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VAKGROEP STUDIE VAN DE DERDE WERELD

The Syrian-Israeli Peace Process and The United States

From Hope to Impasse

1991-2000

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Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Ruddy Doom

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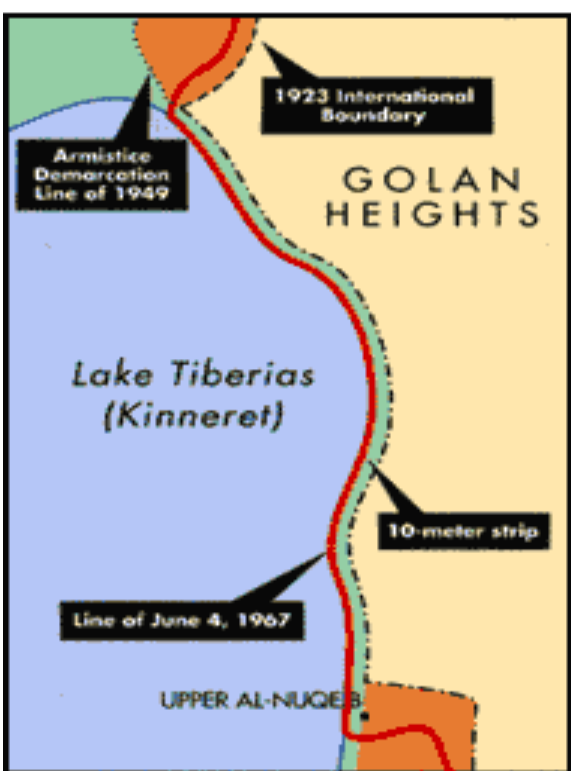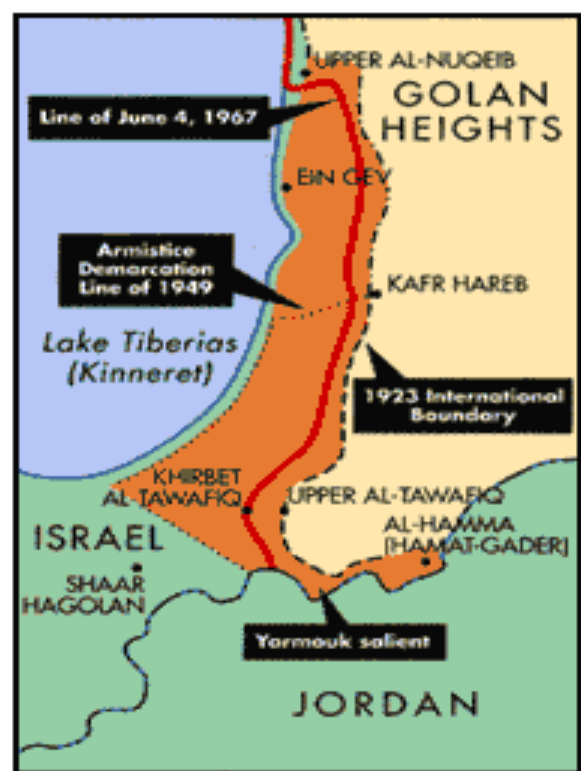
Middle East

ROM.
Bucharest
Constanța
Sevastopol'
UKR.
Krasnodar
RUSSIA
KAZAKSTAN
Aqtaū
KAZAKSTAN
Aral Sea
UZBEKISTAN
Nukus

Sofia
BULGARIA
Varna
Black Sea
Sokhumi
Groznyy
Dashhowuz
Bukhoro

Thessaloníki
İstanbul
Bursa
GEORGIA
T'bilisi
Bat'umi
ARMENIA
Yerevan
Sumqayıt
Baku
Türkmenbashi
Nebitdag
TURKMENISTAN
Chärjew

GREECE
İzmir
Ankara
Samsun
Trabzon
Erzurum
AZERBAIJAN
Tabrīz
Rasht
Ashgabat
Mary

Aegean Sea
Denizli
TURKEY
Kayseri
Van
Lake Urmia
Qazvīn
Mashhad

Crete
Antalya
Konya
Adana
Gaziantep
Mosul
Irbil
Zanjān
Tehrān
Herāt
AFGH.

Nicosia
Aleppo
Latakia
SYRIA
Karkūk
Bākhtarān
Qom
Eşfahān
IRAN

CYPRUS
Beirut
Ḩimş
Baghdad
Arāk

Mediterranean Sea
LEBANON
Damascus
Golan Heights
De Facto Boundary
IRAQ
Aḩvāz
Kermān

Haifa
ISRAEL
West Bank
Jerusalem
Ammān
An Nāşirīyah
Ābādān
Shīrāz
Zāhedān
PAK.

Alexandria
Port Said
Gaza Strip
JORDAN
Al 'Aqabah
Al Başrah
Kuwait
KUWAIT
Bandar-e Būshehr
Bandar-e 'Abbās
Strait of Hormuz

Cairo
Al Jīzah
Suez
Ţabūk
Ḩā'il
Ḩafar al Bāţin
Al Jubayl
Ad Dammām
Dhahran
Manama
BAHRAIN
QATAR
Doha
Dubai
OMAN
Abu Dhabi
Gulf of Oman
Muscat

Asyūţ
Gulf of Aqaba
Buraydah
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
no defined boundary

EGYPT
Luxor
Yanbu' al Baḩr
Medina
Riyadh
SAUDI
De Facto Boundary

Aswān
Tropic of Cancer
ARABIA
OMAN

Administrative Boundary
Ḩalā'ib
Jiddah
Mecca

Port Sudan
Red Sea
Abḩā
Şalālah

SUDAN
Ţarīm
Al Ghaydah
Arabian Sea

Omdurman
Khartoum
ERITREA
Sanaa
Socotra (YEMEN)

Wad Madanī
Asmara
Al Ḩudaydah
YEMEN
Al Mukallā

Aden
Gulf of Aden

DJIBOUTI
Djibouti
Berbera

Scale 1:21,000,000
Lambert Conformal Conic Projection,
standard parallels 12°N and 38°N
Desē
Ḩargeysa
SOMALIA

0   300 Kilometers
0   300 Miles
Addis Ababa

Boundary representation is
not necessarily authoritative.
ETHIOPIA
Provisional Administrative Line

* Israeli occupied with current status subject to the Israeli-
Palestinian Interim Agreement -- permanent status to be
determined through further negotiations.

802475 (R02107) 1-97

The Syrian-Israeli Frontier Relevant Lines: 1923, 1949, 1967

Demilitarized zone, 1949-1967

UN Disengagement Observer Forces (UNDOF)

1967 line
1949 line
1923 line

SYRIA

BANIAS
DAN
SHEAR
TEL AL-AZAZIAT

LEBANON

GOLAN HEIGHTS

UNDOF

QUNEITRA

Lake Hula (former)

DARDARA (ASHMURA)

Line of June 4, 1967

MISHMAR HA-YARDEN

1923 International Boundary

Armistice Demarcation Line of 1949

Jordan River

Galilee

ISRAEL

10-meter strip

Lake Tiberias (Kinneret)

UPPER AL-NUQEIB

EIN-GEV

TIBERIAS

KAFR HAREB

Yarmouk River

KHIRBET AL-TAWAFIQ   UPPER AL-TAWAFIQ

SHAAR HAGOLAN

AL-HAMMA (HAMAT-GADER)

JORDAN

Jordan River

Yarmouk salient

N

0   10 mi
0   10 km

Christine Epperson/Equator Graphics, Inc.
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**Northern
Demilitarized Zone**

LEBANON

Line of June 4, 1967

BANIAS

DAN

SHEAR

TEL AL-AZAZIAT

1923 International
Boundary

Hasbani River

Dan River

Banias River

Armistice
Demarcation
Line of 1949

GOLAN
HEIGHTS

ISRAEL

**Central
Demilitarized Zone**

Lake Hula
(former)

Armistice
Demarcation
Line of 1949

DARDARA
(ASHMURA)

1923 International
Boundary

MISHMAR
HA-YARDEN

Line of June 4, 1967

GOLAN
HEIGHTS

Jordan River

ISRAEL

**Lake Tiberias
Shoreline**

1923 International
Boundary

Armistice
Demarcation
Line of 1949

GOLAN
HEIGHTS

Lake Tiberias
(Kinneret)

10-meter strip

Line of June 4, 1967

UPPER AL-NUQEIB

**Southern
Demilitarized Zone**

UPPER AL-NUQEIB

GOLAN
HEIGHTS

Line of June 4, 1967

EIN GEV

Armistice
Demarcation
Line of 1949

KAFR HAREB

Lake Tiberias
(Kinneret)

1923 International
Boundary

KHIRBET
AL-TAWAFIQ

UPPER AL-TAWAFIQ

AL-HAMMA
(HAMAT-GADER)

ISRAEL

SHAAR
HAGOLAN

Yarmouk salient

JORDAN

Chapter 1

Introduction

In the early 1990s, there were a number of developments at the international and regional levels that created a unique opportunity for the Arabs and Israelis to end their decades long animosity. Many of the circumstances that prevented the Arabs and Israelis from negotiating a peaceful resolution to their disputes had changed. The disintegration of the Eastern European regimes in the late 1980s and the collapse of the Soviet Union precipitated dramatic changes in Middle East politics. Along with these changes in the international arena, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the consequent Operation Desert Storm provided an opportunity for the United States to bring the Arabs and Israelis to peace negotiations.

In the aftermath of the liberation of Kuwait in 1991, then U.S. President George H. W. Bush raised the hope for reconciliation of the Arab-Israeli conflict. He declared the resolution of this conflict one of the most important U.S. Middle East objectives.[1] The establishment of security arrangements in the Persian Gulf, regional arms control of weapons of mass destruction, and promotion of economic development in the region were among other U.S. objectives in the Middle East. The United States, therefore, proposed a peace plan based upon a land for peace formula and the principles of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.[2] Thus, the U.S. in cooperation

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1. "Transcript of President Bush's Address on End of the Gulf War," The New York Times, March 7, 1991, p. A8.
2. In his speech to a joint session of the Congress in March 1991, President Bush said, "a comprehensive peace must be grounded in the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of territory for peace. This principle must be elaborated to provide for Israel's security and recognition, and

with the Soviets invited Israel and its immediate neighbors, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan—in a joint delegation with the Palestinians—to a peace conference in Madrid. Syria, which had long sought an international conference under the United Nations' auspices based upon these UN resolutions, accepted the invitation and the Madrid peace conference was convened in November 1991.

Hafiz al-Asad had accepted a land for peace formula since the early 1970s when he took power in Syria. But throughout the 1980s, Asad opposed negotiations with Israel because he believed that the Arabs were in a position of weakness, and therefore, they could not reach an honorable peace settlement with the Israelis. From Asad's point of view, the strategic imbalance in Israel's favor was one of the main obstacles for the stable and lasting peace in the Middle East. Syria's policy in the 1980s was to obstruct any peace initiatives that were based on separate peace plans between Israel and its Arab neighbors. During this decade, Syria insisted on an international conference for peace in the Middle East with a Soviet-American role. Syria wanted UN Resolutions 242 and 338 to be the basis of any peace negotiations and for the United Nations to play an important sponsorship role. Syria also long insisted on a united Arab delegation to demonstrate a common Arab position in dealing with Israeli demands. Moreover, Syria required Israeli commitment to full withdrawal before negotiations could begin, and sought to resist any attempts to exclude Syria from the peace process.

However, the Madrid peace conference was the beginning of new peace initiatives, aiming to bring the Arabs and Israelis to both bilateral and multilateral negotiations for comprehensive solutions to their conflicts. The conference was designed to encourage bilateral talks between Israel and its Arab neighbors. It also promoted multilateral negotiations on regional issues with participation of the European Union and the United Nations in order to strengthen confidence-building measures between the parties at the regional level. Although it opposed negotiating regional issues before Israel conceded to the principle of withdrawal from Arab lands, Syria attended the conference

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at the same time for legitimate Palestinian political rights." ("Transcript of President Bush's Address on End of the Gulf War," The New York Times, March 7, 1991, p. A8.)

and agreed to bilateral talks with the Israelis. The United States had a significant role in convincing Syria to attend the conference.

In the early 1990s, Hafiz al-Asad made what he called a 'strategic decision' to join the Middle East peace process in Madrid. Following the collapse of the East Bloc and disintegration of the Soviet Union, Syria lost its main benefactors[3], and therefore, could not credibly be a serious threat to Israeli security. Syria also was not able to protect its own national interests in such an unacceptable imbalance of power that might come in the aftermath of radical changes in the Middle East. Hence, Syria's options were highly limited: continuing the 1980s policy of rejectionism or adopting a new policy of integration into the new Middle East after the end of the cold war.

The second Gulf crisis—the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait—provided Asad with an opportunity to make a strategic decision and at the same time forced him to make an important concession. Hafiz al-Asad decided to join the U.S.-led coalition to fight the Iraqi invasion, and also to participate to the U.S.-Soviet sponsored peace process after the Gulf war in October 1991. These two decisions marked a significant, radical change in Syria's strategy toward peace in the Middle East. At the same time, it signified the effect of the power imbalance after the collapse of the East Bloc on Syria's foreign policy: Syria conceded to participate in direct, unconditional, bilateral negotiations with Israel without any Israeli commitment for full withdrawal from the occupied lands. Syria was also forced to accept that Israel would not explicitly accept UN Resolutions 242 and 338 requiring Israeli withdrawal from all the occupied territories.

However, Asad's decision was not to abandon Syria's goal of a just, honorable, and comprehensive peace, but rather to revise his strategy to accept new conditions of non-zero sum games in the Middle East. With the U.S. emphasis on the land for peace formula, and on UN Resolutions 242 and 338 as the legal basis of peace negotiations, Asad believed that he could reach his goals through negotiations. Asad regarded the

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[3]. Helena Cobban, The Superpowers and the Syrian-Israeli Conflict (New York: Praeger Publisher, 1991), pp. 112-138.

letters of invitation from the United States and the Soviet Union to participate in the Madrid peace conference as assurance that the UN Resolutions 242 and 338 would be the legal basis of the peace process. In the letters, the United States and the Soviet Union announced they were "prepared to assist the parties to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement, through direct negotiations along two tracks, between Israel and the Arab states, and between Israel and the Palestinians, based on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338."[4] However, neither the United States nor the Soviet Union promised explicitly that Israel would withdraw from all the occupied lands.

In general, Asad's initial strategy was to end Syria's isolation, to resituate Syria at the Arab center and to explore if he could regain the lost territories through an acceptable agreement. Meanwhile, Syria believes that they have the option to refuse any deal that ignores Syria's rights for full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan.

Moreover, Syria has long sought a direct and active American role as full participant in the negotiations with the Israelis. Among reasons is that Syria maintained that, because of its strategic relations with Israel, only the U.S. could strengthen confidence-building measures between Syria and Israel and pressure Israel to make the necessary compromises. The U.S. also could provide basic needs to address Israeli concerns about its national security through playing a key role among international peacekeeping forces and by providing Israel with sophisticated military equipment to maintain Israel's superiority in the region.

In addition, the Syrian-Israeli talks were basically different from other Middle East peace talks. These two countries had been in either a state of war, or no peace, no war status since Israel's creation. Therefore, the need for a third party to facilitate the communication between the two countries, and to propose initiatives to overcome impasses had long been a crucial factor for the achievement of a peace treaty between

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4. U.S. Department of State, "Invitation to the Madrid Middle East Peace Conference," Department of State Dispatch, (November 25, 1991).

Syria and Israel. Given these considerations, Syria had long insisted that the United States should play an effective and central role in the Syrian-Israeli peace talks.[5]

Moreover, maintaining Syria's need to restore its relations with the United States, Hafiz al-Asad appeared to use its participation in the peace process as a mechanism to advance Syria's relations with the United States. After Syria lost its main patron, the Soviet Union, the Syrians concluded that they desperately needed to have better, normal relations with the United States. Asad's desire to improve relations with the U.S. was a major incentive for the Syrians to participate in the peace process.[6] Better relations with the United States would also allow removal of Syria's name from the U.S. Department of State's terrorist list, and thereby make Syria eligible for U.S. economic aid.

In addition to Syria's need for improving its relations with the United States, the United States made clear to the Syrians that only through the achievement of a peace treaty with Israel could Syria hope for having better relations with the United States. The United States made improvement of its relations with Syria contingent on progress in the Syrian-Israeli track. The United States, therefore, exploited Syria's need for better relations to force Syria to limit its strategic relations with all other parties that oppose the peace process in the Middle East, such as Palestinian rejectionist groups, Hizbollah, and Iran. It was unacceptable to the Americans that Syria participates in the peace process while harboring Palestinian rejectionist groups, and maintaining strategic relations with Hizbollah.

However, Syria wanted to be an effective player in the Middle East peace process while maintaining its special relations with these groups. So it remained unclear that to what extent Syria would limit its strategic relations with the above peace opponents. Syria, however, was aware of the need to make more concessions on procedural matters in order to reach its goals. Therefore, throughout the various negotiations in the 1990s,

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5. In contrast, the Israelis traditionally discouraged Americans from playing such a central role and pursued direct talks with the Arabs. They wanted the United States' role to be as minimal as possible in order to prevent the Americans from pressuring Israel to make major concessions.
6. Andrew Bacevich, Michael Eisenstadt, and Carl Ford, Supporting Peace: America's Role in an Israel-Syria peace agreement (Washington D.C., The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1994), pp. 42-43.

Syria agreed to major concessions—such as normalization of relations, scope of demilitarized zones, and presence of foreign forces on the Golan Heights—although it appeared unlikely to compromise on territorial issues.

At the same time, the United States policy toward Syrian-Israeli negotiations appeared to be based upon the idea that in order to reach a comprehensive peace between Syria and Israel, the U.S. must be engaged in the process as full partner. Due to the mistrustful nature of Syrian-Israeli relations, U.S. officials concluded that only through an active U.S. participation could they achieve a peace treaty between Syria and Israel. The process also could create an opportunity for the United States to advance its regional national interests in the Middle East through achievement of a comprehensive peace between Syria and Israel.

Therefore, tremendous diplomatic efforts took place by different U.S. administrations to bring Syria and Israel to the negotiating table during the 1990s. Several rounds of talks were convened by the United States in order to help the parties reach a meaningful understanding of basic needs to make a comprehensive peace. But in the end, it appeared to damage the U.S. position as full, active participant, and only mediator in the Syrian-Israeli peace talks because it could not convince both sides to make the necessary concessions toward the achievement of a durable and comprehensive peace. The disputes between Syria and Israel over the nature of peace and the extent of Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, on one hand, and both the Israeli and Syrian rigidity, on the other, caused the Syrian-Israeli peace talks to be complicated and tense.

The Syrian-Israeli track

In October 1991, Israel, Syria and Israel's other neighbors, Lebanon, and Jordan in a joint delegation with the Palestinians, attended a peace conference in Madrid, aiming to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. Syria was engaged in bilateral peace negotiations with Israel since the Madrid peace conference. But there was no progress in the early months after the conference. Israel's Likud-led government's refusal of territorial

concessions to the Syrians made any progress in bilateral Syrian-Israeli negotiations impossible.

Only after the new Israeli administration came to power in June 1992 was there some hope for substantive progress in the Syrian-Israeli track. In contrast to the Likud government's rigid policy on retaining the Golan Heights, the Labor government of Yitzhak Rabin agreed to the "land for peace" formula and the possibility of peace with Syria based upon UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.

However, the negotiations did not resume until the Israelis concluded an interim agreement with the Palestinians in September 1993 regarding the Declaration of Principle. In addition, the Israeli negotiations with the Jordanians, which led to an Israel-Jordan peace treaty in October 1994, created yet another pause to the Syrian-Israeli negotiations. Therefore, during the three years after the Madrid conference, there was no remarkable progress in the Syrian-Israeli track. The Israelis preferred to negotiate the tracks that would contain fewer or no territorial concessions, and therefore, postponed negotiating with the Syrians because Syria would not conclude a peace agreement with Israel without Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

But Syria's position in the Middle East peace process was an important factor for Israeli integration into the Middle East. The stalemate in the Syrian-Israeli track would create uncertainties for the future of the peace process in the region, and interfere with Israel's relations with other Arab countries. This is why American's role in keeping the Syrian-Israeli peace process on track was so important. President Clinton's meeting with Hafiz al-Asad in Geneva in January 1994 and his first visit to Damascus in October that year emphasized Syria's crucial role in the peace process.

Following the Geneva meeting, both Syria and Israel decided to engage in substantive negotiations on various issues, particularly a description of security arrangements. The meetings between the chiefs of staff of both Syria and Israel during December 1994 and June 1995 resulted in remarkable progress. These meetings—with

Americans in an active mediation role—led to a formal conclusion and a written agreement titled "The Aims and Principles of the Security Arrangements."

Although they reached important progress on the security arrangements during the last months of Rabin's government, Syria and Israel still had significant disagreements on a variety of issues. Rabin was assassinated in November 1995, but his assassination did not bring a stalemate to the peace talks between Syria and Israel. He was succeeded by Shimon Peres who quickly renewed the Syrian-Israeli talks, aiming to reach a successful conclusion within the short period of time before the election, which was to be held in October 1996. The election was held earlier in May that year.

With full American participation in the talks, both Syrian and Israeli negotiating teams held substantive negotiations on a variety of issues at Wye Plantation in Maryland between December 1995 and March 1996. For the first time, it seemed that both sides were close to reaching a meaningful conclusion. But the negotiations were again derailed because of Peres's decision in February 1996 to hold an early election and most importantly because of a series of terrorist attacks in Israel in early 1996 by Palestinian opponents of the peace process. Consequently, Prime Minister Peres suspended the talks in March 4, 1996, the whole peace process came to a complete standstill, and relations between the two parties deteriorated.

In the election of May 1996, Peres was defeated by the Likud party nominee, Binyamin Netanyahu. The new prime minister then not only refused to resume the negotiations at the point they were suspended by Peres, but also tried to reverse the achievement of the several rounds of talks that took place before he took office. At the same time, Syria also refused to resume the negotiations on a new basis, without any preconditions. Syria maintained such a policy would undermine the achievement of the previous talks. Consequently, the Syrian-Israeli talks did not resume during Netanyahu's premiership and were stalled for almost four years.

Only after Ehud Barak was elected prime minister in May 1999 did the Israelis announce that they would restart the stalled negotiations with both the Palestinians and Syrians simultaneously. This brought new optimism for the Syrian-Israeli peace process in the expectation that the two parties, with American participation, would resume their negotiations from the point at which Peres had suspended them four years earlier. But there was no agreement on where that point was. It was several months before the United States could convince the parties to resume their negotiations. Finally both sides agreed to resume their talks from the point where they left off in March 1996, with the provision that each side have their own interpretation on what the point was. A two-day joint meeting convened in Washington in December 1999 between President Clinton and Syrian and Israeli officials for the purpose of discussing procedural matters of the Syrian-Israeli talks. For the first time, both sides agreed to negotiate their differences with the highest ranking participants ever, Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Foreign Minister Faroq al-Shara'.

The Syrian-Israeli talks were resumed in Shepherdstown in January 2000 after a nearly four-year hiatus. The Shepherdstown talks were the last Syrian-Israeli negotiations at this writing. The talks focused on procedural matters, but finally stalled because of enormous disagreements over which issues should take priority in the negotiations. The Israelis wanted security arrangements to be addressed first, while the Syrians insisted that Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights should take priority. Mutual mistrust and inflexibility on both sides were significant obstacles in these talks. Even an American proposal to convene technical committees to simultaneously discuss the main issues of contention could not bring a breakthrough. The talks were suspended but the parties agreed to resume their negotiations in 10 days. Syria later refused to participate in the negotiations unless Israel agreed to commit in principle to an unconditional withdrawal from the entire Golan Heights.

Consequently, the Syrian-Israeli talks were deadlocked over the fact that Israel did not want to negotiate its withdrawal from the Golan Heights prior to concluding security arrangements and normalization of relations with the Syrians. The Syrians

argued it would be pointless to negotiate the future of relations with the Israelis while they did not know whether Israel would be willing to withdraw from the Golan Heights. The only hope for resumption of the talks was the Geneva summit (March 2000) between Presidents Clinton and Hafiz al-Asad. The Syrians hoped the presidential summit would bring a breakthrough to the stalled Syrian-Israeli track. But President Clinton failed to convince Hafiz al- Asad to resume the peace talks with the Israelis. The summit was the last chance for resumption of the Syrian-Israeli track under Clinton's auspices. Hafiz al-Asad died later in June 2000.

Main questions and hypotheses

Before the 1990s, The United States Middle East policy toward Syria was based on the perception of Syria as the surrogate of the Soviet Union in the Middle East, as a state sponsoring international terrorism, and as an opponent of the peace process in the Middle East.[7] During this period, the United States policy toward Syria was designed to prevent escalation of conflict between Syria and Israel, to consolidate the Camp David Peace Accord, and to prevent Syria from sabotaging U.S. interests in the region. Consequently, Syria faced economic sanctions, diplomatic pressure, and was named by the U.S. administrations a pariah and rogue state.

But in the early 1990s, a considerable shift in the U.S.-Syria relationship occurred because of drastic changes in international and regional affairs in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. In addition to this, American hegemony in the Middle East, which was the immediate consequence of the U.S.-led coalition victory over Iraq, precipitated new changes in the United States' relations with Syria. Syria's crucial decision to join the U.S.-led coalition against the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait provided common interests between the United States and Syria[8] and, eased U.S.-Syria relations.[9]

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7. Meredith R. Sarkees and Stephen Zunes, "Disenchantment With the New World Order: Syria's Relations With the United States," <u>International Journal</u> Vol. XLIX, (spring 1994): p. 355.

8. Syria and Iraq had long been bitter enemies. Rivalry between the two ruling Ba'th parties had been tense during the 1980s when Syria backed Iran after the Iraqi invasion of Iran in 1980. Disagreement on various regional issues intensified personal animosity between Hafiz al-Asad and Saddam Hussein. The rivalry

Syria's participation in the 1991 Madrid peace conference signified this new phase and increased the possible role that the U.S. could play in resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. Thereafter, the United States convened several rounds of talks between the Syrians and Israelis, aimed at resolving the huge differences between the two countries, such as withdrawal of Israeli settlements from the Golan Heights, normalization of relations, and security arrangements.

During the same time, Syria's role in the Arab-Israeli conflict had been crucial. The United States acknowledged on several occasions "a Syrian-Israeli agreement is key to achieving a comprehensive peace. Given Syria's important regional role, it will inevitably broaden the circle of Arab states willing to embrace peace. And it will build confidence throughout the area that peace will endure."[10] Syria has long been a key regional player in the Middle East and its role in the Arab-Israeli conflict cannot be ignored.[11] According to an analysis, "Syria still retains considerable leverage in Middle East peace diplomacy. Without Syria's imprimatur no Arab-Israeli peace can arguably be legitimate and hence durable. If its interests are not satisfied, Syria can obstruct Israel's full incorporation into the Middle East."[12] Therefore, Syria's participation in the Middle East peace talks was essential for the achievement of a reliable and comprehensive peace between the Arabs and the Israelis.

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between the two countries was so tense that Syria took the opportunity to join the U.S.-led coalition, fighting against the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in the early 1990s.

9. Meredith R. Sarkees and Stephen Zunes, p. 355.

10. U.S. Department of State, "Progress Toward Achieving A Common Goal Of Peace In The Middle East," Department of State Dispatch Vol. 5, Issue 10, (November 1994): p. 16.

11. Talcott W. Seelye, "The Syrian Perspective on the Peace Process" American-Arab Affairs No. 17, (Summer 1986): p. 61.

12. In their discussion regarding Syria's role and position in the peace process, Ehteshami and Hinnebusch argue, "a peace agreement with Syria offers the most practical opportunity to neutralize the main military threat Israel faces. The threats of Islamic fundamentalism and Israel's vulnerability to chemically or biologically armed missiles could also be much reduced by a Syrian peace. If Syria remains excluded from a settlement, it can continue to threaten Israeli security in small but bothersome ways. Asad could encourage Hizbollah pressure on Israel's security zone in Lebanon. He could attempt to mobilize the significant numbers of Diaspora Palestinians abandoned and embittered by the Oslo agreement. Anti-Oslo groups like HAMAS and Ahmad Jebril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command (PFLP- GC) can pull off spectacular anti-Israeli operations." (Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Raymond Hinnebusch, Syria and Iran: Middle Power in a Penetrated Regional System (Routledge, February 1997), p. 174.)

The central theme of this research is to examine the United States' role in the Syrian-Israeli peace process from the Madrid peace conference in November 1991 until the death of Hafiz al-Asad in June 2000. The main question is:

What was the American role in the Syrian-Israeli peace process during the 1990s? Did or did not the United States play a pivotal, constructive role in the search for a comprehensive peace between Syria and Israel?

This research will address the U.S. role in the Middle East peace process within the context of the Syrian-Israeli negotiations during the 1990s. It will also examine the process to see if there is any continuity, similarity, or difference in the U.S. role of mediator in the Syrian-Israeli peace process during the successive U.S. presidencies of the 1990s. The main hypotheses below will provide an analytical framework to address the questions above.

Although the United States had been an active participant in the negotiations for a comprehensive peace between Syria and Israel during the 1990s, it failed to bring an end to the Syrian-Israeli conflict. The strong U.S. interest in Israel, driven mostly by domestic politics, made it unwilling to pressure Israel to make the necessary concessions. Syrian inflexibility and Israeli unwillingness to compromise were also crucial factors.

Therefore,

The less willing the United States was to pressure Israel to make compromises, the more determined Syria became to resist making concessions to Israeli demands.

The less ready Syria was to make the necessary concessions, the more the United States ignored Syria's core demand for full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights as the basis for a comprehensive peace.

The less attention the United States paid to Syria's demands, the more Syria resisted and defied American peace initiatives. This scenario brought the whole peace process to several stalemates although Syria avoided sabotaging the initiatives. This was because Syria wanted to moderate its positions as accommodation to the new changes in the international and regional political systems, on one hand, and their need to better their relationship with the United States in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, on the other.

There are few scholarly and systematic works on this subject. But the aim of this research is to evaluate the U.S. role in the Middle East peace process with specific focus on Syrian-Israeli talks. As mentioned, negotiations between the Syrians and Israelis in the 1990s had been complicated and tense, rarely reaching a written agreement, and were suspended several times because of enormous differences on procedural matters. The Americans had tried to keep the talks on track, but due to the tentative nature of these talks, the Syrian-Israeli negotiations were derailed most times before the sides reached a conceptual framework for conducting the negotiations.

The U.S. was not an impartial mediator. It has had strategic relations with Israel, and refused to improve its relations with Syria. The contribution of this research is to examine the American role in the negotiations between Syria and Israel, aiming to provide a better understanding of the patterns of influence by which the U.S. tried to affect Syria's position in the peace process. For example, although the U.S. acknowledged Syria has not been engaged in the international terrorism since 1986, the United States refused to remove Syria's name from the list. The United States also continued to impose sanctions on Syria, aiming to influence on Syria's domestic and foreign policy. The U.S. administrations implicitly made the improvement of their relations with Syria contingent on progress on the Syrian-Israeli track.

This research will show how changes in the regional and international political systems after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait have

affected Syria's position in the Middle East and consequently facilitated the Syrian participation in the peace process.

This research is organized into eleven chapters. Chapter one contains a discussion of the main questions and hypotheses. The second chapter is a brief discussion about the theoretical foundation of this research. Third chapter is an introduction to U.S.-Syrian relations. The next chapter describes early phases of the Middle East peace process that began in Madrid, Spain in November 1991. The reasons that led the Syrians to attend this conference will be discussed briefly in this chapter. The next chapter contains a discussion of the Oslo peace process and its impact on the Syrian-Israeli track. The ramification of this process for Syria and Syria's reaction to this accord will be discussed here. The sixth chapter addresses the slow progress in the Syrian-Israeli track during 1993-1994. The events that caused yet another break in the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations will be discussed in this chapter. The next chapter contains a discussion of an important phase of the Syrian-Israeli peace talks, one which includes negotiations on security arrangements between the Israeli and Syrian chiefs of staff. These negotiations occurred under American auspices during 1994 and 1995 in Washington, DC. Progress on the Syrian-Israeli track during Peres's premiership will be addressed in the eighth chapter. The ninth chapter contains a discussion of the grounds that led to the longest stalemate yet in the Syrian-Israeli peace talks that occurred during Netanyahu's government 1996-1999. The next chapter will address the resumption of talks between Syria and Israel in Shepherdstown in January 2000. This chapter also elucidates differences that prevented the Israelis and Syrians from reaching an agreement. These differences over procedural matters brought the whole peace process between Syria and Israel to a complete standstill. There has been no progress in the Syrian-Israeli track since. The last chapter contains general discussion and prospects for the Syrian-Israeli peace talks.

Chapter 2

Theoretical framework

Introduction

The realist and neo-realist approaches of international politics will provide a theoretical foundation for this study. The U.S. role in the negotiations for the reconciliation of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Syria's participation in the Middle East peace process and also Israeli position in regard to the negotiations could also best be explained through the prism of realist and neo-realist approaches of international politics. However, this work is not a theoretical work and because of that it will not include a comprehensive, critical examination of theories of international relations to see what theory could best be applicable to this study, if there is such a theory!

Since each of the participants in the negotiations (the United States, Syria and Israel) carefully made a strategic decision in order to take part in the talks, the theory of decision-making process could provide a conceptual framework for a critical examination of U.S. peace initiatives, upon which the United States proposed the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict through mechanism of simultaneous, bilateral and multilateral negotiations in the early 1990s. It also would be applicable to Syria's willingness and Israeli's reluctant position to join the Madrid peace conference.

It was obvious that it is not going to be any peace between Syria and Israel while the latter continues its occupation of Syria's territory. What did really lead the United States to propose a peace plan at the time that it was not clear whether its strategic ally, Israel, would agree to withdraw from the occupied Arab lands? There was a complex

ambiguity that the Israelis compromise their national interests by withdrawing from the strategic Golan Heights. What forces led the Syrians to make such a strategic decision to attend the Madrid peace conference while they knew that it was unlikely that Israel concede from its position? Why did Israel demonstrate its reluctance to participate to such a conference, and how the United States convinced both Syria and Israel to attend the conference?

There is variety of factors that led to the arrangement of the Madrid peace conference. But what really made that decision is extremely difficult to answer. We could recognize different variables that somehow formulated this policy. There are a great variety of possible causes that affect the making of foreign policy. These variables were organized by different scholars into conceptual frameworks, such as the scientific work of James Rosenau.[13] Therefore, it would be helpful to use his framework to encompass different variables that led to the establishment of peace process between the Arabs and Israelis in the early 1990s. However, the "power elite" and its significant role in the formation of U.S. foreign policy are not deniable. Therefore, a revisionist critique of decision-making process, in which scholars with a socialist orientation criticized the scientific study of foreign policy, would provide a theoretical alternative for this study. Particularly, the works of Gabriel Kolko is a great contribution to this approach.[14] There will be a brief discussion at the end of this chapter.

The peace negotiations between Syria and Israel began with Syria's acceptance to participate in the Madrid peace conference in November 1991 and were ended in March 2000, when the Americans frustratingly failed to bring practical initiatives to overcome the intractable stalemates in the Syrian-Israeli tracks. This research is mostly a case study to critically examine the ineffective role of the United States as a mediator and facilitator

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[13]- James Rosenau, The Scientific Study of Foreign Policy, (New York: Nichols Publishing Company, 1971).

[14]- Theodore A. Couloumbis and James H. Wolfe, Introduction to International Relations: power and Justice, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1978), p. 106-107. for more information see Kolko's Roots of American Foreign Policy: An Analysis of Power and Purpose (Boston: beacon Press, 1969); The Politics of War: The World and The United States Foreign Policy (New York: Random House, 1968); see also Joyce Kolko and Gabriel Kolko, The Limits of Power: The World and The United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1954 (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

in the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations. However, in order to provide a better understanding, there will be a discussion, in brief, about the theories of international relations, realism and neo-realism approaches, and the making of foreign policies.

Theories of international relations

Theories of international relations, like other theories, is a reflection to the time, problems and difficulties that both scholars and policy-makers has had to analyzing important events of international relations. Stanley Hoffmann, a scholar of the traditionalist school, had defined contemporary theory of international relations as "a systematic study of observable phenomena that tries to discover the principle variables, to explain behavior, and to reveal the characteristic types of relations among national units."[15] David Singer defined theory of international relations as "a body of internally consistent empirical generalization of descriptive, predictive, and explanatory power."[16] Following, there is a discussion, in brief, regarding the evolution of theories of international relations, Level of analysis, the complexity of explanation, and the utility of theory in international relations. It follows a brief discussion about the realism and neo-realism approaches of international relations, and Roseau's conceptual framework for the scientific study of foreign policy and Gabriel Kolko's alternative approach. At the end there is a discussion about the realism in Syrian foreign policy.

The evolution of theories of international relations

In general, one could recognize different paradigms in the study of international relations, which include idealism, realism, radicalism (Marxism) and modernism.[17] The different approaches of the study of international relation could also be simply categorized to traditionalist and scientific. The traditional approach includes both

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[15]- Theodore A. Couloumbis and James H. Wolfe, p. 25 Quoted from Stanley Hoffmann, Theory and International Relations, in International Politics and Foreign Policy, 2ed ed. Rev., ed. James N. Rosenau (New York: Free Press, 1969), p. 30.

[16]- Theodore A. Couloumbis and James H. Wolfe, p. 25.

[17]- For a comprehensive review of theoretical Approaches to international relations see James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Contending Theories of International Relations, (Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc. 1997), pp. 1-45.

idealists and realists. The idealism and realism were dominant approach in the study of international politics between 1920s-1930s and 1940s-1950s respectively. The scientific approaches of international politics, which was the achievement of modernism, consist from behaviorism (1950s-1960s) and post-behaviorism (after 1970). Each approach provides key concepts and framework for analysis, prediction and better understanding of international politics, while demonstrates the most important issues that had been the main concern of the great philosophers and thinkers of political science and international relations.

There are some issues that have always been important for both politicians and scholars alike. Issues such as peace, war, conflict, cooperation, sovereignty, anarchy, power, and etc. have been remained significant. But the level of importance, analysis and understanding of these issues has been subject to different interpretations and descriptions, depending on using different approaches. For example, while power is the main focus of and central to the realism in international politics, the idealists place more weight to peace, and cooperation.

The evolution of international relations passed through serious debates between philosophers and scholars of international politics. The first debate was in the aftermath of World War I, when idealists failed to predict and prevent the catastrophic War. The debate was between the idealists and realists. The realists then could provide a better understanding of power politics at the international level, and therefore, became a dominant approach of the study of international relations in the period between the late 1930s and 1950s.

The enormous empirical progress in the 1950s in social sciences, economy, psychology and other disciplines, on one hand, and the inadequacy and inability of realist approach to explain the most important events of the current international relations (the events that led to disastrous World War II), on the other, brought an inevitable challenge to realist school of thought in international politics. The challenge was an attempt to expand the new achievement of other disciplines to the study of international politics, and

it was mostly methodological, taking to the account the rise of new elements in the formation of the study of international relations. This debate was between traditionalists and behaviorists. This approach named behaviorism, which preoccupied the study of international relations in the 1950s and 1960s.

The third stage of evolution was when scholars of international politics realized the difficulties and inadequacy of behaviorism in the study of international relations. They tried to use every possible means, including traditional and new approaches, to provide a better understanding and prediction in the study of world politics. The debate was between idealism, realism, liberalism, radicalism and behaviorism. The result was led to focusing more on middle-range theory to explain specific issues of international relations, within new approaches such as post-behaviorism, neo-realism (structural realism), neo-liberalist institutionalism, dependency and interdependency, and etc.

The disintegration of the Eastern European regimes, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War brought enormous challenges to the theories of international relations. The fact that none of these theories could explain beforehand the possibility of such drastic changes at this level was a total and complex failure.[18] The theoreticians and scholars of international politics, therefore, tried to explain the reasons that led to this failure and, at the same time, had to reappraise the theories of international relations in such a way that they could provide a better interpretation of contemporary international politics and its complexities.

Level of analysis

Generally, there are three level of analysis: 1) Individual level, which usually refers to personal characters of policy makers, and their impact on the making of foreign policy. 2) Nation-state level that consist of various departments and bureaucracies that influence both on the process of decision-making and on the policy-makers. 3)

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[18]- Richard Ned Lebow and Thomas Risse-Kappen, eds. International Relations Theory and the End of Cold War, (New York: Columbia university Press, 1995) pp. 1-17.

International political system that provides the structural frameworks for the interaction between its members. Both traditionalists and scientists have tried to analyze the impact of the structure of international relations on the formation of foreign policy.[19]

The complexity of explanation in international relations

There is variety of different approaches for the study of international relations. The diversity of these approaches came at different times, mostly in reaction to inadequacy of then current approaches. However, the impact of the achievement of other field of studies, particularly social science, economy, psychology, technology and etc. had also been important in the formation of the study of international relations. The field of International relations is an interdisciplinary field; and, the impact of the other disciplines on the study of international relations would be inevitable.

In addition to unmanageable complexities of issues in international relations, the impact of other disciplines had significantly increased the level of complexity, although it provides a better framework for the explanation and analysis of various patterns of continuity, similarity and changes in international politics. But the problem of having many theoretical frameworks would definitely lead to contradictory explanations, at least in some cases.[20] This complication, however, might prevent us from achieving to a meaningful explanation. Therefore, while we are using a theory in order to explain and analyze a case study, we have to be aware of the fact that such a theory might make a structural dilemma, making us to view the problem only through prism of that theory. Therefore, one should search for a set of alternatives; using theories to the extent that they could provide variety of variables that might have an impact on the making of foreign policy.

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[19]- There are interesting works by Hans Morgenthau, Raymond Aron (classical realist) and Karl Deutsch and Morton Kaplan (behaviorist).

[20]- See G. John Ikenberry, American Foreign Policy: Theoritical Essays (Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc., 1999) pp. 7-10.

The utility of theory in international relations

A conceptual framework could provide a better explanation and interpretation of past and contemporary international relations. International relations is a dynamic field; variety of factors and elements influence on its formation. And because of that, there are variety of different theories and approaches, with different key concepts, and different contributions to the study of international relations. There have been remarkable theoretical debates between different approaches in explaining important issues of world politics.

The applicability of one theory to another in the study of international relations would defiantly depend on the consistency of a theory, on one hand, and on the issues of case study, on the other. The perception of researcher both in regard to the theory and to the case study also is a significant factor. We, however, do need some standards to evaluate the adequacy and applicability of a theory, and to see if a theory could provide a meaningful explanation of contemporary world politics.

The utility of a theory is that if it could provide the variety of variables, specially the interaction between the variables that shape the international relations. A theory of international relations should also minimize, if it is even possible, the impact of parameters, such as personal belief, perception, etc. that might influence on the explanation of international relations.

Realism

Realism and neo-realism approaches of the study of international relations are the basis for a pragmatic study of international politics. Realism emerged as a reaction to the failure of idealism to provide a meaningful understanding of the international politics in the aftermath of the World War I. It, however, evolved through serious debates between realists and the opponents of this approach. The key concepts for realism are power,

national interest, and the struggle for power at the international level.[21] Political realism maintains a negative view of human nature and the fact that human being are essentially self-interested. Hans J. Morgenthau who was proponent of the classic realist approach stated the principles of political realism as follow:

1- "Political realism believes that politics, like society in general, is governed by objective law that have their roots in human nature."

