syria before the 1950s**

Since the Atatürk era (1923-1938), Turkey sought to build good relationship not only with the West but also with USSR and Arabs. After the War of National Liberation, Turkey did not demand anything from the post-Ottoman states, thus there were no conflicts between Turkey and Arab states. Even during Atatürk's tenure, Turkish Foreign Policy was based on establishing good relations with the Middle Eastern and other Eastern states. Consequently on July 8, 1937, the Saadabad Pact (Nonaggression Pact) was signed in the Saadabad Palace in Tehran between Turkey, Iran, Irak and Afghanistan.

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<sup>150</sup> Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.12.

<sup>151</sup> Dietrich Jung with Wolfango Piccoli. 2001. *Turkey at the Crossroads: Ottoman Legacies and A Greater Middle East.* London: Zed Boks. p.136.

The main reason for Turkish attitude towards the region lied in Turkey's advancement in the contemporary world and the Lausanne Treaty (1923-1924) that Turkey signed was a statement that Ankara did not want conflict with Syria or other Arab states. Another reason was that the Middle Eastern states were under the mandate of France and Britain before and during World War II. This peaceful attitude continued during and after World War II. Although Turkey established good relationship with Arab states, it did not seek to build close relations with them. However after World War II, before Turkey aligned itself with the West against the Soviet threats, Ankara continued to establish good relations with Syria and other Middle Eastern states. For instance, Turkey signed some treaties with Iraq in the beginning of 1946 and on March 6, 1946 and recognized Syria's independence as well as Lebanon's.<sup>152</sup>

However the coldness in relations between Turkey and Syria was caused by the unification of Hatay with Turkey. Although Turkey recognized Syria's independence, the unification was not officially recognized by Syria. Turkey and Syria shouldered the crisis peacefully with the mediating initiatives of the Prime Minister of Iraq, Nuri Said Pasha. As a result Turkey did not demand from Syria to recognize the unification of Hatay, and Syria formally accepted not to push the crisis forward.<sup>153</sup> Contrary to Syrian acceptance, Syrian officials sometimes put forward the unification of Hatay on political arena.<sup>154</sup>

Turkey tried to improve its relations with Syria and other Arab states in the post-world war period although the crisis of Hatay remained between Syria and Turkey. Meanwhile, the Palestinian issue was growing to a crisis between Israel and

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<sup>152</sup> Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.16.

<sup>153</sup> *Keesing's Contemporary Archives 1946-1948.* p.7796 cited in Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.16.

<sup>154</sup> For example Syrian Prime Minister's declarations in *Ayın Tarihi* (The History of Month.) January 1947. 158: 60 cited in Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.16.



the Arab states. Turkey objected to the partition plan along with other Arab states in 1947, for which the Syrian President Shukri al-Quwatli sent an appreciation message to President İsmet İnönü.<sup>155</sup> However, the USA, USSR and France accepted the partition plan in the United Nations by 1947. The USSR strategy in accepting the plan was due to its aim to diminish Britain's influence in the region and according to some authors the intention of the USSR to build a communist state in the Middle East.<sup>156</sup>

However with the growing Soviet threat to Turkey and Turkey's alignment with the USA and the West made Turkey widen the gap with Arab states after 1947. Although Turkey opposed to the partition of Palestine along with Arab states in the United Nations by 1947, after the war between Arabs and Israel in May 1948, Ankara joined the Reconciliation Commission of Palestine, which was founded by the UN, but objected to by the Arabs. From then on, Turkish Foreign Policy seemed to change its attitude on the Palestinian issue. Indeed, after receiving aid from the USA and establishing tight relations with Washington because of the growing Soviet threat perceptions, Turkey recognized Israel in March 28, 1949.<sup>157</sup>

Before the recognition of Israel, Syria looked for support from Turkey since Damascus had not established close relations with the Soviet Union and Turkey was a strong state in the region. Indeed the Prime Minister of Syria, Jamil Mardam, came to the Turkish Embassy to request Turkish support over a possible Jewish state which was founded in Palestine. Moreover Syrian President, Shukri al-Kuwatli, repeated

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<sup>155</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, December 2, 1947 cited in Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.23.

<sup>156</sup> Carol R. Saivetz and Sylvia Woodby. 1985. *Soviet-Third World Relations*. Boulder: Westview Press. p.26.

<sup>157</sup> Mehmet Gönlübol and Haluk Ülman. 1996. "İkinci Dünya Savaşı'ndan sonra Türk Dış Politikası 1945-1965." (Turkish Foreign Policy after the World War II 1945-1965.) In Mehmet Gönlübol. (ed.) *opcit.* p.228.

the Syrian request for Turkish support.<sup>158</sup> However, contrary to the Arab states, Turkey recognized the newly founded Jewish state for a number of other reasons, such as fear of military and diplomatic isolation and concerns about membership in every Western organization and also the growing Soviet threat. Syria and the other Arab states were disappointed with Turkey's decision regarding recognition of Israel.

### **4.3. Under the Democrat Party (1950-1960)**

According to some, Turkey's commitment to Westernization ended on May 14, 1950 elections. Indeed, with the handover of government in May 14, 1950 elections, Syria and Arab states thought that the westernization of Turkey stopped and the country even turned its face towards the Middle East. For example; Syrian President Hashim al-Atasi declared to *Cumhuriyet* on November 18, 1950 that President Celal Bayar's statements in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey on establishing good relationships with the Arab world pleased not only Syria but the whole Arab world. In another declaration on December 16, 1950 to *Cumhuriyet*, he saw the Democrat Party administration as a revolution for Turkey and added that Syria and other Arab states were pleased with Turkey's friendship. He explained to *Cumhuriyet* on May 13, 1951 his previous thinking of 'revolution' that with this 'revolution', which contained several arrangements of religious issues, Syria felt Turkey's advance to Islam increased.<sup>159</sup>

On the contrary, Turkish Foreign Policy towards the West did not change. With growing and lasting Soviet threat from north and apparent Soviet intentions in the Middle East, Turkey still kept close to the West. In August 1950, the Minister of

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<sup>158</sup> Aptülaha Akşin. 1991. *Atatürk'ün Dış Politika İlkeleri ve Diplomasisi* (Foreign Policy Principles and Diplomacy of Atatürk). Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi. pp.211-213.

<sup>159</sup> Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.39.

Foreign Affairs, Fuad Köprülü, pointed out to the threat of communist imperialism, which was spreading through the world as well as in the Middle East. He emphasized Turkey's importance for providing peace and security to the Middle East and added that if the cooperation between Turkey and the USA were to be established legally, this would provide great opportunities for Middle East peace.<sup>160</sup> Under these circumstances, the Democrat Party pursued this [joining NATO] policy with respect to lessening Turkey's security concerns. Even though Turkey had a strong intention to become a member of NATO, the country did not have the opportunity to realize it before the Korean War. Thus the Democrat Party saw the war in Korea as a chance to join without taking permission from the Assembly. In claiming to join NATO, not only the Democrat Party but also Republican Peoples Party and the press were all aligned almost in every respect. However Turkey's request to join NATO was not accepted in September 1950 because of "geographical problems"<sup>161</sup> since it was not a Euro-Atlantic country. During the same year and the next year the discussions of Turkey's membership in NATO between members continued and as a result Turkey was invited in on September 21, 1951. The USSR gave Turkey two diplomatic notes on November 12-13, 1951 objecting to Turkey's membership in NATO and revealed displeasure.<sup>162</sup>

Britain proposed a Middle East defense pact, the so-called the Middle East Command (MEC), with the USA, France and Turkey in October 1951. Against Egypt's rejections, Turkey with its allies defended the MEC that the potential command would serve as an important factor in the Middle East peace and security environment. Turkey's positive attitude was because of the admittance of Turkey to

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<sup>160</sup> *Ayin Tarihi*. August 1950, 201:25-27, cited in Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.41.

<sup>161</sup> *Zafer*, September 19, 1950 cited in Mustafa Albayrak. 2004. *Türk Siyaset Tarihinde Demokrat Parti (1946-1960)*. (The Democrat Party in Turkish Political Life (1946-1960). Ankara: Phoenix. p.419.

<sup>162</sup> *Ayin Tarihi*. November 1951, 216:3, cited in Mustafa Albayrak. 2004. *Ibid.* p.422.

NATO that was still discussing in the NATO council. Egypt's rejection to the MEC caused another proposal by the USA and Britain, the Middle Eastern Defense Organization (MEDO) in June 1952.<sup>163</sup>

Turkey under the Democrat Party government focused its foreign policy towards the Middle East. While some differentiations with the western powers' policy could be observed before 1950, was now in tandem with its western allies. Arabs refused the MEC and the MEDO initiatives. Consequently, it can be said that from then on the policy towards the Middle East took shape under the auspices of the West.<sup>164</sup>

#### **4.3.1. The Baghdad Pact**

Turkey's membership in NATO as of February 18, 1952, was a milestone in Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Middle East, because it was a definite positioning of foreign policy parallel to the West. The views on defending the MEC and MEDO also assisted this alignment.

The USSR gave a diplomatic note against intentions of founding the MEC under the premise that the MEC had aggressive attributes and Soviets could not overlook such aggressive plans on their border.<sup>165</sup> Nonetheless the United States insisted on founding a defensive pact in the Middle East because of its growing influence especially after the Korean War. For this reason J.F. Dulles, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the United States, paid a visit to the Middle Eastern states between May 11 and May 18 1953, but found no suitable situation to establish a defense pact. Dulles emphasized that Arabs were dealing with problems against

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<sup>163</sup> Dietrich Jung with Wolfango Piccoli. 2001. *opcit.* p.137.

<sup>164</sup> Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.47.

<sup>165</sup> *Keesing's Contemporary Archives 1950-1952.* p.11854 cited in Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.51.

Israel, Britain and France, thus they did not pay attention to Soviet communism.<sup>166</sup> On the contrary, Turkey, Iraq, Pakistan and Iran were aware of the menace of Soviet communism. In this way, Turkey and Iraq began to discuss the pact in the early 1955 and publicized a declaration of their intentions to establish the pact. Following the visit of the Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, to Iraq on January 6, 1955, Menderes visited Syria and Lebanon in order to persuade them to join the pact. Leftist groups of the Syrian parliament criticized Menderes and there were demonstrations of students against Turkish initiatives.<sup>167</sup>

Menderes met with the Syrian Prime Minister Farouk al-Khoury, and other ministers. However, Syria hesitated to join the pact; Syrians reacted negatively to join in Turkish-Iraqi cooperation since Syria thought that “Turkey was a ‘gendarme of American imperialism’ in the Middle East.” One of the reasons of Syrian negative reaction to the pact was that it might be used as an instrument to undermine the cause of Arab nationalism and encircle Syria.<sup>168</sup> Despite the opposition of Syria and Egypt along with other Arab states, Turkey and Iraq signed the treaty in Baghdad on February 24, 1955. The main aim of the pact was to tie the Middle East defense system indirectly to the Western defense system against the ‘Soviet menace.’ However, most of the Arab states had anxieties about the West more than the Soviet Union because Arab states thought that the West was responsible for founding Israel at the heart of the Middle East.<sup>169</sup>

Consequently, following the signing of the Baghdad Pact, the Arab world was generally divided into three: Egypt-Syria-Saudi Arabia, Lebanon-Jordan and Iraq. In

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<sup>166</sup> *Department of State Bulletin*. June 15, 1953. p.935 cited in Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.53.

<sup>167</sup> Mehmet Gönlübol and Haluk Ülman. 1996. “İkinci Dünya Savaşı’ndan sonra Türk Dış Politikası 1945-1965.” (Turkish Foreign Policy after the World War II 1945-1965.) In Mehmet Gönlübol (ed.) *opcit.* p.257.

<sup>168</sup> Muhammad Muslih. 1996. “Syria and Turkey: Uneasy Relations.” In Henri J. Barkey. (ed.) *Reluctant Neighbor: Turkey’s Role in the Middle East*. Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press. p.117.

<sup>169</sup> Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.76.

the Arab world, while Iraq was pushed into isolation because of signing the treaty, Lebanon and Jordan were neutral, but Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia were against the pact. The reason of Arab rejection of the pact was that they did not feel the ‘Soviet menace’ as much as the so-called Northern Tier states and they thought that the West and Israel were more dangerous than the Soviets.

Indeed, after the Baghdad Pact, Egypt and Syria signed a treaty in order to strengthen military, political and economic status of the Arab world, and one week later Saudi Arabia joined the group.<sup>170</sup> Syrian foreign policy of struggling against the ‘Turkish Pact,’ was a clear indication of Syrian views of the pact.<sup>171</sup> However Turkey was also unhappy about Egypt-Syria-Saudi Arabia initiatives to found a pact and their declarations about the Baghdad Pact. Menderes accused Syria of continuing a policy of opposition to Turkey and he worried about the relations between both states if this policy would last. Following Menderes’ declarations, both states gave to each other diplomatic notes and the relationship was assessed to be in a ‘serious situation.’<sup>172</sup>

The Soviet Union was also unhappy with the signing of the pact, because the USSR felt uncomfortable about ‘Soviet menace’ that was fabricated by the USA and Britain. The Soviets even accused the USA and Britain of craving for the pact for their national interest, not for the supposedly Middle East peace, and emphasized Soviet foreign policy towards the Middle East and their independence movements in the past. Since the formation of the pact and the establishment of foreign military bases in the Middle East had direct effects to the security of the USSR, the Soviet Union could not remain unresponsive to the situation of the Middle East. As a result,

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<sup>170</sup> *Keesing’s Contemporary Archives 1955-1956*. p.14105 cited in Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.66.

<sup>171</sup> Faiz S. Abu-Jaber. July/August 1969. “The Origins of Soviet-Arab Cooperation,” *Mizan* 11(4):226 cited in Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.66.

<sup>172</sup> Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.74.

“Upholding the cause of peace, the Soviet government will defend the freedom and independence of the countries of the Near and Middle East and will oppose interference in their domestic affairs.”<sup>173</sup>

USA and Britain’s main aim of founding the Baghdad Pact was to contain the Soviet Union in its region, but it was not realized. The Soviet Union even began to interfere in the region more frequently after the pact was signed in order to “defend the freedom and independence of the countries” in the region. Indeed Egypt signed an arms supply treaty with Czechoslovakia in September 1955.<sup>174</sup>

Turkey saw the Baghdad Pact, which was initiated by Britain and USA, as a useful instrument in establishing good relations with the Arab states, in addition to its security policy. However, while Turkey supported the Baghdad Pact to establish good relationships with its neighbors and Arab states, it became distant to these states in real, because Turkey undervalued Arab states’ position towards the West. Most of the Arab states took western powers as friend of Israel, so they were against any initiatives of the West as well as Syria. Syria, under the leadership of Egypt, took its position next to Egypt, so the relations between Turkey and Syria were strained and came to be defined as a ‘serious situation.’ The USSR had benefited from the situation of opposition to the western initiatives of obstructing the Soviets in the Middle East. While the USSR had established good relationships with Syria and others, Turkey became distant definitely with Syria and others.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> *Soviet News*, April 19, 1955, No. 3146, pp. 1-2 cited in internet <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1955Soviet-baghdad1.html>. Accessed on May 1, 2005.

<sup>174</sup> *Soviet News*, April 19, 1955, No. 3146, pp. 1-2 cited in internet <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1955Soviet-baghdad1.html>. Accessed on May 1, 2005.

<sup>175</sup> Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* pp.79-80.

#### 4.3.2. The 1957 Crisis

Nationalization of the Suez Canal by Egypt in July 1956 led to crisis not only between Israel and Egypt, but also Britain and France took sides with Israel. Members of the Baghdad Pact organized a meeting during the crisis. The pact members, in order to support Egypt and other Arab states about crisis, demanded that Britain and France withdraw from territories of Egypt but approved the US attitude in the crisis.

The demand that was publicized by the Baghdad pact members did not change and soften the Arab states' policy towards Turkey, because Turkey, with other pact members, did not condemn Britain and France. Turkey's move of calling back its ambassador from Israel also did not help make Arabs change their policy towards Turkey.

This negative attitude towards Turkey lasted in the following year. While Syria established good relationship with the USSR by signing treaties and agreements with the Soviet Union, Syria had a crisis with Jordan at the beginning of 1957. The crisis built up and turned out to be a crisis between Syria and the USA in the following months. Syria accused three American diplomats of supporting a *coup d'état* against Syrian regime and deported them from Syria. USA declared the Syrian ambassador to Washington *persona non grata* and deported him.

Turkey watched these events very carefully. Indeed, Turkey worried about developments that took place in Syria especially after a Syrian left-wing party got stronger after the elections. Some writers in newspapers publicized Turkey's



anxieties, which were Syrian alignment to the USSR, thus becoming a Soviet satellite.<sup>176</sup>

The USSR claimed that Turkey had an aggressive attitude towards Syria and amassed troops on the border. However Turkey did not accept Soviet claims on having an offensive position towards Syria, and added that troop concentrations were not against Syria, but because of NATO maneuvers. Following the Soviet claims, Syria gave a diplomatic note to stop the concentration near the border. Turkey refused Syrian demands and explained that the crisis was because of Soviet intentions of using Syria against Turkey by making Syria as arms depot in its responsive note<sup>177</sup>

In permeating tensions, while the USSR took sides with Syria, the USA supported Turkey against Syria and the Soviets. Indeed both superpowers accused each others of creating the crisis and showed their resolution on defending their ally.

The crisis ended with softening relations between Turkey and the Soviet Union from the end of October 1957. Khrushchev attended the reception at the Turkish embassy in Moscow on October 29, 1957 and gave peaceful messages to Turkish, American and British ambassadors. Softening relations with the Soviet Union brought up softening relations with Syria. Consequently, discussions that took place in the UN about the crisis between Syria and Turkey ended taking back two resolution drafts given by Syria and Norway.<sup>178</sup>

Turkey had confronted Syria directly for the first time after 1945. The crisis also directly affected Turkish-Arab relations. Alignment of Turkey with the West against the Soviets made Turkey become distant to Syria and other Arab states as

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<sup>176</sup> Özcan Ergüder. August 29, 1957. "Hederson'a Birkaç Söz," *Vatan*; Ahmet Şükrü Esmer. August 20, 1957. "Suriye'de Tehlike İşareti," *Ulus*; Ömer Sami Coşar. November 25, 1957. "Suriye'de Ruslar Ne Arıyor," *Cumhuriyet* cited in Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.105.

<sup>177</sup> Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* pp.105-106.

<sup>178</sup> Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.111.

well. Some authors wrote that Turkey reacted to Syria in a severe way by concentrating troops on the border because of Syria's accumulation of excessive weaponry and growing Soviet influence. Turkey could responded to Syria in a more peaceful manner by calling Syria's attention to growing Soviet influence, and by calling UN attention to Syria's weaponry policy, not massing its troops on the border.<sup>179</sup>

Nevertheless, Turkey's sensitivity about the crisis did not deter the USSR from cooperating with Syria; and this event even allowed the USSR settle in the Middle East easier. Turkish attitude towards Syria during the crisis did not soften Syria's attitude towards the West, but on the contrary, made Syria search a protector.<sup>180</sup> This search led Syria to unify with Egypt in 1958 after the crisis ended, Syrian armament still continued under the United Arab Republic (UAR) and dependence of the UAR to the USSR began to increase. Thus, the troubling relations with Syria continued after the crisis between Damascus and Ankara. Turkish Foreign Policy toward Syria broke down between 1958 and 1961.