2- "The main signpost that helps political realism to find its way through the landscape on international politics is the concept of interest defined in terms of power."

3- "The key concept of interest defined as power is an objective category which is universally valid."

4- "Political realism is aware of the moral significance of political action…Realism maintains that universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states…"[22]

In general, the realist tradition emphasizes on power as the means (capabilities) and, at the same time, as the ends in international system; the system itself is characterized by anarchy. National interest is the basis for power, and the states are the primary actors in international relations. Since national interest is the core motivation for the struggle of power in international politics, it assumed that the states are rational actors that they are doing their best, using every possible means regardless of morality and values, to maximize their power in order to protect their national interest, which is mostly the increase of power in order to protect national security.

Neo-realism[23]

The complexity of international relations, the ambiguities of international and regional issues, and the rise of many other non-state actors to the international relations

[21]- See James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, p. 58.
[22]- Phil Williams, Donald Goldstein and Jay Shafritz, Classic Reading of International Relations, 2ed ed. (Harcourt Brace College Publisher, 1999), pp. 43-47.
[23]- See James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, pp. 80-89.

brought enormous challenges to the approach of realist tradition. The challenges came also from other traditions that fundamentally disagree either with the principles or methodology of realism in the study of international relations. Therefore, the need for change was inevitable. A new approach, within the basic conceptual framework of realism, emerged to accommodate to the new changes in the contemporary world politics.

Neo-realism that also called structural realism was an attempt to bring a new understanding to the international politics, looking to the issues of international relations from a new perspective, using both adequate elements of other theories and the achievements of other disciplines to provide a meaningful interpretation to the contemporary international relations. This approach identified with the work of Kenneth Waltz in "Theory of international politics"[24] in the late 1970s. There are also other scholarly contributions that study international relations through different perspective of neo-realism.[25]

According to James Dougherty and Robert Pfaltzgraff, "Neo-realism purports to refine and reinvigorate classical realism by developing propositions based on the disaggregation of independent and dependent variables, and by integrating what is termed classical realist theory into contemporary framework based on comparative analysis."[26] Neo-realism emphasizes on the structure of international system and on the fact that this structure shapes the relationship between its actors.[27] There is a distinct difference between international system and domestic politics by reference to the fact that in international system there is no authority while there is a central, hierarchical authority in domestic politics. The structure of international system, therefore, is anarchy that defined by "the distribution of capabilities among the units…. The structure of the system,

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[24]- Kenneth Waltz, Theory of international politics, (Reading MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1979).
[25]-James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, pp. 80-89.
[26]-James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, p. 80.
[27]- For more information about the international system see Phil Williams, Donald Goldstein and Jay Shafritz, Classic Reading of International Relations, 2ed ed. (Harcourt Brace College Publisher, 1999), p. 71-87.

notably the number of actors and their respective capabilities, shapes the pattern of interaction that will take place."[28]

Foreign policy decision-making process

Who or what makes foreign policies has long been an important question both for scholars and politicians alike. There is variety of academic works for theorization of foreign policy. Because there are enormous uncertainties in regards to the number of variables and the way that they influence on the making of foreign policies, making theory in order to generalize the outcomes to other cases is extremely difficult. These variables include, in fact, the variety of domestic, regional and international issues. It is also accurate to say that finally the individuals that make decisions, either in the name of a nation-state, organization or a group, have great impact on decision making, taking to the account their perceptions that could have considerable impacts on the making of foreign policy, regardless of our inability to measure them. In addition to these uncertainties, there are extensive ambiguities about the process that within which these variables interact and influence on the decisions making.

A simple explanation of foreign policy would be that it consists of the ends and the means and the interaction between these elements, taking to the account the variety of other elements that shapes the ends and makes the means. "Foreign policy consists of two elements: national objectives to be achieved and the resources for achieving them. The interaction between national goals and the resources for attaining them is the perennial subject of statecraft. In its ingredients the foreign policy of all nations, great and small, is the same."[29]

The purpose of this study is not discussion about the elements that somehow influence on the decisions making process. It is, however, to introduce that to some

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[28]- James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, p.82.

[29]- Theodore A. Couloumbis and James H. Wolfe, p. 89 quoted from Cecil V. Crabb, American Foreign policy in the Nuclear Age, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 1.

extent the scientific work of James Rosenau, particularly his linkage theory, provides a good theoretical framework for this study. Rosenau categorized the variables that might influence on shaping foreign policy into five major groups: idiosyncratic, role, bureaucracy, national and systemic variables.

Idiosyncratic variables

The idiosyncratic variables refer to the very special and personal characteristic of individuals that has an important role in the decision making process. Ultimately, the decisions are made and implemented by the individuals that have a role in foreign policy. As Richard Snyder, H. W. Bruck, and Burton Sapin stated, "It is one of our basic methodological choice to define the state as its official decision-maker…State action is the action taking by those acting in the name of state."[30] Therefore, the perception of these individuals both in regard to the subject and to the implementation of the policy is an important factor. Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff emphasize, "Perception is assigned a central place in decision-making theory. When dealing with the definition of the situation, most decision-making theorists regard the world as viewed by decision makers to be more important than objective reality."[31] The personality, education, the quality of life has great impact on people's perception, and their perception in regards to human being, society, and of course in regard to the subject of decision itself, has deniable effects. However, the problem in this regard is that these characters are very personal and it is extremely difficult to examine and generalize to other cases.

Role variables

The second set of parameters is the role variables that usually "defined as job description or as expected rules of behavior for president, cabinet officers, high-level

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[30]- James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, p. 458, quoted from "Decision-Making as an Approach to the study of International Politics," in Richard Snyder, H. W. Bruck, and Burton Sapin, eds., Foreign Policy Decision-Making (New York: Free Press, 1963), p. 65 and pp. 85-86.
[31]- James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, p. 458.

bureaucrats…and other elites who affect, formulate and implement foreign policies."[32] The importance of these variables is that people might change their view based on the position that they have or in another word the position could change people's mind, and therefore their decisions as well.[33]

Bureaucratic variables

The third category is the bureaucracy variables, which include the structure, processes and procedures within which policy makers make the decisions. The importance of bureaucracy is that, due to the complexity of issues and their interdependency to variety of other issues, decisions usually make by various departments and bureaucratic structures that according to Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff "find themselves in competition for the allocation of scarce resources."[34] However, according to Francis Rourke in Bureaucracy and Foreign Policy[35]

> "While they [bureaucracies] can shape the view of political leaders and the public on foreign-policy issues, and often possess technical capabilities that enable them to influence the flow of events, nevertheless bureaucratic agencies compose only one part of a democratic political system. Their power ultimately depends on the willingness of others—for example, Congress and the president—to support them, accept their advice, or legitimize their activities by going along with them."[36]

National variables

The fourth set of variables is about national and domestic parameters. According to Rosenau, national variables include variety of issues such as political and economic system, geo-political position of a country, population, natural resources and many other

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[32]- Theodore A. Couloumbis and James H. Wolfe, p. 92.
[33]- James Rosenau, pp. 177-184.
[34]- James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, p. 460.
[35]- Francis Rourke, Bureaucracy and Foreign Policy, (Baltimore: MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1972), pp. 49-50.
[36]- James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, p. 461, quoted from Francis Rourke, Bureaucracy and Foreign Policy, (Baltimore: MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1972), pp. 62-65.

issues that related to "tangible and intangible elements of power." The impact of political system, and the fact that how does a democratic or non-democratic political system influence on the making of foreign policy discuss under this category. It does also include gross national products and the impact of industrial, and the level of social and economic development on decision-making in foreign policy. Diversity, culture, integrity and the state of ethnic and religious similarities or conflict, and the military capability have important effects on the making of foreign policy.[37] However, as Theodore A. Couloumbis and James H. Wolfe put it, "These variables are numerous, and one should be conscious of their existence. In doing so, however, one should not try to reduce foreign-policy phenomena to simple cause-effect relationships."[38]

Systemic variables

The last category is the systemic variables, which include external elements of foreign policies. The impact of structure of international system on the making of foreign policy is inevitable. To some extent, neo-realist approach was an answer and reaction to the importance of these variables on international politics. James Rosenau discusses in details the external environment as a significant variable in foreign policy analysis.[39] He then links these variables to the national parameters in order to provide a conceptual framework for the linkage theory. According to Theodore A. Couloumbis and James H. Wolfe, "systemic variables (such as structure of the international system, international law, international organizations and alliances, dependencies and interdependencies, and the actions and interactions of other states) affect a state's foreign-policy formulation…systemic variables provide constraints and opportunities that outline the general directions of foreign policies."[40]

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[37]- for more information see: Theodore A. Couloumbis and James H. Wolfe, pp. 94-97.
[38]- for more information see: Theodore A. Couloumbis and James H. Wolfe, p. 97.
[39]- James Rosenau, pp. 317-338.
[40]- for more information see: Theodore A. Couloumbis and James H. Wolfe, p. 99.

Linkage Theory

Emphasizing on the fact that "Modern science and technology have collapsed space and time in the physical world and thereby heightened interdependence in the political world"[41], James Rosenau stated the need for the development of theoretical constructs for explaining the relations between the units and their environments. He, therefore, emphasizes on the fact that there is a great extent of interdependency between domestic and international politics.[42] As Theodore A. Couloumbis and James H. Wolfe put it "That is, no foreign policies are made without regard to their domestic consequences, and vice versa. Indeed foreign and domestic policies are intimately linked; they can be separated only for the purpose of analysis and at the expense of some distortion of reality."[43] Therefore, one should consider the importance of interaction between the making foreign policy and domestic constrains.

Elite Power theory

As Theodore A. Couloumbis and James H. Wolfe stated, Gabriel Kolko's works are quite representative of the critical approach of studying decision-making process through a scientific approach. Accordingly "Kolko has suggested in many of his works that it is near waste of time to study bureaucratic structures, to trace information flows, or to conduct social-origin studies in order to arrive at the sources or causes of bureaucratic decision-making behavior…Kolko believes that there is a "power elite" in the United States and that this elite is virtually synonymous with big business (specially, the 300 largest corporation in the United States). This capitalist-oriented business elite, according to Kolko, has been responsible single-handedly for the definition of America's national interests. A major premise of Kolko's is that big-business interests have achieved a near monopoly in their ability to equate America's foreign policies with the interests of large corporation."[44]

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[41]- James Rosenau, p. 371.
[42]- James Rosenau, pp. 370-401.
[43]- Theodore A. Couloumbis and James H. Wolfe, p. 101.
[44]- Theodore A. Couloumbis and James H. Wolfe, p. 106.

Realism in Syria's foreign policy

There is variety of main issues that could support the idea that Syria's foreign policy, during Hafiz al-Asad era, was formed through prism of realist approach of international politics. Hafiz al-Asad understood the importance of power politics in the region and the structure of international political system, and therefore tried to maximize its gains through playing an important regional role.

For example, following the structural changes in the international political system in the aftermath of disintegration of Soviet bloc and the end of the Cold War, Syria made a strategic decision to better its relation with the United States, the only remaining sole hegemonic superpower, in order to accommodate to the new changes in the Middle East. Syria, therefore, joined the U.S.-led coalition to fight against the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and also participated in the Madrid peace conference, hoping these actions would end Syria's isolation and lead to resituate Syria as an important regional actor.

Whatever political, economical and social or other forces shaped Syria's decision to adjust its foreign policy and to accommodate to the new changes in the Middle East after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the main assumption of this research is that Syria made its decision based upon a prudent, rational calculation of its objectives and capabilities. Even though Syria had no better option but to moderate its foreign policy, Syria's decision was based upon a rational, realist approach and therefore this decision could best be explained through the realism and particularly neo-realism approach of international relations.

Roots of realism in Syria's foreign policy during Hafiz al-Asad's era

The Socialist Ba'th party, which Hafiz al-Asad belonged to them, took power in Syria in 1963. At the time, Syria's foreign policy was preoccupied by both the political

instability and the enormous threat from Israel. The Ba'th party was dominated by the radicals and formulated by anti-Zionism, anti-imperialism and pan-Arab attitudes. Accordingly, the main goals of Syria's foreign policy were the liberation of Palestine and destruction of Israel. The defeat of 1967 war, and the fact that Arabs could not do anything from the position of weakness, provided an opportunity for a moderate and pragmatic member of the Ba'th party to take control of government of Syria in the early 1970s.

When Hafiz a-Asad came to power in 1970, he tried to balance between Syria's objectives and capabilities. His main goal was to downgrade the objectives of Syria's foreign policy from the liberation of whole Palestine to the recovery of the Arab lands that were occupied by Israel in the aftermath of the 1967 War, and finally to the recovery of only Syria's Golan Heights, which he lost when he was defense minister in 1967. Hafiz al-Asad also, at he same time, tried to upgrade Syria's capabilities through strengthening Syria's military power and most importantly through playing an important, crucial, formidable role in regional crises. The interesting point was Asad's fascinating ability to use power politic in the region, particularly in Lebanon, as an important mechanism for the manipulation of power and for making Syria an indispensable regional player that both the United States and other regional powers could not ignore or bypass Syria's important role in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Given Syria's tangible and intangible elements of power, and the fact that Syria was a poor country that neither had the wealth of rich Arab countries, nor the population and military strength of the others, Hafiz al-Asad adopted a policy upon which pragmatism and a realist view of regional and international power politics were an essential element in the formation of Syria's foreign policy.

The study of Syria's foreign policy during Hafiz al-Asad's presidency demonstrated variety of pragmatic and realist indications of the making of foreign policy. In discussing Hafiz al-Asad's role in the making of Syrian foreign policy, Raymond Hinnebusch well

explained his characters and the implication of Asad's personality on Syrian political orientation. He stated

"President Hafiz Al-Asad, a man of strong personality, unique authority within the elite, and possessed of wide powers of office, is clearly the dominant decision-maker. Asad is, first of all, an intense nationalist, strongly committed to the Arab cause, and unprepared to concede major principles…Asad is also a realist rather than an ideologue…Asad tends to think in the objective strategic terms of the military professional…He is cautious, never moving without thorough analysis of the balance of forces, and less ready to expend than to accumulate power used to influence; He is flexible and will bargain if it can be done from a position of enough strength to win some advantage…Asad also has a cool nerve, can recover from setback, and is uneasily panicked… Determined, intelligent, energetic, able to learn from mistakes…Asad is a shrewd practitioner of power politics, able to manipulate power balances, proxies, threats, and subversion, ruthless toward opponents, and a true Machiavellian prepared to use any means, from the bombardment of civilians to assassinations.[45]

According to Raymond Hinnebusch the implication of Hafiz al-Asad's personality for Syria was the reality that he "contrasted his realism with the theory of the Ba'th radicals who allowed ideology to dictate policy to the neglect of the calculus of power… [and] with a keen grasp of international affairs, he has developed into a statesman of more than local stature. It is he who almost single-handedly has turned Syria from a pawn of stronger states into a credible actor in the regional power game."[46]

There are many other examples that Syria during Hafiz al-Asad's presidency approached a realist policy rather than being predominated by the ideology of Ba'thism (pan-Arabic sentiments). These policies could be summarized as

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[45]- Raymond Hinnebusch, "Revisionist Dreams, Realistic Strategies: The Foreign Policy of Syria," in Bahgat Korany and Ali al-Din, <u>The Foreign policy of Arab States: The Challenge of Change</u> (Boulder: Westview, 1991), pp. 387-388.
[46]- Raymond Hinnebusch, pp. 387-388.

1- Syria's intervention in Lebanese Civil War during 1975-1990, and the fact that Syria first intervened in 1975 to fight against the National Movement that were originally linked to Syria. Syria, however, adopted its foreign policy to its previous position after they succeed to make a balance of weakness among the Lebanese and Palestinian factions.

2- Syria's policy toward Egypt after president Sadat concluded a peace treaty with the Israelis in the late 1970s.

3- Syria's support of Iran during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88). In spite of the fact that some maintain that this policy was unrealistic, Syria was going to strengthen its position after Egypt made peace with Israel and at the same time playing a crucial role through having strategic relation with Iran.

4- Syria's decision to resume its relation with Egypt in the late 1980 in order to end its isolation and resituate Syria's position in the Arab politics is another example of Asad's pragmatism.

5- Syria's strategic decision to join the American-led coalition to fight against the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was a realistic approach to build confidence-building measure with the Americans and to provide an opportunity to better its relations with Americans at the time that they were the only hegemonic superpower in the region.

6- Syria's participation in the Arab-Israeli negotiations despite the fact that they were aware of the American strategic relations with Israel, and the fact that it was unlikely that the Americans could pressure Israel to concede to the Arab's demands. The following chapters would include a detail discussion about Syria's participation in the peace process.

According to neo-realism, the structure of international system determines the making of foreign policy and the interaction between the actors at state and non-state level. As we see, in regard to Syria, the change in the international system form bipolarity to a hegemonic role of the United States in the early 1990s had an important effect on Syria's decision both to join the U.S.-led coalition and to participate in the peace process. However, we should not simplify a complex process in which nation-states make their policy. At the same time, we should not make this process to be more complicated through using various conceptual frameworks. A good combination of theory and practical analysis would be useful.

The United States and the peace initiatives

The United States' initiatives, in the aftermath of the liberation of Kuwait, to bring the Arabs and Israelis to a conference for the reconciliation of the Arab-Israeli conflict was a significant decision that also could best be explained through prism of a neo-realist approach of international politics. The impact of the end of Cold War on the structure of international system led to an unprecedented hegemonic role of the United States in the Middle East. This situation convinced the Bush administration that they could reconcile the Arab-Israeli conflict based upon the land for peace formula and the principles of United Nation Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. The theory of decision making, particularly Alison's three model of decision making process,[47] could best explain the difficulties, complexities and lack of integrity in Bush's initiatives for a plan to resolve the intractable Arab-Israeli conflict, perhaps within a short period of time.

The assumption of this study is that making decision, in the aftermath of U.S. victory over Iraq in 1991, in order to provide an opportunity for the Arabs and Israelis to reconcile their long decades animosity was based upon the principles of a rational foreign policy. The U.S. was the only superpower in the region with unchallengeable hegemonic power. So the Bush administration calculated that the time was ripe for the Arabs and

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[47]- Graham T. Allison, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis" in G. John Ikenberry, American Foreign Policy: Theoritical Essays (Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc., 1999) pp. 413-452.

Israeli to compromise their differences and to agree to an honorable, comprehensive peace plan that recognize the basic rights of both Israelis and Arabs. The hypothesis of this research is that the strong U.S. interest in Israel, driven mostly by domestic politics, made the United States unwilling and unable to pressure Israel to make the necessary concessions that were inevitable for making a comprehensive peace between the Arabs and Israelis. Therefore, the U.S. administration during the presidency of Gorge Bush in 1991 made a big mistake in proposing such peace initiatives, because the failure of the Americans to bring peace to the region, and the fact that they took Israeli side in the negotiations for the peace fundamentally damaged U.S. prestige in the region.

Given Bush was interested in making peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors, but it was not only he that could make such a decision. The role of "power elite" in the formation of U.S. foreign policy, the significance of Zionist lobby and their enormous influence on U.S. executive branch, and the fact that Israel could benefit from a vast majority support in U.S. Congress, ultimately, made the United States unwilling and unable to pursue a just, honorable, and comprehensive peace between the Arabs and Israelis. It demonstrates also that the United States was an ineffective mediator in the Arab-Israeli negotiations and in the Syrian-Israeli tracks, in particular.

Therefore, Israel not only was reluctant to recognize the Arab's rights, but also opposed strongly any territorial concessions. They did not recognize the UN Resolutions 242 and 338 as the basis for peace in the Middle East. Having great support in many U.S. administrations, and non-state actors in the United States, Israel made a realist decision to be reluctant in the negotiations for the peace during the 1990s, and to be determined in conceding to the Arabs.

Chapter 3

U.S.-Syrian Relations

Introduction

American relations with Syria have been strained by various factors. During recent decades, the two countries occasionally had good relations, but the relations usually deteriorated. The United States has generally supported Israel and this policy affected its relations with Syria. Moreover, Syria has been on the U.S. list of state sponsoring international terrorism since this list was created in 1979. This was mostly because Syria supported and provided safe-haven for some Palestinian and Lebanese groups and other organizations that U.S. administrations considered terrorist groups. This alleged role in international terrorism has been among the main reasons the United States has not yet improved its bilateral relations with Syria. The U.S. Congress, therefore, imposed several sanctions upon Syria, aiming to make this country ineligible to receive U.S. aid or purchase U.S. military equipment and high tech products. These sanctions have made improvement of relations between the two countries very difficult and contingent upon fundamental changes in Syrian foreign and domestic policy.

1) Historical Background

Until 1947 when the United States announced its support for a Jewish state, the United States had a very positive image in Syria. The image was created mostly by the activities of American educators, missionaries and administrators who helped to establish and promoted educational institutions in some parts of Greater Syria, most prominent

among them, the American University of Beirut[48]. By the mid-19th century, Syria began to experience a national movement. According to the Palestinian author, George Antonius, the American missionaries' "contribution was all the more productive as it was governed by ideas as well as by enthusiasm."[49]

"The educational activities of the American missionaries in that early period had, among many virtues, one outstanding merit; they gave the pride of place to Arabic…with vigor to the task of providing an adequate literature. In that, they were pioneers; and because of that, the intellectual effervescence which marked the first stirrings of the Arab revival owes most to their labors."[50]

The impact of the educational activities of the Americans in Syria was important not only because they established some educational institutions, but even more because of the contributions of their graduates to the Arab awakening. Antonius believes "when account is taken of its contribution to the diffusion of knowledge, of the impetus it gave to literature and science, and of the achievement of its graduates, it may justly be said that its influence on the Arab revival, at any rate in its earlier stage, was greater than that of any other institution."[51]

The impact of Zionism

The creation of the state of Israel in Palestine had strong negative ramifications for the popular image of the United States in the Middle East. The United States endorsed the United Nations' plan to partition Palestine and thereafter supported the new Jewish state of Israel. The United States became Israel's chief benefactor and backed Israel in its conflicts with the Arabs. Consequently, this policy marked a period in which the positive image of the United States began to change.

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48. By the mid-19th century, American had established thirty-three schools in Syria. Approximately one thousand students attended these schools (George Antonius, The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement (London: Hamilton, 1955), p. 42.)
49. George Antonius, p. 41.
50. George Antonius, p. 43.
51. George Antonius, p. 43.

Syria was concerned because it perceived Israel as an immediate threat to its national security. Syria also viewed the creation of Israel in Palestine, historically a part of Greater Syria, as an "imperialist-created colonial settler state unjustly implanted in the heart of the Arab world, as well as a security threat and an obstacle to Arab unity."[52]

Until World War II, the American presence in the Middle East was presented by protestant missionaries to the region, who established schools and colleges providing liberal education and medical personnel. By the end of the war, the priority of American interests changed from the humanitarian to the political, military and economic. Because of its natural resources and geopolitical situation, the United States viewed the Middle East as vital to U.S. interests. In the U.S. policies of the cold war, the region was important as a buffer to contain Soviet Union influence, and for the enormous oil resources of the area.

Viewing Middle East issues through the prism of the East-West conflict,[53] U.S. policy makers focused on the Arab states to contain Soviet Union influence into the region. Therefore, U.S. policy was designed to support pro-Western Arab countries and to prevent any radical group from taking power in this region. The U.S. urged Arab countries to join the Turkey-Pakistan pact of April 1954. But only Iraq signed this pact in 1955[54]; thus Iraq became the only Arab country to join the anti-Soviet arrangement. According to a report by the National Security Council staff, "American friendship for Israel and Israeli dependence on American aid had thoroughly alienated the Arab people and their leaders, likely precluding Arab agreement to join an anti-Soviet defense arrangement in cooperation with the United States or Britain."[55]

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52. Alasdair Drysdale and Raymond Hinnebusch, Syria and the Middle East Peace Process (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1991), p. 98.
53. John Dumbrell, The Making of US Policy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), Second Edition, pp. 3-11.
54. This pact was named the Baghdad Pact after Iraq signed this accord.
55. Bonnie F. Saunders, The United States and Arab Nationalism: the Syrian Case 1953-1960 (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1996), p. 26.

The U.S. attempt to overthrow Syria's government, 1955-1957

In the mid 1950s, the United States was concerned about the possibility that a radical pan-Arab nationalism might take control of power in Syria. There was major concern that such a radical national government might act as a Soviet surrogate and provide an outpost for Soviet influence in the region. Syria's geographic position in relation to the NATO allies, Turkey, as well as its borders with Israel was important to containment of the Soviet Union and communism in the Middle East.[56]

Believing that Syria would provide the ground for Soviet expansionism in the Middle East, the U.S., under the "Eisenhower Doctrine",[57] attempted to alter Syria's government. Hence, on several occasions in the mid 1950s, the United States, with cooperation of the British intelligence services, intervened in Syria's internal politics in order to tip the balance of power toward a pro-Western government. According to an analysis, "when U.S. official[s] believed that communism was making significant inroads into Syrian politics and society, they tried harsher methods. In 1955, 1956, and 1957, the Central Intelligence Agency attempted several times to overthrow the government of Syria.[58] Under the Eisenhower Doctrine of 1957, the president offered military aid, for possible use against Syria, to pro-Western countries in the region, most notably Jordan and Turkey."[59]

Consequently, Syria viewed the United States policy in conflict with its national interests. And according to Saunders, "each action that Eisenhower administration took to minimize Soviet influence in Syria seemed to have the opposite effect…. The sharp anti-Syria and anti-Arab nationalist rhetoric uttered by American officials throughout the

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[56]. Burton I. Kaufman, <u>The Arab Middle East and the United States</u> (New York: Twayne Publisher, 1996), pp. 17-30.

[57]. David W. Lesch, <u>Syria and the United States: Eisenhower's Cold War in the Middle East</u> (Westview Press, 1992), pp. 5-13 and 29-39. See also George Lenczowski, <u>American Presidents and the Middle East</u> (Duke University Press, 1990), pp. 52-54.

[58]. George Lenczowski, pp. 54-57.

59. Bonnie F. Saunders, p. VIII.

period and CIA covert operations drove Syria ever closer to the Soviets, who welcomed the opportunity to gain influence in the Middle East."[60]

The United Arab Republic 1958-61

Fearing Syrian communists might take control of the government and army, the members of the Arab Socialist Revolutionary Party (ASRP) then in power decided to disband the government of Syria to form a unified government with Egypt. The United Arab Republic (UAR) was formed on February 1, 1958. In addition to the perceived threat of communist activities in Syria, the desire for Arab unity was another reason that ASRP leaders voluntarily surrendered Syria's sovereignty only 12 years after achieving independence from France in 1946.

Syria had a minor role in the united government, and found itself to be a subordinate province. However, after three years of increasing dissatisfaction, Syrian nationalists realized that the UAR was not what they had expected.[61] Therefore, a group of nationalist officers instigated a coup d'état in 1961 which led to re-establishing Syria's sovereignty.

The U.S. reaction toward the union of Syria and Egypt was mixed. Despite recognizing the UAR immediately, U.S. officials were concerned that Nasser, Egypt's president and then president of the UAR, had increased power. According to Ambassador Seelye, "while the unity scheme was acknowledged by Washington as an effort by Syrian nationalist[s] to reduce the growing influence of Syrian Marxists, it also appeared to offer expansionist opportunities in the Arab world to Nasser, a figure the Eisenhower

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60. Bonnie F. Saunders, p. VIII.

61-According to Bonnie F. Saunders who analyzed the withdrawal of Syria from the United Arab Republic, the following reasons caused Syrian dissatisfaction and finally led to the reestablishment of Syria's sovereignty; "Bureaucrats from Egypt had known little about the internal affairs of Syria and had shown extreme indifference to Syrian sensibilities. Egyptian, not Syrian, officers and soldiers had manned most military base in Syria. Former ASRP politicians had not participated in Nasser's National Union Party. At no time during the union did Syrians make up more than 30 percent of the UAR cabinet or parliament. Most Syrians believed that Egypt had reaped all of the benefits from the union."(Bonnie F. Saunders, P. 85.) For more information see Anthony Nutting, Nasser (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1972), 246-264.

Administration distrusted, despite its intervention on Egypt's behalf during the 1956 Suez Canal crisis."[62]

2) U.S.-Syrian Relations During the Presidency of Hafiz al-Asad

A moderate member of the Ba'th party, Hafiz al-Asad came to power in November 1970, was elected president of Syria in March 1971. The Arab Ba'th Socialist Party took over the government of Syria in 1963. The Ba'th Party opposed U.S. policies in the region and, therefore, its takeover of the Syrian government did not improve the already strained relations between the two countries. At this time, Syrian foreign policy had been shaped by Arab nationalism and was preoccupied with threats of Israeli expansionism. When the Ba'th party seized power in Syria, it called for the total liberation of Palestine.[63] Under the original, radical Ba'th party (1963-1970) "it was Syria that challenged Israel, giving support to the Palestinian fedayeen and trying to push the Arab states into preparation for a war of Palestinian liberation."[64] This policy led to the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, in which Israel captured vast areas of all its Arab neighbors, including the Golan Heights.

Because the U.S. supported Israel in the 1967 war, most of the Arab countries, including Syria, severed their relations with the United States. At the same time, the Arab defeat in the war brought a new era of "revisionism" in Syrian foreign policy and Syria's relations with the other Arab countries. Raymond Hinnebusch argues, "This defeat generated intense new security fears in Syria, gave new roots to revisionism, and further locked Syria into the conflict with Israel and its backers… and provoked the rise to power of Hafiz Al-Asad."[65] Therefore, when Hafiz al-Asad came to power, U.S. relations with Syria were already at the lowest point ever.

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62. Talcott W. Seelye, U.S.-Arab Relations: The Syrian Dimension (Portland, Oregon: Portland State University, 1985), p. 4.
63. Neil Quilliam, Syria and the New World Order (Lebanon: Ithaca Press, 1999), p. 2.
64. Raymond Hinnebusch, "Revisionist Dreams, Realistic Strategies: The Foreign Policy of Syria," in Bahgat Korany and Ali al-Din, The Foreign policy of Arab States: The Challenge of Change (Boulder: Westview, 1991), p. 375.
65. Raymond Hinnebusch, "Revisionist Dreams, Realistic Strategies: The Foreign Policy of Syria," p. 374.

When Hafiz al-Asad seized power in November 1970, a new era of realism in Syrian foreign policy began, in which he carefully moderated Syria's foreign policy goals. "The role of ideology was relegated, and the new determinants of foreign policy have been shaped primarily by the international political system."[66] Hafiz al-Asad, "scaled down Syria's objectives, focusing them on recovery of the occupied territories, defense of the Syrian state, and enhancement of its stature in the Arab world; he also greatly upgraded Syrian capabilities."[67] In an obvious move toward reconciliation of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Hafiz al-Asad announced in March 1972 that Syria would accept Security Council Resolution 242.[68] Syria had refused to accept this resolution when it was adopted originally after the June War of 1967. This acceptance was coincident with the expulsion of thousands of Soviet advisors from Egypt and Egypt's readiness to pursue a diplomatic strategy to restore Arab rights. According to Mark Tessler, "… from the Arab point of view at least, the United States did little in response to these overtures and made no attempt to encourage meaningful Israeli movement in the direction of territorial compromise…."[69]

The United States and Syria resumed their relationship in June 1974 following the October 1973 War. Then U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger arranged a ceasefire between Israel and Syria. Thus through an active American mediation role the peace negotiations led to the Syrian-Israeli Disengagement Agreement. Upon this agreement, Syria regained territories they lost during the 1973 war as well as parts of the land it had lost during the previous 1967 war.

Although U.S.-Syrian relations were restored in 1974, the relations between the two countries did not improve. Syria refused to continue its cooperation with the United States for negotiating a Second Disengagement Agreement on the grounds that U.S. policy in the region favored Israel. According to Talcott W. Seelye (a former U.S.

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66. Neil Quilliam, p. 2.
67. Raymond Hinnebusch, "Revisionist Dreams, Realistic Strategies: The Foreign Policy of Syria," p. 375.
68. Mark Tessler, A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 479. For more information see: Fred J. Khori, The Arab-Israeli Dilemma (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1985), pp. 367-368.
69. Mark Tessler, p. 479.

Ambassador to Syria) "To Asad, the United States seems determined to deny Syria what it considers its legitimate regional interests or to reduce its importance in the area...Syria also fundamentally distrusts the United States. This is important to keep in mind in discussing Syria's peace perspective, inasmuch as the United States has a central role to play in any peace initiative."[70]

The impact of the Camp David Accord

Egypt's initiatives to make a separate peace with Israel had a significant impact on deteriorating U.S.-Syrian relations. Following the first disengagement agreement between Egypt and Israel in 1974, Egypt's president Anwar Sadat moved toward reconciliation of the Arab-Israeli conflict through diplomatic means. He tried to reach an agreement with the Israelis to recover just the lands that Egypt had lost during the previous war with Israel. Sadat's policies for a second disengagement was viewed by the other Arab countries as "a desire for an accommodation with Israel."[71] Syria and other Arab countries criticized Sadat's policies, fearing that his unilateral postwar diplomacy would weaken the position of all other Arab states in their negotiations with Israel. Hafiz al-Asad viewed the Sinai II Agreement between Egypt and Israel "as plot by the Americans to neutralize Egypt, thus maintaining the existing balance of power in the area, which to the Syrians was heavily in favor of Israel."[72]

Moreover, two important events increased mistrust among the Syrians and other Arab parties regarding Egypt's policy: Sadat's meeting with the new U.S. President Jimmy Carter in April 1977 in Washington and his unprecedented journey to Jerusalem on November 19th of that year significantly damaged the inter-Arab relationship. These events also strained relations between Syria and the United States because Syria strongly opposed Sadat's peace initiatives.

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70. Talcott W. Seelye, "The Syrian Perspective on the Peace Process." p.57.
71. Mark Tessler, p. 507.
72. Talcott W. Seelye, U.S.-Arab Relations: The Syrian Dimension, p.5. Quoted from Adeed Dawisha, "The Motives of Syria's Involvement in Lebanon," Middle East Journal, (Spring 1984): p. 232.

Despite all the criticism, Egypt continued to try to reach an agreement with Israel through American mediation. But the huge differences between the two countries prevented the parties from achieving a peace treaty. Following the impasse in the negotiations between Egypt and Israel, U.S. President Jimmy Carter invited both Egyptian president Anwar Sadat and Israel's prime minister Menachem Begin for historic, face to face negotiations at Camp David. The summit convened September 5-17, 1978, and despite tense negotiations, the talks led to a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, known as the Camp David Accord.[73]

The Camp David Peace Treaty divided the Arab countries and further weakened their already feeble positions in regard to the conflict with the Israelis. Syria objected to the treaty and simultaneously tried to isolate Egypt from the Arab world and to unify the Arab position against any unilateral agreement.[74] "Realizing that a separate peace had weakened the Arab position after Egypt had accepted the terms of Camp David in 1979, Syria sought to coordinate the policies of the Arab parties."[75]

Syria's opposition to Egypt's unilateral peace policy, and specifically its disagreement with U.S. peace initiatives in the Middle East, made more difficult the restoration of U.S.-Syrian relations from the late 1970s onward. The United States viewed Syria as a rejectionist state, whose policy was to undermine the peace process in the Middle East. To make matters worse, Syria's strategic relations with the Soviet Union at that time led the United States to view Syria as a Soviet surrogate.

Therefore, inasmuch as U.S. policymakers tried to exclude the Soviets from Middle Eastern affairs and, from the peace process in particular,[76]they pursued a policy of containment in regard to the Syrian role in the peace process, or at least to involve

73. Laura Zittrain Eisenberg and Neil Caplan, Negotiating Arab-Israeli Peace: Pattern, Problems, Possibilities (Indiana: Indian University Press, 1998), pp. 28-40.
[74]. Martha Neff Kessler, "Syria, Israel and the Middle East peace process: Past success and Final Challenges," Middle East Policy Vol. VII, No. 2, (February 2000): pp. 75-76.
75. Neil Quilliam, p. 177. See also G. Butt, "Asad the Coordinator," Middle East International No. 411, (October 25, 1991): p. 7.
76. Maria do Ceu Pinto, Political Islam and the United States: A Study of Us Policy Towards Islamist Movements in the Middle East (Ithaca Press, 1998) p. 51.

Syria as little as possible in the process. Consequently, this U.S. policy provoked Syria to disrupt the process on the grounds that this U.S. policy ignored Syria's primary national interests in the region. In response, Syria adopted a policy that was designed to prevent any unilateral agreement with Israel that would lead to the expansion of Israeli hegemony in the region.

The impact of the Lebanese Civil War 1975-1990

Syria's role in the Lebanese Civil War[77], which lasted from 1975 to 1990, was an important element in shaping U.S. relations with the Syrians.[78] During this period, the U.S. and Syria periodically confronted each other in Lebanon.[79] However, at other times, Syria's role as a hegemonic power was approved or, at least, ignored, by the U.S. administrations. The ambiguity was due to Syria's geo-strategic position and its changing relations with the Lebanese factions. In order to prevent escalation of the civil war in Lebanon, and to establish stability in this country, there was a need for an influential power to maintain a balance of power in the Lebanese conflict. Syria was the only country that could play such a role. Ambassador Talcott Seelye argues, "Despite mutual suspicions and disagreement regarding basic Middle East policy, Syria and the United States have cooperated and consulted on Lebanon. Both Syria and the United States have a common goal of reestablishing order there and of maintaining a balance between disputing factions."[80]

Although American-Syrian relations were frequently strained because of disagreement over various regional and international issues, the events in Lebanon in the mid 1970s somewhat improved relations between the two countries. Following the Civil War in Lebanon between the National Movement (including Palestinian groups, leftist, Muslim, and Druze factions) and the Maronite Christian forces (the Phalangists), Syria,

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[77]. Martha Wenger and Julie Denney, "Lebanon's Fifteen-Year war 1975-1990," <u>Middle East Report</u>, No. 162, (Jan. Feb., 1990): 23-25. and Alasdair Drysdale and Raymond Hinnebusch, pp.119-129.

78. Talcott W. Seelye, "Syria and the Peace Process," <u>Middle East Policy</u> vol. 2, no. 2. (Spring 1993): pp.104-109.

79. Like the events in the aftermath of the May 1983 Israeli-Lebanese accord.

80. Talcott W. Seelye, "Syria and the Peace Process," p. 106.

with the support of the Arab League, deployed thousands of its troops into Lebanon in order to stabilize the situation. Syria's main goal was to maintain a deliberately precarious balance of power between the Lebanese factions. To that end, Syria intervened militarily on behalf of the Maronites and against the National Movement factions, although these factions had once been supported by Syria and were originally linked to the Syrians.[81]

According to an analysis, "Syria moved its troops into Lebanon in 1976 with U.S. approval. Several times during Syria's occupation of Lebanon, the United States has gone on public record to characterize Syria's role in Lebanon as constructive…."[82] Therefore, Syria's action created an opportunity to improve its relations with the United States. Both the U.S. and Syria had a stake in preventing the Lebanese government from being defeated by the National Movement factions. Cooperation between the two countries led to a better understanding of their mutual interests. Syria played an important role in maintaining the balance of power in Lebanon although it sought to manipulate the Lebanese crisis for its domestic and regional interests.[83]

However, in response to outside influences, Syria once again returned to its previous position in the early 1977, in which it supported the Palestinian and other National Movement factions. The Maronite Christian forces, therefore, turned to the Israelis and increased their connections with them. Also in 1977, Sadat's visit to Jerusalem and his unilateral, separate peace initiatives exacerbated Syria's relations with the United States. Syria traditionally maintained that the Arab countries should be unified to strengthen their position in dealing with the Israelis.

By the end of 1970s, there were some dramatic changes in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. These events jeopardized U.S.

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[81]. For more information about Syrian relations with the Maronites since 1975 see: Robert G. Rabil, "The Maronites and Syrian withdrawal: from "Isolations" to "Traitors?" Middle East Policy Vol. VIII, No, 3, (September 2001): pp. 23-43.

82. Talcott W. Seelye, "Syria and the Peace Process," pp.106-107.

[83]. Itamar Rabinovich, "The Changing Prism: Syrian Policy in Lebanon as a Mirror, an Issue and an Instrument," in Moshe Ma'oz and Avner Yaniv, ed. Syria under Assad (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 179-190.

interests in the region and led to a new U.S. policy in the Middle East. When Ronald Reagan came to office, he viewed the Arab-Israeli conflict through the prism of the Cold War in the context of rivalry with the Soviet Union. Because of Syria's strategic relations with the Soviet Union, the Reagan administration viewed Syria as "an outpost of the Soviets" and therefore adopted a policy of confrontation with the Syrians.

The Israeli Invasion of Lebanon and its Aftermath

The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 further strained U.S.-Syrian relations. U.S. military and economic aid for Israel was approved by the U.S. Congress in December 1982 even as Israel invaded Lebanon. This action demonstrated to the Syrians that the Americans were behind the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Syrian forces suffered major losses and the Lebanese suffered massive civilian casualties and lost much of their infrastructure.

Relations between Syria and the United States became extremely difficult when the Israelis, with American support, negotiated the normalization of relations with the Lebanese government in early 1983. The negotiations led to the May 17, 1983 Agreement, according to which Israel would withdraw from Lebanon within six months and both countries would establish normal relations.[84] Syria strongly objected to the accord and persuaded its allies in Lebanon to reject and to sabotage the agreement. Syria had already warned the Reagan administration that "no agreement could be carried out without its consent, and that Israel must not be allowed to achieve political or military gains in return for ending its occupation in Lebanon."[85] But the U.S. administration ignored Syria's warning and maintained that they could impose a peace treaty on Lebanon on Israeli terms.

According to Ambassador Talcott W. Seelye, Syria rejected the May 17 Accord on the grounds that the agreement "undermined Lebanese sovereignty…it had all the

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[84]. Laura Zittrain Eisenberg and Neil Caplan, pp. 43-56.
85. Talcott W. Seelye, U.S.-Arab Relations: The Syrian Dimension, p. 8.

earmarks of a Camp David-like peace treaty in which American diplomacy had shunted Syria aside…. Assad also saw the Agreement as an Israeli challenge to Syria's preeminent position in Lebanon and as strengthening Israel's security position at Syria's expense. He was particularly taken aback by one provision that would have authorized Israeli soldiers on patrol in Lebanon to operate along the Syrian border only 15 miles from Damascus."[86]

Because of Syria's rejection of the May Accord the Reagan administration viewed Syria as a spoiler in Lebanon. To demonstrate its dissatisfaction with American policy in Lebanon, Syria discontinued its cooperation with President Reagan's Middle East envoy Ambassador Philip Habib and finally declared him persona non grata. As a result of these events in Lebanon, Syrian-U.S. relations became more tense and hostile.[87] The relations came to a critical point when large U.S. casualties were incurred as a result of a terrorist car bombing at the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, which was probably carried out by the Syrian allies. The explosion caused huge damages to American troops. Accordingly, following the bombing, "the National Security Council met and agreed on a tough policy of confronting Syria with a combination of U.S. and Israeli military power."[88]

Thereafter, American forces intervened militarily against Syrian positions in Lebanon. But finally, as a result of enormous U.S. casualties, the U.S. administration decided to withdraw its troops from Lebanon in February 1984 while the Syrian allies were gaining more power in Lebanon. Consequently, "Syria could then declare itself the victor in its confrontation with the U.S. over Lebanon. While the U.S. suffered a considerable loss of prestige and credibility in its clash with Syria over Lebanon, it saved itself from even greater disasters that would likely have occurred had American troops remained."[89]

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86. Talcott W. Seelye, <u>U.S.-Arab Relations: The Syrian Dimension</u>, pp. 8-9.
87. Eyal Zisser, "Syria and the United States: Bad Habits Die Hard," <u>Middle East Quarterly</u> (Summer 2003): pp. 30-32.
88. Talcott W. Seelye, <u>U.S.-Arab Relations: The Syrian Dimension</u>, p. 10.
89. Talcott W. Seelye, <u>U.S.-Arab Relations: The Syrian Dimension</u>, p. 11.