Nonetheless, Turkey's western-integrated Middle East policy did not halt in this period. Indeed Turkey's attitude toward the revolution in Iraq under Menderes' administration was an important indication of its pro-active and western-integrated policy toward the Middle East. Turkey accepted the revolution in Iraq as a movement that was inspired and motivated externally, and emphasized that the revolution aimed to abolish the Baghdad Pact that was a peaceful and stabile component of the Middle East.<sup>181</sup> Moreover, according to Hayrettin Erkmen's notes, Turkish General Staff

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<sup>179</sup> Şükrü Kaya. August 26, 1957. "Suriye Hadiseleri ve Türkiye," *Hürriyet* cited in Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.121.

<sup>180</sup> Patrick Seale. 1965. *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-War Arab Politics*. London: Oxford University Pres. p.299

<sup>181</sup> Haluk Ülman. December 1958. "Orta Doğu Buhranı," *Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi* 13(4):240-257 cited in Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.13.

made plans to intervene in Iraq as was proposed by Minister of Foreign Affairs Fatin Rüştü Zorlu and was approved by Prime Minister Menderes along with President Celal Bayar. The claim was also verified by President Eisenhower's memoirs that Turkey decided to intervene in Iraq and wanted both physical and moral support from the USA.<sup>182</sup> However Turkey's western allies discouraged Ankara from intervening in Syria and Iraq.<sup>183</sup>

Another development took place in Lebanon at the same time with the revolution in Iraq. There were conflicts in Lebanon between the supporters of Camille Chamoun, the western-oriented president of Lebanon, and his opponents. Turkey, in order to support western-oriented Chamoun, supported the US initiatives on intervening in Lebanon and even gave permission to the US to deploy its troops at the İncirlik Base of Adana. Turkey, with Iran and Pakistan, declared that they received the US initiatives in Lebanon with pleasure.<sup>184</sup>

In sum, Menderes and the Democrat Party elites followed the same core issues as their predecessors did: "First, on the maintenance of the integrity and sovereignty of the Turkish state: second, on foreign policy as a means of Western integration."<sup>185</sup> However, while Turkey integrated into the Western world, Ankara was back in the Middle East as a 'staunch ally' of the West and therefore Turkey was increasingly isolated from the Arab world because of being exactly a 'staunch ally' of the West.

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<sup>182</sup> Hayrettin Erkmen's notes, which were written in Yassıada trials after the Revolution of 1960, were published by *Cumhuriyet*, May 25, 1961; and Dwight D. Eisenhower. 1965. *Waging Peace, The White House Years, A Personal Account 1956-1961*. New York: Doubleday Co., Inc., p.227 cited in Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.132.

<sup>183</sup> Ayşegül Sever. 1998. "The Compliant Ally? Turkey and the West in the Middle East 1954-1958," *Middle Eastern Studies* 34(2):73-90.

<sup>184</sup> *Ulus*, July 17,18, 1958 cited in Mustafa Albayrak. 2004. *opcit.* p.480.

<sup>185</sup> Dietrich Jung with Wolfango Piccoli. 2001. *opcit.* p.139.

### 4.3.3. Transboundary Water Courses

During the first period of relations, Turkey and Syria had little troubles with each other on water issues. Indeed, while Syria had troubles with Israel in Arab-Israeli conflict and its internal power struggles between Syrian notables both in political and military life, Damascus had little concern on water. Thus, Syria declared and sent diplomatic notes to foreign embassies in Damascus by July 5, 1944 that Syria was respectful of the treaties and agreements, which were signed by France on behalf of Syria before it gained independence.<sup>186</sup> Turkey had also no concern on water because of its sufficient and immense water resources. Consequently, water was not a problem for either side until 1955.

However, after the crisis of the Baghdad Pact, Turkey and Syria faced another conflict that passed with less trouble. Syria decided to build a dam on Asi River.<sup>187</sup> However, the river, which flows out from Syria and reaches the Mediterranean Sea through Hatay, was important for Turkish agriculture in Hatay; so Turkey was concerned about the water resources that Syria allowed to flow. Thus Ankara offered to negotiate over the water issue, including the Euphrates River.<sup>188</sup> However Syria rejected to negotiate water problems.<sup>189</sup> The water issue remained a dead letter only to become inflamed after the 1980s.

From 1945 to 1960, Turkish foreign policy towards Syria was similar to Turkish foreign policy towards all Arab states. Actually Turkey turned its face

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<sup>186</sup> Sabahattin Elibol and Zekai Arıkan. 1994. *opcit.* p.40.

<sup>187</sup> "Asi River" is Turkish name of the "Orontes River."

<sup>188</sup> "Fırat River" is Turkish name of the "Euphrates River."

<sup>189</sup> M. Schulz. 1992. "Turkey, Syria and Iraq: a Hydropolitical Security Complex – the Case of Euphrates and Tigris," in L. Ohlsson (ed.). *Regional Case Studies of Water Conflicts*. Göteborg: Göteborg University. p.96.

towards the West since the founding of the new Turkish Republic and only made some non-aggression treaties with the Middle Eastern states bilaterally.

After Atatürk's death, with the growing Soviet influence and demands on Turkey, Ankara tied itself to the West with important ties. From then on, especially under Menderes' administration, Turkey followed a more active policy in the Middle East than before. Turkey seemed to support western interests in the Middle East. Indeed the policies adopted were only to defend itself against the Soviet Union as well as its sovereignty and territorial integrity. As of the mid 1960s, however, Turkey incrementally began to adopt a multi-faceted foreign policy which included rapprochement with Middle Eastern countries.

## CHAPTER V:

### TURKEY'S RAPPROCHEMENT WITH THE ARAB WORLD (1960-1980)

#### 5.1. Disappointment with the West and Rapprochement with Arab States

In the beginning of 1960 there was a *coup d'état* in Turkey against the Menderes government by the Armed Forces. When the May 27 1960 *coup d'état* took place, Menderes had scheduled a visit to Moscow in June 1960. The visit itself was not the reason of the *coup*, but it can be said that Turkey wanted to restore and establish a relationship with the Soviet Union after the strained period of World War II.

There was no indication of change in Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East as in 1950s; on the contrary Turkey still interfered in Middle Eastern crises. Turkey recognized Syria's independence after the dissolution of the UAR, and evaluated the dissolution as an 'internal improvement' for Syria.<sup>190</sup> Recognizing Syria's independence, which strained the relationship between Turkey and Egypt, was a continuing policy of Turkey by interfering in Middle Eastern problems as it did in the 1950s.<sup>191</sup> Thus Turkey still followed the West in the Middle East.

After the coup, the new regime followed the foreign policy of its predecessors. Selim Sarper, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the military regime, emphasized that Turkey was committed to all international commitments, e.g. NATO, CENTO, and also indicated Turkey's wish on improving relations with the

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<sup>190</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, September 29,30, 1961 cited in Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.13.

<sup>191</sup> İsmail Soysal. 1999. "Turkish-Syrian Relations (1946-1999)," *Turkish Review of Middle East Studies* 10: 101-123.

Soviet Union.<sup>192</sup> From then on, Turkey applied a multi-faceted foreign policy, because of political reasons and factors, between the West, Socialist states and the Third World.<sup>193</sup> From the beginning of 1960s, all political parties, either leftists or rightists including the extremist factions, agreed on developing relations with the Arab world.<sup>194</sup> The reasons of Turkish multi-faceted policy are mentioned below:

The main reason was that Turkey had several disappointments about western policies- especially of the US- from the beginning of the 1960s. After the Cuban missile crisis between the US and the USSR, the US withdrew the Jupiter nuclear-armed missiles that were deployed in the beginning of 1961. Turkey benefited from withdrawing of the missiles because by withdrawing the missiles the possibility of a nuclear war in Turkey lessened. However, Ankara was disappointed at the very beginning of the crisis, because of thinking that the USA left Turkey be subjected to Soviet nuclear missiles. After opening the archives, it was seen that the withdrawing of the missiles was a “trade-off between the US and the USSR at the expense of Turkey.”<sup>195</sup>

The missile crisis was the first dissension of Turkey-the US relationship but not the last. While Turkey’s disappointment was still continuing, Turkey looked for a consensus between its allies to intervene into the Cyprus because of intensifying violence between Turkish and Greek Cypriots. However, in 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson, the President of the US, sent a letter to the Prime Minister İsmet İnönü to

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<sup>192</sup> Mehmet Gönlübol and Haluk Ülman. 1996. “İkinci Dünya Savaşı’ndan sonra Türk Dış Politikası 1945-1965.” (Turkish Foreign Policy after the World War II 1945-1965.) In Mehmet Gönlübol. (ed.) opcit. p.324.

<sup>193</sup> Mehmet Gönlübol and Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1996. “1973-1983.” In Mehmet Gönlübol (ed.) opcit. p.608.

<sup>194</sup> Ali L. Karaosmanoğlu. 1996. “Turkey: Between the Middle East and Western Europe.” In Kemal H. Karpat (ed.) *Turkish Foreign Policy: Recent Developments*. Madison: University of Wisconsin. p.12.