Finally understanding that Syria could play a more important role in stabilizing the Lebanese crisis, the United States reached the conclusion that they could not ignore Syria's interests in Lebanon. This understanding was based upon events including the failure of U.S. military intervention in Lebanon 1982-83, Syria's good will was shown by facilitating the release of American hostages in Lebanon, and Syria's influence in stabilizing the tension in Lebanon and establishing balance of power between the Lebanese factions. Consequently, "while not always happy with Syrian tactics, the United States has recognized that the Lebanon's current chaotic situation [1975-1990] necessitates the presence of the firm hand of an outside power-- and that only Syria has the appropriate credentials and the will to act in this capacity."[90] As a result, all these circumstances "seemed to make Asad's point that Syria cannot be ignored...and with its co-operation things can be achieved in the Middle East."[91] The United States, therefore, shifted its focus and began to help dampen tension between Syria and Israel in Lebanon. And Syria, thereafter, implemented a policy to relax the tension in its relations with the United States.

In spite of these acts, Syrian-U.S. relations became tense once again in 1986 as a result of a report in which it was alleged Syria had a role in an attempt to blow up an Israeli airplane. The U.S. and other European countries withdrew their ambassadors from Damascus. However, the U.S. ambassador returned to Syria in 1987 when Syria showed its willingness to restrain the radical Palestinian group Abu Nidal. This group, according to the Americans, was obviously engaged in terrorist activities. Syria later on expelled this group. The expulsion of this group and Syria's continuing help in securing the release of several hostages in Lebanon were important in easing the tension between the two countries. Syria also cooperated with the United States and other Arab countries in negotiating the Ta'if Accord[92] in September 1989. The Accord brokered by the Arab league, outlined a comprehensive reform plan for ending the Lebanese civil war. The Accord also endorsed Syrian military presence in Lebanon.

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90. Talcott W. Seelye, "Syria and the Peace Process," P. 107.
91. Raymond Hinnebusch, "Revisionist Dreams, Realistic Strategies: The Foreign Policy of Syria," p. 385.
92. Graham Usher, "Hizballah, Syria, and the Lebanese Elections," Journal of Palestine Studies vol. 26, no. 2 (Winter 1997): pp. 60-61.

Finally, Syria's historic decision to join the American-led coalition against the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 improved their relationship. U.S.-Syrian relations further advanced as a result of Syria's strategic decision to participate in the American peace initiatives, which convened in Madrid in November 1991. Syria agreed for the first time to negotiate its disputes within the context of bilateral negotiations with Israel.

In conclusion, there were several factors that made the improvement of Syria's relations with the United States very difficult even though both countries had significant mutual interests in Lebanon and in the Middle East peace process. These factors included the legislative sanctions that were imposed on Syria by the U.S. Congress as a result of Syria's alleged role in international terrorism. Syria has been on the U.S. list of states sponsoring international terrorism since the list was created in 1979. Because of the importance of these two factors in U.S.-Syrian relations, it is necessary to discuss how these obstacles prevented U.S.-Syrian relations from achieving normalcy.

3) Sources of Tension in U.S.-Syrian Relations[93]

1) Sanctions

The U.S. sanctions imposed upon Syria had long been among the main obstacles to improving the relations between the United States and Syria. The U.S. imposed several economic and military sanctions on Syria in the late 1970s and the mid-1980s. They also banned Syria from receiving American economic aid. The sanctions minimized U.S.-Syrian trade and limited the two country's relations in various fields of cooperation. The first set of sanctions was imposed on Syria in 1979 because the United States perceived Syria as a state that supported acts of international terrorism. These sanctions will hereafter be called legislative sanctions. The second set of sanctions came in the mid-

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[93]. For a detail explanation of the roots of hostility between Syria and the United States see: Alasdair Drysdale and Raymond Hinnebusch, pp. 174-199.

1980s when the U.S., in solidarity with the British, decided to join the European Union in restricting trade with the Syrians.

In the second half of the 1970s, the U.S. Congress passed two acts to terminate economic aid to the countries that support international acts of terrorism: the International Security Assistance and Arms Export Control Act of 1976, and the Export Administration Act of 1979. These two acts became the source of sanctions on Syria and other countries that the U.S. viewed as states sponsoring terrorism. The purpose of these two acts was to terminate foreign assistance to countries that sponsor terrorism, and to increase the role of Congress in determining the U.S. relations with those countries. Therefore, these acts required the Secretaries of Commerce and State to notify Congress before licensing export of goods and technology to the countries that might come under the provision of these acts.[94]

A by-product of these acts was a "terrorism list" that was made by the U.S. Department of State in 1979. Syria has been on the list since its creation and therefore has not been eligible to receive any kind of economic, military, or technological assistance from the United States. Until now, the U.S. has opposed the sale or transfer of any American military equipment as well as other advanced equipment and technology that could be used for military purposes. The U.S. also has prevented the sale or transfer of United States military equipment and technology (for military purposes) from other countries to Syria.

A second set of sanctions, originating with the U.S. president, came in 1986 following what was said to be proof that Syrian government agents had directed the hijacking of an Israeli airplane in London. Britain thereafter severed relations with Syria. The European Union also downgraded their relations with Syria and imposed several economic sanctions on this country. In solidarity with Britain, the United States condemned Syria's role in that act of international terrorism and announced that the U.S. would consider strict political and economic sanctions against Syria. By reducing the size

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94. See Alfred B. Prados, "Syrian-U.S. Relations," <u>Congressional Research Service</u> (May 12, 1992).

of diplomatic representation in both the United States Embassy in Damascus and the Syrian Embassy in Washington,[95] the U.S. downgraded its relations with Syria. The United States also recalled its ambassador to Syria. The economic sanctions were intended to tighten export controls on things such as aircraft and helicopters, to ban the Syrian Export-Import bank, and to terminate an aviation agreement with Syria.

Congressional Actions against Syria

Since 1950, the United States has provided a total of $627.5 million in aid to Syria.[96] Most of this aid was after Syria's acceptance of U.S. role in disengagement negotiations between Syria and Israel in the aftermath of the October 1973 war. However, after Syria rejected the Camp David Accord of 1979 the United States decreased its aid to Syria. Finally on November 13, 1983, after Syria's alleged role in bombing the U.S. Marines Barracks in Beirut, the U.S. Congress voted to stop all remaining U.S. aid to Syria.[97] There has been no U.S. economic aid to Syria after 1983.

In recent decades, the U.S. Congress, spearheaded by Israel's supporters, has taken an unfavorable view of Syria and toughened the restrictions against it.[98] Congress constricted relations with Syria in order to apply more pressure on Syria to comply with certain conditions before improving relations with the United States, and to be eligible for U.S. economic aid. As a result, even in a period when conditions were ideal for improving relations with Syria (after Syria joined the U.S.-led coalition to fight against Iraq and when Syria participated in the Madrid peace conference), Congress passed

95. "U.S. Said To Plan Anti-Syria Steps," The New York Times, November 13, 1986, p. A1.
96. Alfred B. Prados, "Syrian-U.S. Relations," Congressional Research Service (May 31, 2001).
97. Talcott W. Seelye, U.S.-Arab Relations: The Syrian Dimension, p. 10.
98. For example, after Syria was listed as a terrorist state in 1979 U.S. Congress made removal of a country from this list contingent upon fundamental changes: the act of 1989 requires notification by the president to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and to the two specified committees of the Senate. It must be clarified that "(I) there has been a fundamental change in the leadership and policies of the government of the country concerned; (II) that government is not supporting acts of international terrorism; and (III) that government has provided assurances that it will not support acts of international terrorism in the future." (U.S. Congress, "Anti-Terrorism And Arms Export Amendments Act Of 1989, Section 4, Exports to countries supporting terrorism," Public Law 101-222 [H.R. 91] (December 12, 1989).

several restrictions against Syria that made improving relations contingent upon Syria making fundamental changes in its policies.[99]

In March 1992, the House of Representatives passed another resolution, in which improving relations with Syria was made yet more difficult, if not impossible. Section 609 of 1992 H.R. 4546 determined,

"United States assistance may not be provided to Syria until the President determines, and so reports to the appropriate congressional committees, that- (1) the Government of Syria has demonstrated its willingness to enter into direct bilateral negotiations with the State of Israel; (2) the Government of Syria- (A) does not deny its citizens, or any segment of its citizens, the right or opportunity to emigrate, (B) does not impose any tax on emigration or on the visas or other documents required for emigration, for any purpose or cause whatsoever, and (C) does not impose any tax, levy, fine, or other charge (other than a nominal fee for administrative expenses) on any citizen as a consequence of the desire of such citizen to emigrate to the country of his or her choice; (3) the Government of Syria no longer supports groups responsible for acts of international terrorism and no longer provides safe haven for terrorists; (4) the Government of Syria is withdrawing its armed forces from Lebanon; (5) the Government of Syria is no longer acquiring chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons, and the President has received credible assurances that any such weapons now in the Syrian arsenal will not be used to threaten Syria's neighbors; (6) the Government of Syria is fully cooperating with United States antinarcotics efforts and is taking steps to remove those members of the Syrian Government who are involved in the drug trade; and (7) the Government of Syria has made progress in improving its record of respect for internationally recognized human rights."[100]

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99. U.S. Congress, "House Resolution, 4546, Section (609)," (1992).
100. U.S. Congress, "House Resolution, 4546, Section (609)," (1992).

Although Syria attended the Madrid peace conference, which satisfied the first condition, the other conditions directly related to Syria's national interests and were regarded by Syria as interfering in its domestic politics. According to Rabil, "the administration and Congress has been conducting a tug-of-war over Syria during the delicate time of the on-going peace process. The administration wanted to improve its relations with Syria by paving the way to remove sanctions, thereby ridding itself of the legislative shackles either to reward Syria for its participation in the anti-Iraq coalition or to provide it with incentive to enter into a peace agreement with Israel."[101]

General Sanctions against Syria

At present a variety of legislative and executive provisions prohibit U.S. aid to Syria and therefore restrict bilateral trade between Syria and the United States. A general list of sanctions applicable to Syria is summarized as follows:

- The International Security Assistance and Arms Export Control Act of 1976 [P. L. 94-329] requires termination of foreign assistance to countries that aid or abet international terrorism.

- The Export Administration Act of 1979 [P. L. 96-72] requires the secretaries of State and Commerce to notify Congress before licensing export of goods and technology to countries that sponsor acts of international terrorism.

- The Anti-Terrorism and Arms Export Amendments Act of 1989 [P. L. 101-222], section 4 under Exports to Countries Supporting Terrorism requires a valid license for the export of goods or technology to the countries on the terrorist list.[102]

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101. Robert Rabil, "The Ineffective Role of the U.S. In the U.S.-Israeli-Syrian Relationship," <u>Middle East Journal</u> Vol. 55, No. 3, (Summer 2001): p. 425.

102. This act is applicable to a country on the list if the Secretary of State has made the following determinations: "(A) The government of such country has repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism. (B) The export of such goods or technology could make a significant contribution to the military potential of such country, including its military logistics capability, or could enhance the

- The Foreign Relations Authorization Act of Fiscal Years 1994-1995 prohibits the sale or lease of U.S. defense articles and services to "any country or international organization that, as a matter of policy or practice, is known to have sent letters to United States firms requesting compliance with, or soliciting information regarding compliance with, the Arab League primary or secondary boycott of Israel."[103]

In addition to the general sanctions which were imposed on Syria because of their presence on the "terrorism list", there are some other legislative provisions that specify Syria by name and thereby prohibit Syria from receiving U.S. economic aid. According to the various House Resolutions under "Prohibition against Direct Funding For Certain Countries"[104] Syria is barred from receiving any direct or indirect U.S. economic assistance. For example, Section 507 of House Resolution 4811 (P. L. 106-429) prohibits the obligation or expenditure of funds appropriated under this act for any direct assistance to Syria. Based on this act, "the prohibition on obligations or expenditures shall include direct loans, credits, insurance and guarantees of the Export-Import Bank or its agents."[105] Section 523 of this act also refers to indirect assistance to Syria (among other countries) and specifies that:

"None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available pursuant to this Act shall be obligated to finance indirectly any assistance or reparations to Cuba, Iraq, Libya, Iran, Syria, North Korea, or the People's Republic of China, unless the

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ability of such country to support acts of international terrorism." (U.S. Congress, "Anti-Terrorism And Arms Export Amendments Act Of 1989, Section 4, Exports to countries supporting terrorism," Public Law 101-222 [H.R. 91] (December 12, 1989).

103. U.S. Congress, "Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1994 And 1995, Sec. 564, Prohibition On Certain Sales And Leases," Public Law 103-236 [H.R. 2333], April 30, 1994.

104. See U.S. Congress, "House Resolution, 5526," (October 26, 2000), incorporated by reference in Public Law 106-429; Appendix to Public Law 106-113 [H.R. 3422], November 29, 1999; Foreign Operations, Export Financing, And Related Programs Appropriations Act, 1998, Public Law 105-118 [H.R. 2159], November 26, 1997; Public Law 104-107 [H.R. 1868], February 12, 1996; Omnibus Consolidated Appropriations Act, 1997, Public Law 104-208 [H.R. 3610], September 30, 1996; Public Law 103-306 [H.R. 4426], August 23, 1994; Public Law 103-87 [H.R. 2295], September 30, 1993, Foreign Operations, Export Financing, And Related Programs Appropriations Act, 1994.

105. U.S. Congress, "House Resolution 4811," (P. L. 106-429).

President of the United States certifies that the withholding of these funds is contrary to the national interest of the United States."[106]

The last sanction on Syria approved by the U.S. House of Representative in October 2003. Following the escalation of violence in the Middle East, the U.S. Congress voted with the majority of 398-4 the legislation—the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Resolution Act—which enable the U.S. president to impose new sanctions on Syria.[107] In conclusion, the immediate impact of sanctions against Syria has affected Syrian-U.S. bilateral trade. According to some sources, total U.S. exports to Syria mainly industrial equipment and machinery parts came to $223 million in 1995 and $226 million in 1996. In 1997 it dropped to $180.5 million and then to $161.4 million in 1998. In 1999 the total U.S. exports to Syria reached $170 million. The comparison of U.S. exports to other countries in the Middle East with exports to Syria show how very restricted is between these countries. For example, U.S. exports to Saudi Arabia in 1999 came to $7.6 billion, followed by $6.3 billion to Israel, and $3.0 billion to Egypt.[108]

2) Terrorism

Syria's alleged involvement with international terrorism has been a longstanding concern and source of contention between Syria and the United States. In the early 1990s, `two dramatic watersheds helped Syria to improve its relationship with the United States: Syria's participation in the U.S.-led coalition against the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and Syria's participation in the Madrid Peace Conference in October 1991. However, the continuing presence of some Palestinian groups in Syria and Syria's alleged support for such groups involved in international terrorism have remained the main obstacles in the United States' relations with Syria. Syria's relations with the United States was particularly strained over Syria's support of the following groups: the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Islamic

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106. U.S. Congress, "House Resolution 4811," (P. L. 106-429).
107. Stephan Zunes, "U.S. Policy Toward Syria and the Triumph of Neoconservativism," Middle East Policy Vol. XI, No. 1, (Spring 2004): pp. 66-68. and "House Passes Syria Sanctions Bill by a Landslide" The Oil Daily Vol. 53, No. 201 (October 17, 2003), p. 1.
108. Alfred B. Prados, "Syrian-U.S. Relations," (May 31, 2001), pp. 13-14.

Resistance Movement[109] (HAMAS), the Abu Nidal Organization, Hezbollah, the Kurdish Workers Party, and the Japanese Red Army.

In addition, some observers believe Syria was involved in the 1983 bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks[110] and the U.S. Embassy in Beirut[111], or that at the very least, Syria had foreknowledge of these attack by Shi'ite Muslim militants in Lebanon. According to the New York Times, "the United States has accused Syria of responsibility for the suicide bombing of the United States Marine barracks in Lebanon in October 1983, which killed 241 servicemen, and for the bombing of the American Embassy in Beirut"[112] in April 1983. According to some sources, Syrian intelligence was implicated in an abortive attempt to place a bomb on an Israeli jet airliner in London in 1986.[113] Thereafter, the United States withdrew its ambassador from Damascus and imposed strict sanctions against Syria. Relations between the two countries deteriorated and only after Syria expelled the Abu Nidal group,[114] did the U.S. ambassador return to Damascus and

109 - See: Ziad Abu-Amr, "Hamas: A Historical and Political Background," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 22, No. 4 (Summer 1993): pp. 5-19. and Mahmud Zahhar and Hussein Hijazi, "Hamas: Waiting For Secular Nationalism to Self-Destruct, An Interview with Mahmud Zahhar," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 24, No. 3 (Spring 1995): pp. 81-88. and Muhammad Maqdsi, "Charter of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) of Palestine," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 22, No. 4 (Summer 1993): pp. 122-134.

110. On October 23, 1983, simultaneous suicide truck-bomb attacks were made on the American and French compounds in Beirut, Lebanon. 242 Americans and 58 French troops were killed. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility.

111. On April 18, 1983, a heavy bomb was exploded in the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, in which sixty-three people, including the CIA's Middle East director, were killed. The Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility.

112. Elaine Sciolino, "Britain Breaks Syrian Ties," The New York Times, October 25, 1986, p. 1.

113. James Risen, "A Much-Shunned Terrorist Is Said To Find Haven In Iraq," The New York Times, January 27, 1999, p. A1.

114. Abu Nidal was the Palestinian Liberation Organization representative in Baghdad in the early 1970s. When Iraq-PLO relations soured, Abu Nidal severed his relationship with the PLO and established a new organization in Iraq. He later allied himself with the Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, and remained in Iraq until 1983. Discovering Abu Nidal's secret relations with Syria, Iraq forced him to leave the country. By forcing him out, Iraq also expected to improve its relations with the United States in its war against Iran. Abu Nidal then resided in Syria from 1983 until 1987. He died in November 2002 in Baghdad. According to the New York Times, "In 1986 he provided Syrian Air Force intelligence with the suitcase bomb used in an abortive attempt to blow up an El Al airliner in London…. A Syrian intelligence agent, Nezar Hindawi, was later convicted for trying to have his girlfriend carry the suitcase aboard an El Al plane at Heathrow." (The New York Times, January 27, 1999, p. A1.) According to Patterns of Global Terrorism 1996 by the U.S. Department of State, the Abu Nidal organization is an international terrorist group who carried out attacks in 20 countries, killing or injuring almost 900 persons. Its targets had included the United States, Israel, moderate Palestinians, the PLO, and various Arab countries. According to this report the group has not attacked Western targets since the late 1980s. For more information see: U.S. Department of State, Patterns of Global Terrorism 1996 (Washington D.C.: Department of State, 1996).

relations begin to improve. Some observers believe that the Abu Nidal group was responsible for the attack.

Also, initial reports regarding destruction of the Pan American flight over Lockerbie, Scotland in December 1988 asserted that it was the work of some Palestinian groups headquartered in Damascus probably the Palestinian Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC).[115] Syria was again blamed for hosting these groups in its territory. However, subsequent investigation shifted suspicion to Libya.[116]

Syria's support of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) had been another source of concern regarding Syria's terrorist activity. The PKK[117], which was established in 1974 as a Marxist-Leninist insurgent group, has been engaged in an armed struggle against the government of Turkey. According to some sources, Syria provided safe haven within its borders and in Syrian-controlled areas of Lebanon for the PKK and its leader, Abdullah Ocalan, who resided at least part-time in Syria. Syria's support for the PKK had been one of the main roots of hostility between Syria and Turkey.[118] The relations between the two countries deteriorated in early 1996 when Syria refused to extradite Ocalan. Turkey then suspended all official contact with Syria. However, in response to Turkish pressure and a simultaneous U.S. demand, Syria agreed to expel PKK leaders in late 1998.[119]

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115. "Syria's Game," The New York Times, January 26, 1992, p. 12.
116. See: Donald Mcneil, "Lesser Counts Are Dropped in Bombing at Lockerbie," The New York Times, January 10, 2001, p.7; The New York Times, May 23, 1991, p. 7; and The New York Times, January 21, 1992, p.7.
117. According to Alain Gresh "Mesut Yilmaz, the Turkish Prime Minister, calls the PKK one of the most dangerous terrorist organizations in the world, with 3,000 to 4,000 activists. But it has lost the sympathy of the Turkish Kurds and, with it, its power in the country. Without active support from the neighboring states, it could not continue its activities." (Alain Gresh, "Turkish-Israeli-Syrian Relations and Their Impact On The Middle East," Middle East Journal, Vol. 52, NO. 2, (Spring 1998): p. 188.
118. The two countries' historic animosity could well explain their conflict over Turkey's Southeast Anatolian Project and its building of dams on the Euphrates, Syria's support for the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and Turkey's cooperation and alliance with Israel.
119. Robert Kaplan, "Redrawing the Mideast Map," The New York Times, February 21, 1999, p. 17.

Since the U.S. Department of State in 1979 created a list of countries sponsoring international terrorism, Syria has been on the list. The United States frequently accused Syria of having alleged role in supporting terrorist groups or having a role in international terrorism. The then Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Ambassador Philip Wilcox, stated in 1996 that the U.S. policy of opposing Syria's support for terrorism has been constant. "It has been reiterated publicly…U.S. officials have emphasized to Syria the seriousness of this problem in U.S.-Syrian relations."[120] U.S. officials believed that the terrorist groups, which were allowed to operate within Syria or parts of Lebanon under Syrian control, were a threat to Israeli security and to the peace process. They also maintained that although Syria agreed to participate in the Middle East peace process, it did not act to stop anti-Israeli attacks by Hezbollah and Palestinian rejectionist groups in southern Lebanon.[121]

According to Patterns of Global Terrorism 1999, which was released in April 2000 by the Department of State, "Syria continued to provide safe haven and support to several terrorist groups, some of which maintained training camps or other facilities on Syrian territory…. In addition, Syria granted a wide variety of terrorist groups—including HAMAS, the PFLP-GC, and the PIJ [Palestinian Islamic Jihad]—basing privileges or refuge in areas of Lebanon's Bekaa Valley under Syrian control...[also] Syria permitted the resupply of rejectionist groups operating in Lebanon via Damascus."[122] However, the report also maintains that the Syrian government continued to restrain the military activities of terrorist groups based in Syria, limiting their actions to the political realm.

Moreover, according to the State Department's report on Syria in April 1999 "there is no evidence that Syrian officials have been directly involved in planning or

120. Hearing before the Committee On International Relations House Of Representatives by Ambassador Philip C. Wilcox Coordinator For Counterterrorism, (U.S. Congress, Federal Document Clearing House Congressional Testimony (July 25, 1996).
121. U.S. Department of State, Patterns of Global Terrorism 1999 (Washington D.C.: Department of State, April 2000).
122. U.S. Department of State, Patterns of Global Terrorism 1999.

executing international terrorist attacks since 1986."[123] Based on another report the State Department also announced "the Syrian Government continues to restrain the international activities of some groups and to participate in a multinational monitoring group to prevent attacks against civilian targets in southern Lebanon and northern Israel."[124] On July 25, 1996, Ambassador Philip Wilcox, speaking before the Committee on International Relations of the House of Representatives, testified that Syria has not been directly involved in any terrorist acts since 1986. He said:

> "There is no evidence of direct Syrian involvement in terrorist acts since 1986…Syria has used its influence from time to time to restrain Hizballah rocket attacks across the Israeli border…The Syrian government has also demonstrated that it can use its influence to deter Palestinian rejectionist groups resident in Syria to avoid acts of international terrorism outside Israel and the West Bank and Gaza."[125]

Ironically, while the issue of terrorism has been an obstacle in U.S.-Syrian relations, it has played an important role in maintaining the relationship between the two countries. The United States needed Syria's help in dealing with terrorism, and therefore was trying to maintain relations. In addition, Syria played a significant role in the release of American and western hostages in Lebanon in the mid-1980s and early 1990s in Lebanon.[126]

> To improve its relations with the United States, Syria also has used its influence to restrain the activities of radical groups within Syria and in parts of Lebanon

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123. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, Background Note: Syria (Washington D.C.: The State Department, 1999).

124. See U.S. Department of State, Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1997 (Washington D.C.: Department of State, 1998).

125. Hearing before the Committee On International Relations House Of Representatives by Ambassador Philip C. Wilcox Coordinator For Counterterrorism, (U.S. Congress, Federal Document Clearing House Congressional Testimony, July 25, 1996).

126. According to testimony by the Assistant Secretary of State for Near East and South Asian Affairs, John H. Kelly, given before the Europe and The Middle East Subcommittee of The House Foreign Affairs Committee, "Syria has told us that they will be as helpful as possible on the question of hostages in Lebanon." (Robert Rabil, p. 416).

under Syria's influence. Hafiz al-Asad, on his part, had "assured the United States in the past that he would not tolerate terrorists on Syrian territory."[127] Syria was also prepared to expel militant groups if provided with direct evidence of their involvement in terrorist activities such as when Syria forced the Abu Nidal group to leave Syria after it found they had a role in terrorist activities. However, Syria acknowledged on several occasions that it would support the Palestinian and Lebanese groups in their struggle against Israeli occupation. Syrian officials consider such operations the legitimate rights of Palestinians and Lebanese to resist occupation while maintaining, "all attacks on Israel and the occupied territories are legitimate national liberation"[128]. They make a clear distinction between those operations and terrorist activities.

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127. Elaine Sciolino, "U.S. Asks Syria to Curb Group Tied to Terrorism," The New York Times April 2, 1989, p.18.
128. U.S. Department of State, Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1990 (Washington D.C.: Department of State, May 6, 1991).

Chapter 4

The Madrid Peace Conference

Introduction

In the aftermath of the Gulf war in 1991, the United States realized that there was an exceptional opportunity for the achievement of a peace treaty between Israel and its neighboring Arab parties.[129] Moreover, the disintegration of the East Bloc had created a unique prospect for the Arabs and Israelis to reach an agreement, bringing an end to their conflict. The United States, thereafter, viewed this conflict through the prism of its own interests in the region and not that of rivalry with the Soviet Union. Therefore, with cooperation of the Soviets, the United States commenced diplomatic initiatives in order to facilitate negotiations between the Arabs and Israelis, based upon the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of land for peace.[130]

Following U.S.-led coalition's victory over Iraq,[131] President Bush gave his important speech on March 7, 1991 before the Congress. Several days later, Secretary of State James Baker made his first of many trips to the region in order to discuss the new opportunity for reconciliation of the Arab-Israeli conflict. He expressed optimism about the prospect for peace in the Middle East. In his testimony to the House of Representatives Foreign Operations Subcommittee, Baker said,

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[129]. John Dumbrell, <u>American Foreign Policy: Carter to Clinton</u> (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), p. 164-166.

130. "Transcript of President Bush's Address on End of the Gulf War," p. A8.

[131]. John Dumbrell, <u>American Foreign Policy: Carter to Clinton</u>, p. 160-162.

"We've been engaged in a rather intensive effort to find a path to a comprehensive settlement through direct negotiations between Arabs, Palestinians and Israel…. Since we began that effort, I've had no illusions about the challenges and difficulties involved…. But I also had a strong sense that the Gulf war might have created some new possibilities for peacemaking in the region and that the United States has a unique obligation to help explore those possibilities."[132]

Between March and October 1991, Baker made eight trips to the region before he could convince the Arab states and Israel to reach compromise their demands and attend the conference in Madrid. At this time, the Bush administration policy on the Middle East peace was based on the following understanding:[133]

1) Peace in the Middle East should be grounded on the need for comprehensive peace based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338, and the principles of territory for peace, security for Israelis, and legitimate rights for Palestinians.
2) Dual tracks of direct, simultaneous negotiations between Israel and the Arab states on one hand, and Israelis and Palestinians on the other.
3) Multilateral negotiations on regional issues between Israel, Arab countries, and other regional and international powers.

In his first trip, Baker pursued the policy of a two track, direct negotiations between Israel and both the Palestinians and other neighboring Arab states—Syria and Jordan. On the eve of his first trip, Baker said, "We think it is reasonable, in the aftermath of what has happened in the region, to approach the peace process from both sides of it. That is from the Arab state-Israel side and from the Israel-Palestinian dialogue side."[134] Although Baker failed to make a breakthrough in his early trips to the region he did make a little progress. In his endeavors to promote compromise and build confidence between

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132. Testimony to House of Representatives Foreign Operations Subcommittee, May 22, 1991.
133. See The New York Times, March 8, 1991. p. A6. and "Transcript of President Bush's Address on End of the Gulf War," p. A8.
134. Thomas L. Friedman, "After The War," The New York Times, March 8, 1991, p. A1.

the Arabs and Israelis, Baker made several more trips to the region in April and May 1991. These trips also proved unsuccessful. Soon after, Baker made another trip in June, but he could not reach regional consent. A sixth trip by Baker in July 1991 then ended in a certain agreement. Syria eventually approved Baker's proposed conference and agreed to attend. Soon afterwards, the rest of the Arab states followed Syria and agreed to attend the peace conference in Madrid in October 1991.[135]

Syria's Participation in the Conference

As mentioned above, Syria was the first state that agreed to attend the peace conference. There were circumstances that forced Syria to accept the Bush peace initiatives.[136] Among them were the disintegration of the Eastern European bloc, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the United States' demands for the reconciliation of the Arab-Israeli conflict.[137]

The Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries had long been Syria's main benefactors. They supported Syria's position in its conflict with Israel and provided Syria with a variety of political, military and economic support. During the era of the cold war, Syria had benefited well from this support in its conflict with Israel, and therefore it strengthened its position and remained steadfast in its demands for reconciliation of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The disintegration of the Eastern European bloc in the late 1980s and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s had enormous effects on Syria.[138] In past decades, Syria could balance its political and military position with the east bloc's support. But as Syria lost its main patron, Syria's political and military position diminished, and consequently Syria could no longer pose a tangible military threat to Israel. Moreover, without the backing of a major power, Syria's diplomatic positions were also in a weakened state under sustained pressure, which undermined Syria's regional policy. Therefore, Syria had no option but to adopt its foreign policy to the new

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135. The New York Times, July 16, 1991. p. A9.

136. Alasdair Drysdale and Raymond Hinnebusch, pp. 207-210.

137. Itamar Rabinovich, The Brink of Peace: the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 36-43.

138. Alasdair Drysdale and Raymond Hinnebusch, pp. 170-174.

circumstances on both international and regional levels. Although Syria remained resolute on some of its demands, a realistic option was to accept the Bush initiatives and join the peace process.

Moreover, the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait provided a great opportunity for Syria to adjust its regional policy to the new era of American hegemony in the Middle East. The Iraqi invasion and the consequent liberation of Kuwait marked the emergence of a new political climate in the Middle East. These changes, along with the collapse of the Soviet Union, brought uncertainty to the future of former Soviet clients such as Syria. This uncertainty challenged Syria's ability to conduct its 1980s policy of rejectionism, and thereby made it more vulnerable to U.S. hegemonic power in the region. On one hand, Syria did not have the power to resist U.S. demands for convening a peace conference and hence had to modify its policy concerning the conference. On the other, Syria needed an opportunity to demonstrate its willingness to establish a new relationship with the United States in the aftermath of the cold war.

The Gulf War provided an ideal opportunity by allowing Syria to make the strategic decision to join the U.S.-led coalition to fight the Iraqi invasion and to realign its foreign policy toward the United States at the time that the United States needed Syria's participation. It was crucial for America to legitimize its operation against Iraq and to minimize the risk of anti-American sentiment in the region following the operation against Iraq. Syria's participation in the U.S.-led coalition was an important contribution that helped the U.S. to achieve its strategic goal of defeating the Iraqi army without provoking anti-American sentiment in the Arab world. It provided a pretext for the United States to conduct its operation without jeopardizing U.S. interests in the region. These mutual interests provided a chance for Syria to make a strategic decision to join the U.S. peace initiatives for reconciliation of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In an analysis regarding Syria's participation in the Madrid peace conference, Hafiz al-Asad stated,

> "Long discussions that lasted for months were held with the American administration, especially with the Secretary of State at that time, James Baker,

after which we agreed that the initiative, which had become clear, aimed at building a just and comprehensive peace on the basis of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, including a political settlement for the rights of the Palestinian people, along with an American assurance that the United States does not endorse the annexation of any part of the territories occupied in 1967, in keeping with a past American position that rejected the application of Israeli law to the Golan. On that basis we took part in the Madrid conference and in the discussions that were held in Washington."[139]

In general, Syria, through its participation in the U.S.-led coalition, not only managed to make an important contribution but also played an important role in the formation of the Middle East peace conference in Madrid. For Syria, participation in such a peace conference[140] was recognition of its central role in the Arab-Israeli conflict and an important achievement for its foreign policy. Syria had long sought a settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of international legitimacy and relevant UN resolutions for the establishment of a just, honorable, and comprehensive peace.[141] When it realized that there was a better chance for such a peace in the Middle East after the second Gulf War, Syria made the strategic decision to join the conference. In an interview with Patrick Seale, Hafiz al-Asad noted, "There is a phenomenon emerging in Israel which we may consider new, and which we have noticed particularly in the past two years. This is that the trend of opinion in Israel in favor of peace is growing. This phenomenon is bound to have an impact on Israel's rules. We did not notice this trend in the past…. But today, it seems to be gaining strength."[142]

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139. "Assad's Speech to Parliament: There Is Some Hope for Peace." Mideast Mirror, September 12, 1994, Section: Syria, Vol. 08, No. 175.
140. The significance of this conference for Syria was mainly because it was supposed to be based on relevant UN resolutions and the principal of trading territory for peace.
141. Hafiz al-Asad repeatedly said, "the peace we want must be just, it must be comprehensive, and it must be based on UN resolutions." (Patrick Seale, "Interview with Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 22, No. 4 (Summer 1993): p. 112).
142. Patrick Seale, "Interview with Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 22, No. 4 (Summer 1993): p. 112.

Israeli Preconditions and Arab Concessions

Syria and other Arab countries made several important concessions to attend the peace conference. Although in the early 1990s there had been several encouraging developments for Syria to attend the conference, a number of events occurred designed to frustrate the Arabs, in general, and the Syrians, in particular. At the time of the conference Israel inaugurated a new settlement on the Golan Heights. Also, Israel's parliament, the Knesset, voted that the status of both Jerusalem and the Golan Heights would be non-negotiable.[143] Shamir rejected President Bush's call that the conference be based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338, and the principle of trading land for peace. On several occasions, he stated that he would refuse to negotiate the question of Jerusalem. Moreover, Shamir denied the U.S., Soviet and Arab interpretation of UN Resolutions 242 and 338, which emphasize 'the inadmissibility of acquisition of territory by war' and call for Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab lands.

Moreover, the Israeli government approached the Madrid peace conference with many procedural and substantive preconditions. Shamir opposed the recognition of the Palestinian rights of self-determination[144] and also refused to commit Israel to stop building new settlements in the occupied Arab lands. The Israeli government, moreover, rejected negotiations with the Palestinians living outside of the occupied territories, refusing to recognize them as peace partners at the time of the conference. This led to a compromise allowing for a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation. Furthermore, the Israelis had sought unconditional loan guarantees for housing then new Soviet immigrants[145], something that the United States tried to link to restrictions on Israeli policy of building new settlements in the occupied territories. Eventually, the United States, the Arabs and the Palestinians had to accept Israel's substantive preconditions for its participation to the conference. The participation, however, did not mean that

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143. BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, May 13, 1991, ME/1070/A/1.
144. BBC Summary of World Broadcasts May 13, 1991, ME/1070/A/1.
145. Sheldon L. Richman, "The Impact of the Israeli Loan Guarantees," Journal of Palestine Studies vol. XXI, no. 2 (Winter 1992): pp. 88-95. For more details on the importance of the loan guarantee for Israel See: Frank Collins, "The Real Reasons for the Israeli Loan Guarantee Demand," Washington Report on Middle East Affairs Vol. X, No. 5 (November 1991): p.16.

Shamir's government would agree to trade land for peace or to stop settling the occupied territories.[146]

The principle of land for peace

The Bush administration proposed a peace plan based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of land for peace. But the Shamir government rejected the idea and refused to agree to withdraw from the occupied Arab lands, the point once insisted upon by the Arab states as a pre-condition for their participation in the conference. According to the Washington Post, "Shamir and the religious and right-wing parties in his coalition staunchly oppose any Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights, or East Jerusalem, all territories that Israel captured from the Arabs in the 1967 war…." A senior adviser to Shamir here quoted "We have some problems with the very concept that in order to make peace you have to make territorial concessions."[147] In response to Israel's criticism of the Bush peace proposal, the United States announced that it "would not impose a solution to the Palestinian problem on the Israelis… We aren't going to dictate a final plan or an outcome."[148]

In general, Shamir's refusal to commit Israel to President Bush's call for a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict based on the concept of land for peace was one of the most important obstacles for a comprehensive peace in the region. Prime Minster Yitzhak Shamir and his coalition was committed to keeping the occupied Arab lands and to increasing the numbers of settlements in a way that making any concessions in the future be impossible.[149] The Likud bloc believed that "Israel must permanently retain the West Bank, which they call Judea and Samaria, because they believe that this area is their ancient patrimony and it is vital for their defense. … [They] were not satisfied with the original borders of Israel as envisioned in the November, 1947, U.N. General Assembly

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146. The New York Times, April 10, 1991, p. A1.
147. The Washington Post, March 8, 1991, p. A27.
148. The Washington Post, March 8, 1991: p. A27.
149. For more information on the Likud ideology and policies see: Elfi Pallis, "The Likud party: A Primer," Journal of Palestine Studies vol. XXI, no. 2 (Winter 1992): pp. 41-60.

recommendation to partition Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state or as established by the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and the armistice agreements of 1949."[150]

Syria had long been calling for an international conference under the auspices of the United Nation and based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of land for peace. Syria wanted Israel to commit to withdrawal before the conference, but Israel refused to do so. And Syria, under the new circumstances at both international and regional levels, had to retreat from its previous position. Syria, However, received a joint U.S.-Soviet letter of invitation to the Madrid conference in which both the U.S. and the Soviet Union assured Syria that the Madrid peace conference would be based upon UN resolutions.[151] It mentioned in the letter that "The United States and the Soviet Union are prepared to assist the parties to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement, through direct negotiations along two tracks, between Israel and the Arab states, and between Israel and the Palestinians, based on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. The objective of this process is real peace."[152] Syria assumed from the content of this letter that the conference would be based upon the principle of land for peace. But Shamir's position was that Israel would "negotiate without preconditions"[153] which meant Israel would not accept the concept of trading land for peace as requested in the UN resolutions and demanded by both the Americans and Arabs.

New settlements

Beside Israel's refusal to trade land for peace, the building of new settlements in the occupied territories was also another obstacles to the peace conference. "The settlements that were built to enhance Israel's security in the West Bank and Gaza have

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150. Thomas R. Mattair, "The Bush Administration and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," American-Arab Affairs No. 36, (Spring 1991): pp. 54-55.
151. U.S. Department of State, Department of State Dispatch, (November 25, 1991).
152. U.S. Department of State, Department of State Dispatch, (November 25, 1991).
153. The Jerusalem Post, June 13, 1990.

now become albatross."[154] Despite the U.S. request that Israel freeze its settlement activity in the occupied territories,[155] Israel continued to confiscate Palestinian lands and to build new settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.[156] Even during Secretary Baker's trips to the region to persuade Israel to attend the conference, Shamir continued the policy of establishing or expanding new settlements. In a meeting with the far-right wing Tehiya Party, Shamir assured them that "settlements would continue and … [that] he would never trade land for peace."[157]

This Israeli policy frustrated U.S. Secretary of State James Baker. In an interview, he said, "we were very disappointed to learn … that there is yet another settlement that has been established in the occupied territories. I think that probably points up rather visibly that it is easier to obstruct peace than it is to promote it and that the establishment of those settlements certainly doesn't help the effort of those who are interested in peace."[158] After making four trips to the region, Baker expressed his disappointment with the development in the pre-negotiation phases to convene the peace conference. In testimony before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, Baker said, "I do not think there is any bigger obstacles to peace than the settlement activity…nothing has made my job of trying to find Arab and Palestinian partners for Israel more difficult than being greeted by a new settlement every time I arrive [in Israel]."[159]

Despite Bush's position on new Israeli settlements, "Shamir announced near the beginning of Baker's seventh trip that Israel had constructed 15,780 housing units for Jewish settlers in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip."[160] This settlement building was

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[154]. Alon Ben-Meir, "Behind the Palestinian-Israeli Violence and Beyond" <u>Middle East Policy</u> Vol. VIII, No. 1 (March 2001): p. 85.

155. For a comprehensive review of U.S. policy toward Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip see: Donald Neff, "Settlements in U.S. Policy," <u>Journal of Palestine Studies</u> Vol. 23, No. 3 (Spring 1994): pp. 53-69.

156. <u>The Los Angels Times</u>, April 7, 1991: p. A1 and pp. A7-A8.

157. <u>The New York Times</u>, April 24, 1991: p. A11

158. <u>The New York Times</u>, April 25, 1991: p. A3

159. Thomas R. Mattair, "The Bush Administration and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," p. 68.

160. Thomas R. Mattair, "The Arab- Israeli conflict: The Madrid conference and Beyond," <u>American-Arab Affairs</u> No. 37(Summer 1991): p. 10.

crucial to gaining permanent control of the West Bank and Gaza. As Shamir's cabinet minister once declared "the 1967 borders [are] obliterated… talk of land compromise is irrelevant… .We believe our boundaries are at the Jordan River… We won't freeze the settlements at any price. Not even at the cost of the American loan guarantees."[161]

The United States continued to criticize Israel's settlement policy, but that did not alter Shamir's position on settling the occupied lands. Since Israel has always had strong support in U.S. Congress, the U.S. government usually failed to put pressure on Israel (in a case they wanted) in order to Israel comply with the basic needs for peace in the region: abandoning the settlements and trading land for peace. According to Robert G. Neumann,

"It lies in the peculiar nature of American politics that lobby's influence and pressure is primarily directed at the Congress. Elections are expensive in America, and congressional candidates for election or reelection depend on outside, not party, funds to win…. The pro-Israel lobby has for many years perfected its skill and superb organization by offering enticements as well as threats. By targeting specific senators and congressman for defeat, the lobby, centered especially in the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) but commanding other organisms as well, has shown how dangerous it can be to oppose the policies of Israel."[162]

In general, the Bush Administration viewed new settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as "illegal" and an "obstacle to peace"[163], while the Shamir Government viewed it as a "means to guarantee Israeli control of the territories."[164] Accordingly, the United States tried repeatedly to stop Israel from building new settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Americans believed these settlements would make it more

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161. The Los Angeles Times, September 25, 1991: p. A1.
162. Robert G. Neumann, "1992 – A Year of Stalemate in the Peace Process?" Middle East Policy Vol. I, No. 2, (1992): P.48.
163. In an interview, the Secretary of State said, "We feel extraordinarily strongly about the issue…I think the President will be willing to go to the American people (to argue the issue) because it is their tax dollars that will be supporting settlement activity that we used to characterize as illegal -- and which we now moderately characterize as an obstacle to peace." (The Los Angeles Times, September 18, 1991, p. A1.)
164. The Los Angeles Times, September 18, 1991, p. A1.

difficult to convince the Arabs to attend the conference. Therefore, the Bush administration proposed a delay of 120 days over the $10 billion loan guarantees. Israel needed this loan for providing houses and facilities for thousands of Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union.[165] Consequently, the U.S.-Israeli relations declined in summer 1991 due to Israel's policy of settling occupied Arab lands and the disagreement between the two countries over the housing loan guarantees.