<sup>195</sup> George S. Harris. 1972. *Troubled Alliance: Turkish-American Problems in Historical Perspectives*. Stanford: Hoover Institution Studies 33. p. 91-5 cited in Dietrich Jung with Wolfango Piccoli. 2001. opcit. p.139.

warn İnönü “if Turkish action on the island would invite a Soviet attack, then NATO was not obliged to defend Turkey.”<sup>196</sup> This letter was an unexpected reaction from the US and made Turks disappointed about Western intentions. By sending the letter, “the United States had exploited Turkey’s political loyalty,”<sup>197</sup> and the letter caused “the reappearance of the deep-rooted suspicious against the West” in Turkey.<sup>198</sup> The US and West did not support Turkey’s rights on the Cyprus issue and this policy was accepted as an unsupportive and unjust policy by Turks while Turkey was a ‘staunch ally’ of the West. Thus there were some discussions on ‘real’ benefits of alignments with the West in Ankara, and Ankara examined its commitments to the US and adopted a more diversifying foreign policy.<sup>199</sup>

On the other hand, although Turkey had strained relations with the USSR beginning from the end of World War II, the Soviet Union changed its attitude towards Turkey to a most friendly atmosphere after warning Ankara on the Cyprus issue. The USA warned Turkey also on the Cyprus Crisis. Following the USA warning, the USSR changed its attitude towards Turkey. Having seen “the sign of a crack in the NATO alliance prompted the Soviets alter their position,” and the Soviet Union declared neutrality in the crisis.<sup>200</sup> After the bilateral visits of ministers, Turkey and the USSR signed an economic agreement on constructing “important industrial projects, including an iron and steel complex, an oil refinery, and an aluminum plant, and Soviet loans to Turkey for economic projects have been larger

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<sup>196</sup> Nur Bilge Criss. 1997. “Strategic Nuclear Missiles in Turkey: The Jupiter Affair, 1959-1963,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 20(3): 97-122.

<sup>197</sup> Faroz Ahmad. 1984. “La Politique Exterieur Turque,” *Les Temps Moderne* 41(456-7): 156-174 cited in Dietrich Jung with Wolfango Piccoli. 2001. *opcit.* p.139.

<sup>198</sup> Dietrich Jung with Wolfango Piccoli. 2001. *opcit.* p.139.

<sup>199</sup> Yasemin Çelik. 1999. *Contemporary Turkish Foreign Policy*. Westport: Praeger. p.47.

<sup>200</sup> Galia Golan. 1990. *Soviet Policies in the Middle East*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.249.



than those to any less developed country in recent years,” estimated nearly at \$200 million.<sup>201</sup>

The coldness in relations between Turkey and the Soviet Union was one of the reasons of negative Turkish attitudes towards the Arab world throughout the 1950s. However beginning with the second half of the 1960s, following improvements in relations between Turkey and the USSR, Turkey established relations with the Arab world. The public opinion of Turkey over the Soviet Union improved especially after the UN Resolution No. 2077 voting on December 18, 1965 about the Cyprus issue.<sup>202</sup> Having abstained in the UN voting, the USSR and other socialist states gained prestige among both the left and right wing of Turkish political parties. This improvement also affected Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East because most of the Arab states saw the USSR as an ally.

Following no support from the West on the Cyprus issue, Turkey was also disappointed with the manner of Arab states in the UN. In 1965, Turkey was not supported by Arab states in a resolution of the UN on the Cyprus issue. Syria, UAR and Lebanon voted against Turkey’s interests in Cyprus, while the other Arabs states abstained and Saudi Arabia was absent.<sup>203</sup> As a result, this difficult situation that Turkey faced led Ankara to become distant from the western world and search other alternative foreign policy ways: normalizing relations with the Arab states and USSR. The reorientation of foreign policy after the UN voting was not limited with the Arab countries and Soviet Union; it was expanded towards the Warsaw Pact and Balkan countries.<sup>204</sup> According to Dietrich Jung:

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<sup>201</sup> Alvin Z. Rubinstein. 1992. *Soviet Foreign policy Since World War II: Imperial and Global*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers. p.204.

<sup>202</sup> <http://www.mfa.gov.cy>. Accessed on June 30, 2005.

<sup>203</sup> Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.141.

<sup>204</sup> Ali L. Karaosmanoğlu. 1983. “Turkey’s Security Policy in the Middle East,” *Foreign Affairs* 62(1): 158.

The Turkish move to normalise its relations with the Arab world was, in the first place, a response to these disappointments with western policies. In the second place, it was an attempt to overcome the now painful isolation to which the foreign policy of Menderes had brought the country.<sup>205</sup>

Also growing tensions with Greece on the Cyprus issue and unjust position perceived of the West with a decreasing 'Soviet menace' from the north led Turkey to move towards the Arab world.<sup>206</sup> Thus rapprochement with the Arab world accompanied improving relations with the USSR.

The Turkish attitude towards the Arab states was received positively by both the leftist groups because of opposition to the West- especially the US, and the rightist groups because of religious reasons.<sup>207</sup> Thus, Turkey was in a suitable situation to establish ties with the Arab states because there was a consensus between the public opinion and political powers.

Turkish-Syrian relations began to improve under these circumstances. From the beginning of the 1960s, Turkey wanted to restore and reestablish relationship with Syria and this accelerated mainly from the second half of the 1960s. Turkey's first test of rapprochement with the Arab states was the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.

## **5.2. The 1967 'Six-Day' War**

Relations between Syria and Israel were strained in the period between 1956 and 1967 and tensions increased as of the beginning of 1967 because Palestinian guerrillas attacked from the border of Syria. Thus Israeli officials made declarations that an operation against Syria would be unavoidable if the attacks went on.

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<sup>205</sup> Dietrich Jung with Wolfango Piccoli. 2001. *opcit.* p.140.

<sup>206</sup> Ali L. Karaosmanoğlu. 1983. *op. cit.* 62(1): 157-175.

<sup>207</sup> Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.141.

The USSR benefited from this situation by spreading disinformation of a supposed Israeli plan to attack Syria. The Soviet aim by spreading disinformation was not only to unify the Arab states under an ‘anti-imperialist’ basis but also to help Syrian government against domestic conflicts and external pressure from its Arab neighbors.<sup>208</sup> The reason to protect the new Syrian government by the Soviet Union was because it was a socialist government and applied leftist policies among those Arab states including Egypt and Iraq, thus the continuation of the government was very important for the USSR.

Turkey publicized its position in the crisis on May 28, 1967 that discussions over the crisis was considered according to the UN laws and supported by the principles of right and justice. Turkey also added in the declaration that it kept in mind the good relationships between Arab states and Turkey.<sup>209</sup>

By declaring ‘keep in mind the good relationship between the Arab states and Turkey,’ Ankara announced its support on behalf of the Arab states in which *Al-Ahram* wrote the official opinion of the UAR (or Egypt) that Turkey gave guarantees to the UAR that Turkey would not permit to use the bases of NATO against Arab states and did not concentrate its troops on the Syrian-Turkish border.<sup>210</sup>

While the war was still continuing, İhsan Sabri Çağlayangil, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, made a speech in the Grand National Assembly and Senate about Turkey’s good will on ending the war. He also made a statement to *Cumhuriyet* that the use of NATO bases in Turkey against Arab states was not allowed by the Turkish

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<sup>208</sup> Walter Laqueur. 1968. *The Road to War, The Origins and Aftermath of Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1967-1968*. London: Cox-Wyman Ltd. pp.92-95 cited in Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. opcit. p.143.

<sup>209</sup> Dışişleri Bakanlığı. 1967. *Dışişleri Bakanlığı Belleteni*. (Journal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) Ankara. 32:34. cited in Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. opcit. p.154.

<sup>210</sup> *Al-Ahram* was a newspaper, which was published in Egypt. *Cumhuriyet*. June 1, 1967 cited in Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. opcit. p.155.

government.<sup>211</sup> Indeed Turkey drew a new and different foreign policy line by not permitting to use the base against Arabs after giving permission to the US to use İncirlik Base in Lebanon Crisis in 1958.

After the war Turkey sent aid of food, clothing and medicine to those Arab states that had heavy casualties in the war, beginning firstly with Syria and other states respectively.<sup>212</sup> Turkey supported the Arab states in the UN after the war by declaring clearly that it did not accept the land gains of Israel in the war and emphasized that the UN insisted on returning the lands to the Arab states from Israel.<sup>213</sup>

Turkey's foreign policy in the 1967 War was a clear milestone of Ankara's new foreign policy towards the Arabs states. Turkey tried to establish a rapprochement between itself and the Arab states. Mainly Syria and the UAR were pleased with the new Turkish attitude. Indeed the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Syria, I. Makus, publicized that Turkey's attitude in the crisis and war created appreciation and gratitude among Syrians.<sup>214</sup>

Turkey continued its rapprochement policy towards the Arab states and of course with Syria after the war. "Turkey displayed a certain willingness to act against Western interests in the Middle East."<sup>215</sup> Turkey denied any intention of founding a defense pact, which was proposed by the US in 1968, in the Gulf including Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, because this pact made Turkey become distant to

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<sup>211</sup> *Cumhuriyet*. June 6, 1967 cited in Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.156.

<sup>212</sup> Mehmet Gönlübol and Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1996. "1965-1973 Dönemi Türk Dış Politikası." (Turkish Foreign Policy between 1965 and 1973.) In Mehmet Gönlübol. (ed.) *opcit.* p.536.

<sup>213</sup> Dışişleri Bakanlığı. 1967. *Dışişleri Bakanlığı Belleteni*. (Journal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) Ankara. 33: 55-56 cited in Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.156.

<sup>214</sup> Dışişleri Bakanlığı. 1967. *Dışişleri Bakanlığı Belleteni*. (Journal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) Ankara. 35: 20 cited in Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.158.

<sup>215</sup> Dietrich Jung with Wolfango Piccoli. 2001. *opcit.* p.140.

its Arab neighbors as in the Baghdad Pact.<sup>216</sup> At the end of 1968, Turkey did not permit an exercise of NATO that would take place at the Turkish-Syrian border despite pressure from NATO.