The U.S. maintained a belief, according to Secretary Baker, that if the United States approved Israel's demand for the housing loan guarantee without the stipulation that they halt building new settlements in the occupied Arab lands, the Arabs might pull out of the conference. In contrast, the Israelis wanted the United States to approve the housing loan guarantees without any such stipulation so they could use it to continue building new settlements for Soviet immigrants. Eventually, the United States did link the loan guarantee to an exclusion of new settlements in the occupied territories in order to accommodate the Arabs' demand.[166]

Palestinian representative

The presence of Palestinian representatives at the peace conference was another main obstacle. Israel explicitly did not recognize the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) as the Palestinian representative and hence refused to negotiate with them.[167] Shamir's government regarded the PLO as a terrorist organization and made it clear that it would not talk directly with them or with anyone considered as PLO proxies.[168] Although the PLO renounced terrorism and recognized the existence of a Jewish State in 1988, this did not alter Israel's position towards the PLO till late 1992.[169] Arafat's

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165. The Christian Science Monitor, September 23, 1991, p.19.
166. The New York Times, September 23, 1991, p. A10.
167. Camille Mansour, "The Palestinian-Israeli Peace Negotiations: An Overview And Assessment," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 22, No. 3, (Spring 1993), pp. 9-10.
168. The Los Angeles Times, September 27, 1991, p. A7.
169. It was until December 1992 that the Israeli parliament moved to legalize contact between Israelis and members of the PLO. Before that time, all Israeli governments—both the Labor alignment and the Likud bloc—rejected the concept of direct negotiations with the Palestinian Liberation Organization. In the late 1992, although some Israeli officials still insisted on refusing direct talk with the PLO, this progress

support of Saddam Hussein during the second Gulf War[170] made it enormously difficult for the PLO to be as a partner at the peace conference.[171]

Syria insisted that the Palestinian issue would be interdependent with all other issues. So, it was crucial to the conference to have this issue on its main agenda. Syria believed the absence of independent Palestinian participation could undermine the fundamental goal of the conference. As part of a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, the conference should address the Palestinian issue in order to fulfill the Arab interests.

Israel's refusal to talk with the PLO forced the Arabs to concede to Israel's demands. In order to get Israel's agreement to participate in the conference, the Arab parties agreed to a joint Palestinian-Jordanian negotiating team. The United States also assured Israel that Palestinians would not attend the conference as a separate delegation but would be represented at the peace talks by Jordanian King Hussein in a joint Palestinian-Jordanian delegation.[172] According to an agreement, the Palestinians in this delegation would be residents of the West Bank and Gaza with no formal contact with the PLO.[173] Moreover, Israel demanded the right to approve the Palestinian delegates on a joint negotiating team with Jordan.[174] Prior to the conference, the United States assured Israel that "The U.S. has no intension of bringing about a dialogue between Israel and the PLO or negotiations between them."[175] The Bush administration also reassured the

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introduced as the most significant political move by the Israel's Labor Party that came to power in summer 1992. (The Independent (London), December 3, 1992, p. 12.)

170. For a review of the impact of the Gulf War on the Palestinians see: George T. Abed, "The Palestinian and the Gulf Crisis," Journal of Palestine Studies vol. XX, no. 2 (Winter 1991), pp 29-42; and An Interview with Faisal Husseini. "Palestinian Politics After the Gulf War," Journal of Palestine Studies vol. XX, no. 4, (Summer 1991): pp. 99-108.

[171]. Laura Zittrain Eisenberg and Neil Caplan, pp. 77-81.

172. Lamis Andoni, "The PLO at the Crossroads," Journal of Palestine Studies vol. XXI, no. 1 (Autumn 1991), p. 62-63.

173. Camille Mansour, p. 9. See also The New York Times, October 15, 1991: p. A12.

174. The New York Times, October 14, 1991, p. A6.

175. "The Madrid Peace Conference: U.S. Letter of Assurance to Israel," Journal of Palestine Studies vol. XXI, no. 2 (Winter 1992): p. 120.

Israelis that "The U.S. will not support the creation of an independent Palestinian state."[176]

Eventually, the United States, the Arabs, and the Palestinians had to accept Israel's substantive preconditions to participate in the conference. As mentioned above, even before the conference, Israel said that it would not negotiate the status of Jerusalem; it would reject the concept of trading land for peace, and it would not accept the U.S., Soviet, and Arab interpretation of the UN resolutions, which require Israeli withdrawal to pre-1967 borders. Although demanded by the United States and the Arabs, Israel refused to stop settling the occupied lands. Israel also set strict conditions on Palestinians taking part in the conference—among them the Israeli rights to approve the Palestinian delegation in a joint Jordanian negotiating team.[177]

The Arab states showed flexibility on these issues. While they maintained that "without the principle of land for peace, peace cannot be achieved…without recognizing the rights of all parties to security and self-determination, there can be no peace process"[178]. The Arab states also conceded the issue of settlements.[179] Although Israel did not agree to halt the settlement activities, the Arab states—Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and a representative from the Gulf Cooperation Council—assured the United States that they would attend the conference.

The Structure of the Madrid Peace Conference

The structure of the peace process in the Madrid conference was designed based on the role of the United Nation as a "silent observer"[180], the concept of bilateral discussions, and multilateral negotiations on regional issues. The conference also built upon the notion that it had no power to impose a solution on the parties. The cosponsors

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176. "The Madrid Peace Conference: U.S. Letter of Assurance to Israel," p. 120.
177. The New York Times, October 14, 1991, p. A6.
178. The New York Times, October 14, 1991, p. A6.
179. According to Secretary of State James Baker, every Arab government asked him to force Israel to freeze its settlement program as a condition for peace talks. (The Los Angeles Times, September 18, 1991, p. A1.)
180. The Washington Post, October 27, 1991, p. A1.

of the conference (the U.S. and the Soviet Union) could only facilitate the negotiations; they would have no rights to veto any agreements reached by the active participants; and there would be no mediators or arbitrators in the negotiations.

UN attendance at the conference

Syria had called since 1974 for an international conference under United Nation supervision based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, and the principle of land for peace. Israel had opposed this idea and rejected any international conference under the auspices of the UN on the grounds that such a this conference, with the presence of a wide range of Arab and major powers, could pressure Israel to concede the principle of land for peace and to comply with Arab demands.

Moreover, from Israel's point of view, the United Nations had disqualified itself from offering any solutions to the Arab-Israeli conflict a long time ago. In 1975, the UN General Assembly adopted one of its most controversial resolutions, no. 3379, which passed 72-35 with 35 abstentions, equating Zionism with racism. As a result of this resolution and similar resolutions Israel distrusted the United Nations and accused the UN of being biased in favor of the Arabs in the Arab-Israeli disputes. Israel argued that "this resolution is one of the main reasons why the UN should be disqualified from taking part in any Middle East peace conference."[181] As Richard Bernstein[182] expressed,

> "Virtually every committee and commission in the United Nations has created some sort of unit whose main function is to condemn Israel and to express solidarity with the P.L.O. There is a Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Population of the Occupied Territories. There is a United Nations-mandated International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. In the Secretariat, there is a Division for Palestinian

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181. <u>The Independent</u>, May 15, 1991, 12.
182. The chief of the Times bureau at the United Nations.

Rights. Since 1967, the Security Council has voted on some 200 anti-Israeli resolutions, which were either adopted or were defeated only by an American veto."[183]

There are other causes for deteriorated relations between the United Nations and Israel that could be summarized as follows:

1- The Security Council condemnation of the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories in the Six Day War in June 1967.
2- The granting of observer status to the Palestine Liberation Organization by the General Assembly after the October War of 1973.[184]
3- The establishment by the General Assembly of the Palestine Committee, a "committee for the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people" which regularly reports on the violation of human rights by the Israelis.[185]
4- An official call in 1983 by the General Assembly for an international peace conference under UN auspices to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict.[186]
5- The designation of a day by the General Assembly as "International day of solidarity with the Palestinian people" in 1977, which is celebrated each year on November 29.[187]

Israeli officials distrusted the UN as biased and pro-Arab. Therefore, the presence of the UN at the Madrid peace conference was one of the most contentious issues between the U.S. and Israel. During his eighth trip to the Middle East, Baker convinced Shamir that the UN would be a "silent observer" that would not hurt Israel.[188] Earlier in September 1991, U.S. President George Bush called upon the United Nations to repeal its 1975 resolution equating Zionism with racism. President Bush was trying to ease

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183. Richard Bernstein, "The UN Versus The U.S.," <u>The New York Times</u>, January 22, 1984: Section 6: p. 18.
184. <u>The New York Times</u>, October 15, 1985, p. A1.
185. <u>The New York Times</u>, January 22, 1984, Section 6: p. 18.
186. See: Muhammad Hallaj, "A Monroe Doctrine for the Mideast," <u>The Christian Science Monitor</u>, March 26, 1985, p. 18. And <u>The New York Times</u>, September 16, 1984, Section 6: p. 59.
187. <u>The Jerusalem Post</u>, "Festival of hate against Israel set for UN," November 29, 2001, p. 2.
188. <u>The Washington Post</u>, October 27, 1991, p. A1.

deteriorated relations between the UN and Israel, on one hand, and between the U.S. and Israel, on the other. In his speech, President Bush said, "Zionism is not a policy, it is the idea that led to the creation of a home for the Jewish people, to the state of Israel. …This body cannot claim to seek peace and at the same time challenge Israel's right to exist…. By repealing this resolution unconditionally, the United Nations will enhance its credibility and serve the cause of peace."[189] With U.S. pressure,[190] Israel finally agreed to attend a peace conference but a conference that the United Nations would have no role more than a silent observer with no right to address the conference.[191]

The bilateral negotiations[192]

As mentioned above, the structure of the peace process in the Madrid conference was based on a limited role for the United Nation and on the concept of direct, face-to-face, bilateral negotiations between Israeli and each of its Arab neighbors. While the Syrians had long insisted that any conference on the Arab-Israeli conflict should be based upon relevant UN resolutions, the Israeli official rejected this assumption and insisted on direct, bilateral negotiations in order to pursue separate peace deals with its Arab neighbors.

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189. The New York Times, September 24, 1991, p. A14.
190. According to the testimony of John H. Kelly, the U.S. Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, before the Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, the Bush administration believed that "the UN should have a role at the conference. A role for the UN should pose no problem, since this is a conference that cannot impose its preferences and cannot be a court of appeal." (U.S. Department of State, "Recent Developments in the Middle East," Department of State Dispatch (June 24, 1991).
191. Thomas R. Mattair, "The Arab- Israeli conflict: The Madrid conference and Beyond,", p. 18.
192. From November 1991 till December 1992 several rounds of bilateral negotiations took place between the Arabs and Israelis:
First bilateral round of talks: Madrid November 3, 1991
Second round: Washington, D.C., December 4-17, 1991
Third round: Washington, D.C., January 13-16, 1992
Forth round: Washington, D.C., February 24- March 4, 1992
Fifth round: Washington, D.C., April 27-30, 1992
Sixth round: Washington, D.C., August 24- September 24, 1992
Seventh round: Washington, D.C., October 21- November 20, 1992
Eight round: Washington, D.C., December 7-17, 1992
For more information about these negotiations See: Itamar Rabinovich, The Brink of Peace: the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations, pp. 54-84. and Camille Mansour, pp. 10-28.

The Arab states particularly Syria have sought the convening of an international conference attended by all concerned parties, including the PLO as well as other major powers, such as the permanent members of the Security Council. The Arabs expected that the conference could reconcile the most contentious disputes of the Arab-Israeli conflict and force Israel to comply with the principle of land for peace and the concept of self-determination for the Palestinians. Israel has long rejected an international conference fearing it could be forced to make unwanted concessions. Israel's main concern was to avoid such an unexpected outcome resulting from a wide international forum. The United States also, particularly during the cold war, opposed the idea of international conference, fearing that any Middle East international peace conference would give the Soviet Union an opportunity for involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict and it might pressure Israel to comply with the Arab demands.[193]

There are some other reasons why Israel opposed the idea of international conference during the 1970s-1980s. As mentioned in one of Israel's Cabinet statement, there was a concern about attending a conference with the participation of countries that do not maintain relations with Israel. The Soviet Union and other Communist governments broke diplomatic relations with Israel after the 1967 Six-Day War.[194] Due to the Soviet position on the Arab-Israeli conflict, Israeli officials believed that such a framework that would include the Soviet Union would not serve the goal of peace and only would bring about radicalization between the parties.[195] Therefore, Israel continued insisting on its preconditions that it would refuse to attend an international conference with Soviet participation until Moscow recognized Israel and reestablished diplomatic relations with the Jewish State. Israel also insisted that the Soviet should soften their stance on Jewish emigration and allow free emigration of Soviet Jews**.**

Furthermore, Israeli opposition to an international conference was based partly on the assumption that such a conference would include the European Community and the

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193. See: Muhammad Hallaj, "A Monroe Doctrine for the Mideast," The Christian Science Monitor, March 26, 1985, p. 18. See also The New York Times, September 16, 1984, Section 6, p. 59.
194. The Los Angeles Times, August 5, 1986, Part 1, p. 7.
195. The New York Times, June 3, 1985, p. A1.

Palestinian participation, particularly the Palestine Liberation Organization.[196] Israel also had been against the European role in the Arab-Israeli conflict because of its fear that such a role could be in favor of the Arabs. The European Community has long demanded implementation of relevant UN resolutions to resolve the Arab-Israeli disputes and had long supported the notion of an international conference under the auspices of the United Nations with participation of all the parties concerned, including representatives of the PLO.

Moreover, Israel has long sought direct and bilateral negotiations with each of its neighboring Arab states, reasoning that this approach would first require Arab recognition of Israel as a sovereign state. In an analysis of why Israel long insisted on direct negotiations, the Jerusalem Post in mid 1991 expressed that

"The more pertinent reason for Israel's insistence on direct talks is that it is Arab refusal to recognize Israel's legitimacy which is the root cause of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is, in fact, virtually unique to this conflict, and there is no hope of establishing peace between Israel and the Arab states as between equal sovereignties unless it is removed. Giving the talks international cover is tantamount to licensing this Arab refusal to recognize Israel's legitimacy. It does not matter that the parties would be required to talk face to face. As long as there is a higher authority lurking over them, the talks are doomed. They will be deadlocked by those who would pretend that Israel is not a sovereign negotiating partner, and essential points of dispute would be referred to the conference sponsors, who are known to oppose most of Israel's positions. This will bring not peace but mutual recriminations and the exacerbation of tension."[197]

Meanwhile, most of the Arab states have feared that any direct negotiations with Israel would mean de facto recognition of the Jewish State before Israel accepted the concept of trading land for peace and recognized Palestinian rights. They argued that

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196. Israel had long accused the PLO of being a terrorist organization and therefore refused to negotiate with them. However, both sides reached an agreement in September 1993, the Oslo Accord.
197. The Jerusalem Post, May 14, 1991.

recognition of Israel, as sovereign state without any precondition, would make Israel more reluctant to comply with the principle of land for peace formula. The Arab states, particularly Syria, have long maintained that separate bilateral negotiations, which ultimately might lead to separate peace deals with Israel, would undermined the Arab positions in the negotiations with the Israelis. Therefore, Syria favored a collective Arab delegation in direct negotiations with Israel, a notion that was rejected by both the United States and Israel.

Finally, the Arab states agreed to direct negotiations with Israel despite Israel's well-known interpretation that the UN resolutions would not require Israeli withdrawal to the pre-1967 borders.[198] Furthermore, Israel insisted that the Madrid conference should convene once only to facilitate launching direct, bilateral negotiations with each of its Arab neighbors. Israeli officials also emphasized that the conference would have no arbitration role and that the cosponsors would have no operational role as mediators or arbitrators between Israel and the Arab states. The conference also neither could veto the outcome of the conference nor could impose a solution on the parties.[199] Moreover, Israel announced that it would not accept the Soviet Union as a cosponsor of the conference until Moscow restored its diplomatic relations with Israel.[200]

The Multilateral talks on regional issues

The Madrid peace conference was scheduled in three phases: the initial phase was a ceremonial session in which each party presented its views on Middle East peace; the second phase was designed for bilateral negotiations between Israel and its immediate Arab neighbors; and the third phase featured multilateral talks on regional issues with the participation of most regional countries and some of major powers. The multilateral talks were organized into five working groups, and were designed to be an essential part of the bilateral negotiations in order to enhance confidence-building measures between the

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198. The Washington Post, April 12, 1991, p. A1.
199. Thomas R. Mattair, "The Bush Administration and the Arab-Israeli Conflict,", pp. 62-64.
200. Before the conference convened, the Soviet Union ended 24 years of severed relations with Israel and formally restored full diplomatic relations with the state of Israel on October 18, 1991. (The New York Times, October 19, 1991, Section 1, p. 5.)

Israelis and Arabs. Although Syria agreed to attend the bilateral negotiations, its participation in the multilateral talks was contingent on Israel's intention to implement relevant UN resolutions, which in Syria's understanding, explicitly required Israel's withdrawal from the occupied Arab lands.

The cosponsors of the Madrid peace conference proposed that the multilateral track be convened within two weeks of the initial phase. But due to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and disagreement between parties, this track was delayed for over two months.[201] Finally, on January 28, 1992, 36 parties, including 11 Arab states, attended a meeting in Moscow and established five working groups to study the most important regional issues vital to the comprehensive peace between the Arabs and Israelis.

The origins of multilateral talks

The multilateral negotiations originally were designed to address regional problems that had long been the cause of tension and instability in the region. They were intended to bring regional countries as well as other major powers into a comprehensive discussion on regional issues. These talks were also designed to encourage social and economic relations between the Israelis and Arabs. The U.S. maintained that broader human contact at the regional level would advance bilateral negotiations between Israel and each of its Arab neighbors. Therefore, to advance the prospect of peace in the Middle East, this track was designed "to be an essential complement to the bilaterals--to tackle those regional problems that are themselves a source of tension and instability." Edward Dierijian, the then U.S. Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, in addressing the multilateral talks in the Arab-Israeli peace process at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy said that,

"In preparing the multilateral track for Madrid, we had a vision of the fruits of peace in terms of economic, human, social, developmental, environmental, and

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201. Marvin Feuerwerger, "How the Moscow Talks Can Benefit Mideast Peace," The Christian Science Monitor, January 29, 1992, p. 19.

security needs. We recognized that many functional problems affected the entire region, from the Maghreb to the Gulf. In order to address these problems effectively, we needed as broad a regional participation as possible. … We recognized, too, that in order to deal comprehensively with the problems of the Middle East, we had to include extra-regional parties."[202]

The bilateral negotiations brought the Israelis into direct negotiation with four Arab parties, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and the Palestinians. But the multilateral track brought the Israelis into contact with seven more Arab states, among them the Gulf Cooperation Council, and some of the North African Arab countries. While the multilateral talks were important themselves, it was assumed that their most significant function was to improve the bilateral negotiations-- the negotiations that could facilitate and normalize Arab-Israeli relations. The multilateral track also brought other major powers such as the European Community, China, Japan, and Canada to the regional discussions. These parties could make important contributions to regional development.

Furthermore, the multilateral negotiations brought new elements to the peace process.[203] Not only did the number of parties involved in the peace talks increase, this track also provided a forum for discussing issues critical to establishing and maintaining peace in the region, such as arms control and regional security, water, and regional economic development. Consequently, all theses events, particularly the participation of Arab states provided more recognition for Israel at the regional level, although Israel had not yet agreed to concede to Arab demands: withdrawal from the occupied lands and recognition of Palestinian political rights.

The first meeting of the multilateral talks convened in Moscow in January 1992, in which the parties agreed to establish five working groups[204] in order to advance

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202. Edward P. Djerijian, "The Multilateral Talks in the Arab-Israeli Peace Process," <u>Department of State Dispatch</u> Vol. 04 No. 41 (October 11, 1993).
[203]. Itamar Rabinovich, <u>The Brink of Peace: the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations</u>, p. 76.
204. The U.S. and Russia led the sub-committee, "Arms Control and Regional Security" in order to implement some confidence-building measures and to advance communication between parties on a

regional talks on issues important to the Arab-Israeli conflict: arms control and regional security, environment, economic development, refugees, and water resources. Also, the Steering Group was created to monitor and to organize the multilateral track.

Syria's position on the multilateral talks

Although Syria made some important concessions to attend the bilateral negotiations with Israel, it refused to participate to the multilateral negotiations on the grounds that these negotiations would imply normalization of relations with Israel before Israel committed itself to a comprehensive peace. Syria declined to join the multilateral process until there was tangible progress in the bilateral negotiations. Syria maintained that until the bilateral peace negotiations attained concrete progress toward achieving a just, honorable and comprehensive peace, there would be no reason for Syria to attend the multilateral process. Syria argued that negotiations on security and economic cooperation required development at the bilateral talks between Israel and the Arab states without which any proposal on regional cooperation would fail to achieve results.

Syria's foreign minister, Faroq Shara', argued Syria's position on refusing to attend the multilateral regional talks on the ground that discussing such issues before resolving the main issues of the Arab-Israeli disputes would undermine the whole peace process. In an interview he said, "we are sincere about wanting to reach that stage, [the multilateral talks] but we don't want to jeopardize the process by running to the multilaterals before we can move our feet slowly on bilaterals."[205]

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regional level. The European Community chaired the Economic Development working group, which mainly planned to act on the regional level to provide a framework to help the countries of this region increase trade and economic relations. The Japanese and Canadians respectively led the Environment and Refugee Working Groups. The main purpose of the Environment Committee was to advance cooperation of all regional countries and to address regional environmental problems. The Refugee Committee worked on one of the most contentious issues of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Water Resources working group was led by the United States. Its main purpose was to address the very real problem of water sharing between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

205. The New York Times, November 29, 1991, p. A16.

Syria also tried to discourage other Arab parties from attending the multilateral negotiations[206], reasoning that normalization of relations with Israel before Israeli withdrawal or Israeli commitment to withdraw from the Arab lands would enormously undermine Arab's bargaining positions in the negotiations with Israel. From Syria's point of view, such this negotiations would definitely jeopardize the entire peace process. Syria had long insisted on the necessity of a strong Arab bargaining position in negotiations with Israel for achieving a just and reasonable peace.

Despite Syria's insistence, the Arab countries, except Lebanon, ignored Syria's demand.[207] Consequently, the Arab states, including the Gulf Cooperation Council and some of the North African Arab countries attended the multilateral talks to negotiate regional cooperation with Israel. However, they assured Syria that "they will not normalize relations with Israel before it withdraws from occupied Arab lands"[208]

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206. The Los Angeles Times, October 25, 1991, p. A1.
207. The Los Angeles Times, October 25, 1991, p. A1.
208. The Los Angeles Times, October 25, 1991, p. A1.

Chapter 5

The Oslo Peace Process

Introduction

As we have seen, structural changes in international and regional arenas in the 1990s provided new possibilities for reconciliation of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Although the parties to the conflict agreed in October 1991 to convene the Madrid peace conference, they could not achieve significant progress; the negotiations were obstructed from the very beginning. The main core of the conflict remained unresolved. But following the election in June 1992 of the left-wing Labor Party,[209] which was led by Yitzhak Rabin,[210] the Israeli government, which had earlier refused to negotiate with the PLO, legalized contact with them[211], providing an opportunity to negotiate directly with this organization as a Palestinian representative. Since negotiations with the Palestinian

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209. For more information about the election, Labor Party and the impact of the Rabin's victory on the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations See: Leon T. Hadar, "The Israeli Labor Party: Peacemaker or Likud II?," Journal of Palestine Studies vol. XXI, no. 3 (Spring 1992): pp. 80-94. George T. Abed, "The Palestinians In The Peace Process: The Risks And The Opportunities," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 22, No. 1 (Autumn 1992): pp. 5-17. Herbert C. Kelman, "Acknowledging The Other's Nationhood: How To Create A Momentum For The Israeli-Palestinian Negotiations," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 22, No. 1 (Autumn 1992): pp. 18-38.

210. According to an analysis "Yitzhak Rabin's victory thus inspired both hope and doubts about the prospects of the peace talks. On the one hand, he was ready to move the peace talks forward and to accelerate the negotiations on Palestinian autonomy. One the other hand, given his worldview and record, he was likely to act with great caution in order to safeguard what he considers to be Israel's overriding great security interests. In a sense, he replaced the ideology of Greater Israel with the secular ideology of national security." (Avi Shlaim, "Prelude to the Accord: Likud, Labor, and the Palestinians," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 23, No. 2 (Winter 1994): pp. 12-13).

211. In late 1992, although Israel's officials refused to talk directly with the PLO, they did legalize contact with members of the PLO. This was a significant move by the Israeli government to further peace negotiations.

representatives in the joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation did not reach a solution[212], Israelis and Palestinians began secret negotiations outside of the Madrid peace conference framework. The secret negotiations led to a historic reconciliation in September 1993, in which Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization agreed to recognize each other's legitimacy and put an end to decades of hostilities.

In August 1993, many observers were surprised by the news that the PLO and Israel had reached an agreement through secret negotiations. These negotiations were conducted mainly in Norway, facilitated by Norwegian diplomats. The agreement astonished the Arab parties to the Middle East peace process, especially Syria that had sought a unified approach to dealing with the Israelis. After months of secret negotiations, a bilateral agreement had been achieved on a "Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements"[213] (DOP). This resultant Declaration of Principles was signed on September 13, 1993 at the White House[214] by high-ranking officials on each side, in the presence of President Clinton, PLO chairman Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.[215] The initial phase of the agreement was known as Gaza-Jericho First Plan[216] and the full series of agreements became known as the Oslo Accords.[217] Also the negotiations between the PLO and Israelis that led to the agreement of September 1995 became known as Oslo II.

Prior to this agreement, the PLO chairman declared that his organization recognized "the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and security," renounced "the use of terrorism and other acts of violence",[218] and accepted United Nations Security

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212. Among other reasons, earlier rounds of talks failed to reach an agreement because Israel agreed to negotiate only with the Palestinians of their own choosing. Also, exclusion of the PLO by Israel from participating in the peace negotiations was another reason for the failure of the Israeli-Palestinian talks.
213. "Israel-PLO Declaration of Principle, Washington, D.C., 13 September 1993," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 23, No. 1 (Autumn 1993): pp. 115-124.
214. "The White House Ceremony," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 23, No. 2 (Winter 1994): pp. 119-124.
215. The New York Times, September 10, 1993, p. A1.
216. Raja Shehadeh, "Questions of Jurisdiction: A Legal Analysis of the Gaza-Jericho Agreement," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 23, No. 4 (Summer 1994): pp. 18-25.
217. For a comprehensive review of the accord see: Burhan Dajani, "The September 1993 Israeli-PLO Documents: A Textual Analysis," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 23, No. 3 (Spring 1994): pp. 5-23.
218. The New York Times, September 10, 1993, p. A12.

Council Resolutions 242 and 338 as a basis for the reconciliation of the conflict with the Israelis. The PLO also committed itself to "a peaceful resolution of the conflict between the two sides"[219] through negotiations and announced that those articles of the Palestinian Covenant that contradict this commitment would no longer be valid.[220] In response, the government of Israel recognized the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and commenced officially to negotiate with them within the context of the Middle East peace process.[221]

The Declaration of Principles neither was a peace treaty nor a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian disputes; it was an agreement, providing a framework on how to continue the negotiations in order to reach a comprehensive solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict within the next five years, beginning May 1994. The agreement established a timetable for reaching a permanent settlement through gradual Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza Strip and partial transfer of power to the Palestinian Authority (PA). The Clinton administration welcomed the PLO-Israeli initiatives, and with the active support of the United States, the Oslo Accords became a central theme in the peace talks between the Israelis and Palestinians.

The Accords were based upon the concept that both parties would agree to put an end to decades of confrontation and animosity, and to recognize their mutual legitimate rights in order to achieve an honorable, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement through a historic reconciliation. As was stated, the main purpose of this agreement was

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219. The New York Times, September 10, 1993, p. A12. This led to the improvement of U.S. relations with PLO. For more information see: David W. Lesch, ed. The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999), pp. 244-261.

220. Yasser Arafat in his letter to Rabin said, "In view of the promise of a new era and the signing of the Declaration of Principles and based on Palestinian acceptance of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, the P.L.O. affirms that those articles of the Palestinian Covenant which deny Israel's right to exist and the provisions of the Covenant which are inconsistent with the commitments of this letter are now inoperative and no longer valid. Consequently, the P.L.O. undertakes to submit to the Palestinian National Council for formal approval the necessary changes in regard to the Palestinian Covenant." (The New York Times, September 10, 1993, p. A12.)

221. "Mideast Accord; Three Letters That Sealed The Diplomatic Bargain." The New York Times, September 10, 1993, p. A12. According to some Arab-Israeli observers, recognition of the PLO, which was formally endorsed by the Rabin government, was significant for furthering negotiations with the Palestinians. In an interview, Rabin said, "If there is to be peace with the Palestinians, the only negotiating partner is the PLO…You don't make peace with friends…You make peace with very unsavory enemies." (The New York Times, September 10, 1993, p. A1.)

to establish a "Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority" in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, for a transitional period, not to exceed five years. The agreement also was to be a framework for permanent reconciliation of the conflict based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338.

The first step toward implementation of this agreement was known as "Gaza-Jericho First", in which Israeli forces were to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and Jericho and transfer some civilian responsibility to the Palestinians.[222] According to the DOP, negotiations finalizing the nature of an Israeli-Palestinian settlement including, borders, Jerusalem, and refugees would commence not later than the beginning of the third year of the interim period (May 1996). Following that, the permanent status would be implemented, which under the DOP was to be by May 1999, five years after the implementation of the first agreement, (the Gaza-Jericho plan).

The second stage of the process came after months of difficult negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. They concluded a major agreement in September 1995, which became known as Oslo II. The accord specifies, step by step, the partial withdrawal of Israeli forces from the West Bank, the election of the Palestinian Council[223], and the transfer of security arrangements to the Palestinian police.[224]

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222. On May 4, 1994 Israel and the PLO reached an agreement in Cairo on the initial implementation of the 1993 Declaration of Principles. The agreement paved the way for Israel to start handing over parts of the West Bank (Jericho) and Gaza Strip (except for Jewish settlements). After Israeli withdrawal, partial control of civilian administration was transferred to the Palestinians.

223. Khalil Shikaki, "The Palestinian Elections: An Assessment," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 25, No. 3 (Spring 1996): pp. 17-22.

224. According to the accord, the West Bank was divided into three categories: Area A the Palestinians would maintain exclusive control. This area included populated Palestinian towns—Jenin, Nablus, Tulkarm, Qalqilya, Ramallah, Bethlehem and Hebron (Hebron itself was divided into three divisions: under exclusively Israeli control, exclusively Palestinian control, and an area of joint Israeli-Palestinian control.) Area B the Palestinians would be responsible for public affairs and the Israelis for security arrangements. This area composed of some 450 villages and towns. Area C would remain under exclusive Israeli control. This area included unpopulated lands, Israeli settlements, and military zones. (The New York Times, September 25, 1995, p. A1.)

As many Palestinians opposed the agreement,[225] the Israeli right also saw the accord as a surrender of the biblical land of the Jews and called the accord a tragedy and swore to obstruct the accord.[226] In response to his opponents, Israel's then Prime Minster Rabin, reiterated that "the final settlement would not return to 1967 boundaries, that Jerusalem would remain united and part of Israel, and that Israel's "security border" would stay at the Jordan River."[227] However, the whole process was halted after the assassination of Rabin[228] in November 1995 and came to total deadlock when Binyamin Netanyahu came to power in May 1996.[229]

The critical point of these agreements was that the Accords did not offer any solutions for the sensitive issues such as Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements, and borders. The Accords explicitly stated that these issues were to be excluded from the interim arrangements. Moreover, the Accord did not give the Palestinians sovereignty over the self-rule area; it granted them restricted self-rule only in limited areas such as educational and cultural affairs, health, and social welfare. The Jewish settlements continued in the areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.[230] And most importantly, the Accords left all security arrangements for the West Bank and Gaza Strip under Israeli control.[231]

The PLO and Israel's Position at the Time of the Accord

The Oslo Accords came at a time when the Palestinians were in a feeble position. The PLO supported Saddam Hussein during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. This policy had

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225. For details see: "The Oslo Agreement, An Interview with Haydar Abd Al-Shafi," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 23, No. 1 (Autumn 1993): pp. 14-19. And "The Oslo Agreement, An Interview with Nabil Shaath," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 23, No. 1 (Autumn 1993): pp. 5-13.
226. Avi Shlaim, "Prelude to the Accord: Likud, Labor, and the Palestinians," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 23, No. 2 (Winter 1994): pp. 5-19.
227. The New York Times, September 25, 1995, p. A1.
228. Benny Morris, "After Rabin," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 25, No. 2 (Winter 1996): pp. 77-87.
229. For more information about the opponents of the Oslo Accord in Israel See: Ian S. Lustick, "The Oslo Agreement as an Obstacle to Peace," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 27, No. 1 (Autumn 1997): pp. 64-66.
230. Peter Shaw-Smith, "The Israeli Settler Movement Post-Oslo," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 23, No. 3 (Spring 1994): pp. 99-109.
231. Ziad Abu-Amr, "The View From Palestine: In The Wake Of The Agreement," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 23, No. 2 (Winter 1993): pp. 75-83.

enormous negative effects on PLO. It undermined PLO's relations with many countries, including key Arab countries. The result was financially disastrous for the PLO because they lost the main sources of financial aid such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the Palestinians who worked in these countries and other Persian Gulf States. The isolation of the PLO led to the loss of its credibility and legitimacy as a Palestinian representative. The PLO was under massive regional and international pressure and, therefore, forced to concede to Israeli demands and preconditions for a limited autonomy in a small area of the occupied territory of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Realizing the difficulties in reaching a comprehensive agreement with the Arabs, Israel had based its policy upon negotiating separate and bilateral deals with its Arab neighbors. The Rabin government prepared to negotiate with the PLO at the time that this organization had already been isolated because of its regional policy. Israel's goals were neither to reach a comprehensive solution with the Palestinians nor to provide the Palestinians legitimate rights of self-determination and statehood. Among other considerations, Israel's tactic was to separate the Palestinian question from other Arab parties, particularly from Syria and Jordan.

The value of this approach for Israel was to undermine Syria's policy. Hafiz al-Asad had long insisted that peace negotiations should be conducted in the context of a collective, unified position of the relevant Arab states in order to reach a comprehensive solution.[232] On several occasions, both before and in the aftermath of the Madrid peace conference, Syria rejected the concept of a separate and bilateral deal with the Israelis. Hafiz al-Asad once said that "The Golan was originally occupied in a battle waged for the sake of Palestine, and so was Sinai."[233] In 1993, the Syrian foreign minister also affirmed, "Syria would not sign a treaty with Israel, even if the whole Golan were returned, until the Palestinians accepted an interim self-government agreement."[234] In an interview, Hafiz al-Asad said that,

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232. As mentioned before, Syria preferred these negotiations to be under the UN auspices in an international conference based upon UN resolutions 242 and 338.
233. BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, May 9, 1990: Part 4. The Middle East, ME/0759/A/1.
234. Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Raymond Hinnebusch, pp. 161-162.

"He would insist that any peace accord with Israel cover the interests of all Arab parties to the Middle East talks, and he said Syria had no intention of signing a separate treaty with Israel…a bilateral deal was out of the question. Damascus would not abandon the goals of the Palestinians, Jordanians, and Lebanese."[235]

Therefore, according to some Middle Eastern observers, Israel pursued secret dialogues with the PLO representatives due to Asad's intractable position. Another reason for these negotiations was that such agreement with the PLO did not require a total Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza and had none of the preconditions demanded by the Syrians. In the early stage of the Madrid peace conference, Syria insisted that even negotiations with the Israelis should be based upon Israel's commitment to withdraw from the entire Golan Heights.

Moreover, the agreement was designed to serve Israel's interests; it was deliberately vague in the powers that it gave to the Palestinians, but was clear about the things that the Israelis could achieve through implementation of the accord. From another point of view, the Oslo Accords was also an important achievement for the Israelis. First of all, the PLO assumed the responsibility of providing security for the Israelis and were to stop militants opposing the peace in the Middle East. Netanyahu once said, "The core of the initial Oslo agreement was the Palestinian Authority's [PA] commitment to act against terror organizations from areas under its jurisdiction."[236] But perhaps the most important accomplishment for the Israelis was the recognition of the Jewish state by some of the Arab countries and many other countries around the world. The removal of the secondary Arab boycott was also an enormous economic benefit for the Israelis.

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235. The Christian Science Monitor, March 19, 1993, p. 3.
236. "Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Speech on the Requirements of Peace," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 27, No. 2 (Winter 1998): p. 155. Netanyahu later continued, "the PA has not acted against these organizations…. The Oslo agreements have created bases and havens for terror organization in our immediate vicinity."

Syria's Reaction to the Oslo Accords

After the signing of the Declaration of Principles (DOP), Syria's official newspaper, al-Ba'th, stated, in a news analysis, that the DOP would bring neither a just and comprehensive peace to the region nor stability and security to the Israelis. Referring to Rabin's statements in which he declared that there would be no withdrawal to the 1967 borders, and that there would be no dismantling of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the al-Ba'th analysis concluded that only full implementation of the relevant UN resolutions and the land-for-peace principle would bring a just peace, not a unilateral, separate, interim agreement based upon an ambiguous notion.[237]

In an address to Syria's then newly elected parliament in September 1994, Hafiz al-Asad expressed his deep disappointment with the unilateral agreement that both the Palestinians and Jordanians reached with the Israelis. He said,

"For decades, Syria waged the Arabs' battle against the Israeli occupation, to liberate the land and recover the (Arabs') rights…. We have exerted great efforts to restore Arab solidarity in recent years, … From the beginning, our decision was clear: coordination with the Arab parties participating in the peace process…. because we realized that by all standards, unilateral negotiations can never be in the interests of a single Arab party, which is weak (on its own) and has no option but to submit to the pressures and make concessions…but instead we were surprised by the Palestinian-Israeli agreement, followed by the Jordanian-Israeli agreement…. [The] reality makes unambiguously clear the enormity of the damage that unilateralism has inflicted on the core of the causes for which we have long fought and struggled."[238]

After the Oslo Accords, the Syrian-Israeli track was slowed, and Syria even refused to attend another round of negotiations with Israel. Encouraging both

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237. Mideast Mirror, September 15,1993, Section: The Arab World; Vol. 07, No. 178.
238. Mideast Mirror, September 12, 1994, section: Syria; Vol. 08, No. 175.

Syrians and Israelis to continue their negotiations, president Bill Clinton met with Hafiz al-Asad in Geneva in January 1994. In the meeting, Hafiz al-Asad stated his concern about the unilateral agreement that Arafat reached with the Israelis. He said,

"To me, there is no difference between the Golan, South Lebanon and the occupied parts of Palestine or Jordan…. It is all one Arab land as far as I am concerned, with no part of it more precious to me than another. What I demand for one part I demand for all, and that is only natural, because it is all one land for one nation. This fact reveals the secret behind the failure of unilateral settlements or unilateral peace agreements to end the historic conflict between the Israelis and the Arabs…. Peace cannot be peace unless it is comprehensive. You have before you three experiments that did not make peace or end the conflict: Camp David in 1978 with Sadat's Egypt, May 17 1983 with Amin Gemayel's Lebanon, and the Gaza - Jericho accord with Yaser Arafat on September 13, 1993. These are enough to indicate that unilateral solutions, even if they multiply, do not make peace."[239]

Referring to the PLO-Israel agreements, Asad maintained that Israel had been taking advantage of "some Arab officials' moments of weakness to steal their signatures for agreements." He continued that such an agreement "built on force and coercion is not peace. It is nothing but an agreement of submission, that which is imposed by an occupier…."[240] In an obvious reaction, Hafiz al-Asad said that he felt "personally betrayed by the Israel-PLO accord." He continued that the accord "undercuts efforts to forge a comprehensive peace in the region." Asad also said,

"We were of this perception, of this understanding that the coordination among the Arab countries would achieve its objective of pushing the peace process

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239. "What Assad told Clinton: A report by a member of the Syrian delegation to Geneva," <u>Mideast Mirror</u>, January 18, 1994: Section: Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, Vol. 08, No. 11.
240. <u>Mideast Mirror</u>, January 18, 1994, Section: Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Vol. 08, No. 11.

forward and of achieving success and security for the peace process as a whole. Suddenly we hear about a secret agreement that takes place between some PLO leaders and Israel. From my point of view, this certainly was not their best option. And it is not the best way to achieve peace."[241]

On several occasion, Hafiz al-Asad made it clear that unilateral solutions would complicate the issues of the Arab-Israeli conflict. He insisted, "The Arabs are one people. If I were to sign an agreement similar to that signed by Arafat, I would have faced great problems. You all know that there are Arab leaders who paid with their lives as the price for such separate behavior."[242]

However, Syria's official position was that it would neither oppose nor support the accord. As Hafiz al-Asad said in an interview that although "this was not a [the] best way to achieve peace… we decided not to hinder the agreement which they had reached not to obstruct it…[T]his responsibility belongs to the Palestinian people and their institution"[243]. However, Damascus clearly announced that it would not approve the Oslo Accords on the grounds that separate agreements and unilateral solutions would not bring peace and security for the region; it could also become a new source of tension. Syria also considered the accord a violation of the principles upon which the peace process was built, referring to the UN Resolutions 242 and 338, and the land-for-peace principle.[244]

According to al-Hayat, Syrian officials believed that "the agreement does not address any of the Palestinians substantive issues: there is no end to the occupation, not even an acknowledgment that the land is occupied; no return for the refugees; no Arab right to Jerusalem…[T]he agreement is a leap into the unknown. It turns part of the Palestinian population into a police force for the protection of Israel, and it is an

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241. "Assad keeps up war of words on the Israel-PLO agreement," Mideast Mirror, October 4, 1993: Section: The Arab World, Vol. 7, No. 191.
242. The New York Times, June 11, 2000, p. 51.
243. Mideast Mirror, October 4, 1993, Vol. 07, No. 191.
244. Mideast Mirror, November 1, 1993, Section: Arab Islamic World; Vol. 07, No. 211.

instrument that the Israelis are using to squeeze concessions out of the Arabs, not least of which is an end to the Arab boycott."[245]

In conclusion, Syria criticized the agreement and Arafat's concessions to reach a restricted self-rule in parts of the West Bank and Gaza. However, they remained neutral and publicly expressed that the Palestinians could do whatever they considered advantageous to their national interests. Syria's foreign minister asserted that while "the others, or some of the others, have broken away and negotiated for the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Jordanian territories. Thus Syria does not wish to be more royal than the king."[246]

Nevertheless, Syria's media strongly criticized Arafat and condemned the Oslo Accords. In an analysis Mohammad Khair-al-Wadi, editor of the Tishreen, stated that the Oslo Accords were an absolute disaster for the Palestinian people. Not only did the accord not bring peace but it also worsened the Palestinian situation under Arafat's rule. There are a few facts regarding this accord:

1) The Oslo Accord was not an agreement between two parties equal in terms of power. It was a "suspicious deal whose thrust was the PLO's submission to all Israeli terms." According to him, the Israeli government "did not offer anything that can effectively contribute to just and comprehensive peace, whereas the PLO relinquished almost everything—land, rights, dignity and even its role as leader of the Palestinian liberation struggle…."[247] Khair-al-Wadi continued that the PLO abandoned its principles in a "humiliating manner" by accepting the accord upon which Israel defined new missions for the PLO, i.e. to protect the Israeli occupation, to provide security for the settlers, and to demolish Palestinian resistance.

2) Events in the year after the implementation of the initial phase of the accord (the Gaza-Jericho First plan) presented evidence that the accord did not constitute a step

245. Al-Hayats report in Mideast Mirror, October 4, 1993, Section: The Arab World; Vol. 07, No. 191.
246. BBC Summary of World Broadcasts January 8, 1996, Part 4, The Middle East, ME/D2503/MED.
247. Mideast Mirror, August 23, 1994, Vol. 08, No. 162.

towards peace. Although in the beginning it provided some hope for Arab-Israeli reconciliation, this optimism did not last. The Rabin government continued the settlement policy and refused to dismantle the settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. And because of that, the Oslo Accord caused a new cycle of tension and violence in Palestinian-Israeli affairs.

3) The Palestinian Authority in the area of its self-rule, the Gaza, and other West Bank cities, did not bring prosperity, security and stability for the Palestinians. Several factors contributed to the Palestinian Authority's inability to do so. Among them is the Palestinian self-rule agreement, in which Israel retains enormous control over Palestinian affairs. Moreover, beside the corruption of Palestinian authority,[248] Arafat's policy to contain the Palestinian resistance and to submit to Israeli demands had an important influence on the deterioration of conditions of the Palestinian inhabitants under Palestinian self-rule.[249]

In conclusion, the main point of Syria's disapproval of the Oslo Accords was that such unilateral solution would favor only the Israelis by furthering their plans to divide the Arab parties in order to reach separate, interim agreements with them. Syria agreed to attend the Madrid conference on the grounds that it was to be based on the principle of land for peace. Syria expected that the negotiations to be within the context of the conference, i.e. avoiding secret talks and unilateral solutions. Therefore, the Oslo Accords, from Syria's point of view, was a violation of the basic notion on which the current peace process—the Madrid peace conference—was established. Syria's main

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248. According to a survey was taken in June 1997 by the Nablus-based Center for Palestine Research and Studies (CPRS) %62.9 of Palestinians living in West Bank and Gaza maintained that there was corruption in the Palestinian Authority institutions. See: "Palestinian Opinion," In Peace Monitor: 16 May-15 August 1997, Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 27, No. 1 (Autumn 1997): p. 118.

249. According to different sources, Palestinian security had deteriorated because of Arafat's commitment to Israel to curtail Palestinian resistance. As an observer stated, "the reckless behavior of Arafat's police and the commitments to Israel have constrained the Palestinian security organs. The self-rule police are now waging large-scale campaigns of repression and terror against resistance groups, rounding up dozens of people, torturing them and even not hesitating to kill Palestinians…The most dangerous thing of all is that these reckless practices by Arafat's group are threatening to trigger a Palestinian civil war." (Mideast Mirror, August 23, 1994, Vol. 08, No. 162.)

concern was that this agreement would undermine the Arab's position in negotiating with the Israelis.

The Effects of the Oslo Accords on Syria

The Oslo Accords had several important effects on Syria. First, it undermined Syria's concept of a comprehensive peace. Second, both Israelis and Palestinians excluded Syria from the negotiations over Palestine. Third, the accord stalled further progress in the Syrian-Israeli track. And finally, the accords brought Syria under pressure to stop the Palestinian groups in Damascus that opposed Arafat's agreement with the Israelis. Thus, this time, Syria's ability to place limitations on these opponent groups made Syria more important to the peace process than ever.

Syria maintained a belief, as Hafiz al-Asad once said that, "Peace cannot be peace unless it is comprehensive."[250] When the PLO concluded a separate deal with the Israelis, which was followed by the Jordanian decision to do the same, Syria had no option except to revise its concept of a comprehensive peace. Syria could not be "more royal than the king", and demand more for the Palestinians and Jordanians who conceded to Israeli preconditions.

In an interview, Syria's foreign minister analyzed the difficulties that this agreement brought for the Arabs. To answer the questions of whether Syria would sign a separate deal with Israel and if Syria had changed its stance regarding the necessity of Israeli withdrawal from all the occupied Arab territories, he said,

> "Syria's stance has never changed. Syria insisted and continues to insist on withdrawal from all the Arab lands occupied in 1967. [But] under the current political atmosphere and in view of the developments that have taken place since the Oslo Agreement, Syria cannot consider the comprehensive peace to be that

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250. "What Assad told Clinton: A report by a member of the Syrian delegation to Geneva." <u>Mideast Mirror</u>, January 18, 1994, Section: Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Vol. 08, No. 11.

which existed in the past. …Thus, after what has happened, Syria says that comprehensive peace is one that will lead to full withdrawal from the Golan up to the 4th June 1967 line, as well as from southern Lebanon. This is the Syrian position…"[251]

The second effect of the Oslo accords on Syria was that it led to the exclusion of Syria from the peace process by the other parties. By signing the Oslo accord, the PLO excluded Syria from negotiating on behalf of the Palestinians. Israel also wanted to exclude Syria from negotiating on other Arab-Israeli disputes. Syria viewed the question of Palestine as the core dispute of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and even believed that the Palestinian cause belonged to all the Arabs and not just to the PLO. Because of that, Syria challenged the PLO on several occasions (e.g. in the 1983 Lebanese war and its aftermath), particularly when the organization was on the verge of adapting a unilateral approach in dealing with the Israelis or Jordanians.

Third, the accord hindered further progress on the Syrian-Israeli track. One of the reasons was Rabin's opinion that Syria was not a priority. His priority was to reach an interim agreement with the PLO, because a total withdrawal was not an issue in the PLO-Israel agreement. Furthermore, the substantive issues in the Palestinian-Israeli disputes, i.e. Jerusalem, refugees, and borders, were postponed for future decision. Asad's reaction was strong. He said, in an interview, "Priority is exclusively for the peace process…. Nothing in the peace process ground rules speaks of priorities. The Arabs, in other words, are not queuing for Rabin's decisions. Israel set up a number of delegations for bilateral talks with each of the Arab sides simultaneously. This new logic proves that the Israelis do not want peace. On our part, we want peace but we are not begging for it. If the other side does not want peace, we can also take the same attitude."[252]

Fourth, in the aftermath of the Oslo accord, several different Palestinian groups, who resided in Syria, strongly criticized Arafat's unilateral decision. These groups based

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251. BBC Summary of World Broadcasts January 8, 1996, Part 4, The Middle East, ME/D2503/MED.
252. Mideast Mirror, October 4, 1993, Section: The Arab World; Vol. 07, No. 191.

their position on the fact that the Oslo Accord "deals with the Palestinian people on the basis of sub-dividing them…[and that it is a] new method other than direct Israeli military and administrative control of densely-inhabited Palestinian population centers."[253] To further the negotiations between the PLO and Israel, the United States asked Syria to silence Palestinian opposition to the agreement. Syria's leverage over these groups made Syria more important to the United States and to the peace process. As one observer said, "these groups can be held on a tight leash or let loose. They are obligated to Syria and they can be persuaded to change course."[254]

In response to a request that Syria should silence the Palestinian opposition to the Oslo agreement, Hafiz al-Asad said, "If Syria is being asked to silence Palestinian opposition to the agreement, why is no one asking the Israeli government to silence Israeli opposition to the agreement? There are a number of parties in Israel that are strongly and firmly opposed to this agreement." Asad continued, "Even if (Syria) were elated with the agreement, it has no right to act as a policeman, preventing other people from expressing their views on a central cause which has been the focus of their struggle for several decades."[255]

The Impact of the Oslo Accord on the Palestinians

The Oslo accord had enormous effects on various aspects of the Palestinians situation.[256] As mentioned before, the Oslo Accord, which called for an end to terrorism, mutual recognition of the PLO and Israel, creation of Palestinian self-rule, and for Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, increased optimism for peace and reconciliation of the Israeli-Palestinian disputes. That optimism caused the Palestinians, remarkably, to support peace negotiations and oppose terrorism. According to a Palestinian public opinion survey, in September 1995, more than 71 percent of the Palestinians supported continuation of the peace process. This support reached 81 percent

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253. <u>Mideast Mirror</u>, January 11, 1996, Section: Palestine; Vol. 10, No. 8.
254. Neil Quilliam, p. 201.
255. <u>Mideast Mirror</u>, October 4, 1993, Section: The Arab World; Vol. 07, No. 191.
256. Avi Shlaim, "The Oslo Accord," <u>Journal of Palestine Studies</u> Vol. 23, No. 3 (Spring 1994): pp. 24-40.

by June 1996, having dropped to less than 60 percent in the year after Netanyahu came to power. At the same time, support for attacks against Israelis had steeply dropped from 57 percent in November 1994, and 56 percent in February 1995, to 21 percent in March 1996.[257]

The Oslo accord brought the PLO international recognition as an organization that transformed its struggle for Palestinian statehood from a guerilla war to diplomacy. Although the deal that PLO leadership signed with the Israeli government in September 1993 had many disappointing features,[258] the achievement had an important result for the PLO—following the agreement, the PLO could restore its status at the regional level as well as in the international arena. In addition to the Israeli government, the United States recognized the PLO as the Palestinian representative and commenced negotiating with them in order to facilitate communication between the Israelis and Palestinians.

One of the most important effects of the Oslo accord on Palestinian society was that the accord provided a framework for national reconstruction. Based upon that framework, the Palestinians had their first general election to establish the Palestinian Authority (PA) and other electoral bodies for self-rule in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Insofar as the Palestinians believed the peace negotiations progressed toward reconstructing their aspirations of statehood, they continued to support the concept of the Oslo Accord. In contrast, as implementation of the Oslo Accord stalled—especially when Binyamin Netanyahu came to power in May 1996—the support of the peace process among the Palestinians dropped significantly. In particular, Israel's response to the Palestinian resistance movement and to the violence that targeted Israelis, including collective punishment and containment of Palestinian people, led to more Palestinian frustration and increased uncertainties regarding their future status. Accordingly, the result was a cycle of violence and frustration on both sides. Needless to say, that this

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257. Khalil Shikaki, "Peace Now or Hamas Later," <u>Foreign Affairs</u> (July-August 1998): p. 29.
258. Naseer H. Aruri, "Early Empowerment: The Burden Not the Responsibility," <u>Journal of Palestine Studies</u> Vol. 24, No. 2 (Winter 1995): pp. 33-39. And "Symbols versus Substance: A Year after the Declaration of Principles: An Interview with Edward W. Said," <u>Journal of Palestine Studies</u> Vol. 24, No. 2 (Winter 1995): pp. 60-72.

frustration was one of the main causes of Palestinian resistance and attacks on Israeli targets.

Another criticism of the Oslo Accord was that although the accord led to general elections and establishment of the Palestinian Legislative Council, the Palestinian Administration did not lead to a democratic society. Corruption and mismanagement in the Palestinian Administration frustrated the Palestinians as much as the lack of progress in negotiating peace with the Israelis. According to a public opinion survey, only a fourth of the Palestinians believed that the Palestinian Authority was moving toward democracy.[259] A considerable majority of Palestinians were dissatisfied with the political order that caused Arafat to dominate in various aspects of their political life.

The lack of economic growth also caused the Palestinians to be disappointed with the accord. However, although more than 80 percent of the Palestinians disapproved of the PA's performance, most Palestinians believed that a stalemate in the peace process had been the main source of their economic suffering, and not the PA's flaws. According to a public opinion survey, "In 1997, 57 percent said that the peace process had a negative impact on the Palestinian economy. Similarly, in 1995, only 8 percent reported that their personal economic situation had improved since the beginning of the peace process, while 53 percent reported that it had worsened—statistics that show little sign of changing."[260]

In conclusion, the Oslo accord, in theory, sought to establish confidence-building measures during the five years of the interim agreement, and to transform Palestinian society into a community supporting peace and coexistence, and to bring peace and tranquility to both the Israelis and Palestinians. But in practice, its insufficiencies gradually became clear. In reality, the ambiguity and uncertainties of the accord made it futile and ineffective as a framework for reaching a just, honorable and comprehensive

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259. Khalil Shikaki, "Peace Now or Hamas Later," p. 29.
260. Khalil Shikaki. "Peace Now or Hamas Later." p. 29.

peace between the Israelis and Palestinians.[261] The fact that Israel could interpret it whichever way they wanted, clashed with Palestinian anticipation that this accord would lead to statehood, making things more complicated.

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[261]. Edward W. Said, The end of the peace process: Oslo and After (New York: Pantheon Books, 2000).

Chapter 6

Slow progress between the Oslo Accord and the Wye Plantation talks

1993-1995

Introduction

As mentioned, the Oslo Accord had significant effects on Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations. The agreement extremely undermined Syria's bargaining position wherein Hafiz al-Asad insisted on a unified, strong, common Arab stance in order to secure Arab rights. Moreover, the accord undermined Syria's goal of a comprehensive peace in negotiating with the Israelis. Although Syria neither supported nor opposed the accord, Hafiz al-Asad threatened that Syria would foil the accord if it become clear that it would create major damage to Syria's national interest.[262]

The accord also stalled further progress along the Syrian-Israeli track. Since the initial phase of the Middle East peace process in October 1991, the negotiations between Israel and Syria had been stuck on setting priorities: should Syria's acceptance and definition of full peace come first or Israeli commitment to withdrawal from the Golan Heights? The talks were deadlocked over enormous differences between Syria's expectations and Israel's. Syria had proposed full peace in return for full withdrawal from the Golan Heights. But they refused Israeli demands that they explicitly define what full peace would mean lest it be defined too rigidity or too narrowly. Accordingly, Israel also had refused to define the extent of its withdrawal from the Golan Heights, and even refused to commit itself to the principle of land for peace until Syria defined the meaning

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262. Anoushirvan Ehteshami and Raymond Hinnebusch, p. 162.

of peace. Therefore, having been discouraged by the prolonged deadlock in the bilateral negotiation with Israel, Syria's frustration was intensified by the separate, interim PLO-Israel accord of September 1993. This circumstance led Syria's foreign minister in late September 1993 to declare, "Syria would boycott the next round of peace talks unless Israel offered a prior commitment to withdraw from the Golan Heights."[263]

The stalemate in the Syrian-Israeli negotiations brought more uncertainty about the future of the whole peace process. In order to stimulate the peace process, The United States encouraged the two parties to resume negotiations. President Clinton even met with Hafiz al-Asad in Geneva in January 1994, and visited Syria later that year in October. The meeting between the presidents in Geneva and Damascus provided an opportunity for Syria to spell out its concept of peace. It also helped Syria to improve its relations with the United States and to convince the U.S. president to assert Syria's key role in the Middle East peace process. However, during this time there were some events that triggered more violence between the Palestinians and Israelis, such as the Hebron Massacre in February 1994. The massacre and consequent Palestinian response had negative impacts on Syrian-Israeli talks. The Jordanian separate peace deal with the Israelis in November 1994 also undermined Syria's position in the peace process. The ramifications of these events will be discussed later in this chapter.

Clinton-Asad Meeting (January 1994)

The Clinton-Asad meeting on January 16, 1994 in Geneva was part of the United States effort to further the Arab-Israeli peace process. The meeting between the Presidents was also a reminder that Syria was a major player in the Middle East, and that the United States could not ignore or bypass Syria in the peace process. By that time, it was clear that a peace accord between Syria and Israel would remove the remaining direct military threat to Israel. It was expected that such an accord would improve Israel's relations with all the Arab countries, which was essential for Israel's integration

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263. "A Syrian warning to Jordan: separate peace can bring instability," Mideast Mirror, September 28, 1993, section: Israel: Vol. 07, No. 209.

into the Middle East. Moreover, there was no doubt that progress in Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations could eliminate or at least significantly reduce Syria's support for the Palestinian groups opposed to peace.

Despite the difficulties in the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations, a comprehensive peace in the Middle East was believed to depend on progress on the Syrian-Israeli track. A meaningful agreement between Syria and Israel was expected to further progress on the other tracks, especially the Lebanon and Palestinian one because Syria had long had enormous influential power in Lebanon and over Palestinian opposition groups residing in Syria. It was because of Syria's important role in the peace process that the U.S. president decided to meet with Hafiz al-Asad, although the U.S. continued to list Syria as a state which allowed so-called "terrorist groups" to use its territory to attack U.S. interests in the region.

Therefore, despite the fact that the meeting could improve U.S.-Syrian relations, the U.S. administration continued to keep Syria on the list of countries sponsoring terrorist groups. That meant, according to Anthony Lake, National Security advisor, the meeting between the presidents would not result in a change of U.S. policy toward Syria. He stated "We are well aware of Syria's support for organizations involved in terrorist acts and its own involvement in the attempt to bomb an El Al jetliner in 1986.… This justifies its continued inclusion on the State Department's list of states which support terrorism. We are thus maintaining sanctions against Syria and have no intention of removing Syria from the terrorism list until and unless it ends its support for these terrorist organizations."[264] The U.S. officials repeatedly said that Syria had long encouraged Lebanese groups attacking Israeli troops in south Lebanon and Palestinian groups opposed to the PLO-Israeli peace agreement.

In general, Syria's international and regional position was an important factor in Syria's approach toward peace in the region. Syria's bargaining position was weakened by the collapse of its chief benefactor, the Soviet Union. That made Syria more

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264. The Jerusalem Post, January 5, 1994: section: News, p. 1.

vulnerable to U.S. hegemony in the region. Hence, Syria's priority was to improve relations with the United States. Having lost its main patron, Syria was eager to appear more flexible and willing to enter into a process that would further U.S. interests in the region.

But Syria's maneuverability was still restricted by the fact that the U.S. Congress would not accept any changes in the U.S.-Syrian relationship until Syria modified its general policy to their satisfaction. The U.S. Congress had long been dominated by the pro-Israeli lobby. That meant that the overall U.S. policy toward Syria would remain unchanged, even though Syria entered the peace process. Hafiz al-Asad was aware of this fact, and of the pro-Israel bias of the Clinton administration in particular.[265] Nevertheless, the peace process was perhaps the only avenue open to Syria to seek better relations with the United States and to convince U.S. officials that Syria's role was indispensable to the process.

During their press conference, President Clinton acknowledged Syria's key role in the peace process. He said "I was personally committed to the objective of a comprehensive and secure peace that would produce genuine reconciliation among the peoples of the Middle East…. I believe Syria is the key to the achievement of an enduring and comprehensive peace that finally will put an end to the conflict between Israel and her Arab neighbors."[266] This acknowledgement pleased Hafiz al-Asad who had long insisted that peace in the Middle East could only be possible through a comprehensive solution that address all Arab-Israeli disputes. In the opening statement at the joint conference, Hafiz al-Asad stated:

> "Syria seeks a just and comprehensive peace with Israel as a strategic choice that secures Arab rights, ends the Israeli occupation and enables our peoples in the region to live in peace, security and dignity. In honor we fought, in honor we negotiate, and in honor we shall make peace. We want an honorable peace for our

265. "When Clinton Meets Assad," The Christian Science Monitor, January 14, 1994, p. 23.
266. "Assad and Clinton Speak: New Commitment to Peace," The New York Times, January 17, 1994, p. A6.

people … we want the peace of the brave -- a genuine peace which can survive and last -- a peace which secures the interests of each side and renders all their rights.”[267]

After the meeting, President Clinton said that he believed Asad sincerely wanted peace: “He is very smart and very tough. I think he has reached the conclusion that it is in the interest of his people, his administration and his legacy to make a meaningful and lasting peace. I believe that.”[268] Asad’s statement, referred to peace as Syria's strategic choice, and the most significantly, was the first instance in which he defined peace as “normal, peaceful relations” with Israel. In the context of a news conference following the meeting, Asad further indicated his flexibility when in response to a question regarding what Syria would be willing to give Israel for a withdrawal from the Golan Heights, Asad signified Syria's understanding of “the requirement for peace” and that of Syria's readiness to “respond to these requirements.”[269] This meant that he was ready to make concessions about the requirement for peace: normalization of relations and Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories.

Asad’s direct reference to achieving “normal, peaceful relations” with Israel was interpreted by the U.S. officials as greatly encouraging and very important; a significant advance for the Syrians since the Israelis had long wanted Syria to define the meaning of peace.[270] President Clinton also was asked if Hafiz al-Asad committed himself to full diplomatic relations with Israel, i.e. establishing an open border, trade, and exchange of embassies. He said, “The short answer is yes. I believe that President Asad has made a clear, forthright and very important statement on normal, peaceful relations.”[271] Accordingly, U.S. officials argued “Assad's language met Israel's demands for a clear Syrian commitment to full peace.”[272] They maintained the words “normal peaceful relations”, and Asad's acknowledgement of Syria's readiness to respond to the

267. “Assad and Clinton Speak: New Commitment to Peace,” p. A6.
268. The Washington Post, January 17, 1994, p. A1.
269. “Assad's Signal: Syria is ready for peace,” Newsday (New York) January 17, 1994, p. 8.
270. The Washington Post, January 17, 1994: p. A1.
271. “Assad Tells Clinton Syria Wants Peace,” The Washington Post, January 17, 1994, p. A1.
272. The Washington Post, January 17, 1994: p. A1.

requirements of peace were considered a major departure for Asad and a significant development in the Syrian-Israeli peace process.

However, Israel responded with skepticism and caution. Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said "Normalization has been mentioned by Syria in the past…. The problem is still, what is the meaning behind this term 'peace' and what is the timetable for achieving this peace and what is the price Israel is going to have to pay for this peace."[273] Peres also maintained that the Syrian leader's priority was improving relations with the United States through making peace with Israel.

In the final analysis, Hafiz al-Asad did not commit Syria to the normalization of relations with Israel in terms and conditions that Israel required. Hafiz al-Asad said, "We want the peace of the brave--a genuine peace which can survive and last, a peace which secures the interests of each side and renders to all their rights. If the leaders of Israel have sufficient courage to respond to this kind of peace, the new era of security and stability in which normal peaceful relations among all shall dawn anew."[274] Asad referred to "normal, peaceful relations" but made them contingent upon Israel's agreement with a "genuine peace" which can protect the interests of all the parties.

In conclusion, the meeting between the Presidents of the U.S. and Syria did not produce any tangible progress in U.S.-Syria relations. The U.S. did not remove Syria's name from the list of states sponsoring terrorist groups, and thereby did not make Syria eligible for U.S. economic aid, investments, and purchase of advanced technology. However, the meeting helped Syria to spell out its basic and uncompromising position and was an opportunity for Syria to promote the importance of its role in regional issues, particularly the Arab-Israeli conflict.

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273. Newsday, January 17, 1994, p. 8.
274. U.S. Department of State, "U.S. and Syria Pledge Cooperation on Middle East Peace Negotiations." Department of State Dispatch Vol. 05 No. 01 (January 3, 1994).

The Hebron massacre

The Clinton-Asad meeting in January 94 encouraged both the Israelis and Syrians to resume their peace negotiations. But before the talks began, the Hebron Massacre[275] took place on February 25, 1994. In this unprecedented incident, an American Israeli Jewish extremist, Dr. Baruch Goldstein, killed forty-eight Palestinian Muslims praying in the ancient Ibrahim Mosque in the holy month of Ramadan in Hebron. The massacre triggered more violence between the Palestinians and Israelis during the rioting that broke out subsequently in Hebron and elsewhere.[276]

Soon afterward, reactions to the carnage were predictable. The massacre had significant repercussions for the broader Middle East peace process. The events exacerbated the already aggravated situation between the Israel and Arabs. As a result of the Hebron massacre and in solidarity with the Palestinians, Arab parties to the peace process broke off their participation in the process and thereby suspended all round of talks.[277] The immediate effect of the massacre was that the Palestinian opponent groups argued the massacre confirmed that peace with Israel would be impossible. However, supporters of the peace process, led by Israeli Prime Minster Rabin condemned the massacre, calling it "a loathsome criminal act of murder." Rabin vowed, "We will do everything necessary to advance the peace talks, to prevent misunderstandings, to remove obstacles in the way and to reach, together, the day of peace…"[278]

Nevertheless, because of the U.S. position in the peace process, especially President Clinton's direct involvement in the peace talks between Syria and Israel, the negotiations were resumed quickly, although the parties did not reach a breakthrough in their deep differences. According to an analysis, "The U.S. position had been that getting Israel and Syria to negotiate seriously was crucial to maintaining momentum in the peace process after the Israeli-Palestinian accord was in place."[279] For that reason,

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275. Peter Shaw-Smith, pp. 107-108.
276. The Los Angeles Times, February 26, 1994, p. A1.
277. The New York Times, February 27, 1994, p. 17.
278. The Los Angeles Times, February 26, 1994, p. A1.
279. "Syria, Jordan, Lebanon Halt Talks to Protest Massacre," The Washington Post, February 28, 1994, p. A14.

President Clinton became directly involved in the Syrian-Israeli track, particularly after the Israelis and Palestinians reached an agreement a year before in September 1993. Therefore, President Clinton met with Hafiz al-Asad in Geneva in January 1994. He also visited Damascus in October 1994 for the first time since President Richard Nixon's visit in 1974 in the aftermath of the 1973 October War. President Clinton seemed determined to visit Syria after Jordan and Israel reached an agreement on October 26, 1994 in order to persuade both Syrians and Israelis to restore a momentum in their bilateral negotiations.

Realizing the difficulties of the peace negotiations, Syria, according to some observers, persuaded other Arab parties to resume the negotiations, and worked toward easing Syrian-Israeli disagreement over the peace talks. Despite the series of setbacks in the Arab-Israeli negotiations during 1994, including the Hebron massacre, Syria's position on resuming the negotiations was a demonstration that peace, as Hafiz al-Asad repeatedly said, was Syria's strategic choice. It was also an indication of Syria's understanding of the linkage between progress in the Syrian-Israeli track, on one hand, and improvement in the relationship with the United States, on the other.

The Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty

On July 25, 1994, King Hussein of Jordan reached an agreement with the Israelis (the Washington Declaration) upon which both countries hoped to end decades of animosity. Although the Declaration was not a peace treaty, it paved the way for a formal peace agreement two months later in October 1994. The "Washington Declaration" of July 1994 led to the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty of October 1994. But once again, this breakthrough in the Arab-Israeli conflict resulting from separate, bilateral negotiations undermined Syria's position in the peace process.

Israel and Jordan had been in a state of war since the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948. Jordan was among the Arab countries that took part in the conflict of 1948. In 1967, Israel captured the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which at that time were under Jordanian control. In the 1973 October War, when Egypt and Syria launched a surprise

attack both from Sinai and the Golan Heights, Jordan did not participate in the attack. According to some observers, Israel and Jordan had covert relations many years before they signed a formal peace agreement. For that reason, Jordan's peace with Israel was not considered as major a breakthrough as that of the PLO accord with the Palestinians a year before in September 1993.

There were several reasons why Jordan was willing to achieve a separate agreement with Israel. Among them the following considerations had enormous effects on Jordan's decision-making process: Jordan's vulnerability, the impact of the Oslo accord, the difficulties in the Syrian-Israeli track, and Jordan's need to end its isolation and restore its relationship with the United States.[280]

First of all, Jordan's geopolitical and economic position in the Middle East made it militarily and financially vulnerable to U.S. hegemonic power and Israel's superiority in the region. Jordan's stance in the 1990 Gulf War and its opposition to the use of military force against Iraqi occupation of Kuwait not only alienated it from the United States and its allies but also made Jordan more vulnerable to pressure from them.

Second, the impact of Israel's accord with the PLO—the Oslo Accord—was significant for the Jordanians. Although the accord undermined Arab's unity and brought more uncertainties and ambiguities to the whole peace process, Jordan enjoyed its outcomes, upon which it could pursue its own national interests without fear of being influenced by other regional powers, mostly Syria. The accord weakened Syria's position in the peace process while it helped Jordan to distance itself from Syria's leverage. The Accord also made it possible for Jordan to ease its tensions with the Israelis in a separate, bilateral deal, rather than waiting for Syria and Israel to reach an agreement.

Third, realizing the difficulties on the Syrian-Israeli track, in which neither Syria nor Israel were willing to concede to each other's immediate demands, King Hussein decided to put an end to the state of belligerency with Israel fearing the whole peace

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280. "Filling In the Peace Map," The New York Times, July 26, 1994, p. A18.

process would be stalemated if Syria and Israel could not reach a meaningful agreement. Moreover, the Madrid peace process was based upon bilateral negotiations between Israel and each of its Arab neighbors. So, from Jordan's point of view, there was no need to consider progress on other Arab-Israeli tracks.

Fourth, Jordan's position during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, in which Jordan supported Saddam Hussein and disregard the UN resolutions against Iraq, led to the disastrous consequences of Jordan's isolation in the international and regional community. Therefore, in a move aimed at ending its isolation, King Hussein completed an agreement with Israel and ended the state of war between the two countries. In the past, Syria had enjoyed a considerable ability to challenge any unilateral solutions to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Although it could not prevent Egypt's initiatives in the late 1970s, Syria was strongly opposed the Camp David Accord and severed its relations with Egypt. However, due to enormous changes in the international and regional arena, Syria could neither manipulate Jordan's initiatives nor could it prevent Jordan from making a separate peace deal with Israel.

Finally, Jordan's need to reestablish its relations with the United States was another factor influencing its decision to pursue a separate agreement with Israel. Having good diplomatic relations with the United States could underpin Jordan's economy, which had long been suffering economic crises. This remarkable change in Jordan's foreign policy was a minimum prerequisite for U.S. economic and diplomatic support to Jordan.

Because of King Hussein's support for Iraq during the Gulf war, and his violation of the United Nations sanctions against Iraq, the Congress cut off U.S. economic aid to Jordan. However, after Jordan's decision to participate in the Madrid peace conference, the U.S. resumed its economic and military aid. Moreover, to reward Jordan's full cooperation in the Middle East peace talks, specifically, King Hussein's strategic decision to bring an end to the Jordanian-Israeli belligerency, the Congress responded positively to President Clinton's plea to forgive Jordan's $700 million debt to the United

States.[281] The decision was also aimed at encouraging other Arab parties to complete their bilateral negotiations with Israel in order to benefit from U.S. economic assistance.

The effect of the Jordan-Israel peace treaty on Syria

The accord once again undermined Syria's policy of comprehensive peace. It was a remarkable breakthrough because it did not involve any Israeli territorial concessions. Syria's quest for a collective Arab position in negotiating with the Israelis was badly damaged when Jordan pursued its own peace initiatives. The accord brought more ambiguity and uncertainty for Syria. Syria lost its credibility as an Arab peace coordinator, and therefore could no longer insist on a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. However, Jordan's decision was based upon the grounds that the time was ripe to pursue its own national interests. But such a policy was not acceptable to the Syrians[282] because it could pave the way for Israeli integration into the Middle East.

From the beginning, when Syria realized that coexistence with the Israelis would be the only remaining option, Syria had continued to maintain that the peace process in the Middle East was a struggle to prevent Israel's hegemony in the Arab world. Regardless of the Arab-Israeli peace process, Syria viewed the Zionist movement as a severe challenge for Syria and for the Arab countries. Syria opposed reconciliation of relations with Israel and did not attend the multilateral talks fearing that the talks would legitimize Israel's integration into the Middle East before Israel committed to withdraw from the occupied Arab territories.

In January 1994, Syria's vice president, Khaddam, reiterated that "the Zionist challenge and the foreign designs" were the most serious challenges for the Arab nations.[283] Khaddam expressed that Arab nations had faced these challenges under very complicated circumstances: the lack of balance in the international arena and the

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281. The New York Times, July 27, 1994, p. A8.
282. Viewing the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole, interdependent process that was intertwined with other Arab-Israeli disputes, Syria had long opposed any unilateral agreement, which at best would only inadequately address some of the Arab-Israeli disputes.
283. Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Raymond Hinnebusch, p. 168.

fragmentation and division in inter-Arab relations. He emphasized that the Arabs were suffering from this fragmentation; all joint pan-Arab values had vanished and were replaced by the Arab states' national interest while Zionism remained the most serious challenge because the movement was founded upon "an ideology and a strategy based on the establishment of a major power in this region."[284] From Syria's point of view, separate and unilateral peace treaties between Israel and the Arab parties had severely undermined the Arab struggle with Israel.

The Jordanian peace treaty had some ramifications for Syria. It significantly reduced Syria's maneuverability, so it could not bargain anymore for the Palestinians and Jordanians who had already reached an agreement with the Israelis. The Jordanian peace deal, also like the Oslo accord, had substantial benefits for the Israelis. It helped Israel establish commercial relations with the other Arab countries, including the states of the Gulf Council Cooperation. Moreover, by signing the peace treaty with Jordan, Israel could successfully isolate Syria from negotiating on other Arab-Israeli disputes. The accord also paved the way for Israel to participate in the first regional economic conference—the Casablanca Conference in November 1994.[285] Syria refused to attend the conference on the grounds that it would legitimize Israel's integration into the Middle East before Israel conceded Arab rights.

In reaction to the Jordanian unilateral peace treaty, Hafiz al-Asad stated that the treaty caused great damage to Arab interests. He said, "For decades, Syria waged the Arabs' battle against the Israeli occupation, to liberate the land and recover the [Arabs'] rights…. We fought for the land and the recovery of rights, and the conflict continued to achieve that aim…. We strove for a just and comprehensive peace that would restore land and rights." Asad continued that in order to achieve Arab rights, Syria had based its policy upon coordination with the Arab parties participating in the peace process. Asad argued that coordination between the Arab parties was necessary because "by all

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284. "Syrian Vice-President Khaddam discusses Arab unity, course of peace process," BBC Summary of World Broadcasts January 6, 1994: Part 4 Middle East, ME/1888/MED.
285. "The Casablanca Conference – winner and loser," Middle East International No. 488, (November 18, 1994): p. 18.

standards, unilateral negotiations can never be in the interests of a single Arab party, which is weak (on its own) and has no option but to submit to the pressures and make concessions." Asad explicitly stated, "We wanted to help the Arab parties, but instead we were surprised by the Palestinian-Israeli agreement, followed by the Jordanian -Israeli agreement. I do not want to discuss what they (the Palestinians and Jordanians) arrived at, but reality makes unambiguously clear the enormity of the damage that unilateralism has inflicted on the core of the causes for which we have long fought and struggled."[286]

In conclusion, the Jordanian peace accord had several implications for Syria. It led to the failure of Syria's comprehensive policy. It also brought more pressure on the Syrians to conclude an agreement with the Israelis. The accord also essentially restricted Syria's alternatives in negotiating with the Israelis; the prospect of concluding a separate peace remained Syria's only alternative. Given that other Arab parties participating in the peace process decided to not wait for a solution in the Syrian-Israeli track, Syria could no longer coordinate the final outcome of the peace process. That severely undermined Syria's position in its own track with the Israelis, too. The only thing that Syria could insist on was that, as Asad repeatedly said, "Syria recognizes the importance of a peace that guarantees a full withdrawal, and it recognizes that peace has its objective requisites and will fulfill the objective requisites of peace on which agreement is reached."[287]

Clinton Visit to Damascus (October 1994)

President Clinton's visit to Damascus was the first in 20 years by an American president. It was surprising that Clinton decided to visit a country that had been branded a sponsor of international terrorism by the United States. But Clinton decided to visit Damascus on the grounds that Syria's role in the peace process was indispensable and that the United States would remain a peace mediator between Syria and Israel.

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286. "Assad's Speech to Parliament," <u>Mideast Mirror</u>, September 12, 1994, Section Syria, Vol. 08, No. 175.
287. "Assad's Speech to Parliament,".

The meeting reflected a grudging, mutual respect between the two countries. On one hand, because of the U.S. strategic relations with Israel[288] and the nature of Syrian-Israeli disputes, Syria believed that the constant U.S. role as a third party in the negotiations with the Israelis was essential. On the other hand, the U.S. maintained that Syria's role in the Middle East peace process was crucial for the entire process to reach a meaningful conclusion that would assure both Israel's security and integration into the region. Therefore, the meeting was expected to improve U.S.-Syrian bilateral relations, since the two countries reached an understanding, that with mutual cooperation, they could achieve their national interests in the region.

However, it was clear that the U.S. president's visit to Damascus would not bring a breakthrough on the Syrian-Israeli track. The purpose was to reassure Syria that the United States would play a constructive role as a full partner and an honest broker to advance the Syrian-Israeli track. As President Clinton stated in a joint press conference with the Syrian president, "the role of Syria in the security and stability of the region is absolutely critical. I don't think we can finish a comprehensive peace or maintain peace in the region unless there is peace between Syria and Israel."[289] He furthered stated "A Syrian-Israeli agreement is key to achieving a comprehensive peace. Given Syria's important regional role, it will inevitably broaden the circle of Arab states willing to embrace peace, and it will build confidence throughout the area that peace will endure."[290]

President Clinton also reaffirmed Syria's stance on the peace process; Syria insisted that peace be based on the relevant UN resolutions and the principle of trading land for peace. Clinton said, "For peace to endure, it must also be just. Peace between Israel and Syria must be based on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of land for peace. Peace must also be real. More than mere words

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[288]. Helena Cobban, The Superpowers and the Syrian-Israeli Conflict, pp. 78-103. David W. Lesch, ed. The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999). Pp. 227-243.

289. "Assad commits to peaceful normal relations with Israel," Mideast Mirror, October 27, 1994, Section: The Arab World; Vol. 08, No. 208.

290. "Clinton In The Middle East," The New York Times, October 28, 1994, p. A21.

on paper, more than just the absence of war, nations must establish normal, peaceful relations." [291]

In the joint press conference, Hafiz al-Asad also clarified Syria's position on the peace process; he reaffirmed to President Clinton that Syria would pursue peace as a strategic choice. Asad furthered defined peace as a process that "secures Arab rights, ends the Israeli occupation of the Arab lands in conformity with Security Council Resolutions 242, 338 and 425 and enables all peoples of the region to live in peace, security and dignity." As one important step in progress toward reconciliation of the Syrian-Israeli conflict, Hafiz al-Asad stated Syria's readiness "to commit itself to the objective requirements of peace through the establishment of peaceful normal relations with Israel in return for Israel's full withdrawal from the Golan to the line of June 4, 1967 and from the South of Lebanon."[292]

Due to Syria's vulnerability in the aftermath of the PLO and Jordan's separate peace treaties with Israel, Syria had no alternative but to adjust its foreign policy from negotiating on behalf of the Arabs to bargaining for sovereignty over its own territories, the Golan Heights. This revision was a remarkable breakthrough in Syria's foreign policy that could advance the Syrian-Israeli track. Up to this point, Asad had refused to explicitly talk about the nature of peace and "peaceful normal relations" with Israel. Peace meant for the Syrians the end of belligerency, and not diplomatic relations. But due to Israel's inflexibility, no significant progress was made until that time. Also Syria's suspicion about Israel's attempted domination in the region brought more difficulties to the negotiations between the two countries, and finally led to a series of stalemates, some of them persisting for a rather long period of time. Therefore, neither President Clinton's meeting with president Hafiz al-Asad in January 1994 nor his visit to Syria in October 1994 could bridge the enormous gap between Syrian and Israeli positions in the peace process.

291. "Clinton In The Middle East," p. A21.
292. "Assad commits to peaceful normal relations with Israel," Mideast Mirror, October 27, 1994, Section: The Arab World; Vol. 08, No. 208.

However, Clinton's visit to Damascus highlighted Syria's stance on international terrorism; the U.S. had accused Syria of having a role in sponsoring terrorist groups residing in Syria and the parts of Lebanon territories which were under Syrian control. The most troublesome episode in Clinton's visit to Syria was that, despite U.S. expectations, Hafiz al-Asad refused to publicly condemn the terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians that had taken place a few days before.[293] Instead, Asad implicitly accused the United States of including Syria's name on the terrorist list because of Syria's conflict with Israel. Asad said, "The problem of terrorism is a charge made because of the conflict between us and Israel. That is a fact. None of you, in my opinion, Arabs and non-Arabs, can help but know that the reason for the terrorism charge is not that the Syrians and those who are in Syria practice terrorist acts. Rather, the reasons have to do with the position on Israel. That is why this charge has been made for so long. And despite the desire of individuals and officials in Syria and the United States to settle this problem in different periods, we have not arrived at such a settlement so far."[294]

In conclusion, Clinton's visit to Damascus did not produce any tangible results. Syria did not commit to resuming direct negotiations with the Israelis. Moreover, although Hafiz al-Asad talked about "peaceful, normal relations" with Israel, he did not further explain the nature and meaning of peace. Nor did the visit improve U.S. relations with Syria. The U.S. administration did not remove Syria's name from the "terrorist list", and therefore did not provide to Syria economic aid and technical support.

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293. Clinton later said, "I regret that President Assad did not take the opportunity to say in public what he said to me in private, about his deep regret about the loss of innocent lives, and particularly the bus bombing," (The New York Times, October 28, 1994, p. A1.)
294. "Assad commits to peaceful normal relations with Israel," Mideast Mirror, October 27, 1994, Section: The Arab World; Vol. 08, No. 208.

Chapter 7

Progress on the Syrian-Israeli track

1994-1996

Introduction

As mentioned, Clinton's meeting with Hafiz al-Asad in January 1994 and his visit to Syria later that year in November focused U.S. attention on Syria's peace track with Israel. This, in return, encouraged Syria and Israel to end the prolonged stalemate in their peace negotiations. As a result, Syria and Israel held several peace negotiating sessions under American sponsorship during 1994 and 1995.

In a remarkable move toward reconciliation of Syrian-Israeli disputes, the Americans proposed that the Army Chiefs of Staff of both Syria and Israel hold private negotiations in an effort to break their deadlock. Both Syria and Israel accepted the proposal and the Chiefs of Staff met for the first time in December 1994 in Washington to discuss security issues. Due to the deep differences in Syrian and Israeli concepts of peace, the negotiations between Amnon Shahak and Hikmat al-Shihabi, respectively the Israeli and Syrian chiefs of staff, failed to produce any measurable progress. However, still maintaining that progress on the security issues would make it easier to make progress on other issues, the United States persuaded Syria and Israel to resume their negotiations on security arrangements.[295] Consequently, Syria and Israel's chiefs of staff met again in Washington in June 1995.