### 5.3. The 1973 War

The year of 1970 led to a great change in Syria: Hafiz Assad came to control the administration by eliminating Nur al-Din al-Atasi and other party elites. Change of power took place while a crisis between Syria and Jordan was still going on. The crisis was about Jordan's operation against Palestinian guerrillas, who had been living in Jordan after the Arab-Israeli War of 1948 as refugees, were out to topple the Jordanian regime. Syria wanted to intervene to the conflict between the Jordan Armed Forces and Palestinian guerrillas but its operation failed because of Syrian domestic problems (e.g. struggle for power between Assad and Jadid) and other external factors (e.g. lack of Soviet support). Syrian domestic struggle for power ended with handover of the power by Hafiz Assad. The new regime under control of Hafiz Assad seemed to be more moderate and peaceful than the former regime.

Turkey applied a cautious policy, which was a continuation of the post-Menderes period and different from its policy of the 1950s, and supported neither Syria nor Jordan in the crisis. As after 1967 War, Syria appreciated Turkey's attitude towards the crisis between Syria and Jordan. Because, during the crisis, Turkey denied access to US paratroopers and war planes at Incirlik Base and emphasized that Turkey did not permit to use the NATO bases in operations against Arab states. Turkey did not allow the US fleets use the Iskenderun harbor either.<sup>217</sup> Turkey rejected nearly all offers from its ally in the crisis because the Turkish-Syrian Crisis

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<sup>216</sup> Dışişleri Bakanlığı. 1968. *Dışişleri Bakanlığı Belleteni*. (Journal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) Ankara. 40: 22 cited in Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* p.159.

<sup>217</sup> Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* pp.180-181.

in 1957 was due to Turkish support of western policies in the Syrian-Jordanian Crisis and Turkey was disappointed with Johnson's letter in its Cyprus policy.

Turkey's rapprochement with the Arab states continued after 1970. Although Syria improved its relations with the USSR, Turkey continued its policy of supporting Arabs in the international arena, but being neutral in inter-Arab problems.

Turkey's support of Syria and Arabs continued in the 1973 Arab-Israel War. Before the war, Turkey declared that Israel had to withdraw from Arab territories and made statements about Arab rights. While the war was still going on, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Syria and Egypt requested political support from Turkey in the war. Turkey declared that it did not approve Israeli occupation of Arab territories by using force and emphasized that accepting the legitimate rights of Arabs could provide permanent peace.<sup>218</sup>

During the war, some Arab ambassadors requested from Turkey humanitarian aid on October 14. Four days later Turkey informed the US that the bases in Turkey could not be used for sending aid to Israel,<sup>219</sup> which was a continuation of Turkish Foreign Policy from the mid-1960s. Turkey also provided some indirect support to Syria by permitting Soviet flights that was rumored to bring arms to Syria over Turkey. Moreover Turkey offered to Syria its southern ports in order to transport materials that were sent from other third countries.<sup>220</sup> However, despite Turkey's general support on two articles of the UN Resolution No.242, which included Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories and Israel's right on having secure and

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<sup>218</sup> Mehmet Gönlübol and Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1996. "1973-1983." In Mehmet Gönlübol (ed.) opcit. p.594.

<sup>219</sup> Mehmet Gönlübol and Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1996. "1973-1983." In Mehmet Gönlübol (ed.) opcit. p.595.

<sup>220</sup> Ayhan Kemal. 1974. "Turkey's Relations with the Arab World," *Foreign Policy* (Ankara) 4(4): 101.

recognized territories, after the 1973 War Turkey supported the withdrawal of Israel from occupied territories.<sup>221</sup>

Turkey followed a supportive policy towards Arab states and Syria after the 1973 War. Although Turkey supported the legal rights of Palestinians before the War, Ankara discussed independent Palestine state in its post-war policy. Turkey also recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1976 and permitted the PLO to open an office in Ankara in 1979.<sup>222</sup> The second indication of continuity in Turkish Foreign policy was Ankara's position on an inter-Arab problem: The Lebanon Crisis in 1976. Turkey did not take sides in the crisis but preferred to be neutral and not to interfere in the crisis.

#### **5.4. Terrorism and Its Implications**

From the founding of Israel in 1948, the Middle East was in a period of change and chaos. However considering the terrorist organizations and movements the Middle East was quiet until 1967. Following the defeat in 1967 Six Day War, Arabs were in a hopeless situation which led to growing terrorism among the Arabs.

The main Arab terrorist organization in 1960s was the PLO. The PLO established and made operations to Israel from Jordan. However, the PLO had problems with King Hussein thus it was ousted from Jordan. Afterwards, it was established in Lebanon, and Syria had opportunity to control the PLO. Indeed Syria had little influence over the PLO before 1967, however after the 1967 Six Day War the PLO and other terrorist organizations became solid tools of Syrian state policy. Also the defeat of 1973 Yom Kippur War accelerated Assad's policy to improve its

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<sup>221</sup> Fahir Armaoğlu. 1983. *20. Yüzyıl Siyasi Tarihi 1914-1980 (The Political History of 20<sup>th</sup> Century 1914-1980)*. Ankara: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları. p.849.

<sup>222</sup> Ramazan Gözen. 1995. "The Turkish-Iraqi Relations: from cooperation to uncertainty," *Foreign Policy* 19(3-4): 49-58.

relations with Marxist Palestinian groups. The reasons were because of Syrian failure on political and military fields and these failures prevented Damascus from facing other rival states through diplomatic ways. Therefore Syria used terrorism as an instrument in its foreign policy; it used terrorism as a bargaining power against its rivals.<sup>223</sup>

While the Arabs and Syria began to be interested in terrorist organizations, the USSR did not recognize them as legal organizations in the beginning of the 1960s. As a result, the USSR did not establish relations with these groups until the end of the 1960s. However, with growing interest of the Soviets towards the Middle East and improving its relations with the Arab states, Moscow changed its mind about terrorist organizations, even considered some of them as liberation organizations and ‘freedom fighters’. Moreover the Soviets supported some of anti-western terrorist organizations in order to abolish the pro-western regimes and establish new regimes that supported Soviet interests. On the other hand, the West also supported terrorist organizations in order to influence Syrian and other Arab policies.<sup>224</sup>

Syria supported Marxist movements in Lebanon especially after the Syrian intervention to Lebanon. Syrian aim in supporting terrorist activities in Lebanon was because of the intention to use them against Israel and other rival states as well as Turkey and to maintain control over Lebanon. The Soviet Union also supported the Marxist movement in Lebanon as well as all over the world and tried to create a ‘safe heaven’ for Marxist organizations. From the early 1970s, left-wing Turkish terrorists also began to use Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley under Syrian control in order to train their

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<sup>223</sup> The Turkish Democracy Foundation. 1996. Syria and International Terrorism. Ankara: Aşama Matbaacılık. p.11.

<sup>224</sup> Sabahattin Elibol and Zekai Arıkan. 1994. opcit. pp.69-71.



militants.<sup>225</sup> Some of the terrorist organizations that were established in Bekaa Valley under control of Syria were Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA), People's Liberation Party-Front of Turkey (THKP/C or known as Acilciler), Revolutionary Left, Turkish Workers' and Peasants' Liberation Army (TIKKO), Marxist Leninist Armed Propaganda Force (MLSPB), Turkish Communist Party/Marxist-Leninist (TKP/M-L), Revolutionary Communist Party/Armed Popular Corporations (DKP/SHB).

Turkey changed its policy on the Palestinian issue after the 1970s because Ankara saw some political benefits of rapprochement with the Arab world after the 1967 Arab-Israel War.<sup>226</sup> Thus Turkey recognized the PLO as the “sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in all liberated Palestinian territory,” since October 1974.<sup>227</sup> From then on, Turkey officially referred to “Palestine” instead of “the Palestinian Authority” or “the PLO,” and “President Arafat” instead of “the chairman Arafat.”<sup>228</sup>

Turkey worried about support to the anti-regime terrorist organizations against itself emanating from Lebanon. Although there was some information about PLO support to the anti-Turkish regime terrorists that the PLO denied, Turkey kept its silent position on the issue. Indeed terrorist activities in Bekaa Valley could not be realized without Syrian authority or PLO's knowledge that controlled the valley and

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<sup>225</sup> Nihat Ali Özcan. 1999. *PKK (Kürdistan İşçi Partisi): Tarihi, İdeolojisi ve Yöntemi. (PKK (Kurdish Workers' Party): It's History, Ideology and Method)*. Ankara:ASAM.pp.12-13.

<sup>226</sup> When the Greek Cypriot leader Makarios proposed a decision against Turkey in the Third Non-Aligned Summit Conference in Zambia in 1970 like the one in 1964, some of the moderate Arab states such as Morocco, Jordan, and Kuwait and also the radical Arab states like the United Arab Emirates, Algiers, and Syria supported Turkey against the proposal. Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1972. *opcit.* pp.10-12.

<sup>227</sup> Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1987. “Development of Turkish-Arab Relations: A Historical Appraisal.” In Seyfi Taşhan and Ali L. Karaosmanoğlu (eds.) *Middle East, Turkey and the Atlantic Alliance*. Ankara: Foreign Policy Institute. pp. 8-27.

<sup>228</sup> Alan Makovsky. 1996. “Israeli-Turkish Relations: A Turkish “Periphery Strategy?”” In Henri J. Barkey ed., *Reluctant Neighbor: Turkey's Role in the Middle East*. Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press. pp.147-170.

terrorist organizations that were trained in the valley. Even then Turkey permitted the PLO to open an office in Ankara. This was because of the new Turkish foreign policy towards the Arabs that was applied from the beginning of the 1960s in which Turkey obtained some benefits especially in the international arena of rapprochement with the Arabs since 1960. Indeed Arab states along with the USSR sometimes supported Turkey's interests in the international arena.