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295. <u>The Los Angeles Times</u>, June 11, 1995, p. A6.

Chiefs of Staff Meeting I (December 1994)

On December 21, 1994, after months of negotiations, the Israeli and Syrian Chiefs of Staff met in Washington D.C. According to the head of Syria's negotiating team, while Clinton was in Damascus in November 1994, he persuaded Hafiz al-Asad to begin discussing security issues in an attempt to further progress on the Syrian-Israeli track.[296] At that time, the New York Times reported that both countries held private, high-level peace negotiations under U.S. sponsorship in Washington for the few months prior to the Chiefs of Staff meeting in December 1994.[297] Itamar Rabinovich, Israel's Ambassador to Washington and its chief negotiator, met with Syria's Chief of Staff, Hikmat Shihabi. Also, Walid al-Moualem, Syria's Ambassador to Washington and the deputy head of its negotiating team, met with Israeli Chief of Staff, Ehud Barak.[298]

The negotiations between the Army Chiefs of Staff failed to bring an end to Syrian-Israeli disputes over security arrangements. Maintaining that "officers on their own cannot reach a decision," Syria, according to Foreign Minster Farouq al-Shara', viewed such a meeting as an Israeli tactic to delay the negotiations.[299] But the Clinton administration persuaded the Syrians to continue their negotiations with the Israelis on security issues. Syrian and Israeli chief negotiators had several meetings in early 1995. The negotiations led to a mutual understanding on security issues, titled "The Aims and Principles of the Security Arrangements." Although this achievement was neither peace treaty nor a comprehensive agreement on security issues, it was considered a framework for progress in the Syrian-Israeli track.

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296. Helena Cobban, The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks: 1991-1996 and Beyond (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1999), p. 66.

297. "Syria and Israel Said to Conduct Talks in Private," The New York Times, December 31, 1994, Section 1, p.1.

298. Itamar Rabinovich, The Brink of Peace: the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations, p. 175.

299. Helena Cobban, The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks: 1991-1996 and Beyond, p. 66.

The Aims and Principles of the Security Arrangements

In May 1995, Syrian and Israeli officials agreed to an unprecedented document that spelled out the objectives and principles of security arrangements between their countries. The agreement came at the time that a meeting between the two chiefs of staff in December 1994 failed to produce any progress on the Syrian-Israeli track. Aimed at renewing the talks, President Clinton encouraged Hafiz al-Asad to resume the negotiations. According to the head of Syrian delegation to the peace talks, Al-Moualem, "President Asad instead suggested that both sides, after analyzing why the talks between the chiefs of staff had failed, should reach an agreement on the aims and the principles of the security arrangement, to set a framework."[300] According to Al-Moualem, the importance of this agreement was that "it established the principle that the security of one side must not be at the expense of the security of the other side—the principle of equality, mutuality, and the fact that any arrangement on one side must be equal on the other."[301] The aims of this agreement, according to the Christian Science Monitor, included "reducing, if not almost totally eliminating, the danger of a surprise attack; preventing or limiting daily friction along the border; and reducing the danger of a large-scale offensive, invasion, or comprehensive war."[302] Helena Cobban quoted the principles as follows:

1. "The legitimate need of each of the parties is that the security of one party or the guarantees thereof should not be achieved at the expense of the other…"
2. "[T]he security arrangements will be equal, mutual, and reciprocal on both sides…[and] if in the course of the negotiations, in transpires that the implementation of equality, from the geographic dimension, proves impossible with regard to specific arrangements, then experts from both sides will discuss the problematic aspects of the specific arrangement and solve them—whether through

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300. "Fresh Light On The Syrian-Israeli Peace Negotiations, An Interview With Ambassador Walid Al-Moualem," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. XXVI, No. 2 (Winter 1997): p. 92.
301. "Fresh Light On The Syrian-Israeli Peace Negotiations, An Interview With Ambassador Walid Al-Moualem," p. 92.
302. The Christian Science Monitor, January 9, 1997, p. 19.

modification (including additions or subtractions) or through some other agreed upon and acceptable solution with a single variable….”

3. “Security arrangements must coincide with each party's sovereignty and territorial integrity…. [T]he arrangements will be confined to the relevant areas on both sides of the border.”[303]

Helena Cobban concluded that, “According to participants, this agreement was possible only because the Rabin government had previously agreed to entertain the idea of pulling Israel completely out of the Syrian territory occupied in 1967 on the Golan.”[304] Ultimately, this achievement paved the way for the second meeting of the Syrian-Israeli chiefs of staff in June 1995, COS II.

Chiefs of Staff Meeting II (June 1995)

The optimism that followed the agreement on the Aims and Principles of the Security Arrangements led to the resumption of talks between Syria and Israel. With U.S. mediation, the two countries resumed their negotiations on security arrangements, one of several important disputes that had long prevented both sides from reaching a comprehensive solution. The previous rounds of negotiations had broken off on the grounds that Syria wanted complete Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights before normalization of relations with Israel, but Israel wanted a gradual, even partial, withdrawal after normalization of relations with Syria.

The stalemate in the negotiations was ended by U.S. mediation in May 1995; the American Secretary of State visited President Hafez al-Asad in order to persuade Syria to return to the negotiating table. Syria agreed to another round of military chiefs of staff negotiations in June 1995, hoping that it could make further progress in the Syrian-Israeli track. The military delegations, headed by Israel's Lieutenant-General Amnon Shahak and Syria's Lieutenant-General Hikmat Shihabi, met on 27th through the 29th June 1995

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303. Helena Cobban, The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks: 1991-1996 and Beyond, pp. 68-69.
304. Helena Cobban, “Stop Waffling, Mr. President, Your Leadership Is Needed,” The Christian Science Monitor, January 9, 1997, p. 19.

in Washington. The meeting itself was a remarkable advance in Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations, but it was ultimately disappointing since the chiefs of staff could not reach an agreement to further the negotiations. According to Donald Neff, the parties agreed on the need to discuss four basic subjects: "a demilitarized zone separating Israeli and Syrian troops on the Golan Heights; a 'limited forces' zone behind the militarized zone; an early warning system; and confidence building measures such as joint patrols, exchanges of military delegations and a special communications network."[305]

Although Syria agreed to a demilitarized zone and a 'limited forces' zone, the negotiations failed to produce tangible progress because there were still wide and deep differences between the parties: Israel sought to remain on some strategic parts of the Golan Heights in order to observe Syria's military movements using their own early warning system. Syria strongly disagreed with this proposition on the grounds that it would violate its national sovereignty. Israel had already sought confidence-building measures to advance normalization of relations with Syria before they agreed to commit to the concept of total withdrawal from Syria's territories. Syria asserted that the normalization of relations and the confidence-building measures that Israel insisted on would only occur after the implementation of a peace treaty.

Nevertheless, there was growing optimism for progress on issues such as the extent of the demilitarized zone and limited force zone. Although Syria insisted that overall security arrangements should be symmetrical, it made a remarkable concession in late May 1995: it would no longer insist on equal and symmetrical withdrawal of Israeli and Syrian forces from the Golan Heights. Because Syria has more territory than Israel, and in order to give the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations momentum, Syria showed more flexibility on the symmetrical extent of withdrawal of both countries forces from the Golan Heights. Israel argued that symmetrical withdrawal of Israeli forces would mean that a large portion of northern Israel would be demilitarized.

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305. Donald Neff, "Barren Parley," <u>Middle East International</u> no. 504, July 7, 1995, p. 9.

However, it was obvious that such optimism and progress on discussing the details of security arrangements would not bridge the differences between Syria and Israel. Even if both chiefs of staff could reach an agreement on details of security arrangements, the implementation of the agreement could happen only if the Israelis agreed to withdraw from the Golan Heights. Since it was still unclear if Israel would be willing to commit to withdraw from Syria's territory, the meetings between the chiefs of staff were actually "talking more about talking than engaged in substantive negotiations. Nonetheless, U.S. officials believe that it is better than not talking at all. So they continue to encourage more meeting[s] on technical security issues as a way to give Prime Minister Rabin and President Asad time to make the basic and fateful decision whether peace is really in their own and their nation's interest."[306]

The Wye Plantation Talks

After a six-month interruption in the Syrian-Israeli peace talks, the negotiations resumed at Wye Plantation in Maryland on December 27, 1995. Under United States auspices, Syria and Israel renewed their negotiations aimed at ending the state of war and arranging timing and security of Israel's withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

In the aftermath of the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, the prospect for peace between Syria and Israel had dimmed.[307] The Israelis were deeply split about returning the Golan Heights to Syria. Rabin's successor, Acting Prime Minister Shimon Peres, lacked both Rabin's military credentials and moral authority. Therefore he had not enough power to persuade Israelis that Syria could be trusted and that they could obtain security and full relations with Syria in return for territorial concessions.

However, the assassination of Rabin and the succession of Peres changed the atmosphere and created a new opportunity for peace negotiations between Syria and Israel. This intensive new phase of negotiations came after a rather long hiatus in the

306. Donald Neff, p. 9.
307. Benny Morris, "After Rabin," pp. 77-87.

talks. After more than four years of negotiations aimed at ending the state of war between Syria and Israel, the two countries remained deeply distrustful of each other. However, a growing number of Syrians had come to accept the possibility of a peace with the state of Israel.

But the previous rounds of negotiations had failed to produce any progress because of continuing disagreement about Israel's withdrawal from the Golan Heights and its insistence on normalization of relations prior to withdrawal. After the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Syria showed greater seriousness about reaching an agreement with the new Prime Minister Shimon Peres. Peres also showed more interest in reaching a solution with Syria. That was the factor that encouraged the U.S. administration to become optimistic about possible important progress in the Syrian-Israeli disputes.

Moreover, Israel's initiatives in concluding a separate peace with the PLO and Jordan caused Syria's leadership to review their negotiating position. Syria's inability to restrain other Arab parties from concluding a separate, bilateral peace treaty paved a way for Syrians to deal with the Israelis based on their own national interests: the unconditional return of the Golan Heights. The discussions at the Wye Plantation were designed to advance Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations on the grounds that Israel would agree to withdraw from the Golan Heights, and in return Syria would offer full peace.

Therefore, the U.S. encouraged both Syria and Israel to resume their suspended talks. Three rounds of talks took place in late 1995 and early 1996. Meeting under United States auspices, the Syrian and Israeli negotiating teams represented respectively by Walid al-Muallim[308] and Uri Savir.[309] The U.S. group was led by Clinton's special Middle East envoy Dennis Ross. The first round of talks took place December 27-29, 1995 and January 3-5, 1996. Encouraged by the progress in the negotiations, U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher visited Syria and Israel in early January 1996 to

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308. Syria's ambassador to the U.S.
309. Director-General of Israel's foreign ministry.

bridge the gap between the negotiating teams, and to persuade Syria and Israel to allow their military officials to join the Wye Plantation peace discussion.

The second round of talks, which did include senior military officials, occurred January 24-26 and January 29-31, 1996. According to some sources, the Israelis tried to expand these talks into full-scale negotiations like the negotiations that they concluded with the Jordanians. Syria, as they did before, insisted that discussion about other issues, like water and economic cooperation, could only be made after Israel's commitment to withdraw from Syria's territories.[310]

Fearing that the huge gap between Syria and Israel might derail the whole peace process, Secretary Christopher undertook another mission to the region in early February 1996 in order to accelerate the search for peace between the two countries. The visit failed to bring a breakthrough to the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations. Syrian radio, which usually represents the official Syrian view, asserted "Israel is hostile to real peace because it wants to hold on to land and impose its hegemony over the region."[311]

Following Christopher's visit, the third round of Wye Plantation talks was convened February 27-29, 1996, and was supposed to resume the following week. The negotiations, however, were suspended by the Israelis on March 4,1996. It was obvious that there was no hope of reaching a solution because of an early Israeli election and the simultaneous Palestinian bombing of Israeli targets. The early election in Israel brought a pause in the peace process.[312] Accordingly, Peres was unable and of course unwilling to make any territorial concessions before the election, which was scheduled for May 1996. The Golan Heights was one of several important issues in the election; the right-wing alliance was opposed to any territorial concessions and therefore campaigned against Shimon Peres, assuming he intended to remove settlers from the Golan Heights.

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310. Godfrey Jansen, "More talks about talks," Middle East International no. 517, January 19, 1996: pp. 4-5.
311. Godfrey Jansen, "More talks about talks," p. 5.
312. For more information see: "Peace put on hold," Middle East International no. 519, February 16, 1996: p. 8.

The Achievement of the Wye talks

The Wye Plantation talks were remarkably different in structure and content from the previous Syrian-Israeli rounds of negotiations. The talks that opened on December 27, 1995 were, in their way, a breakthrough. For the first time, Syria agreed to negotiate terms of normalization of relations prior to Israel's commitment to withdraw from the entire Golan Heights. At the Wye talks, the Syrian and Israeli negotiators discussed different aspects of the Syrian-Israeli disputes over the nature of peace, security arrangements, and other issues related to the future of Syrian-Israeli relations. In an assessment, Syria's chief of the negotiating team, Ambassador Moualem, described the achievements of the Wye talks as "serious and useful." He said "the result of the talks show that it is possible to achieve substantive progress on the main issues despite the existence of difficulties and gap between the positions of the two sides on some basic elements of peace."[313] Moualem also said,

> "We completed 75 percent of the work of negotiating an agreement. We agreed that there would be a complete Israeli withdrawal, to be implemented in two stages—though there was still a gap on the total implementation time, with them requiring three years, and us offering sixteen months. Regarding security arrangements, we agreed there would be early warning from air and space; zones of demilitarization and zones of limited forces in the area from Qunerita to Safad, that is, the "relevant areas"—though we still disagreed on the types and precise locations of these deployments. We even agreed on some confidence-building measures. Regarding normalization, I agreed on nine of the fifteen elements that were on the table."[314]

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313. Helena Cobban, <u>The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks: 1991-1996 and Beyond</u>, p. 134. Quoted from "Syria's al-Mu'allim: Talks Serious, Useful," Syrian Arab Television Network (Damascus), in Arabic, January 5, 1996; as translated in FBIS-NES-96-008.
314. Helen Cobban's interview with Ambassador Muoalm, Washington, D.C., June 1999: Quoted from her book: <u>The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks: 1991-1996 and Beyond</u>, p. 136.

On their part, (although they still avoided clarifying the extent of a possible withdrawal from the Golan Heights), the Israelis expressed satisfaction with the ongoing negotiations. In an interview, Israel's chief negotiator, Uri Savir, said, "I am less doubtful than in the past about the Syrians determination to attain peace—real peace, as the Syrian call it…. We heard the Syrians also saying that an Israeli-Syrian peace agreement will put an end to the Middle East conflict, which is definitely a step forward."[315]

The Americans also confirmed that both parties achieved considerable progress in the negotiations. At the end of first round of talks, "Chief US negotiator Dennis Ross expressed his delight that more had been achieved in their six days of talks so far than during the four years of Israeli-Syrian negotiations that had gone before."[316] The Clinton administration took an active role in the negotiations, participating as a full partner in all sessions. Warren Christopher, the U.S. Secretary of State, went on two diplomatic missions to the Middle East after each round of talks, aiming to bridge the huge gap between the Syrian and Israeli points of view regarding the Golan Heights, the nature of peace, and security arrangements.

Issues under discussion in the Wye Plantation talks

The two most important issues under discussion in the Wye Plantation talks were the nature of peace and the issue of the Golan Heights. Although Peres placed priority on reaching an agreement with the Syrians, these issues continued to be intractable. Peres emphasized, "the main gap between Israel and Syria was over the nature of peace, reasserting that the depth of Israeli withdrawal would depend on the depth of peace."[317]

Syria, according to various sources, had promised full peace in exchange for full withdrawal. But the problem was the enormous gap between the two countries' points of view concerning the nature of peace. According to some Middle East observers, "As far as Damascus is concerned 'full peace' is, in itself, a great concession to Israel because,

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315. Helena Cobban, <u>The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks: 1991-1996 and Beyond</u>, p. 134 quoted from FBIS-NES-96-008.
316. Quoted from Helena Cobban, <u>The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks: 1991-1996 and Beyond</u>, p. 134.
317. <u>Middle East International</u> no. 516, January 5, 1996: p. 8.

according to Security Council Resolution 242, on which the peace process is meant to be based, the Arabs should renounce belligerency in exchange for withdrawal from occupied land."[318]

The terms of full peace for the Syrians signified at least three things: an end to the state of war between Syria and Israel, balanced security arrangements, and the finalizing of disputed borders. Syria repeatedly stated, "full peace involves peaceful relations but not necessarily friendly relations and normalization."[319] The Syrian line was: "we have peace with many countries but close relations with only a few."[320] However, the Israelis envisioned full peace as not just normal relationship. They wanted Syria to end its good relations with Iran, to contain Islamic militants in neighboring Lebanon, and to close the Damascus headquarters of rejectionist Palestinian groups.[321]

Economic cooperation was an important issue in the content of normalization of relations between Syria and Israel. One of Israel's main goals was the integration into the Middle Eastern Market, and because of that they wanted Syria to open its borders and markets to Israeli goods. Because of its economic position, Syria was deeply concerned that the impact of the stronger Israeli economy on Syria would cause intense domestic problems. In an interview, Ambassador Moualem expressed Syria's position:

"They wanted open borders, open markets for their goods, and so on. This would have an obvious effect on our own economy. Our economic regulations are not against them; we do not open our markets to any country. And how can you integrate two economies when one has a per capita income of $900 per year and other has a per capita income of $15,000 per year? Such integration is not possible, so we discussed a transitional period during which we could raise our

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318. Michael Jansen, "Differences on full peace," <u>Middle East International</u> no. 516, January 5 1996: p.8.
319. Michael Jansen, p.8.
320. Michael Jansen, p.8.
321. These demands would have required a complete change in Syria's politics and a total transformation of power in Syria.

economy to the level where there can be competition without undue hardship on our society."[322]

Obviously, what the Israelis wanted extended beyond just a peace treaty. The Israelis simply wanted a peace treaty with Syria that would include full normalization of relations with Syria; a treaty that would allow them to remain in some strategic parts of the Golan Heights for security reasons. Moreover, Israel's term of full peace would, ultimately, force Syria to capitulate to Israel's increasing demands. As we saw, Israel had long tried to link the peace treaty with full normalization of relations with Syria; Israeli officials on several occasions said that the geographic depth of withdrawal would depend on the depth of peace.

In contrast, Syria was prepared to end the state of belligerency and to give Israel a peace that at last would only include recognition of mutual and legitimate rights of both countries. Anything more than formal relations, from Syria's point of view, would not only take time, but would also require Syria to sacrifice its national interests. According to an observer, "The Israelis may have to learn the hard way that the Arabs are prepared to tolerate them but not to love them."[323] The essential problem was that the Israelis based their argument on a policy that had "neither legitimacy nor morality" on its side, because "it is using land taken by force as a bargaining counter to gain diplomatic advantage. No country nor any international accords, such as the UN Charter, condone such actions. In theory at least, the aggressor should not be allowed to profit from its use of force."[324]

The Suspension of Talks

The Wye talks, which brought new opportunities to the Syrian-Israeli negotiations, were ended by the Israelis on March 4, 1996 before the completion of the

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322. "Fresh Light On The Syrian-Israeli Peace Negotiations, An Interview With Ambassador Walid Al-Moualem," p. 92.
323. Michael Jansen, p. 8.
324. Middle East International no. 516, January 5, 1996: p. 7.

third round. There were several reasons the negotiations were suspended; the two most important were the early election proposal and the threat of suicide bombers.

Peres's decision to hold an early election brought a rather long period of forty months stalemate in the Syrian-Israeli negotiations. Under the shadow of elections, Peres was not able to focus on the Syrian-Israeli track while he was faced intense opposition by the Likud Party, particularly by Binyamin Netanyahu, Likud's nominee for the Prime Minster post. The election campaign was intense because for the first time, in Israel's history, a direct election for Israel's new prime minister supposed to be held separate from the elections for Knesset. The Golan Heights was a main issue in the elections. The Likud right wing alliance campaigned against any territorial concession to the Syrians. They realized that "the Golan Heights was a potentially valuable wedge issue that could split traditional Labor voters away from their leadership and bring them over either to Likud or at least to Third Way, which was planning to field its own list of candidates in the election."[325]

Less than two weeks after Peres's announcement to hold an early election, on February 25, 1996, a Palestinian suicide bomber blew himself up on a bus killing twenty-four people in Jerusalem. On February 26, another suicide bomber blew himself up which led to killing of an Israeli solder. Also two more suicide bombings came a week later, which brought a total of Israeli causalities to thirty-one in several separate blasts.[326] The emotional effects of suicide bombings were enormous on both the coming election and the Syrian-Israeli talks. The Israeli team that had been preparing to complete the third rounds of Wye talks received instruction to return home, and consequently the whole process was brought to an end by Peres's March 4, 1996 decision to suspend the negotiations with Syria. Fifty-two months of direct Syrian-Israeli negotiations that had been launched at the Madrid Conference in October 1991 ended without an agreement, although both sides made significant progress during months of intense negotiations.

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325. Helena Cobban, <u>The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks: 1991-1996 and Beyond</u>, pp. 144-145.
326. For more information about the Palestinian suicide bombers see: Lamis Andoni, "Searching for Answers: Gaza's Suicide Bombers," <u>Journal of Palestine Studies</u> Vol. 26, No. 4 (Summer 1997): pp. 33-45.

Conclusion

In conclusion, at the Wye talks both Israelis and Syrians achieved a remarkable understanding of necessary steps to resolve their disputes. Although, the negotiations did not produce any formal agreement because Israel did not commit itself to withdraw from the Golan Heights and Syria did not concede to a list of political demands put forward by the Israelis.[327] The Israelis wanted to gain symbolic gestures by demanding that Syria agree to such key issues as an exchange of embassies, trade, tourism and so on, prior to Israeli evacuation from the Golan Heights. These symbolic gestures were necessary, from the Israeli point of view, to give the Israeli public the illusion that they were getting back something instead of giving up the Golan Heights. In contrast, concession to such demands was viewed by Hafiz al-Asad "as extortion, an attempt to make him pay in kind for a territory that rightfully belong[s] to him."[328]

Moreover, the sense of horror that came after several suicide bombings in Israel in early 1996 had immediate effects on historic moves towards peace between Syria and Israel. It had also an important impact on Israel's early elections that were to be held in May 1996; Peres lost the elections. The bombings brought an end to the negotiations between the Syrians and Israelis that had been scheduled to continue on February 27, 1996 as part of completion of the Wye talks. Besides the Syrian talks, the bombings also jeopardized the entire peace process between the Palestinians and Israelis. The bombings undermined negotiations on the final status of Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza Strip that were scheduled to begin in early May 1996.

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327. There were other reasons the negotiations failed. According to the Middle East International, "Indeed the talks were doomed to failure by Israeli claims on Syrian water made just as latest round of talks got underway. These claims were launched when Ehud Barak said bluntly that whatever the arrangement over the Golan, Israel would retain control over the water from the tributaries of the River Jordan that rise in the Golan and then flow into Lake Tiberias, which feeds the Jordan." (Middle East International No. 518, February 2, 1996: p. 8.)
328. Godfrey Jansen, "More talks about talks," p. 6.

Chapter 8

Deadlock in the Syrian-Israeli negotiations

1996-1999

Introduction

The achievement of the several rounds of talks between the Israelis and Syrians at Wye Plantation during the period between December 1995 and February 1996 led to a remarkable understanding. It brought optimism and a breakthrough in the Syrian-Israeli peace process. Both parties and the American peace coordinators were satisfied with the achievement of the negotiations.[329] But despite this optimistic progress, political developments[330] inside Israel and at the regional level drastically changed the situation on the ground.

The negotiations that had already been suspended by Peres in early March 1996 came to an intractable stalemate when Netanyahu won the general election of May 1996. Netanyahu's victory exacerbated the problems of the peace process between Syria and Israel; not only was there no meaningful movement on the Israeli-Syrian track during

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329. The Syrian Times reported on January 27, 1996 that the American coordinator of the peace talks, Dennis Ross, said, "they had achieved more than all the negotiations between the two parties since the Madrid conference." (Middle East Contemporary Survey Vol. XX, 1996, (Westview Press, 1998), p. 661.) Moreover, Syrians and Israelis also stated their satisfaction. According to Asad, the Wye Plantation talks were "conducted in a better atmosphere than in the past." Also, Uri Savir, the director-general of the Israeli foreign ministry and head of the Israeli delegation to the talks "asserted that a peace agreement could be reached before the end of 1996, and that the real remaining problem between Israel and Syria was mainly psychological." (Eyal Zisser, "Syria," Middle East Contemporary Survey, Vol. XX, 1996, (Westview Press, 1998), p. 661.)

330. These developments were the result of several suicide bombings, Peres's decision to hold an early election, and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in April 1996.

Netanyahu's premiership,[331] but the new Israeli Prime Minster tried to reverse the unwritten agreement that the Syrians had achieved with the Israeli Labor Party during several rounds of peace negotiations. "Netanyahu has criticized Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres for deferring too much to Asad and has expressed the view that Syria can be made to accept 'subarrangements' that enhance Israel's security without Israel having to return any territory on the Golan."[332]

Moreover, Operation Grapes of Wrath, which began in early April 1996, had enormous negative impacts on the peace process. The operation jeopardized Peres's position in the election. It also showed that Israeli government preferred the use of military might to bring peace to its northern border. The operation brought enormous casualties, triggered Arab anger against Israel's policies, and jeopardized the achievements of previous rounds of negotiations. It also led to the victory of the Likud Party in the election.

The Operation Grapes of Wrath

Grapes of Wrath[333] was Israel's biggest military incursion[334] into Lebanon since its invasion in 1982-84. The operation began on April 11, 1996 when Israeli forces bombed electricity generating stations and other civilian and military infrastructure throughout southern Lebanon and Beirut. It ended on April 27, when an understanding was reached through an American mediator consulting with Syria and France.[335] It

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331. Laura Drake, "A Netanyahu Primer," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 26, No. 1 (Autumn 1996): pp. 58-69.

332. Patrick Seale and Linda Butler, "Asad's Regional Strategy and the Challenge from Netanyahu," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 26, No. 1 (Autumn 1996): p. 27.

333. The Washington Post reported: "The trigger came April 8, when a 16-year-old Lebanese boy was killed by a mysterious explosion in Barasheet. Israel described the explosive as an old mine or shell; Hezbollah accused Israel of planting a bomb. On April 9, the guerrillas loosed the deadliest Katyusha barrage into northern Israel in more than two years, inflicting 34 casualties…. Israel's diplomatic channels to Washington fell silent. The Clinton administration did nothing to intervene. Two days later, after quietly evacuating children from Israel's northernmost towns, Peres launched Operation Grapes of Wrath. (The Washington Post, April 21, 1996: p. A1.)

334. "Grapes of Wrath: Background," Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 26, No. 1 (Autumn 1996): pp. 139-140.

335. See Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. XXV, No. 4 (Summer 1996): pp. 174-180.

caused many civilian casualties and led to the displacement of more than 400,000 Lebanese.[336] During the operation, the Israeli army committed a massacre in which more than one hundred Lebanese civilians, who had taken refuge in the UN base in the village of Qana, were killed by artillery. Ironically, the operation that was designed to bring peace and security to the Israeli northern border brought only more international condemnation for the Israeli military intervention in Lebanon

Following a series of suicide attacks in Israel by the two Palestinian resistance movements, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, Israel and Hizbollah engaged in an escalation of violence in southern Lebanon. According to some sources[337], in response to the killing of a Lebanese civilian, Hizbollah intensified rocket attacks on northern Israel, hoping to end the Israeli military occupation of southern Lebanon. In return, the Israeli government decided to take action, aiming to eliminate Hizbollah's capabilities and infrastructure. Generally, Operation Grapes of Wrath had a number of related objectives:

1) To respond to Hizbollah's firing of Katyusha rockets at northern Israel and to destroy Hizbollah's infrastructure in southern Lebanon.
2) To force the Lebanese government to take stronger measures against Hizbollah and to rein in Hizbollah's activities in southern Lebanon.
3) To provide a platform for Peres to win the election which was to be held May 29, 1996.

By attacking Lebanon in April 1996, the Israeli prime minister, Shimon Peres, sought to achieve a variety of political and military goals. During the 1980s and 1990s, Israelis had faced resistance movements in southern Lebanon, which brought many casualties to the Israelis. In fact, with "the Grapes of Wrath," Peres sought to reduce the

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336. The subsequent Israeli invasion of Lebanon was "The horror of the attack on the U.N. compound, and the deliberate rocketing of an ambulance by an Israeli helicopter in which four children and two adults being evacuated from southern Lebanon died, and the killing of a mother and her seven children—including a four-day-old baby—in their home finally galvanized the world community. The Israeli public…then began wondering how Shimon Peres was going to bring matters to an end." (Richard H. Curtiss. "Despite 162 Death in Lebanon Peres Re-Election Remains Precarious," Washington Report on Middle East Affairs Vol. XV, No 1 (May-June 1996): p. 89.)
337. The Washington Post, April 15, 1996: p. A1.

potential threat of those movements, particularly Hizbollah. However, there were several more important reasons why Peres initiated a massive invasion into Lebanon in April 1996. Peres faced an early election in May 1996, and his decision to launch a military action against Lebanon was most likely motivated by his desire to win the election.[338] In the aftermath of several suicide bombings in early 1996, security, as always, had been among a major concern for the Israelis. It was difficult for Peres to acquire a majority in the forthcoming election, mostly because he was viewed by the Israelis as less hawkish than his right wing challenger, Netanyahu. Peres needed to change his dovish image. He wanted to show, in the case of national security, he would use every possible means to minimize Israel's vulnerability. The operation was an important message to the Israeli electorate that the dovish Peres would be no less hawkish than the rightwing Likud Party's nominee.

There was, perhaps, a more important reason Shimon Peres decided to initiate a massive retaliation against Hizbollah's militant activities in southern Lebanon. Syria had often used the Lebanese resistance to indirectly increase pressure on the Israelis without providing enough incentive for the Israelis to retaliate militarily against Syrian targets. Since 1976, when Syria militarily intervened in the Lebanese Civil War,[339] Syria has been a political and military force in Lebanon. It influenced various political and military events both between the Lebanese themselves and between the Lebanese and Israelis. Having thousands of military forces in Lebanon, Syria played a particularly important role in the conflict between Hizbollah and Israel. Moreover, Syria's use of the Lebanese resistance gave Syria an opportunity to be in a position of strength in negotiating with the Israelis. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon made southern Lebanon a "free-fire zone"[340], in which both Syria and Israel came into direct conflict through their proxies. In order to put

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338. Moreover, as Fredric C. Hof said, the operation could make important contribution to the election of a new government in Israel. It was mostly because the operation showed Israel had no intention to withdraw from the Golan Heights as part of a possible peace treaty with Syria. Unlike the Labor Party, the Likud did not regard a peaceful agreement with Lebanon as the by-product of a comprehensive peace with Syria. (Frederic C. Hof, "Syria and Israel: keeping the peace in Lebanon," Middle East Policy Vol. IV, No. 4 (October 1996): p. 110.)

339. For more information about the Lebanese Civil war See: Naomi Joy Weinberger, Syrian Intervention in Lebanon: The 1975-76 Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

340. Frederic C. Hof, p.112.

more pressure on the Israelis, Syria often sponsored, or at least ignored, anti-Israeli operations in southern Lebanon.[341] Syria also, in some cases, used its influence to bring an end to the escalating tensions in southern Lebanon e.g., during Operation Grapes of Wrath Syria proved that it could play a crucial role in achieving a cease-fire and meaningful resolution to the conflict between Hizbollah and Israel.

Prior to the escalation of tensions between Hizbollah and Israel, Syria played an important role in limiting the escalation of the crisis in southern Lebanon, thereby, providing a better environment for Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations. After the announcement of early elections by Peres, and particularly after Peres's suspension of talks on March 4, the Syrian leadership might conclude that there was no need to restrain the escalation of tensions in southern Lebanon. Accordingly, due to Syria's influence in Lebanese internal politics, Syria's position might have contributed to an escalation in the cycle of violence in southern Lebanon during the period before the Operation Grapes of Wrath began. Helena Cobban believes that "After Peres's announcement of early election, however, and even more so after his suspension of peace talks on March 4, the calculation in Damascus regarding the need to limit escalation in Lebanon clearly shifted." She continued, "Evidently, the parallel calculation on that score inside Israel's political leadership was shifting during those weeks, too."[342] She concluded that throughout March 1996, tension in southern Lebanon rapidly moved toward a boiling point. It is plausible that Peres's initiation of Grapes of Wrath was to minimize Hizbollah's threat in such a way that would significantly change the Syrian/Israeli balance of power in southern Lebanon in favor of Israel.

The U.S. role

The Israeli invasion of Lebanon brought increasing international condemnation of Peres's government. Despite this criticism, the Clinton administration put all the blame on Hizbollah for provoking the attacks by firing Katyusha rockets at northern Israel. The

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341. These operations were carried out against either the South Lebanon Army (SLA) or Israeli occupying forces in a southern Lebanon.
342. Helena Cobban, The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks: 1991-1996 and Beyond, p. 156.

U.S. did not put pressure on the government of Israel and most importantly showed its unambiguous backing for the Israeli invasion.[343] White House spokesman Brian Cullin said, "The expression from our government is for Hizbollah and those who might have influence over Hizbollah to cease...provocative acts and end the cycle of violence…. Israel will need to feel more secure about its own national security before it can engage in the peace process again."[344] According to Patrick Seale

"American support for Grapes of Wrath—indeed Clinton's haste to reward Peres for the disastrous operation—came as a shock to the Syrians not least because, until 1996, their relations with the United States had, by their lights, been reasonably good. At Asad's two meeting with Clinton…the American president had, to Asad's satisfaction, reaffirmed his commitment to the search for a comprehensive settlements on the basis of land for peace…the United States had showed a sustained interest in the Syrian-Israeli negotiations."[345]

However, almost from the beginning, the U.S. administration took some initiatives to resolve the crisis. But it was only after the Qana massacre that the U.S. Secretary of State, aiming to bring parties to a diplomatic solution, traveled to the region and spent more than a week in the Middle East shuttling between Syria and Israel. The U.S. called for an end to Hizbollah attacks against Israeli targets in both southern Lebanon and northern Israel. It was also proposed that the Israelis would negotiate a withdrawal from southern Lebanon, but only after nine months of calm on the Israeli-Lebanese border. Moreover, the Americans expected Syrians to take the responsibility of guaranteeing Israel's security in southern Lebanon. However, it was neither within Syria's ability to halt a total ban on resistance movements in southern Lebanon nor within

343. According to Patrick Seale "For the Syrians, the most disturbing element of this new constellation was the U.S. involvement, most regrettably the 'green light' Washington is believed to have given Israel for Operation Grapes of Wrath. It is generally supposed that approval for the operation was given when President Clinton took Peres back to Israel on Air One from the Sharm al-Shaykh summit and attended, along with the director of the CIA, a meeting of the Israeli inner cabinet." (Patrick Seale and Linda Butler, "Asad's Regional Strategy and the Challenge from Netanyahu," pp. 28-29).
344. The Washington Post, April 15, 1996: p. A1.
345. Patrick Seale and Linda Butler, "Asad's Regional Strategy and the Challenge from Netanyahu," p. 29.

Syria's national interests to do so. Syria's manipulation of Lebanese resistance movements has often been a main pillar of Syria's policy in Lebanon.

While the Clinton administration worked to bring the crisis to an end, the French took some diplomatic initiatives. The French proposal[346] recognized Syria's role in Lebanon and gave Hizbollah the right to retaliate if Israel attacked Lebanese civilians. Lebanon accepted the French plan, providing momentum for the crisis to come to an end. The terms and conditions, in which both parties agreed to a cease-fire, were concluded as the Grapes of Wrath Understanding.

Grapes of Wrath Understanding

The operation that began on the eve of April 11 came to an end April 26 when Secretary of State Christopher (in consultation with Syria and France) was able to bring about an understanding between Israel, Lebanon, and Syria. Syria played a pivotal role in achieving the understanding, which led to a cease-fire between Hizbollah and Israel. The cease-fire was based upon an unwritten agreement of July 1993, called the July Understanding, in which an informal agreement was reached between Israel and Hizbollah in the aftermath of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Operation Accountability. This agreement sought to limit attacks on the civilian populations of both sides.

According to the understanding, both Israel and Hizbollah agreed that they would refrain from bombing civilian targets. But, if civilians were hit, the other side implicitly was permitted to retaliate. Therefore, this agreement effectively gave Hizbollah the right to attack Israeli targets if Israel attacked Lebanese civilians.[347] These were rules of the game upon which on several occasions, during the period between July 1993 and April 1996, Hizbollah retaliated against Israeli attacks on Lebanese civilians by shelling the northern Israeli border. The retaliation did not provoke a massive Israeli response during

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346. The French proposal was based mostly upon the unwritten agreement between Hizbollah and Israel in the aftermath of Israeli Operation Accountability in July 1993.

347. "Hizbollah warns Israel it will respond in kind if Lebanese civilians come under attack." (Mideast Mirror, December 21, 1994: Section: Lebanon, Vol. 08, No. 247.)

this period of time. The importance of this agreement was that it was written down and a Monitoring and Consultative Groups were established to observe implementation of the agreement. The new understanding was based upon these stipulations:

"1) Armed groups in Lebanon will not carry out attacks by Katyusha rockets or by any kind of weapon into Israel. 2) Israel and those cooperating with it will not fire any kind of weapon at civilians or civilian targets in Lebanon. 3) Beyond this, the two parties commit to insuring that under no circumstances will civilians be the target of attack and that civilian populated areas and industrial and electrical installations will not be used as launching grounds for attacks. 4) Without violating this understanding, nothing herein shall preclude any party from exercising the right of self-defense." [348]

The Monitoring Group consisted of the United States, France, Syria, Lebanon, and Israel. The United States also were to organize a Consultative Group consisting of these countries as well as the European Union and Russia. The understanding demonstrated once more Syria's important role in Lebanon and that without Syria's participation there could be no sustainable agreement between Lebanon and Israel. The United States also emphasized the importance of achieving a comprehensive peace in the region through resumption of the stalled negotiations between Israel and both Syria and Lebanon.

In conclusion, Israel's attempts to end militant activities originating in Lebanon against northern Israel has usually entailed massive bombardments, occupation of southern Lebanon, establishment of a security zone, and massive invasions such as Operation Peace to the Galilee in 1982, Operation Accountability in July 1993, and Grapes of Wrath in April 1996. Contrary to Israel's goals, each attempt brought new incentives and more reasons for Lebanese resistance groups to attack Israel. From its origin in 1982, when the Israeli army invaded Lebanon, Hizbollah's major goal has been

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348. "Mideast Accord; Restricting the Violence in Lebanon" The New York Times, April 27, 1996: Section 1, p. 8.

to bring an end to Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. Israeli invasions into Lebanon could neither alter this goal nor bring peace and tranquility to the northern Israeli border.

The occupation of southern Lebanon and the establishment of security zones brought no security to the Israelis. Instead, guerilla activities continued until the situation became intolerable, and then the Israeli government repeated attacks against militants that usually caused extensive damage to Lebanese property and resulted in enormous civilian causalities and a flow of refugees.

In contrary to Peres's goal, Operation Grapes of Wrath brought more international condemnation of the Israeli government. It also significantly jeopardized Peres's position in the election of May 1996. Peres hoped the operation would show the Israeli electorate that he was not soft on issues related to the security. But his method of handling the crisis brought criticism to his government.

The operation also had enormous effects on the peace process. Although the process had already stalled because of Peres's March 4, 1996 decision, the Grapes of Wrath showed that Israeli government preferred use of military might rather than negotiation to bring peace to its northern border. The consequence of the operation, particularly the tragedy of Qana, triggered enormous Arab anger against Israeli policies and jeopardized the achievements of previous rounds of negotiations between Israel and its Arab parties. Generally, the situation in the aftermath of several suicide bombings, suspension of peace talks, and Operation Grapes of Wrath finally led to bringing the Likud Party to power. The result was a total stalemate in peace process negotiations between Syria and Israel during the years that Likud was in power, 1996-1999.

Stalemate on the Syrian-Israeli Track During Netanyahu's Premiership

Several factors contributed to the Syrian-Israeli stalemate during Netanyahu's premiership. The Syrian-Israeli negotiations came to an end on March 4, 1996 when Peres suspended peace talks with Syria in the aftermath of several suicide bombings that

severely jeopardized Peres's position, and shifted the balance of power toward the anti peace camp in Israel. The negotiations came to an intractable stalemate when Netanyahu came to power and tried to reverse the achievement of previous rounds of talks between Syria and Israel.

On Syria's side, Peres's announcement of the early election, and the new priority given by the Israelis to combating Palestinian attacks in the aftermath of the early 1996 suicide bombings, contributed significantly to the suspension of the talks.[349] The announcement of the early election, which created uncertainties about the future of the Peres government, made impossible any progress in the Syrian-Israeli peace talks. Being under pressure from within his own coalition, Peres decided to call an early election, hoping strengthening his position on the ongoing negotiations. But, under the shadow of these uncertainties, and because of narrow margins between the Labor and Likud parties in the polls, there was no hope the Syrian and Israeli delegations could reach an agreement.

From Israel's point of view, Syria's refusal to denounce so called Palestinian terrorist attacks complicated the situation on the ground and brought more skepticism about Syria's true commitment to making peace with Israel. Moreover, Syria's absence from the anti-terrorism conference that was held following the incidents in Sharm al-Shaykh, Egypt, drew more criticism for Syria's position.

Although Israel expected Syria would have to denounce terrorism in the aftermath of the suicide bombings, they were disappointed. Not only did Syria not denounce the bombings, but also it was absent from the anti-terrorism conference held in their aftermath. Syria refused for two main reasons. First, Syria distinguished between terrorist attacks and actions taken to liberate an occupied homeland. On many occasions, Syrians expressed the view that resistance inside occupied territory is a legitimate activity for the Palestinians. Second, the Syrians refused to attend the conference because they believed

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349. "Fresh Light on the Syrian-Israeli peace Negotiations, an interview with Ambassador Walid Al-Moualem," p. 82.

that, according to Syria's foreign minister, "the lack of proper preparations and the emotional atmosphere under which it [the conference] was taking place would serve Israeli interests only."[350] According to the Israelis, Syria's refusal had an enormously negative effect on their ongoing negotiations with Syria. Therefore, the Israeli delegation halted the progress of negotiations and refused to renew it, hoping to put pressure on the Syrians to recognize Palestinian attacks inside Israel as terrorist attacks.