### **5.5. Transboundary Water Problems Revisited**

From the mid 1950s, Turkey and Syria did not confront each other seriously considering water issues. It seemed that water issues were left to time. Especially at the beginning of the 1960s and Turkish rapprochement with the Arab world, it was thought that Turkey was compromised to Syria and Arab world. This thought might have stemmed from worsening of Turkey's situation in the international arena because of problems with its ally, the USA, on the Cyprus issue and threatening to be left alone against a possible Soviet threat by the USA. Although its allies did not support Turkey, Ankara tried to continue its development every way possible. One of the main development regions was the southeast region of Turkey.

Turkey, in order to continue its economic growth and develop its southeastern region, planned to build a dam over Euphrates, the Keban Dam. Syria and Turkey arranged a meeting of sharing the water resources in September 1964. However Turkey stopped the meeting because Syria wanted to consider water resources only on the basis of the Euphrates River without discussing the water regime of Asi River. Iraq proposed to arrange a meeting of water resources between Syria, Turkey and Iraq in 1965.

Not only Syria but also Iraq hesitated about Turkey's decision to build a dam over Euphrates because both states thought that Turkey would cut their water resources and leave them into a difficult situation if Ankara built an irrigation dam over Euphrates. Thus both states lobbied against building the dam in international organizations that were to assist Turkey. Turkey decided unilaterally to allow 350 cubic meter per second water flow to Syria not to endanger the funding sources that was needed in construction of the Keban Dam.<sup>229</sup> As a result they were partly successful in their attempts to build a dam but the international organizations provided Turkey funds to build a hydroelectric plant over Euphrates, not an irrigation dam.<sup>230</sup>

Although Turkey faced problems and obstacles in international organizations and even when its allies did not support Turkey's interests, the West and the USA restricted Turkey in its economic projects, Turkey continued to plan and tried to build new irrigation and development projects. One of them was the Southeast Anatolian Development Project (GAP), which was planned as of 1964. As mentioned above, with Syrian and Iraqi initiatives, the West and USA did not fund Turkey in this huge project. Speculation had it that this was because of the US plan to gain concessions in the Arab-Israeli conflict for the Israeli side over Turkey's back.<sup>231</sup>

Nonetheless Turkey planned its development project of GAP despite the lack support from its allies and international organizations. However, Turkey could not afford to realize this 'gigantic' project till the end of the 1970s. Syrian initiative of building Tabqa or al-Thawra Dam on Euphrates and beginning to fill Lake Assad in

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<sup>229</sup> Özden Bilen. 1996. *Ortadoğu Su Sorunları ve Türkiye (The Middle East Water Conflicts and Turkey)*. Ankara: TESAV. p.87 cited in Yakup Şalvarcı. 2003. *Pax Aqualis*. İstanbul: Zaman Kitap. p.101.

<sup>230</sup> Sabahattin Elibol and Zekai Arıkan. 1994. opcit. p.38.

<sup>231</sup> Mehmet Gönlübol and Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1996. "1973-1983." In Mehmet Gönlübol (ed.) opcit. p.616.

1976 accelerated Turkish efforts to build a dam over Euphrates for irrigation and hydroelectricity.<sup>232</sup>

Turkey's intention of using water inside its borders was considered by Syria as a dangerous development. Thus, in order to get rid of the dangerous situation, Syria put pressure on Turkey by using international organizations, e.g. the Arab League and World Bank that Syria applied before 1970 in order to obstruct Turkish efforts on building Keban Dam for irrigation purposes. Indeed Syrian efforts were sometimes effective when its allies in the international arena did not support Turkey. For instance, halting to sell petroleum by some of the petroleum producing states to Turkey in 1977 was perceived as a reaction to reduce the flow of Euphrates by Turkey. Ankara had to guarantee the World Bank to release 500 cubic meters per second of water to Syria in order not to face financing problems for the Karakaya Dam, which would be the biggest dam of Turkey when planned, over the Euphrates River at Malatya.<sup>233</sup>

Turkey was badly affected from Menderes's foreign policy during the 1950s. Although their aim was to protect Turkey from external threats, the foreign policy took Turkey out of the Middle East. Syria and other Arab states saw Turkey as an 'instrument of imperialism' in the Middle East.

However, with the beginning of the 1960s, Turkey changed its stance towards the Arab world. Now Ankara adopted the principles that Taşhan summarized: non-interference in domestic affairs of the Arab states; non-interference in intra-Arab relations; equality among states of the region and development of bilateral relations; political support to the Arab states for Palestine and maintaining diplomatic ties with

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<sup>232</sup> Philip Robins. 1991. *Turkey and the Middle East*. London: Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chantam House Papers). p.89.

<sup>233</sup> Yakup Şalvarcı. 2003. *opcit.* p.300.

Israel; not allowing Turkey's Western relations adversely affect its relations in the Middle East and vice versa.<sup>234</sup>

Although Turkey obtained some benefits from applying these principles, Ankara sometimes had problems with Syria, e.g. Syrian support to terrorist groups and on the water issue. Turkey's political conjuncture, domestically as well in foreign affairs, was to change dramatically after 1980.

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<sup>234</sup> Seyfi Taşhan and Ali L. Karaosmanoğlu (eds.) 1987. op. cit. pp.6-7.

## CHAPTER VI:

### ADOPTING YET ANOTHER ACTIVE POLICY (1980-1991)

#### 6.1. The Turgut Özal Period

Turkey had severe internal problems at the beginning of the 1980s. In this difficult situation, the *coup d'état* led by General Kenan Evren took over on September 12, 1980. This was the second direct interference of the armed forces in Turkey's political life. Although pressure from other states and international organizations was expected because of the *coup d'état*, the West especially the USA assented to the *coup* with tolerance. The NATO and the Council of Europe also reacted to the *coup* with tolerance. One reason towards the *coup* was because of Turkey's intention to continue the January 24 economic decisions.<sup>235</sup>

Bülent Ulusu, who was appointed as the Prime Minister by the *coup* makers, declared in the program of government that Turkey continued its peaceful foreign policy with intentions to last its good relationships with NATO, Europe and the USA. He emphasized that Turkey intended to improve its relations with its neighbors and gave special importance to the relationship between the USSR and Turkey. Turkey continued to support the Middle East problems and crisis due to principals of justice and equity and rejection of occupation of territories. Ankara also supported rights of the Palestinians.<sup>236</sup> Turkey did not accept, as its Arab neighbors did, the Israeli decision of claiming Jerusalem as the capital of Israel with its undividable

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<sup>235</sup> Mehmet Gönlübol and Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1996. "1973-1983." In Mehmet Gönlübol (ed.) opcit. p.600.

<sup>236</sup> Mehmet Gönlübol and Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1996. "1973-1983." In Mehmet Gönlübol (ed.) opcit. p.601.

territorial integrity in July 1980. While the Arab states decided to break off relations with Israel, Turkey downgraded its ambassadorial level to the secondary secretary level and rejected Israeli's request to open an embassy in Jerusalem.<sup>237</sup> Turkey's supportive policy continued was clearly seen in Turkey's attitude towards the annexation of Golan Heights by Israel. Turkey protested the decision of the annexation and declared that it did not recognize the Israeli decision.<sup>238</sup> These policies pleased the Syrian side as well as the other Arab states.

Another indication of Turkish supportive policy towards the Arabs in 1982 was during the US intervention to Lebanon. Turkey was cautious of taking sides with the US about intervention in Lebanon and permitting the US to use İncirlik Base by following its rapprochement policy with the Arabs. However the US was given permission to use the base in December 1983 only for humanitarian purposes. Turkey gave the permission after discussions with Saudi Arabia in order not to cause Arab resentment. Indeed the permission came after the declaration of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in November 15, 1983 and during the co-production negotiations of F-16 fighter airplanes were continuing in order to show the US that Turkey was still a sincere ally of the US.<sup>239</sup>

Following three years of regime of the *coup d'état*, Turkey went to an election in which Turgut Özal became the Prime Minister. From then on, Turkey adopted an 'active' foreign policy, which was provided by lessened tensions in international affairs.

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<sup>237</sup> Mahmut Bali Aykan. 1993. "The Palestinian Question in Turkish Foreign Policy from the 1950s to the 1990s," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25: 100-103.

<sup>238</sup> Fahir Armaoğlu. 1983. *opcit.* p.851.

<sup>239</sup> Helmut Hubel.1987. "Turkey and the Crisis in the Middle East." In Seyfi Taşhan and Ali L. Karaosmanoğlu (eds.) *Middle East, Turkey and the Atlantic Alliance*. Ankara: Foreign Policy Institute, pp.111-112.

Indeed, although the multi-faceted policy that Turkey adopted in the 1960s was because of political factors, Ankara applied a multi-faceted policy by taking into account economic factors in the 1980s. The economic approach in multi-faceted policy generally began in the 1970s but it was evident especially as of the 1980s.<sup>240</sup> Prime Minister Özal saw that Turkey had to improve economic and trade relations with the Arab world for providing development. Thus Turkey began an ‘active export strategy’ especially towards the Middle Eastern countries. This strategy gave its fruits from the very beginning that “Turkish exports to the Middle East increased fivefold” between 1980 and 1985.<sup>241</sup>

Despite an increase in Turkish exports towards the Middle East, Turkey could not continue the improvement. Turkish trade towards the Middle East declined in the 1985-1995 period.<sup>242</sup> On the contrary, while the volume of trade with the Middle East was decreasing, relations with the USA improved rapidly. “Turgut Özal's unabashed pro-Americanism, and a vigorously restored foreign assistance program - 1985 and 1986 were high water marks in US aid to Turkey, nearly a billion dollars' worth annually - sustained bilateral ties.”<sup>243</sup>

Moreover, while Turkey improved its relations with the US, the relations with Israel were also improving from the mid-1980s, even though Turkey had downgraded its diplomatic representation level. This rapprochement was because of:

The lack of Arab support concerning the Cyprus issue, their lack of attention to the mistreatment of Bulgarian Turks, tensions over water rights, and differences over ASALA and PKK activities, put an end to high levels of economic and political relations between Turkey

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<sup>240</sup> Mehmet Gönlübol and Ömer Kürkçüoğlu. 1996. “1973-1983.” In Mehmet Gönlübol (ed.) *opcit.* p.608.

<sup>241</sup> Dietrich Jung with Wolfango Piccoli. 2001. *opcit.* p.141.

<sup>242</sup> Dietrich Jung with Wolfango Piccoli. 2001. *opcit.* p.142.

<sup>243</sup> Alan Makovsky. 1999. “Marching in tep, mostly,” *Private View*, Spring, <http://www.tusiad.org/yayin/private/spring99/pdf/sec09.pdf>. Accessed on June 2, 2005.



and some Arab countries. The main thrust of Bolukbasi's argument suggests that Turkish decision-makers replaced solidarity with Arabs with solidarity with Israel, gradually coming to see the Tel Aviv administration as its main partner in Middle East politics.<sup>244</sup>

In addition to these suggestions, Syria had not only differences with Turkey over issues of terrorism but was also an active supporter of terrorist organizations against Turkey and its other rivals.

With the growing importance for the US in the Middle East as in 1950s, Turkey became a regional power in the Middle East. On the other side, Syria weakened after non-lasting conflicts and wars against Israel and continuing disputes with its neighbors, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon. However, in the 1980s, Turkey's army was the second biggest army of NATO. Turkish Armed Forces was superior to Syria not only in manpower but also in technological means.

## **6.2. PKK Terrorism**

Syrian policy of supporting terrorist organizations continued after 1980. Although Syria denied its relations with terrorist organizations, the US put Syria on the list of supporter states of terrorism by the late 1970s. Indeed Syria was mostly accepted as supporter of terrorist organizations from the mid-1960s. It is interesting enough that Syria supported terrorist organizations cooperating with the Soviet Union. However the Soviet Union did not appear mostly as a terror supporter state although some countries argued that it was.

From the 1970s, Syria had a state policy of supporting terrorist organizations in order to have an advantageous situation in bargaining tables considering its 'rival'

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<sup>244</sup> Bülent Aras. 2002. "The Academic Perceptions of Turkish-Israeli Relations," *Alternatives*, 1(1): 10-22. Aras attributed these suggestions to the article of Suha Bolukbasi. 1999. "Behind The Turkish-Israeli Alliance: A Turkish View," *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, 29(1): 28-29.

states. For Turkey, Syria supported extremist leftist groups in Bekaa Valley; Syria even supported ASALA against Turkey from the late 1970s. Syrian aim of supporting terrorist groups, as mentioned above, was because of Syrian will of wearing its rivals out, which it could not eliminate by war through diplomatic means.

When Syria realized that it could not obstruct Turkey by diplomatic means, Syria strengthened its efforts to obstruct Turkey by non-diplomatic ways. From the beginning of the 1980s, Syria changed its terror tool to Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK: *Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan*). It is interesting enough that the activities of ASALA finished when PKK activities intensified. Syria began to support PKK as a bargaining card during the diplomatic discussions with Turkey especially in the water conflict.<sup>245</sup>

Although PKK was founded before 1980, PKK did not have influence during its first years inside Turkey, especially after the September 12 *coup d'état*. Thus Abdullah Öcalan began to live in Damascus and lead the PKK from Damascus. PKK was established in Bekaa Valley that was under control of Palestinian guerrillas and had help in training its terrorists.<sup>246</sup> Keeping Öcalan in Syria and PKK militants in the Bekaa Valley was the first indication of Syrian support. However the support was not the last help that Syria provided to PKK. Syria also helped PKK in training the militants with its secret service during the 1980s; Syria permitted PKK to get established and open bureaus in Syria. Nonetheless, when "Turkey insists on Syria's ceasing to support anti-Turkish activity and toughens its stance, Syria asks Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) and PKK *guerrillas* to leave the country."<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Sabahattin Elibol and Zekai Arıkan. 1994. *opcit.* p.71.

<sup>246</sup> Sabahattin Elibol and Zekai Arıkan. 1994. *opcit.* p.74.

<sup>247</sup> Emphasized is mine. *Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan* (PKK) –Worker's Party of Kurdistan- was founded before 1980 by Abdullah Öcalan. AliÇarkoğlu and Mine Eder. 2001. "Water Conflict: The

Although Syria asked that PKK members leave the country, the support of Syria still continued. Even Öcalan said, “The Iranian President Ali Ekber Hashimi Rafsancani and Syrian President Hafiz Assad are two friends of mine. My organization has friendly relations with Iran and Syria.”<sup>248</sup> This was a proof of Syrian support to PKK.

Turkey saw Syrian intention of using PKK as a ‘foreign policy tool’ in relations between Turkey and Syria especially through the water conflict. Looking into the issue from Turkish side, Ankara wanted to solve the problem without straining relations. Furthermore Turkey agreed to sign two protocols with Syria in Damascus. While Turkey guaranteed to flow 500 cubic meters per second of water from the Euphrates River according to the first protocol, with the second protocol “Syria pledges to end its support of PKK and other anti-Turkish groups.”<sup>249</sup>

Nevertheless Syria continued to support PKK in the following years. In October 1989, Turkey publicized that it ended its support to the 1987 document, because Syria did not adhere to the security accord of the 1987 protocol. Turgut Özal accused Syria of not taking any measures on the Turkish-Syrian border where PKK infiltrations still continued.<sup>250</sup> Turkey had more anxiety in the following years that it accused Syria of waging an ‘undeclared war’ against Turkey and threatened Damascus with military consequences unless the war continued.<sup>251</sup>

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Euphrates-Tigris Basin.” p.244. In Barry Rubin and Kemal Kirisci (eds.) *Turkey in world politics : an emerging multiregional power*. Boulder, Co.: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

<sup>248</sup> Ali Tekin. 1999. “The Place of Terrorism in Iran’s Foreign Policy,” *Eurasia File: An International Relations and Strategic Researches Center Publication*. Ankara: Kültür Ofset. p.66.

<sup>249</sup> AliÇarkoğlu and Mine Eder. 2001. opcit. p.245.

<sup>250</sup> AliÇarkoğlu and Mine Eder. 2001. opcit. p.245.

<sup>251</sup> Alan Makovsky. 1999. “The New Activism in Turkish Foreign Policy,” SAIS Review 19:99 cited in Dietrich Jung with Wolfango Piccoli. 2001. opcit. p.145.

### 6.3. GAP and Water Issue

From the beginning of the 1980s Turkey began the ‘gigantic’ Southeast Anatolian Development Project (GAP). The GAP project planned to realize “agro-industrial development” in southeastern part of Turkey.<sup>252</sup> Its main principles were “to boost the agricultural production of the region, to develop water and energy resources, and to increase regional employment and infrastructure.”<sup>253</sup> The project contains 22 dams and 19 hydro-electric plants on the Euphrates and Tigris<sup>254</sup> and first stage of the project will cost \$12 billion.<sup>255</sup>

Syria and Iraq feared this ‘gigantic’ development project because they believed that it caused water shortages and hampered their irrigation and hydroelectricity projects. Thus Syria, Iraq and Turkey arranged a trilateral technical committee in 1980. The technical committee met fourteen times until 1989 but did not reach an agreement by either state.<sup>256</sup> The disagreement was because of different opinion of the sides. While Syria claimed Euphrates River to be ‘international waters,’ Turkey claimed Euphrates as ‘transboundary waters.’ Also while Syria demanded from Turkey ‘sharing of water’ from its source, which means ‘common sovereignty,’ Turkey claimed ‘allocation’ in the water dispute. Turkey also emphasized that it depended on the principle of ‘equality’ in allocation of water.<sup>257</sup> Indeed Turkey committed to Syria to allow more than 500 m<sup>3</sup>/sec. of water by signing of the Protocol of Economic and Technical Cooperation in 1987.<sup>258</sup> However Syrian attitude was not same as Turkish goodwill policy considering Asi River, which Syria did not allow water flow in the summer months.

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<sup>252</sup> S. Mutlu. 1996. “The Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP) of Turkey: its context, its objectives and prospects,” *Orient*, 37(1):69.

<sup>253</sup> Dietrich Jung with Wolfango Piccoli. 2001. *opcit.* p.144.

<sup>254</sup> S. Mutlu. 1996. *opcit.* 37(1):69.

<sup>255</sup> Philip Robins. 1991. *opcit.* p.89.

<sup>256</sup> Philip Robins. 1991. *opcit.* p.89.

<sup>257</sup> Sabahattin Elibol and Zekai Arıkan. 1994. *opcit.* pp.54-55.

<sup>258</sup> Yakup Şalvarcı. 2003. *opcit.* p.305.