As we saw, there was another obstacle that had a significant outcome to the Syrian-Israeli track and broadly jeopardized the achievement of previous negotiations. Operation Grapes of Wrath had both direct and indirect negative impacts on the Israeli election, and on the Syrian-Israeli track. On one hand, it undermined Peres's position on the election campaign, on the other, it prepared the grounds for Netanyahu to criticize Peres's peace partners, Arafat and Syria, for encouraging, or at least not restraining the Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hizbollah from attacking Israelis.[351]

Moreover, the operation brought more frustration to the peace process. Particularly the unambiguous U.S. support for Peres during the Israeli operation in Lebanon discredited the U.S. as an honest broker and mediator in the Syrian-Israeli conflict. Syria was further disappointed when the United States took initiatives to support the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, hoping the invasion would strengthen Peres's position in the coming election.[352] The operation brought more frustration that even with the Labor

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350. Eyal Zisser, "Syria," p. 661.
351. Benny Morris, "Israel's Elections and Their Implications," <u>Journal of Palestine Studies</u> Vol. XXVI, No 1 (Autumn 1996): p. 73.
352. According to Patrick Seale, "American support for Grapes of Wrath—indeed haste to reward Peres for the disastrous invasion—came as a shock to the Syrians not least because, until 1996, their relations with the United States had, by their lights, been reasonably good." He continued that "for their part, the Syrians felt they had done a good many of the things the Americans had asked or expected of them: Syrian Jews had been allowed to leave the country; greater efforts were made to clean up the drug traffic in the Biqa; Faruq al-Shara', Syria's foreign minister, appeared on Israeli television; Asad himself publicly abstained from attempting to subvert Israel's separate deals with the Palestinians and Jordan, although he made it clear that they did not serve Arab interests…. Above all, Asad repeatedly stressed that he had made a 'strategic choice' in favor of peace with Israel and had undertaken a major effort to prepare Syrian opinion for peaceful coexistence with Israel, if not for immediate enmity." (Patrick Seale and Linda Butter, "Asad's Regional Strategy and the Challenging From Netanyahu," p. 29-30.)

Party in power there would be no fundamental differences in Israeli policy toward peace with the Arabs.[353]

Finally, Netanyahu's victory further strained the poor relations in the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations.[354] It completely deadlocked the already stalled peace negotiations with the Syrians. When he came to power, he outlined his government policy regarding peace negotiations with Syria on the basis that the Golan Heights would be considered very important to Israel's security, and therefore his administration would consider peace with Syria base upon retaining the Golan Heights.[355] Not only he did reject the possibility of Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, he also abandoned the "Land for Peace" principle as a logical base for the peace process.[356] Effectively, he pursued a policy to reverse the entire peace process, even the understanding that Syrian and Israeli negotiators had already reached during the Labor government. In general, during his premiership, there was no meaningful movement on the Syrian-Israeli track. In an analysis regarding the implication of Netanyahu's victory, Benny Morris stated,

> "Netanyahu's insistence on a 'peace-for-peace' rather than 'land-for-peace' formula; his assertion of Jerusalem's 'nonnegotiability' and his threats to close down Palestinian institution in East Jerusalem; his insistence on 'autonomy' rather than statehood for the Palestinians; and his reiterated commitment…to the expansion of Jewish settlements (inevitably at the expense of the Palestinians) all bode ill. The gap between the PLO's positions and Palestinian aspirations and expectations on the one hand and Netanyahu's positions and hopes on the other is

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353. Syria's traditional view had long been that which party was in power was of no matter to Syria. During the election campaign between Peres and Netanyahu, Syria's official newspaper carried an analysis that stated "We have always asserted that Israeli elections mean nothing to Syria…there is no difference between them regarding the peace process and the Arabs, as they both guaranteed the occupation of Jerusalem, and the position toward the Golan Heights was still the same." (Eyal Zisser, "Syria," p. 662.)

354. Itamar Rabinovich, The Brink of Peace: the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations, pp.254-264.

355. When submitting the new Likud government's policies to the Knesset in June 1996, Netanyahu emphasized that his government would maintain "the Golan Heights as essential to the security of the State and its water resources. [He said] retaining Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights will be the basis for any arrangement with Syria." ("Guidelines of the Government of Israel," Mideast Mirror, June 18, 1996: Section: Israel; Vol. 10, No. 117.)

356. Benny Morris, "Israel's Election and Their Implications," pp. 80-81.

simply too wide to be bridged, even given American mediating expertise and goodwill: No final stage peace settlement between the two seems possible."[357]

Tensions between Syria and Israel increased once Netanyahu took office in June 1996. Netanyahu's policy engendered Syrian anger and frustration. Syrian officials and media expressed their extreme disappointment on several occasions. In reaction to Netanyahu's victory, Syria's foreign minister said, "Anyone who claims they can achieve security and peace while holding on to the Golan and other occupied Arab territories is an advocate of war not peace. The adoption of such a policy will most certainly destroy opportunities for peace in the region and no Arab citizen anywhere can deal with such a policy."[358] On another occasion, the official Syrian Tishrin newspaper, reported:

> "The new Israeli government is dominated by rabbis, racists, generals and those who massacred Arabs, displaced them and called for destroying the peace process in the region…Netanyahu's program starts with the title "destruction of the Basis of Peace," [and proceeds with] how to draw the region to tragedies, disaster, killing and destruction, [and] how to bury the Arab's land right and threaten their existence. He wants to establish a Greater Israel through settlements, more immigrants, terrorism and war."[359]

Disappointed with the attitude of the new Israeli government on the peace process, the head of Syria's negotiating team expressed the concern that Netanyahu had no strategy for peace. He said, "Peace is our strategic option…. But you cannot achieve peace by yourself—you need a partner for peace. We do not yet see signs that the Netanyahu government is such a partner or that Netanyahu has a strategy for peace. He has a strategy for expanding the settlements, which are bullets in the heart of the peace process."[360] At the same time, Netanyahu also was strongly suspicious about any possible peace between the Arabs and Israelis. He once said,

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357. Benny Morris, "Israel's Election and Their Implications," p. 80.
358. Al-Hayat May 28, 1996 as quoted in Eyal Zisser, "Syria," p. 662.
359. Tishrin June 18, 1996 as quoted in Eyal Zisser, "Syria," p. 663.
360. "Fresh Light on the Syrian-Israeli peace Negotiations, an interview with Ambassador Walid Al-Moualem," p. 93.

"Our region…is rich in inter-Arab peace agreement and declaration of friendship and brotherhood that could unfold over many years and disappeared overnight. There is no reason, therefore, to expect that the quality of Arab-Israeli peace will be better than that of inter-Arab peace…. As long as the regimes around us are not democratic and peace-seeking by nature we will be not able to afford settlements in which they security component is not dominant…. As long as our area characterized by non democratic regimes, we will have to purse a policy that will preserve our ability to deter, and will not give up strategic assets that are vital to our security. I believe that these principles can guide us also in obtaining a peace settlement with Syria… principles that place security as the first and most important tier in obtaining and maintaining peace."[361]

Efforts towards the resumption of talks

Despite tensions in Syrian-Israeli relations following the suspension of talks in March 1996, the Americans made several attempts to renew negotiations after the formation of the new Israeli government. Hoping to revive the stalled peace process, Dennis Ross, the U.S. Middle East peace coordinator, met with Hafiz al-Asad in late July 1996. But due to Netanyahu's refusal to commit his government to the previous unwritten agreement, on one hand, and Syria's insistence on resumption of the negotiations from the point at which it was suspended, on the other, the negotiations did not resume during Netanyahu's premiership. During the period after the suspension of talks, Syrian officials repeatedly claimed that they reached the understanding with the Labor Party that Israel would withdraw from the entire Golan Heights in exchange for peace and normalization of relations with Syria; Hafiz al-Asad in his interview with CNN said,

"Efforts on the part of the Americans, Israel and the Arabs were needed, but the effort was made and resulted in the sides making significant achievements which meant commitments by the sides. In this framework, understanding was reached

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[361]. Itamar Rabinovich, <u>The Brink of Peace: the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations</u>, p. 263.

between Syria and Israel regarding the withdrawal of the Israelis from the Golan to the 4 June 1967 borders. After that we turned our attention [to the discussion of] the completion of the other elements of peace. This was done under the supervision, and with the knowledge, of the United States."[362]

In an interview, Walid Al-Moualem, said, "Prime Minster Rabin committed himself to withdrawal…. After Rabin was assassinated, Peres informed us in November [1995] through the Americans that he wanted to continue the talks, and he repeated the commitment." Moualem continued that the agreement of Israel's compliance with Syria's essential demand of full withdrawal "had been made public on the Israeli side, following the publication in September of a book in Hebrew giving an accurate account, from Israeli sources, of what happened. Earlier, [Egyptian] President [Husni] Mubarak, had said in an interview with the Arabic newspaper al-Hayat that Rabin had informed him of his readiness for full withdrawal to the line 4 June 1967."[363]

Accordingly, since Syrians believed that they had reached an important achievement with the Israelis during previous rounds of negotiations, they had long insisted that the stalled negotiations could be resumed only "on the basis that the Israelis recognize the commitments made by the previous governments."[364] However, Al-Moualem maintained, "The principle of land for peace alone is not sufficient…. We need Israeli acceptance of what Rabin committed Israel to—full withdrawal to the line of 4 June 1967—and Israeli commitment to the "Aims and Principles of Security Arrangements" paper reached in May 1995 after Rabin's visit to Washington. They also have to agree to resume talks from the point where they left off in February 1996."[365]

However, during Netanyahu's premiership, Syria and Israel were engaged in a dispute about the commitment, if any, of full Israeli withdrawal to the 4 June 1967 line,

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362. Eyal Zisser, "Syria," p. 666.
363. "Fresh Light on the Syrian-Israeli peace Negotiations, an interview with Ambassador Walid Al-Moualem," pp. 82-83.
364. "Fresh Light on the Syrian-Israeli peace Negotiations, an interview with Ambassador Walid Al-Moualem," p. 88.
365. "Fresh Light on the Syrian-Israeli peace Negotiations, an interview with Ambassador Walid Al-Moualem," p. 91.

made by the Rabin and Peres government. Although there was little doubt that Israel made such a commitment to fully withdraw from the Golan Heights. Syria were reluctant to negotiate with Netanyahu's government because as Syria's ambassador to Washington once said, "to find a new basis for the negotiations and new terms of reference…. Netanyahu wants to disregard the work of the last four years. If we accept the precedent of going back to square one every time there is a change of government, we will never reach an agreement."[366]

Based upon Patrick Seale's analysis, the commitments were "a tale of political deception, of saying one thing and meaning another, of missed opportunities and bitter disappointments."[367] He maintained "An examination of the evidence forces one to conclude that August 1993 Yitzhak Rabin certainly made a commitment on full withdrawal from the Golan to be implemented within the context of a peace package. The commitment was formally conveyed to Asad by Secretary Christopher. But the extravagant terms Rabin demanded in return, the absolute secrecy he insisted on, and above all, the timing of his offer, all suggest that he did not mean it. It was, in all probability, a political maneuver, of doubtful sincerity, made in the interest of other objectives."[368]

Conclusion

From the beginning, Syrian-Israeli negotiations passed through a difficult and complex process. They were suspended several times due to either Israel's domestic politics or Syria's rigid position on its principle demand, full withdrawal from the Golan Heights. The negotiations were stalled usually by the Israelis, particularly when they were actively engaged in negotiating agreements with the other parties to the peace process. For example, in September 1993, when Israel reached an agreement with the Palestinians under the so-called Oslo Accord, the Syrian-Israeli peace talks were

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366. "Fresh Light on the Syrian-Israeli peace Negotiations, an interview with Ambassador Walid Al-Moualem," p. 91.
367. Patrick Seale, "The Syrian-Israeli negotiations: Who is telling the truth?" Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. XXIX, No. 2 (Winter 2000): p. 65.
368. Patrick Seale, "The Syrian-Israeli negotiations: Who is telling the truth?" p. 69.

interrupted for a while. The negotiations were suspended again when Israel was negotiating a peace treaty with the Jordanians in October 1994. On both occasions, the Syrians were informed through the Americans that the Israelis could not proceed on the Syrian track because the Israeli public needed more time to digest either the Oslo Accord or the Jordanian-Israeli agreement.

According to Al-Moualem, it was only after the Israelis finalized Oslo II with the Palestinians in September 1995, and Peres became prime minister in November 1995, that the Israelis returned to Syrian track. They wanted to move very quickly.[369] It was during that time that remarkable progress was made in most areas of disputed issues. Al-Moualem said, "Both men [Rabin and Peres] wanted to achieve a settlement with Syria, but each had his own speed and conditions. Rabin was reluctant, suspicious, very cautious. He moved very slowly, inch by inch. When Peres became prime minister, he was in hurry—he wanted to enter the elections with the Syrian-Israeli agreement in his hand. He wanted to 'fly high and fast,' as he used to say."[370]

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369. "Fresh Light on the Syrian-Israeli peace Negotiations, an interview with Ambassador Walid Al-Moualem," p. 85.
370. "Fresh Light on the Syrian-Israeli peace Negotiations, an interview with Ambassador Walid Al-Moualem," p. 85.

Chapter 9

Shepherdstown Talks

Introduction

On 17 May 1999, Israelis overwhelmingly elected Ehud Barak as their Prime Minister. The election of Ehud Barak created encouraging momentum for the resumption of peace negotiations with both the Palestinians and Syrians. Barak's emphasis on peace as an approach to bring security for the Israelis pleased the Arab parties in the peace process. In an interview before the election, he said, "I want to give a new momentum to peace agreements." Although he insisted on an uncompromising position on Israeli vital interests, Barak said "I learned during many years -- decades -- of fighting that the right way to bring about personal security to Israelis and overall security to Israel is through peace agreement with our neighbors."[371]

The Impact of Barak's Victory on the Peace Process

Following his victory in the election, Barak stated that he would restart peace negotiations simultaneously with Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinians, aimed at achieving a comprehensive framework for peace in the Middle East within a 15-month timetable.[372] According to Barak, this would encompass implementation of the Wye River accord,[373] and discussion of final status arrangements with the Palestinians. Barak also set a

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371. The New York Times, May 18, 1999, p A1.
372. According to The New York Times, the specific timetable of 15 months for achieving a peace agreement was motivated by two factors: 1) to establish a momentum to encourage parties to reach an agreement within a reasonable period of time; 2) to avoid the impact of a "political timeout" in the United States because of the fact that the presidential election campaign was to be held in early fall of 2000. Israelis viewed the election campaign might influence on U.S. role in the negotiations. (The New York Times, July 19, 1999: p. A1.)
373. This accord was signed with the Palestinians in Maryland in November 1998.

timetable for resumption of the stalled peace process with the Syrians, and for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from southern Lebanon.[374]

Barak's victory was welcomed by the U.S. administration, hoping the new Israeli government would provide an opportunity for the United States to facilitate the peace process in the Middle East. Syria also welcomed Barak's election.[375] According to the European Union envoy, Miguel Moratinos, who visited Syria following the Israeli election, Syrians viewed Barak's victory as an opportunity to reach a final peace agreement with Israel within a reasonable time, possibly a year.[376] In unprecedented interviews with Patrick Seale, the British writer and Hafiz al-Asad's biographer, both Syrian president Asad and Prime Minister Barak expressed their respect for each other. Barak said, "There is no doubt that President Assad has shaped the Syrian nation. His legacy is a strong, independent, self-confident Syria -- a Syria which, I believe, is very important for the stability of the Middle East." He continued: "The only way to build a stable, comprehensive peace in the Middle East is through an agreement with Syria. That is the keystone of peace." Barak emphasized that his policy is "to strengthen the security of Israel by putting an end to the conflict with Syria." In retrospect, Hafiz al-Asad described Barak as "a strong and honest man" who has "wide support" and who "wants to achieve peace with Syria. He is moving forward at a well-studied plan." Asad further described Barak as a leader who "can accomplish whatever he decides to do."[377]

Following the formation of the new Israeli government, substantive efforts took place to help Syrians and Israelis resume their negotiations. Hoping to broker a peace treaty, President Clinton took diplomatic initiatives to revive the long-suspended negotiations between Syria and Israel. He seemed willing to take whatever steps necessary to establish a peace treaty in his remaining months in office. Barak visited

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374. Fredric C. Hof, "Israel Withdraws from Lebanon: May 24th and Beyond," Middle East Policy Vol. VII, No. 3, (June 2000): pp. 165-167.

375. Martha Neff Kessler, "Syria, Israel and the Middle East peace process: Past success and Final Challenges,", pp. 69-70.

376. Scott Peterson, "Syria and Israel dust off abandoned peace track," Christian Science Monitor June 8, 1999, Section: World: p. 7.

377. Patrick Seale, "Assad and Barak prepare to negotiate," Mideast Mirror June 23, 1999, Section: Syria, Israel, Vol. 13, no. 118. See also The New York Times, June 24, 1999: p. A9.

Washington in July 1999 to arrange the resumption of peace negotiations. President Clinton sent a letter to Hafiz al-Asad, urging him "to seize the moment of opportunity for peace negotiations with Israel."[378] During the period before Israel and Syria agreed to resume their negotiations (from early July 1999 to December 1999), a number of secret, unofficial, and diplomatic missions took place to close the distance between the opening positions of the Syrians and Israelis. Following Barak's election, Patrick Seale, Asad's biographer, had a role in restoring the process, carrying a series of messages between Syria and Israel.[379] James Baker, former U.S. Secretary of State, and Edward Djerejian, former U.S. Ambassador to Israel and Syria visited Syria in July 1999.[380] Spanish Prime Minister, Jose Maria Anzar also visited both Syria and Israel in July 1999, hoping to bridge the differences over resumption of talks.[381]

Despite all these diplomatic efforts, both Syria and Israel continued to insist on their positions. Syria wanted to resume the talks where they left off in March 1996. The Clinton administration did not support Syria's position.[382] The United States came down on the Israeli side, confirming, "Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, and there were no agreement in this area."[383] The U.S. State Department's spokesman also determined that "The United States only conveys, from one party to another, what we are authorized to convey"[384], confirming that there had not been such a commitment by the Israelis to withdraw from the entire Golan Heights as the Syrians claimed. The Israeli government also made clear that "Israel never gave any commitment to withdraw to this or that line. The territorial issue, just like other issues, should be part of the negotiations and not a prerequisite to them."[385]

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378. The New York Times, July 27, 1999: p. A3.
379. Patrick Seale, "The Syrian-Israeli negotiations: who is telling the truth?" pp. 65-77.
380. Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. XXIX, no. 1 (Autumn 1999): p. 114.
381. Mideast Mirror, July 19, 1999, Section: Israel; Vol. 13, No. 136.
382. Syria maintained that Rabin and Peres committed to withdraw to the June 4, 1967.
383. Patrick Seale, "The Syrian-Israeli negotiations: who is telling the truth?" p. 66. Although Syria claimed that Israel was committed to fully withdraw from the Golan Heights, The United States maintained that there was no such agreement.
384. Patrick Seale, "The Syrian-Israeli negotiations: who is telling the truth?" p. 66.
385. Patrick Seale, "The Syrian-Israeli negotiations: who is telling the truth?" p. 66.

However, Barak showed willingness to trade land for peace with Syria, although he refused to define the scope of Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. He later insisted that Israel would never return to the pre-1967 border.[386] In a review of the chronology of events, the Journal of Palestine Studies reported that Barak (following his meeting with President Clinton in July 1999) agreed to resume the talks from the point at which they left off in March 1996. But both sides could not agree on exactly where that point was. Syria continued to insist that the point was Rabin's commitment for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the entire Golan Heights, while Israel claimed that the discussion about the June 4, 1967 line was only "hypothetical", and that the talks should resume without preconditions.

Following months of continuous diplomatic efforts, both Syria and Israel were frustrated by the inability to reach an agreement for resumption of their negotiations. But a breakthrough came following the meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Istanbul, Turkey in November 1999. Prior to the meeting, President Clinton and Barak, who attended the meeting, discussed the progress in the Syrian-Israeli track. After that, U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright held a meeting with Hafiz al-Asad in Damascus, in early December, in which they reached an agreement for resumption of Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations. On December 8, 1999, Clinton announced that Syria and Israel agreed to resume their negotiations "from the point at which they left off,"[387] with no preconditions. He gave no details on what the two sides had already agreed to, nor did he state what the Syrian and Israeli positions were; a formulation in which each side could reserve the right to maintain their own interpretation of what the point was.

There are several conditions that paved the way for the breakthrough. First of all, Barak's victory created an opportunity for the United States to play an important role in bridging the differences, and to facilitate the resumption of talks. Following Barak's election in May 1999, the Clinton administration had struggled to convince Syrians to

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386. Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. XXIX, no. 1, (Autumn 1999): p. 114.
387. "A leap forward in Mideast peacemaking," Christian Science Monitor December 10, 1999: p. 6.

resume the negotiations because he was interested "in establishing a legacy as a peacemaker in his remaining office."[388] He lured the two sides together by proposing an ambiguous formula that Syrian-Israeli negotiations were to resume "from the point where they left off" without any specific references to what "the point" was. This formula satisfied both parties since they could interpret "the point" in their own way on the basis of all previous negotiations that took place under American auspices. To the Israelis "the point" meant no preconditions, no guarantees on withdrawal and, of course, no full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. To the Syrians "the point" meant the renewal of Rabin's promise that Israel would fully withdraw from Syria's territory in exchange for full peace and normalization of relations with Israel.

Moreover, although Israel did not renew its promise to withdraw from the entire Golan Heights to the June 4, 1967 line, Barak conceded that "Israel will have to pay a heavy territorial price"[389] for making peace with Syria. In a plea to Israel's parliament, Barak said, "The negotiations are opening without any prior conditions…. [but] we have not wiped out the past, neither Madrid, nor the contents of the contacts and talks with Rabin, Peres, and even not with Netanyahu." He acknowledged that any peace deal with Syria would "include a painful withdrawal and the changing of the existing border," saying that "the scope of [withdrawal] will be determined in negotiations, in accordance with the depth of the peace and the quality of security arrangements."[390]

The other condition that helped to end the stalemate was the fact that Barak pledged to withdraw Israeli troops from southern Lebanon within a year of taking office, i.e., by July 2000.[391] On several occasions, he even stated the possibility of withdrawing Israeli troops faster than the one-year period he had already pledged in his election campaign, with or without a Syrian-Israeli agreement.[392] Barak's announcement of his willingness to remove Israeli troops from Lebanon caused the Syrians moderate their

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388. The New York Times, July 21, 1999: p. A12.
389. "Israel Lawmakers Closely Approve Talks With Syria," The New York Times, December 14, 1999: p. A1.
390. BBC Summary of World Broadcasts December 15, 1999, Part 4, The Middle East; Israel-Syria; ME/D3718/MED.
391. The New York Times, May 20, 1999: p. A12.
392. "Fresh Air for the Middle East, The New York Times, December 15, 1999: p. A16.

preconditions for returning to the negotiating table. Israel wanted Islamic resistance forces in southern Lebanon to be restrained in order to have a secure border after its withdrawal. Because Lebanese government had no authority in the south, and Syria already had significant influence on Lebanon, Syria was the only power broker that could restrain those forces from attacking the Israelis.[393] Therefore, resumption of negotiations was crucial both for Syrians and Israelis; a unilateral Israeli withdrawal could escalate the conflict in southern Lebanon.[394] Syria wanted to use Israel's concern for its northern border security as a bargaining position. Therefore, they wanted Israel to withdraw from Lebanon as part of a comprehensive peace deal, which would include Israel's withdrawal of the Golan Heights as well.

At the same time, as the dominant military power in Lebanon, Syria could play an important role in stabilizing southern Lebanon in the aftermath of Israeli withdrawal. Therefore, although Barak said that he would withdraw Israeli forces from Lebanon even without reaching an agreement with Syria, he preferred to restart negotiations with the Syrians to secure Israel's northern border from attack by Islamic militants. Even after the negotiations started in December 1999, and stalled again in January 2000, Barak hoped to withdraw Israeli forces from Lebanon within a framework of a peace agreement with Syria. According to the New York Times, Israel's highest-ranking military official "urged the government not to abandon efforts to find a way back to the negotiating table."[395] There was fear that without a Syrian-Israeli agreement, Syria would "sabotage an Israeli withdrawal by fostering violent attacks in southern Lebanon or into Israel."[396]

Washington Talks

After the collapse of the Syrian-Israeli talks in early 1996, the Washington talks began on December 15, 1999 at the White House. The participants, Syria's Foreign

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[393]. Claude Salhani, "Syria at the Crossroads," Middle East Policy Vol. X, No, 3, (Fall 2003): pp. 136-143.
394. For more information see: Fawaz A. Gerges, "Israel's Retreat From South Lebanon: Internal And External Implications," Middle East Policy Vol. VIII, No, 1 (March 2001): pp. 106-116. and Martha Neff Kessler and others, "Lebanon and Syria: Internal and Regional Dimensions" Middle East Policy Vol. VIII, No. 3, (September 2001): pp.1-22.
395. The New York Times, March 28, 2000: p. A1.
396. The New York Times, March 28, 2000: p. A1.

Minister Faroq al-Shara' and Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Barak, were the highest ranking ever. From the American point of view, this was a major change in the Syrian-Israeli negotiations since it was for the first time that both countries held a meeting at such a high political level.[397]

The negotiations resumed after months of secret and diplomatic efforts. Asad was convinced by the Americans that "Barak was prepared to meet his territorial demands in exchange for guarantees on security and other issues."[398] According to an analysis, after private diplomatic exchanges through U.S. mediation, both sides entered "the talks with a clear understanding of the other's requirements on issues relating to territory, timing, security and the nature of diplomatic, cultural, and trade relations."[399] This understanding brought an optimistic assessment about the prospect of a possible agreement between Syria and Israel, although both sides still had substantive differences over their disputes.

Before the negotiations began, there were some expectations that the talks would proceed with remarkable speed. According to one estimate, a Syrian foreign minister maintained, "70 percent of the issues were already solved when the talks broke off in early 1996."[400] He also said, "I am so optimistic to say that a few months could be enough to reach a peace agreement." He added "We think we can achieve genuine results within a short time if all the parties have the good intentions."[401] One of Israel's foremost experts on Syria, Moshe Maoz, believed, "Most of the issues have already been understood and agreed upon - not on paper but orally." He said the meeting between Shara' and Barak would be a very crucial meeting on principles and "once the principle are set, it won't take long"[402] Itamar Rabinovich, former head of the Israeli team negotiating with Syria, maintained that this meeting was "the most auspicious moment

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397. Ilene R. Prusher, "A leap forward in Mideast peacemaking," Christian Science Monitor December 10, 1999, Section: World: p. 6.
398. "Secret Efforts By U.S. Put Israel, Syria Closer to Pact; Peace Talks Will Resume With Clear Understandings," The Washington Post, December 13, 1999: p. A01.
399. "Secret Efforts By U.S. Put Israel, Syria Closer to Pact; Peace Talks Will Resume With Clear Understandings," p. A1.
400. Ilene R. Prusher, p. 6.
401. "Syria Says Peace Deal With Israel Could Be Reached Soon," The New York Times, December 13, 1999: p. A10.
402. Ilene R. Prusher, p. 6.

yet for reaching an Israeli-Syrian accommodation." He said, "Success could lead to peace between Israel and Syria, to a peaceful Israeli exit from Lebanon and to a revival of the quest for a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement. Failure could lead to a long-term collapse of the Israeli-Syrian track, to confrontation in Lebanon and to further disruptions of the precarious peace process."[403]

The Washington talks were a two-day, joint meeting between U.S. mediators, President Clinton, and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and both Prime Minster Barak and Foreign Minister Shara' for the purpose of discussing procedural matters and confidence-building measures. The goal of the meeting was mostly to set a time frame and ground rules for negotiations on the substantive issues that had long divided the two countries, including the status of the Golan Heights, security arrangements, water, and diplomatic relations. It was agreed to hold negotiations on January 3, 2000. In an opening speech, both President Clinton and Prime Minster Barak spoke briefly about an opportunity for a possible comprehensive peace in the Middle East. But Foreign Minister Shara' gave a rather long prepared address, welcoming the resumption of talks but expressing Syria's grievances with Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights.

Clinton called the talks "a big step along the path" to peace. He said, "For the first time in history, there is a chance of a comprehensive peace between Israel and Syria and indeed all its neighbors…. we have never had such an extraordinary opportunity to reach a comprehensive settlement."[404] Barak briefly said, "We came here to put behind us the horrors of war and to step forward toward peace. We are fully aware of the opportunity of the building of responsibility and of the seriousness, determination and devotion that will be needed in order to begin this march together with our Syrian partners to make a different Middle East, where nations are living side by side in peaceful relationship and in mutual respect and good neighborliness."[405] In his speech, Shara' took advantage of the moment and made clear that Syria wanted to resume the negotiations from the point it was disrupted in early 1996. He said, "if these talks are to succeed as rapidly as we all

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403. Itamar Rabinovich, "The Best Chance Yet," The Washington Post, December 14, 1999: p. A39.
404. The New York Times, December 16, 1999: p. A12.
405. The New York Times, December 16, 1999: p. A12.

desire, no one should ignore what has been achieved until now…."[406] He proclaimed, "Peace for Syria means the return of all its occupied land. While for Israel, peace will mean the end of the psychological fear which the Israelis have been living in as a result of the existence of occupation, which is undoubtedly the source of all adversities and wars."[407]

Shepherdstown Talks

Although Syria and Israel officially resumed their negotiations in Washington in December 1999, the Shepherdstown Talks were the first meetings between Syria and Israel since 1996 in which both sides negotiated substantive issues of the peace process. It was also the last Syrian-Israeli meeting under President Clinton's auspices. To date[408] there have not been any subsequent negotiations between Syria and Israel. Talks in Shepherdstown focused mostly on sequence: Israel's demand that security should be addressed first, and Syria's insistence that Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights must be discussed before other issues. Mutual mistrust had always been a significant obstacle in the Syrian-Israeli negotiations. The negotiations stalled several times because of procedural problems and, most importantly, what should come first. The Shepherdstown Talks were also stalled at the beginning over disagreement on how to proceed with the negotiations. The two sides could not reach a compromise. The U.S. proposed to set up four technical committees to address simultaneously the main issues of contention: border/withdrawal, security arrangements, water, and normalization of relations.

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406. In his speech, Shara' also criticized the western media for portraying Syria as the aggressor while ignoring the consequences of the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights. He said, "what we have witnessed during the last four days of attempts to muster international sympathy for a few thousand settlers in the Golan, ignoring totally more than half a million Syrian people who were uprooted from tens of villages on the Golan, where their forefathers lived for thousands of years and their villages were totally wiped out from existence…. The image formulated in the minds of Western people and which formulated in public opinion was that Syria was the aggressor and Syria was the one who shelled settlements from the Golan prior to the 1967 war. These claims carry no grain of truth in them. As Moshe Dayan has explained in his memoirs, it was the other side who insisted on provoking the Syrians until they clashed together and then claimed that the Syrians are the aggressors." (The New York Times, December 16, 1999: p. A12.)
407. The New York Times, December 16, 1999: p. A12.
408. April 2004.

Although this arrangement brought a breakthrough for convening the Syrian-Israeli talks, the negotiations failed to make any progress on confidence-building measures. The fact that the two sides had huge disagreements over which issues should take priority in the talks led to the suspension of negotiations. Only the committees on normalization of relations and security arrangements ever met. The other two committees, i.e. border/withdrawal and water, did not convene because the Israelis wanted to know the extent of Syria's willingness to agree to security arrangements, such as the scope of demilitarized zones and establishment of an early warning stations, before discussing Syria's demand for full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. From Syria's point of view, negotiating issues such as these and other points of contention such as water rights, normalization of relations, and the nature of peace and future relations were pointless until they knew whether Israel was willing to fully withdraw from the entire Golan Heights. Therefore, the whole new process came to a complete deadlock and finally was suspended by the Syrians on the grounds that Israel refused to convene the border committee.

The Seven-Page Document

The seven-page document[409] was written by the United States administration as the draft of a possible peace treaty between Syria and Israel. It was a summary of the issues that Syria and Israel had already agreed upon in the past and the differences that remained to be resolved through substantive discussions. The document was conveyed confidentially to the Syrian and Israeli negotiating teams, but it was leaked to an Israeli newspaper, Ha'aretz on January 13, 2000.[410] As mentioned, following disagreement on procedural matters between Syria and Israel, the United States convinced both sides to discuss simultaneously most of the crucial disputes in four technical committees. But the committees could not bring a breakthrough to the talks since the Israelis did not want to

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409. "Syria Offers Israel Major Concessions," The Washington Post, January 14, 2000: p. A1.
410. According to The New York Times, the leak of the draft enormously damaged the ongoing peace process between Syria and Israel in Shepherdstown: "Peace talks were suspended in January after the leak of a draft treaty embarrassed Syrian officials and indicated that Syria had already negotiated some aspects of normalizing relations with Israel without nailing down a firm Israeli commitment to leave all the occupied Golan Heights, the main issue separating the two sides." ("Assad Meeting With Clinton Could Renew Peace Talks," The New York Times, March 23, 2000: p. A9.)

negotiate the borders and withdrawal issues prior to Syria's commitment to fully normalize its relations with Israel and agree to Israel's demands of security arrangements. The negotiations were suspended by Syria two days after convening technical committees. It followed Syria's refusal to participate in the negotiations. The United States presented "the seven-page document", hoping to bridge the differences that still existed between the Syrians and Israelis. The negotiations continued for another two days but finally ended without even a tentative agreement.

The document indicated[411] both sides agreed to terminate the state of war and establish peace between them. Accordingly, Syria showed more flexibility on several key issues such as security arrangements and normalization of relations. In regard to the security arrangements, the two sides reached an agreement on "areas of limitation of forces and capabilities,"[412] within which demilitarized zones will be established, although they disagreed on the extent of these zones. Syria insisted on a zone equidistant from the border while Israel wanted proportional zones that would extend more into Syrian territory.

Syria made an important concession regarding the early warning stations. According to the document, Syria agreed that the early warning stations on Mt. Hermon be "operated by the United States and France under their total auspices and responsibilities." During the previous rounds of talks that collapsed in 1996, Syria rejected the stationing of any Israeli and other foreign forces in the Golan Heights, arguing that technical devices, such as U.S. satellites, could provide Israel with enough information on Syrian military movements. On this point, Israel still insisted on "an effective Israeli presence."

The document also indicated recognition of "each others sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence and right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries." According to the document, "the parties will establish full

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411. "Clinton Administration: A framework for peace between Israel and Syria," <u>Journal of Palestine Studies</u> Vol. XXIX, no. 3, Spring 2000: pp. 157-161.
412. "Syria Offers Israel Major Concessions," p. A1.

diplomatic and consular relations, including the exchange of ambassadors." They agreed to "promote beneficial bilateral economic and trade relations including…the free and unimpeded flow of people, goods and services between the two countries; remove all discriminatory barriers to normal economic relations; terminate economic boycotts directed at the other party…[and] promote relations between them in the sphere of transportation." They also agreed to "promote cooperation in the field of tourism in order to facilitate and encourage mutual tourism and tourism from third countries."

In conclusion, although the document indicated that the two sides had agreed to several key issues, such as full diplomatic relations, free trade, open borders, and cooperation in tourism, it made clear that they still had not reached an agreement on many substantial issues. These included security arrangements, water sharing, the scope and timing of Israeli withdrawal, the position of the final border, and the extent of demilitarized zones. The document generally was more favorable to Israel because while Syria agreed to fully normalize its relations with Israel, the latter did not commit to fully withdraw from the entire Golan Heights. Syria significantly changed its previous position on security issues, allowing early warning stations to be established on Mt. Hermon.

Suspension of Negotiations

Following Syria's dissatisfaction with Israel's refusal to negotiate the borders and withdrawal issues, the negotiations in Shepherdstown slowed down. The U.S. initiatives could not bring a breakthrough, although the parties agreed to discuss how to proceed in the negotiations. The Shepherdstown Talks ended without even a working framework for a provisional agreement on core disputes. But, before the negotiating teams broke up their meetings, it was agreed to resume a second rounds of talks on January 19, 2000. Syria later refused to participate in these negotiations unless Israel agreed to discuss withdrawal issues.

There are several reasons why Syria refused further negotiations with the Israelis. Mistrustful and procedural problems frustrated the Syrians. The Syrian-Israeli peace

process had long been affected by mutual mistrust and disagreement over which issues should take priority in the negotiations. Despite this fact, Syria agreed to resume its long-frozen negotiations with the Israelis in December 1999 without an explicit or even vague Israeli commitment to withdraw from the entire Golan Heights. However, from Syria's point of view, there was a reasonable chance for progress.

Contrary to Syrian's optimistic view, following the resumption of talks in Shepherdstown, however, Syria was convinced that neither the Americans nor the Israelis would be willing to put Syria's demands at the top of the agenda. Even the seven-page document, which was assumed to be the draft of a possible peace treaty, favored the Israelis and did not address the timing and the extent of Israeli withdrawal. There was yet another fact that caused the Syrians to abandon the negotiations. According to the New York Times, "the leak of the draft to an Israeli newspaper unsettled the Syrians, who had never before disclosed to their public what they were willing to give up. It was interpreted in the Arab world as Syria making big concessions without winning much in return."[413]

Therefore, before it returned to the second round of the talks, which was scheduled for January 19, 2000, Syria restated its demands and apparently went back to its previous position: Syria insisted Israel first publicly commit in principle to an unconditional withdrawal from the entire Golan Heights before discussion on the nature and depth of peace took place. On January 16, 2000 Syria's foreign minister, Shara called Secretary of State Albright, saying, "Syria could not participate in further negotiations unless withdrawal topped the agenda."[414] He later reiterated Syria's position that "Syria would not return to the talks until Israel promised to withdraw to the 6/4/67 border."[415] In response, Israel's prime minister vowed, "he would not commit in writing to withdraw from the Golan to get talks back on track."[416] Therefore, the process that might have brought both Syrians and Israelis to an honorable, comprehensive peace fell apart and led

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413. "Israel And Syria Postponing Talks," The New York Times, January 18, 2000: p. A1.

414. Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. XXIX, no. 3 (Spring 2000): p. 123. See also: Mideast Mirror, February 3, 2000, Section: Syria, Egypt, Vol. 14, No. 23.

415. Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. XXIX, no. 3 (Spring 2000): p. 123.

416. Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. XXIX, no. 3, (Spring 2000): p. 123.

to another series of stalemates. The only hope for breaking the stalemate was the meeting between President Clinton and Hafiz al-Asad, in March 2000, in Geneva.

The Geneva Summit (March 2000)

After a nearly two-month stalemate in the Syrian-Israeli negotiations, President Clinton announced that he would meet with Hafiz al-Asad in an effort to bridge the differences between Syria and Israel, hoping it would lead to a renewal of the negotiations. This meeting was the first since President Clinton met with Syria's president in Damascus in November 1994. Prior to the summit, there were some expectations that the Geneva meeting would bring about a breakthrough in the stalled Syrian-Israeli negotiations, since a summit at the presidential level would not be held unless both parties had already known the general outcome.

Moreover, as a result of extensive diplomatic efforts to facilitate the Syrian-Israeli peace talks during the 1990s, the Clinton administration was clear on the difficulties and differences in the Syrian and Israeli peace negotiations, on what caused the previous negotiations to be suspended. Due to this perspective, there were some hopes that the presidential summit would find a formula, a compromise solution that would satisfy the basic demands of both parties. In an interview with the Lebanese newspaper, al-Mustaqbal, Syria's foreign minister said, "when Clinton invited Assad to meet him in Geneva, he told him he had something important to tell him which due to its importance could not be conveyed through the normal channels of communication. Accordingly we went to Geneva on the basis that we would be apprised of something important."[417] The Syrians, particularly, expected that President Clinton would bring a commitment that Israel would be ready for full withdrawal from the Golan Heights as part of a comprehensive peace deal.

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417. "Sharaa: Assad won't bequeath his son a dishonorable peace," Mideast Mirror, March 31, 2000, Section: Syria, Vol. 14, No. 63.

In an analysis of what might be the achievements of the Clinton-Asad summit in Geneva, the New York Times reported, "The meeting itself has buoyed hopes that Israel and Syria might be close to finding a formula that meets the Syrian demand for full withdrawal and Israeli security concerns about a pullback down to the shores of the Sea of Galilee."[418] According to the report, "a significant breakthrough occurred a month ago, when Mr. Barak told his cabinet that his predecessors, including Yitzhak Rabin, had promised Syria an Israeli withdrawal to the border that existed between the two countries on June 4, 1967."[419] Consequently, this assessment brought the optimism that everything had already been prepared and settled. Moreover, since it was President Clinton's last year in office, many Arab officials described the Geneva Summit as the last chance for achieving peace between Syria and Israel during Clinton's presidency.[420] On another occasion, the Israeli public security minister, Shlomo Ben-Ami, maintained that "it looks like the gaps between the sides are small, and there is time pressure on all sides."[421]

However, despite the high expectations, the United States played down the prospect that the Geneva meeting would lead to any quick progress in the Syrian-Israeli disputes, although the aim of the meeting was to bridge the differences preventing renewal of the direct Syrian-Israeli talks. Moreover, the Syrian and Israeli negotiators doubted that the meeting would facilitate an immediate advancement in the stalled Syrian-Israeli talks.[422] However, since the previous rounds of negotiations were interrupted because of differences over procedural matters there was some hope that President Clinton would conclude a compromising formula that satisfy both parties. Contrary to expectations, President Clinton brought no "good news" to satisfy the basic needs of Syrian demands, and, furthermore, according to various sources, put pressure on the Syrians to be "more flexible" regarding Israeli demands for security arrangements, water issues, and normalization of relations.

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418. "Assad Meeting With Clinton Could Renew Peace Talks," The New York Times, March 23, 2000: p. A9.
419. "Assad Meeting With Clinton Could Renew Peace Talks," p. A9.
420. For example, in an interview President Hosni Mubarak said, "He believed that both leaders agreed on many basics, and wanted to overcome their differences on other items." ("Assad Meeting With Clinton Could Renew Peace Talks," p. A9.)
421. "Assad Meeting With Clinton Could Renew Peace Talks," p. A9.
422. "Clinton's Effort Fails To Get Syria To Resume Talks," The New York Times, March 27, 2000: p. A1.

At the summit, President Clinton recited "Barak's maximum requirements" to make peace with Syria. According to some sources, he brought "two entirely new Israeli demands: mastery of all the water (which Asad took to mean not only of Lake Tiberias but also of the tributaries of the Jordan River), and control of a zone hundreds of meters east of lake Tiberias (of which Syria has held the north east corner in 1967), pushing the border to the foot of the Golan escarpment."[423] That was totally unacceptable to the Syrians; President Asad apparently rejected these demands. Reciting maximum Israeli demands, instead of bringing a compromise solution, badly damaged U.S. role[424] as an honest broker in the Syrian-Israeli disputes. According to Seale,

> "The summit never recovered from this unfortunate start. It turned into a fiasco, damaging Assad's hitherto friendly relationship with the American president. Assad returned home in a sour mood. He felt he had been tricked."[425]

Therefore, the summit came to a quick end, without any news conference or even a joint statement. There was no agreement on resumption of future talks. The Summit not only failed to produce any tangible or even incremental progress on the Syrian-Israeli track, but also made renewal of the negotiations very difficult since the negotiations had failed at the presidential level. Although President Clinton cautioned Hafiz al-Asad that "if progress were not achieved now in the peace process, it could be generations before they could resume again"[426], the negotiations were stalemated on the ground that there were no compromising solutions by the Clinton administration. While the United States mediators knew the main obstacles in the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations, they failed to bring proposals to close the enormous gaps between the parties.