Syria with its Arab friends had experience of using petroleum as a political weapon and was aware of the importance of water and feared that water resources would also be used in this way. Because of Syrian suspicions of Turkey “in possession of a powerful water weapon,”<sup>259</sup> it tried to reach an agreement of controlling water from its source that tied Turkey’s hand.<sup>260</sup>

In a distrustful environment, the so-called ‘Peace Pipeline Project,’ which appeared in 1986, cannot attract the Arab states interest including Syria. The project was based on “building two pipelines to supply drinking water from the Turkish rivers Ceyhan and Seyhan to the Arab peninsula, Syria and Jordan.”<sup>261</sup> However the ‘commercially minded idea’ did not get affirmative response from Syria and other Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia.<sup>262</sup> The negative response was based on mainly two reasons: The distrustful environment of the Middle East was the first reason because the Middle Eastern states thought that the main reason of the pipeline was to provide water to Israel, the ancient enemy. The second reason was that Turkey would be able to influence the Middle Eastern affairs after establishing the pipeline<sup>263</sup> and deepening Arab concerns of increased dependence upon Turkey.<sup>264</sup>

Turkish rapprochement with the Arab world still continued after 1980. However Turkey was disturbed by Syrian support of terrorist groups and growing water disputes. Bilateral attempts did not succeed in solving the problems.

Turkey improved its relations with the US after the 1980. Following the 1983 elections and establishing Turgut Özal’s government, Turkey applied a more active

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<sup>259</sup> B. Hoffmann. 1998. “Hydro paranoia and its myths. The issue of water in the Middle East,” *Orient* 39(2):255 cited in Dietrich Jung with Wolfango Piccoli. 2001. *opcit.* p.144.

<sup>260</sup> Sabahattin Elibol and Zekai Arıkan. 1994. *opcit.* p.55.

<sup>261</sup> Erol Manisalı. 1996. “Water and Turkish-Middle East Relations,” cited in Kemal H. Karpat. *Turkish Foreign Policy: Recent Developments*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. p.166.

<sup>262</sup> Dietrich Jung with Wolfango Piccoli. 2001. *opcit.* p.145.

<sup>263</sup> Sabahattin Elibol and Zekai Arıkan. 1994. *opcit.* p.60.

<sup>264</sup> Philip Robins. 1991. *opcit.* p.98.

policy than the last two decades. He made daring attempts in diplomatic arena against Syria in order to have the initiative in terror and water disputes. The courageous attempts were because of growing US support to Turkey and declining Soviet support to Syria that left Syria alone in international arena. Syria was also isolated from the Arab world because of its policies in Lebanon.

## **CHAPTER VII:**

### **CONCLUSION**

After the end of World War II, the world was in a great change of international relations as if the world was left to the hands of the superpowers, the USSR and USA. In this changing environment, mainly Britain and France left the Middle East to the superpowers. Because of the World War II, France became weak than before the war. This caused France diminished its influence in its mandate states, such as Syria. As a result, Syria gained its independence in 1946 with support of the superpowers. From then on, Turkey established relations with Syria. Turkish foreign policy towards Syria was not different from Turkish foreign policy towards Arabs. When Turkish relations with Arabs strained, it generally strained with Syria, or vice versa.

Turkey followed a foreign policy of advancing through the contemporary world since it was founded. Thus the Middle East took negligible part in Turkish foreign policy. Indeed Turkey signed the Saadabat Pact (Non-aggression Pact) with Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan in 1937. However the pact was far from an example of activist policy but rather a defensive one because with this pact either side accepted not to involved domestic issues of the other. Turkey wanted to secure its southern borders and its territorial integrity by signing the pact. After being silent for the last twenty years in the Middle East, Turkey began to get involved into Middle Eastern affairs. Actually, the involvement can be summarized as drawing of Turkey into the Middle East by the US and Britain at some aspects.

After the World War II, the Soviet Union demanded Turkey from territorial rights and joint defense of the Straits. However Turkey refused all of the Soviet demands. In the face of growing and continuing Soviet demands, Turkey, in order to provide its security and territorial integrity, wanted to join North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Although Turkey did not want to involve in Middle Eastern affairs, after the World War II, Turkey objected the partition plan in 1947 of Palestine along with other Arab states that pleased Arabs and Syrian President Shukri al-Quwatli even sent an appreciation message to President İsmet İnönü for Turkey's support. Contradictory to the objection of the partition plan in the UN, Turkey recognized newly founded Israel by 1949. Concerns about military and diplomatic aid that was provided by the US and being not accepted to every type of western organizations made Turkey be along with other western powers on recognizing Israel. Turkey did not take into account Arab reactions because of the West was more important in Turkish foreign policy.

With the beginning of the 1950, Turkey had drawn into the Middle East. Actually, because of security concerns and desires of being align with the West, there seemed no danger of Turkey's involvement in the Middle East. However, after the changing of the Soviet leadership that Khrushchev adopted new way in Soviet foreign policy towards the Middle East, Turkey would face with difficult problems especially after 1955. In 1955, Khrushchev decided to enter in Middle Eastern affairs, and the Baghdad Pact could be spoil Moscow's plans. Thus the Soviet Union reacted negatively to the pact and its attitude was clearly seen in the first crisis between Syria and Turkey of 1957 crisis. The Soviet Union gave reaction to Turkish amassing troops on the Syrian-Turkish border and benefited from supporting Syria



by using Turkey. The Soviet Union even threatened Turkey with war if Turkish stance towards Syria continued. Turkey also attracted Arab resentment after permitting US to use bases in 1958 Lebanon crisis. From then on, the Soviet Union strengthened its position in the Middle East of course in Syria. On the contrary, Turkey was isolated from the Middle East and Arab world because of taking side with the West.

Turkey did not gain more of aligning with the West in the Middle East but rather became mired in the swamp in the beginning of the 1960s. Moreover, Turkey saw disadvantages of being isolated from Arabs especially in the international arena. Turkey waited Arabs support in the Cyprus crisis in 1964 but Arabs did not support Turkish interests in the crisis including Syria. In addition to displeasure of not supporting in the crisis, the US sent a warning letter to Turkey that Turkey would not be defended in a possible war. Turkey disappointed by the letter and adopted a new in its foreign policy of *rapprochement* with Arabs and also establishing good relations with the Soviet Union.

From 1965, Turkey quitted from its 1950 foreign policy and applied new principles in its foreign policy: non-interference in domestic affairs of the Arab states; non-interference in intra-Arab relations; equality among states of the region and development of bilateral relations; political support to the Arab states for Palestine and maintaining diplomatic ties with Israel; not allowing Turkey's Western relations adversely affect its relations in the Middle East and vice versa.<sup>265</sup> The policy can be called as multi-faceted foreign policy that was different from the western-oriented foreign policy. Actually Turkey signed economic treaty with the Soviet Union to build factories that estimated nearly \$ 200 million.

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<sup>265</sup> Seyfi Taşhan and Ali L. Karaosmanoğlu (eds.) 1987. op. cit. pp.6-7.

During the 1970s, Turkey was almost far from aligning with the US in Middle Eastern affairs. Following Turkish intervention in Cyprus, the arm embargo caused Turkey continue its multi-faceted policy. Although Turkey mostly supported Syrian interests in its conflicts or rather preferred to be neutral in inter-Arab relations, Syria was not sensitive to Turkish national interests. Syria took no notice of terrorist organizations, which had training facilities in the Bekaa Valley under Syrian protectorate, against the Turkish regime. Syria did not accede to Turkish request on water disputes; moreover, it made lobbies against Turkish initiatives of building dams over Euphrates.

Turkish multi-faceted policy still continued after the 1980 *coup d'état*. Because of having Arab resentment after aligning with the US in Lebanon Crisis by 1958, Turkey was careful in the 1982 Lebanon Crisis. Turkey permitted to use the bases for only humanitarian purposes after discussing with Saudi Arabia. Although Syria was listed in the terrorist supporter state, Syria, as in the 1970s, used PKK as tool against Turkey. However, Turkey, under Turgut Özal, seemed to leave its low-profile policy. Having hopes of cutting Syrian support to PKK, Turkey signed a security and water protocols with Syria. Although Turkey had some impressions of leaving the low-profile policy towards the Arab world, it did not leave diplomacy aside in its relations with Syria.

Consequently, Turkish foreign policy towards Syria in private and Arabs in general was not only drawn with Soviet threat, but Turkey's aim of using its allies' defense capabilities and Turkish national interests. While Turkish moves in the 1950s did not serve benefits to Turkish national interests, multi-faceted policy that began from 1965 served more to national interests.

We can see the evolution of Turkish attitude towards the Arab world and the Soviet Union from the UN Resolutions and Turkish position in the resolutions. In considering the 1947 and 1965 period, Turkey voted as same as the US in the UN on Middle Eastern problems. In this period Turkey mostly voted on parallel with the US while it voted % 36 of the resolutions same as the Soviet Union and Egypt. However, in the 1965-1975 tenure, the situation became reversed. We understand from the votes that Turkey did not follow the policy on parallel with the US but voted % 92 same in the Soviet Union and Egypt. This multi-faceted policy continued in the 1975-1991 period Turkey mostly voted with the Soviet Union and Egypt.<sup>266</sup>

Thus Syrian-Turkish relations were not affected directly by the Soviet Union in both negative and positive way. Since Syria was not a ‘satellite’ state of the Soviet Union, it did not apply its foreign relations on parallel with Moscow. Syria even created problems to Moscow and had intentions to use the Soviet Union as its supporter. On the other side, Turkey did not apply its foreign relations because of Soviet threat. While Turkey adopted a multi-faceted foreign policy, it did not undervalue either side that includes the Soviet Union and the West and the Arab world.

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<sup>266</sup> Faruk Sönmezoğlu. 1994. “Kıbrıs Sorunu, Bağlantısızlar ve BM Genel Kurulu’ndaki Oylamalar / Kararlar” In Faruk Sönmezoğlu (ed.) 1994. *Türk Dış Politikasının Analizi*. İstanbul: Der. pp.441-481.

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