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423. Journal of the Palestine Studies Vol. XXIX, no. 4, (Summer 2000): p. 128.
424. At least from Syria's point of view.
425. Patrick Seale, "Obituary of the Syrian Track," Journal of the Palestine Studies Vol. XXIX, no. 4 (Summer 2000): p.155.
426. "Israel's intransigence blamed for failure of Assad-Clinton summit," Mideast Mirror, March 27, 2000, Section: Syria, Vol. 14, No. 59.

In an analysis why the Summit failed to produce any advancement on the Syrian-Israeli track, one could say that miscalculation by both sides had some contributions for the failure of the summit. The Americans seemed to have believed that Syria would be more flexible on its core demands.[427] This miscalculation were mostly upon the facts that since Hafiz al-Asad was not in good health[428], on one hand, and because of the fact that all parties felt that time was running out rapidly, on the other, Syria would consider to conclude a peace deal with Israel in rather short period of time, possibly during President Clinton's remaining time in the office.[429]

At the same time, the Syrians expected that President Clinton would bring an Israeli commitment for its withdrawal to the June 4, 1967 Line. According to Patrick Seale, "Assad arrived with a large delegation for what he anticipated would be a historic effort to put the peace train back on the rails. The Syrians -- and most independent observers -- assumed that Clinton would bring Assad an assurance from Barak that he was at last ready to recognize the June 4 line as the border between the two countries, and that Clinton would in turn receive assurances from Assad on other subjects in dispute. Detailed negotiations on the entire peace package could then resume with a good chance of success." He continued, "But Assad was in for a shock. His expectations were dashed in the very first minutes of the encounter. Instead of the "good news" he had expected about the border, he was taken aback when Clinton began to recite Barak's maximum requirements. Barak wanted control of all the waters -- not just of Lake Tiberias itself but

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427. Following the collapse of the summit, the Syrians, according to Patrick Seale, "were harshly critical of Dennis Ross who, they felt, had orchestrated the summit and allowed Barak to believe that Assad could be made to yield to pressure from Clinton." (Patrick Seale, "Obituary of the Syrian Track," p.155.)

428. A few days before the Summit, the Mideast Mirror, reported, "Assad is not in good health. According to reliable sources, his movements are painfully slow and he finds it difficult to get up from his chair or to stand. Most importantly, he has problems focusing his thoughts and has a short attention span…. If, given his present state of health, he is dragging himself and all his ailments to Geneva, it stands to reason that he will be getting something in return for what he is being expected to give." ("Geneva summit lottery: One heavy bet is on 'good news'," Mideast Mirror, March 24, 2000, Section: Israel; Vol. 14, No. 58.)

429. In an interview published in the Beirut daily al-Mustaqbal, Syria's foreign minister, Shara', expressed Syria's position on the impact of Asad's health on the peace process. He said that "Israel (and the U.S.) were mistaken if they thought Assad could be browbeaten into abandoning his long-standing demand for a full Israeli pullback from the Golan Heights to the June 4, 1967 line by considerations related to his health or to arranging the succession of his son Bashshar… the president did not want his son to inherit a dishonorable peace with Israel." ("Sharaa: Assad won't bequeath his son a dishonorable peace," Mideast Mirror, March 31, 2000, Section: Syria; Vol. 14, No. 63.)

of the Upper Jordan River and the other tributaries flowing into the Lake from the Golan."[430]

Syria's reaction to the failure of the summit was mixed. While "the view in Damascus was that Syria was the victim of a conspiracy. It had been asked to capitulate to Israel's demands", Syria's foreign minister, said in a statement "It is not possible to say that the summit failed or succeeded. The Geneva summit is part of American efforts that will continue with the aim of achieving just peace. If it appears until now that these efforts have not achieved the results hoped for, that's because, where the peace process is concerned, the Israeli government exercises the logic of force rather than the force of logic." Shara continued:

> "Although we had no prior illusions, we were surprised that the American president did not bring anything new from the Israeli side, but came to request from Syria that which might help Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak in his difficult circumstances…."[431]

In conclusion the key reason, according to Seale, for the failure of the summit was that "Israel wants to push the Syrians back from the Lake not only beyond the June 4 line, but beyond the 1923 international border by several hundred meters in order to control the road which runs around the Lake…the Israelis are not only disputing Syria's demand that the border run along the June line; they even want to amend the 1923 line and push it further east."[432] While this was the major reason for the failure of the summit, Israel's demand to remain in parts of the Golan Heights to control the early-warning station was another reason to break up the meeting.

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430. Patrick Seale, "Obituary of the Syrian track," <u>Mideast Mirror</u>, May 9, 2000, Section: Syria, Lebanon; Vol. 14, No. 87. Also see, Patrick Seale, "Obituary of the Syrian Track," p. 155.
431. "Israel's intransigence blamed for failure of Assad-Clinton summit,".
432. "Israel's intransigence blamed for failure of Assad-Clinton summit,".

Chapter 10

Syrian Perspectives on the Main Issues of the Peace Process

Introduction

There are several main issues that had long been important in Syrian-Israeli negotiations. The nature of peace, the meaning of comprehensive peace, the extent of Israeli withdrawal, and security arrangements were among the main issues of peace negotiations between Syria and Israel. But Syria's strategic goal in the peace process has long been the return of the Golan Heights. Prior to 1993, Syria also maintained that Palestinian rights were equally important. However, after the conclusion of Palestinian-Israeli agreement—the Oslo Accords—Syria was excluded from the negotiations over the Palestinian issues and therefore appeared to be reluctant about whatever the Palestinians preferred in their relations with the Israelis. These topics will be briefly discussed in this chapter.

Syrian Goals in the Peace Process

1) **Return of the Golan Heights**

The most strategic of Syria's goals in the peace process was to regain the Golan Heights, which were occupied by the Israelis in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.[433] The importance of the Golan Heights for Syria lies not only in security, but also in the

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433. For an report about Syrian life, political resistance and other social and economic measures after Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights See: Tayseer Mara'i and Usama R. Halabi, "Life Under Occupation In The Golan Heights," <u>Journal of Palestine Studies</u> Vol. 22, No. 1 (Autumn 1992) pp. 78-93.

symbolic value of these Heights.[434] Hafiz al-Asad consistently insisted that a peace settlement must be based on the unconditional return of the entire Golan Heights, meaning all the territory taken from Syria in the 1967 war. He also made any considerable progress in the peace negotiations with Israel contingent on the full return of the Golan Heights. Because of Syria's position on the Golan Heights, this issue has become one of the most important keys to securing a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The Golan is significant because of its strategic geo-political situation in the region. It is located at the meeting point of Israel, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. On a clear day, the view from Mount Hermon, which rises to about 9,000 feet, reaches to Damascus, about 30 miles to the northeast. The Golan plateau also dominates the entire northern Israeli border with the Lebanon. The Golan Heights has military importance for both Syria and Israel. For Israel, the Golan Heights is a strategic buffer zone against any attack by the Syrians. For Syria, the Golan is important because it is located only forty miles from its capital, and there are no natural obstacles in the road to Damascus. In addition to its obvious military value, the area is one of the most important sources of water for Israel. The region gives Israel access to the headwaters of the Jordan River. In conclusion, despite the Golan Heights' strategic importance, the military importance of this area is reduced in the era of ballistic missiles and unconventional warfare; its values are more symbolic.

While the Golan Heights have a highly symbolic value for Syria, they were especially important to Hafiz al-Asad because the loss of the Golan occurred while he was Minster of Defense. Therefore, to recover the national dignity of Syria, Asad consistently insisted that a peace settlement must be based on the unconditional return of the full Golan Heights. The Israelis wanted to stay on some part of the Golan Heights in order to make sure that their security would not be at risk. But, Syria opposed the Israeli proposal. The Syrians believe that Israeli presence on the Heights challenges Syria's

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[434]. Andrew Bacevich, Michael Eisenstadt, and Carl Ford, pp. 8-9.

sovereignty over its entire territories, and that it is "a symbol of occupation and a permanent reminder of national humiliation."[435]

However, after entering the peace process, Syria showed flexibility in negotiating with Israel over security concerns, a demilitarization zones, and peacekeeping forces. Syria has long demanded full and immediate Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. Syria considers Israeli surveillance equipment for early warning stations on the Golan Heights against its national interests, but it might accept security arrangements that do not require an Israeli presence on Syrian territory. From the Israeli point of view, although the early warning stations have a military importance to protect Israel's security concerns, the value of these stations is more symbolic.[436] Syria believes that the U.S. could provide Israel with high-quality communication monitoring and high-resolution optic photos through U.S. satellites.

2) Palestinian rights

Syria had long insisted on the comprehensive peace, which from Syria's perspective, means that peace had to address all Arab-Israeli disputes,[437] including Palestinian rights. The rights of Palestinians, from Syria's point of view, requires total Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza, Palestinian rights for self-determination in these areas, and the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland. Because of that, Hafiz al-Asad emphasized on several occasions that "Syria had no intention of signing a separate peace treaty with Israel and would insist that any accord cover the

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435. Alon Ben-Meir, "The Psychological Barriers To Israeli-Syrian Peace," The Christian Science Monitor, August 14, 1995: p. 19.

436. The reason is that "for nearly three decades the Israeli public has been told by successive governments that the Golan was critical to the country's national security and that only an Israeli presence on the plateau can guarantee security." (Alon Ben-Meir, "The Psychological Barriers To Israeli-Syrian Peace," p. 19.)

437. Given the importance of the Golan Heights for Syria, the question is whether Syria would be ready to sign an agreement with Israel if negotiations make progress on the Syrian-Israeli track but fail to achieve Palestinian rights in the West Bank and Gaza. Syria's position in this regard is ambivalent. Insisting on the idea that no one has any interest in the absence of a comprehensive peace, Hafiz al-Asad believed that "any separate or partial peace process will not achieve peace, security and stability in this region, and any party continuing the state of war with Israel will bring back complicated circumstances to the region and will lead to comprehensive wars in the future. Therefore, comprehensive wars and comprehensive conflict necessitate a comprehensive peace." (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts October 29, 1991, Part 4, The Middle East, Africa And Latin America; Madrid Conference; Me/1215/A/1.)

interests of all parties."[438] Asad also said, "had Syria thought of its own interest only…it would have achieved a unilateral solution…but it did not and will not do this. The Golan was originally occupied in a battle waged for Palestine."[439]

Contrary to Syria's interests, the Palestinians decided to negotiate a separate peace deal to resolve their conflicts with the Israelis. In August 1993, the Palestinians and Israelis reached an agreement after secret negotiations. The agreement posed extreme difficulties for Syria's policy in the peace process. Disappointed by the Palestinians, Syria's reaction was strong: criticizing Arafat for making such secret deal without achieving any remarkable progress. However, Syria did not try to sabotage the agreement, declaring it would neither hinder the agreement nor restrain the Palestinian protest against the accord. In an interview with an American television station, Hafiz al-Asad said,

> "We were of this perception, of this understanding that the coordination among the Arab countries would achieve its objective of pushing the peace process forward and of achieving success and security for the peace process as a whole. Suddenly we hear about a secret agreement that takes place between some PLO leaders and Israel. From my point of view, this certainly was not their best option. And it's not the best way to achieve peace. Nevertheless, we decided not to hinder the agreement which they had reached not to obstruct it. We said that this responsibility belongs to the Palestinian people and their institutions."[440]

Frustrated by the PLO action, Asad expressed he felt personally betrayed by the Oslo accord, saying he believed "it undercuts efforts to forge a comprehensive peace in the region." He continued, "the Arabs are one people. Had I signed the type of agreement signed by Arafat, I would have faced major and numerous problems not for love of

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438. The New York Times, March 19, 1993: p. 3.
439. Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Raymond Hinnebusch, p. 161.
440. "Assad keeps up war of words on the Israel-PLO agreement," Mideast Mirror, October 4, 1993.

Arafat or hate for me, but because Syrian citizens would believe that, by taking such a decision, I have turned my back on another Arab people."[441]

The Meaning of Comprehensive Peace

Syria had long insisted on a comprehensive peace. The meaning of comprehensive from Syria's point of view includes at least two elements: 1) the peace should address all Arab-Israeli disputes based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338; and 2) the Arab parties in the peace process should avoid making partial, separate deals with the Israelis; they should unify to coordinate a common role from a position of strength to secure Arab rights.

Comprehensive peace from Syria's view means that peace should secure Arab rights. These rights traditionally include the achievement of Palestinian rights and Israeli evacuation from the 1967 occupied land. Syria maintains all Arab-Israeli disputes are connected to each other; separate and partial agreements would not bring the conflict to an end. Hafiz al-Asad in a meeting with President Clinton in January 1994, emphasized that

"To me, there is no difference between the Golan, South Lebanon and the occupied parts of Palestine or Jordan…It is all one Arab land as far as I am concerned, with no part of it more precious to me than another. What I demand for one part I demand for all, and that is only natural, because it is all one land for one nation…Peace cannot be peace unless it is comprehensive. You have before you three experiments that did not make peace or end the conflict: Camp David in 1978 with Sadat's Egypt, May 17, 1983 with Amin Gemayel's Lebanon, and the Gaza-Jericho accord with Yaser Arafat on September 13, 1993. These are enough to indicate that unilateral solutions, even if they multiply, do not make peace."[442]

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441. "Assad keeps up war of words on the Israel-PLO agreement,".
442. <u>Mideast Mirror</u>, January 18, 1994, Section: Syria, Lebanon, Jordan; Vol. 08, No. 11.

Moreover, Syria maintains that the implementation of relevant UN resolutions on the Arab-Israeli conflict is an important component of comprehensive peace. Syria also encouraged other Arab parties in the peace process to emphasize on the implementation of UN Resolution 242 and 338. Syrians believe this would be the only way to secure Arab rights and to achieve a stable and durable peace between the Arabs and Israelis. In an interview, Syrian Foreign Minister Shara said:

"What we want is to implement United Nations resolutions, in particular, UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. These resolutions call for Israel's withdrawal from the occupied Arab lands and safeguarding the Palestinian national rights. And we think these two requisites are important in order to establish a just and comprehensive peace in the region…there is no other alternative—if we want peace in the region—but to implement UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.[443]

The meaning of comprehensive peace does not mean negotiations on all issues between all parties at the same time. In an interview with CNN on October 28, 1997, Hafiz al-Asad asserted that comprehensive for him means comprehensive solution for all Arab-Israeli disputes, not simultaneous negotiations on all tracks. He said, "This does not mean that a step here should be coupled with another step there. I do not mean that negotiations among the different committees should take place simultaneously. No one insists on this because it is impractical. I am discussing the final solution, which must be comprehensive. However, it is natural that one committee will move quickly and another committee will move slowly. This is natural for discussions and will certainly take place."444

One of the other components of the comprehensive peace is the need for all Arab parties to avoid making partial, separate agreements with the Israelis. Syria wants all Arab parties to coordinate their views on the peace process to reach a common position in

443. BBC Summary of World Broadcasts June 9, 1992, Part 4, Middle East Peace Process; Me/1402/A/ 1.
444. BBC Summary of World Broadcasts October 29, 1991, Part 4, The Middle East, Africa And Latin America; Madrid Conference; Me/1215/A/1.

order to play from a position of strength in the negotiations with the Israelis. Syrians believe that "Israel has focused on trying to disrupt Arab coordination by trying to lure some of the Arab parties into separate deals"445. Therefore, coordination between Arab parties in the peace process is crucial in order to avoid damages that could undermine Arab interests as a whole.

Syria views the peace process as a battlefield, which requires Arab coordination to regain the occupied territories, and to achieve a just and sustainable peace in the region. In this regard, President Hafiz al-Asad had repeatedly said that "the battle of peace is no less fierce than a real war and that Syria's commitment to regaining full Arab rights and rejection of any concession leaves no alternative to waging the battle of peace using every possible resource."446 Therefore, to win the battle of peace, Syrian officials believe that the Arabs must coordinate their positions.447 "There is no choice but to pool Arab ranks, making the battle of peace a battle for all Arabs and not just for those who take part in it."448

In general, Syria maintains the comprehensive peace as a way to restore Arab rights through negotiations with the Israelis. Explaining Syria's vision in this regard, Hafiz al-Asad once said in a news conference with U.S. President Bill Clinton that,

"Syria seeks a just and comprehensive peace with Israel as a strategic choice that secures Arab rights; ends the Israeli occupation; and enables all peoples in the

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445. Mideast Mirror, September 2, 1993, Section: The Arab Islamic World; Vol. 07, No. 169.
446. BBC Summary of World Broadcasts August 19, 1993: Part 4 The Middle East, Africa And Latin America: A. The Middle East; Me/1771/A.
447. To encourage other Arab parties to take part in a unified position, Syria argued that "the rights of the Arabs are clear, and the Arabs have not relinquished one iota of these rights or one inch of their territories. Arab demands are based on the international community's resolutions and charters, which denounce aggression, ban the occupation of territories by force and disapprove of changing the nature of these territories or planting them with settlements." (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts August 19, 1993: Part 4 The Middle East, Africa And Latin America: A. The Middle East; Me/1771/A.)
448. BBC Summary of World Broadcasts August 19, 1993: Part 4 The Middle East, Africa And Latin America: A. The Middle East; Me/1771/A.

region to live in peace, security, and dignity. In honor we fought; in honor we negotiate; and in honor we shall make peace."[449]

Meaning of Normalization and the Nature of Peace

The nature of peace is one of the most controversial disputes between the Syrians and Israelis. Although Syria had confirmed its commitment to normalizing its relations with Israel, the scope and the meaning of peace have been unclear. Therefore, despite the fact that there has been some progress in the Syrian-Israeli track, serious obstacles remain unresolved. The negotiations itself had long been deadlocked over the nature of the peace that Syria would agree to offer, and the scope of withdrawal to which Israel would be ready to concede. The Israelis want the Syrians to define what Hafiz al-Asad once called 'full peace'[450] before even they consider withdrawal from the Golan Heights. At the same time, the Syrians maintain Israel must declare its readiness to withdraw from all of the Golan Heights before they normalize their relation with the Israelis.

During the 1990s, Syria and Israel had several peace negotiations under the auspices of the United States. But most of talks ended with both sides reporting a continued deadlock over the same basic principles: the withdrawal and the nature of the peace. According to the New York Times, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was ready to give up large parts of the Golan Heights but he insisted that Syria must first elaborate on the nature of the peace treaty it is prepared to sign.[451]

The concept of peace settlement, from Syria's perspective, means "ending the state of war and leaving the matter of normalization of relations to future generations."[452] The concept of full peace from Syria's view is the implementation of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. Syria's Vice-President once said that "Syria's position in the peace process remains as clear as ever: peace must involve the implementation of the

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449. U.S. Department of State, "U.S. and Syria Pledge Cooperation on Middle East Peace Negotiations,".
450. Mideast Mirror, December 21, 1995, Section: Syria; Vol. 09, No. 247.
451. The New York Times, November 7, 1993: p. 10.
452. Mideast Mirror, January 13, 1994, Section: Syria, Vol. 08, No. 8.

Security Council Resolutions and therefore full (Israeli) withdrawal from the occupied territories."[453] From Syria's point of view, these resolutions recognize the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, and request Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders. Accordingly, Syria is not legally obliged to accept Israel's demand and definition of a normal relationship. Asad once said,

> "First we must end the state of belligerency. That means the implementation of United Nations Resolution 242. and the end of belligerency will mean the beginning of a stage of real peace…. If the Israelis return to the 1967 frontier and the West Bank and Gaza become a Palestinian state, the last obstacle to final settlement will have been removed."[454]

From Syria's perspective, normalization could follow only after full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied lands. Syria also insisted that normalization is not an issue that could be imposed. It would come only as a result of confidence and trust between the states.[455] Because of that, Syria usually refused to discuss the issues of normalization before the establishment of peace. According to Itamar Rabinovich,

> "Asad had accepted the notion of settlement and peace with Israel, but his concept of peace was consciously different from those of Sadat, Hussein, and Arafat. He saw the conflict with Israel in geopolitical terms and he saw its resolution through the same prism. Israel remained a rival, if not an enemy, and the terms of the peace settlement should not serve to enhance its advantage over the Arabs, Syria in particular, but rather to diminish it."[456]

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453. <u>Mideast Mirror</u>, January 5, 1994, Section: Jordan, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon; Vol. 08, No. 2.
[454]. Moshe Ma'oz, <u>Syria and Israel: From war to Peacemaking</u> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), P. 145.
[455]. Martha Neff Kessler, "Syria, Israel and the Middle East peace process: Past success and Final Challenges," p. 70.
[456]. Itamar Rabinovich, <u>The Brink of Peace: the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations</u>, p. 168.

In contrast to Syria's view, some Israelis maintain that with Syria, the only agreement Israel should accept is "peace for peace."[457] Hence, Israel wants to have both peace and the land in return for peace with the Arabs. Syria has always been disappointed with such this policy. Head of Syria's delegation to the peace talks, Muwaffaq al-Allaf, expressed Syria's position that, "Israel's refusal to abide by the requirements of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, on which the peace process is based, and its insistence on raising issues which cannot be discussed before the establishment of peace and which do not constitute a precondition for peace, is a serious matter indeed."[458]

Syrian maintains that there is a meaningful correlation between withdrawal and normalization of relations. That means the peace should be implemented in proper sequence; Israel must first recognize Syria's sovereignty on whole Golan Heights and commit to evacuate Syria's territories in a reasonable timetable before Syria could open its borders and markets to the Israelis. Syria's Foreign Minister, Faruq al-Shara', in an interview in October 1994 simply explained:

"Let us put things in the proper sequence. We do not want to have loopholes or snags here and there, which would be counterproductive. We want to move the whole people together to believe that peace is coming and this peace would be real and this peace would be comprehensive…at the same time, there could be no peace with Syria without a total withdrawal from the Golan…because just imagine if there was peace and a part of our occupied territory would remain under the Israeli control. I mean, what the reaction of the Syrian people would be. They would say: Well, this is capitulation, this is not peace, and they would not even think of dealing with the Israelis under any circumstances, even if the

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457. In contrast to Likud's policy on the peace process, Prime Minister Rabin recognized the formula of land for peace. When he took power in the summer of 1992, "Rabin strongly suggested that Israel is willing to return at least part of the Golan Heights to Syria for peace with that country…[he said] The idea of 'peace for peace' does not work where Syria is concerned. I never heard of anyone interpreting the Syrian reading of 242 and 338 as meaning peace for peace. Security Council Resolution 338 calls for negotiations toward a just and durable peace in the region. (The New York Times, September 10, 1992: p. A8.)
458. BBC Summary of World Broadcasts December 18, 1992.

government would issue orders to them. So peace should be honorable, it should be just, it should be balanced."[459]

Israel, however, expected that making peace with its Arab neighbors should facilitate Israeli incorporation and integration into the Middle East. Because of that, Israel insisted on achieving normalization of relations prior to its withdrawal from Syria's territories. Therefore, on several occasions, Israeli officials made clear that the scope of Israeli withdrawal would be contingent on the extent of normalization. Israelis believe that peace without normalization of relations, the so-called cold peace, could easily revert to a conflict and eventually lead to another war.

The problem is that Syria views Israeli economic and cultural penetration into the Arab world as the main concern for its national security and interests. Therefore, Syria's strategic goal has long been to contain Israeli penetration into the Arab world. Then Syrian Vice-President Abdelhalim Khaddam declared in January 1994 that "the idea of a 'new Middle East' in which Israel would become part of the Arab world is aimed at giving the Jewish state control of Arab resources…even if Israel withdrew from all the occupied Arab territories, it could still pose a threat to the Arabs, given its present arms buildup…. We refuse to have Israel as part of the Arab world."[460]

In general, Syria has been unwilling to normalize its relations with Israel mostly because of its psychological and economic dimensions: from a psychological perspective, Syria believes that it will take time "to direct Syrian popular attitudes from a state of war to a state of peace. This is not logical, especially since it is rare to find a household in Syria that has not lost someone on the battlefield…you can't oblige them to buy Israeli goods or visit Israel if they are not convinced that Israel has changed from being an enemy to a neighbor…we cannot be obliged to make the peace warm."[461] From an

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459. BBC Summary of World Broadcasts October 10, 1994, Part 4, Middle East Peace Process; Me/2122/Med.
460. Mideast Mirror, January 5, 1994, Vol. 08, No. 2.
461. "Fresh Light on the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations: an interview with Ambassador Walid al-Moualem," p. 86.

economic perspective, the chief of Syria's negotiating team, Ambassador Moualem, explained Syria's objections on the grounds that

> "They wanted open border, open markets for their goods, and so on. This would have an obvious effect on our own economy. Our economic regulations are not against them…how can you integrate two economies when one has a per capita income of $900 per year and the other has a per capita income of $15,000 per year? Such integration is not possible, so we discussed a transitional period during which we could raise our economy to the level where there can be competition without undue hardship on our society."[462]

In conclusion, the basic Syrian conception of peace would have meant neither diplomacy nor trade relations; it means only the end to the belligerency between Syria and Israel. If Israel conceded to withdraw from the Golan Heights, Syria would be willing to maintain some kind of 'cold peace' with Israel. However, the warm peace and complete normalization of relations would be contingent on other issues such as the achievement of Palestinian rights.

Meaning Of Withdrawal

Syria insists on Israeli withdrawal to the line of June 4, 1967.[463] This line was the confrontation line between Israel and Syria before Israel occupied Syria's territory of the Golan Heights during the six-day war of June 1967. The line was neither an internationally recognized boundary nor a border recognized by both states of Israel and Syria. Previously Syria neither had recognized the 1923 line of demarcation nor the armistice line of 1949 as a border with Israel. The 1923 line was the result of the Anglo-French partition of Greater Syria that was drawn by the British and French in the

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462. "Fresh Light on the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations: an interview with Ambassador Walid al-Moualem," pp. 86-87.

[463]. For an explanation why Syria insisted on Israeli withdrawal to the lines of June 4, 1967 see: Itamar Rabinovich, The Brink of Peace: the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations, pp. 142-143.

aftermath of World War I. The armistice line of 1949 was also derived from formal security agreements that were negotiated between Syria and Israel under United Nations auspices after the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948.[464]

As mentioned above, while Syria has never recognized any border with Israel, it has long insisted on the withdrawal of Israeli forces to the line of June 4, 1967.[465] Syria wants Israel to pull back to this line in order to have access to the northeastern shore of Lake Tiberias, which it lost in the six-day war of 1967. According to Frederic Hof, "major elements of the line of June 4, 1967 were set in place by war in 1948, armistice in 1949 and, above all, by the failure of the Parties to convert their armistice to a treaty of peace in the early 1950s. As it became increasingly clear that peace was not on the horizon, Israel and Syria both sought to take maximum advantage of the territorial ambiguities left in place by their armistice."[466]

Contrary to Syria's position that clearly insisted on Israel's return to the line of June 4, 1967, "Israel's stance on the question of withdrawal and the permanent boundary is more ambiguous than the Syrian and often contradictory."[467] Syria has long demanded the return of the entire Golan Heights, although it has shifted its initial position on demanding an immediate Israeli pullout. Syria also has long insisted on a specific and reasonable timetable for a total pullout. Nevertheless, Israel, especially during the Rabin administration, has repeatedly said it will withdraw from some parts of the Golan Heights, and not from the entirety of the Golan Heights.

Furthermore, Israel has consistently refused to spell out the extent of the withdrawal until Damascus commits itself to a full peace with Israel. Rabin had also

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464. The negotiations followed the end of the Israeli war known as the war of independence, and called for the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution of November 16, 1948. The purpose of this resolution was to end hostilities between Israel and its Arab neighbors and to facilitate permanent peace in Palestine.

465. Itamar Rabinovich, The Brink of Peace: the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations, pp. 142-143.

466. Frederic Hof, "The Line Of June 4, 1967," Middle East Insight Vol. XIV, No. 5. (September-October 1999).

467. James Moore, "An Israeli-Syrian Peace Treaty: So Close And Yet So Far," Middle East policy Vol. III, no. 3, 1994: p. 75.

repeatedly said that the depth of the withdrawal would be based on the depth of the peace. Rabin, since he established his administration in 1992, frequently used the vague formula of the correlation between the depth of peace with Syria and Israel's withdrawal from the Golan Heights. According to the Jerusalem Post, Rabin used this formula to lure Hafiz al-Asad into making peace with Israel based on Israel's conditions. "He [Rabin] based it on intelligence assessments that Syria had made peace a strategic option, maybe even a priority in light of global and regional changes. Even then, Rabin repeatedly asserted, Israel will unequivocally insist on the principle of gradual withdrawal and a comprehensive security arrangements package."[468]

Therefore, Israel and Syria remain far apart on crucial issues of the meaning of full peace and the extent of the withdrawal. In a meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Rabin said that Israel would be "willing to sign an accord for an unspecified Golan withdrawal to be completed in three stages over a five-to eight-year period…Israel could yield the Golan Druse villages at the end of the first phase, …in return for Syria establishing full diplomatic relations with Israel."[469] These three stages would include: 1) a minor withdrawal from some of the Golan Druse villages, 2) three years of normalization of relations as a test to see whether Syrians are serious about peace with Israel, and 3) a referendum on further negotiations over a general peace package and the extent of Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights.[470]

However, Syria's response was a strong rejection. Farouq al-Shara', Syria's Foreign Minister said that due to the smallness of the Golan Heights, there is no need for such a long trial period.[471] The referendum proposal,[472] in which Rabin said a future peace treaty with Syria will be dependent on the will of the Israelis, brought two divided

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468. "Rabin out to lure Assad into making peace," The Jerusalem Post, September 9, 1994: p. A3.
469. "Israel offers three-stage Golan Heights withdrawal," The Jerusalem Post, May 1, 1994: p. 1.
470. See The Jerusalem Post, September 9, 1994: p. A3.
471. The New York Times, September 11, 1994: p. 18.
472. On January 17, 1994, Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli prime minister announced that his government would hold a referendum on a future peace treaty with Syria. He said "a significant withdrawal is likely to involve uprooting settlements, and I would like the decision on this to be according to the will of the entire people. .... If and when we come to a draft peace treaty between Syria and Israel and it demands a painful price - perhaps beyond what the residents of Israel expect - if, and I emphasize, and when, in my opinion it will have to be brought to a referendum." (The Independent (London) January 19, 1994: p. 12.)

reactions: some observers believed the referendum proposal was to push forward talks with Syria while others argued that "Rabin proposed a referendum to delay the prospects of any agreement with Syria, believing that President Hafez al-Assad is incapable of offering the kind of peace which would make possible an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan. They say the ploy is an excuse to give no further concessions on the extent of withdrawal."[473]

Hafiz al-Asad expected that the Golan Heights be treated like the Sinai, which was returned in its entirety to Egypt in exchange for peace. But the Israelis believed that Syrian leaders had not been willing to make any concessions as Anwar Sadat did once, when he made an unprecedented trip to Israel in 1977. Hence, Israel repeatedly insisted that its return of the Golan Heights is not to be the same as that of the Sinai, in which Israel withdrew from all of the Sinai Peninsula in return for making peace with Egypt. Rabin once said "Israel's return of the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt should not serve as a precedent for the Golan talks."[474] In response to a question regarding the implementation of UN Resolutions 242 and 338 on the Syrian-Israeli track, Rabin replied, "When we said that Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 were applicable to peace with Syria, we implied that the IDF would withdraw to secure and recognized borders. We envisage withdrawal on the Golan Heights but not from the Golan Heights."[475] By insisting on the withdrawal to "secure borders", Rabin meant that Israel should keep parts of the Golan Heights for maintaining Israel's security.[476] However, regarding Israeli settlements in the Golan Heights, Rabin once hinted that Israel would be willing to remove settlements from the Golan Heights for the sake of making peace with Syria. He said:

"Settlements may be removed only for the sake of peace. If we reach the point where we need to remove settlements for the sake of peace, I have been and will

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473. The Independent (London) January 19, 1994: p. 12.
474. The Guardian (London) October 27, 1992: p. 11.
475. The Jerusalem Post, October 27, 1992.
476. Yitzhak Rabin insisted on several occasions that Israel must maintain a strip of the Golan for security reasons. See The Independent (London) January 16, 1994: p. 12.

remain in favor of it… For me, peace is higher value for Israel's future and security than this or that settlements."[477]

Security Arrangements

Security arrangements have long been one of the key issues in Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations. If the Israelis agree to withdraw from the Golan Heights, they would demand precise and guaranteed security arrangements in which they could prevent the risk of any surprise attack by Syria from the Golan Heights. Although both Israel and Syria agreed on the key issue of the creation of a demilitarized zone, the two countries have extreme differences on the issues of security arrangements. While Israel's position was to remain on parts of the Golan Heights and to dismantle Syria's weapon of mass destruction, the Syrians maintained that "security was a concern of both parties…security arrangements were to be parallel and reciprocal and without prejudice to the sovereignty of any party nor to the principle of equal rights for both."[478]

One of Israel's main concerns is to prevent any surprise attack by Syria. Israel's logic, according to former Prime Minister Barak, is that "Syria has a large standing army and can keep many, many troops and tanks constantly deployed near its border with Israel, so that a surprise attack is possible at any time. That's Israel's constant fear. Israel has a small standing army, so it uses the Golan as a land buffer that would slow down any Syrian surprise attack long enough for Israel to mobilize its reserves."[479] So the key point in Israel's position is to do whatever is necessary to decrease its vulnerability. The dismantling of Syria's ability to mobilize such a surprise attack from the Golan Heights is among Israel's main goals.

Therefore, Israel insisted on substitute security guarantees in the case of its withdrawal from the Golan Heights. These substitutes include at least pushing Syria's

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477. James Moore. "An Israeli-Syrian peace treaty: so close and yet so far." <u>Middle East policy</u> Vol. III, no. 3, 1994: p. 75.
478. Itamar Rabinovich, <u>The Brink of Peace: the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations</u>, p. 61.
479. <u>The New York Times</u>, December 12, 1999: p.15.

troops from the border, dismantling Syria's chemical weapons of mass destruction, installing early-warning stations on some parts of the Golan Heights, and the reduction of Syria's standing army. With respect to these issues, both Syria and Israel agreed on some key elements through negotiations between the chiefs of staff of Israel and Syria in the mid-1990s. However, there had been some significant disagreements on the principle of symmetry. Syria wants all security arrangements and demilitarized zones to be equal on both sides while Israel rejects this notion.[480] Due to these polarized positions, Syria and Israel could not reach a peace treaty in the mid-1990s when Syria apparently proposed the notion of 'full peace for full withdrawal', and Israel accepted the concept of partial withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

In general, Israel believes that Syria has a formidable ballistic missile capability and the capacity to use chemical weapons against Israel.[481] Hence, Israel wanted the dismantling of Syria's chemical weapons arsenals. Moreover, Israel wanted both a tangible reduction in Syria's standing army and an area of limited forces deep into the Syrian heartland. Israel wanted to push Syria's troops and army equipment as far as possible from the frontier, almost to Damascus. Israel also believes that Syria's mass deployment of forces near the border could jeopardize its security. So Syria is expected to cut significantly its ground forces and army equipment.[482]

However, such a reconstructing of Syria's army would be detrimental to its national security, which Syria is unlikely to accept. Because it has been faced some potential threats from its neighbors, Syria needs to strengthen its position. So it is implausible to expect Syria to accept such a plan as proposed by the Israelis, which would significantly reconstruct and reduce the size of its army.

In addition to its need to maintain internal security in order to sustain its minority government, Syria has long been faced with unfriendly and, in some cases, antagonistic

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480. James Moore, "An Israeli-Syrian peace treaty: so close and yet so far," p. 79.

481. Scott Peterson, "Slow going on the Syria-Israel peace track," The Christian Science Monitor, October 19, 1999: p. 7.

482. See Aryeh Shalev, Israel and Syria: peace and security on the Golan Heights (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), P. 199.

relations with Iraq during the 1980s and 1990s. Turkey also has long been a main concern for Syria's national security. Syria's relations with Turkey had been strained because of Syria's alleged support for the Turkish Kurds in their conflict with the Turkish government on the one hand, and Turkey's friendly relationship and military alliance with Israel on the other. Moreover, Syria had to deal with the enormous instability and civil war in Lebanon during the 1975-1990. Syria still deploys thousands of its armed forces in Lebanon. Therefore, Damascus believes that they need stronger military forces not only to maintain Syria's national security but also to further regional security for the Levant. Furthermore, due to the long history of conflict with Israel the suspicion would remain for a while; and in the case of making peace with Israel, it would be implausible for the Syrians to trust Israeli intentions in the near future.

In addition to Israel's demand for dismantling Syria's chemical weapons of mass destruction and reductions in Syria's standing army, Israel also wanted to maintain its sophisticated, long-range, electronic observation devices as early-warning stations on some parts of the Golan Heights, particularly on Mt. Hermon.[483] Israel's logic, according to Omri Bar-Lev,[484] a former Israeli colonel, is that it needs the warning time to mobilize its reserve forces.[485]

From the beginning of its establishment, Israel has been concerned about a surprise attack from its hostile neighbors, and therefore the rationale behind its defensive strategy has been not only to prevent such an attack but also to reduce the fear of a surprise attack. Hence, the Israelis, themselves, want to keep maintaining the early warning stations that they have already set up on the Golan Heights. According to Bar-Lev, the Israelis are apprehensive about putting the nation's fate in the hands of others. So the idea of operating the early warning stations by international forces would be rejected.

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483. Mt. Hermon is 2,814 meters high and is located only 60 kilometers from Damascus. The Israelis has already installed their sophisticated electronic observation posts that enable them to see far into Syria's heartland. Israel maintains the Mt. Hermon post is the key point for Israel's security. However, there are other major hills that give Israel long-range observation by advanced electronic devices, among them Tel Fares 1,250 meters high, the Hermonit, and the Avital and Booster Tels, all 1200 meters high. Israel has already installed high-tech, long-range electronic observation devices on these hills.
484. He is author of Security Arrangements on the Golan Heights in Light of the Future Battlefield.
485. "Early warning stations are key to deal," The Jerusalem Post, December 10, 1999: p. A3.

Bar-Lev believes that "The central warning (stations) need to be in our hands…. We must always rely on ourselves...so warning and our ability to make sure agreements are being kept are central components in any arrangement."[486]

Although such early warning stations have genuine security values, the importance of these stations for Israel is more symbolic than real. To justify their occupation of Syria's territories and to prevent a surprise Syrian attack, Israeli officials have long insisted that the Golan Heights is a strategic asset and therefore critical to Israel's national security. Once the Golan is given back, Israeli officials argue, Israel will lose crucial positions. Accordingly, only Israeli presence on the Heights, or at least early warning stations manned only by the Israelis, could guarantee Israel's security.

Syria has its own legitimate reasons for opposing Israel's demands. First, Syria argues that security arrangements should not compromise the integrity of either side. As one Syrian diplomat said, "We do not want to have a Syrian early warning station in Israel, and we will not allow an Israeli one on our territory."[487] Second, technically, early warning stations manned by the Israelis could be used for other military or non-military purposes. In each case, these stations could undermine Syria's national security. Third, an Israeli warning station on Mount Hermon is a symbol of continuing Israeli occupation of Syria's territory. Syrians believe it would be "a permanent reminder of national humiliation…. This would be the height of insult to our dignity as a people and a stigma to our national pride."[488]

The previous round of talks between Syria and Israel which took place in the first half of the 1990s stalled and finally collapsed in 1996 over Syria's intractable position rejecting any Israeli or foreign presence in the Golan Heights. Syria argued that technical surveillance, i.e., U.S. satellites, would be enough monitoring, and it could provide Israel with the intelligence about Syria's military movements.

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486. The Jerusalem Post, December 10, 1999, p. 3A.
487. Alon Ben-Meir, "The Psychological Barriers to Israeli-Syrian Peace," p. 19.
488. Alon Ben-Meir, "The Psychological Barriers to Israeli-Syrian Peace," p. 19.

However, during dramatic progress in Syrian-Israeli negotiations in December 1999-January 2000, Syria agreed to provide Israel with an early warning station on the Golan Heights if it were operated by U.S. and French military observers.[489] Although this proposal could appear to be important progress, Israel insisted on their previous position; the need for Israel's presence on the Golan Heights and the negotiations stalled again.

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489. John Lancaster, "Syria Offers Israel Major Concessions," The Washington Post, January 14, 2000: p. A1.

Chapter 11

Conclusion

This chapter is divided into two sections: first, a conclusion for previous chapters, and second, a general conclusion.

Chapter 2: U.S.-Syrian Relations

U.S.-Syrian relations have been strained in recent decades. The relations deteriorated due to both facts and misperceptions. The two countries each perceived the other as seeming to ignore or sabotage its regional interests. Several factors have always strained the relationship between Syria and the United States. The American plot to subvert Syrian government in the mid 1950s was the beginning of a decades long confrontation and animosity between the United States and Syria. The Syrians maintained that because of U.S. strategic relations with Israel, the United States sought to contain Syria's legitimate interests in the region. The fact that the United States became Israel's chief benefactor in its conflict with the Arabs exacerbated the relations between the two countries.

Syria and the United States have been challenged over several regional issues; most prominent among them is the Arab-Israeli conflict. Syria's alleged role in international terrorism and its support for radical Palestinian and Lebanese groups has had enormous negative effects on its relations with the United States, as well. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States viewed Syria as an opponent of peace in the Middle East, and as a country whose main goals was to prevent Americans from achieving their interests in the Middle East.

Prior to the 1990s, Syria's close relations with the Soviet Union provided an opportunity for the Soviets to expand their influence in the Middle East. The United States, therefore, viewed Syria in the context of the Cold War and rivalry with the Soviet Union. The Americans considered Syria an outpost and surrogate of the Soviets in the Middle East. Therefore, as much as the United States tried to exclude the Soviets from having an important role in Middle East affairs—particularly in the Arab-Israeli conflict—they also sought to contain Syria's regional role. The United States, therefore, tried to exclude Syria from the Arab-Israeli peace process in the late 1970s and early 1980s, or at least to marginalize Syria's role. There was no reference to Syria in the two peace agreements that were signed under American auspices during this time: the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel in 1978, and the stillborn May 17, 1983 Accord between Lebanon and Israel.

Syria objected to these accords on the grounds that these unilateral agreements would not resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict and finally would lead to Israeli penetration and integration into the Middle East. This unilateral U.S. policy provoked Syria to disrupt U.S. peace initiatives in the Middle East. Syria, therefore, adopted a policy to isolate Egypt from the Arab world, and to sabotage the May 17 Accord through its proxies in Lebanon. These events exacerbated the already strained relations between Syria and the United States, and prevented the two countries from finding common interests for regional cooperation.

However, the collapse of the Eastern European countries and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s led to drastic changes in the Middle East. These changes provided new opportunities for the United States and Syria to cooperate at the regional level. The United States appreciated Syria's participation in broader regional issues, such as taking part in the U.S.-led coalition against the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and in the negotiations of the Madrid peace conference in November 1991. In spite of this cooperation, the United States refused to upgrade its relations with the Syrians. The U.S. continued to include Syria on its list of states sponsoring international terrorism. They

also imposed sanctions on Syria, preventing Syria from receiving American economic aid and purchasing American advanced technology. These sanctions have long been among the main obstacles keeping relations between the two countries from achieving normalcy.

Chapter 3: The Madrid Peace Conference

Syria was the first Arab country that agreed to attend the Madrid peace conference. Several reasons caused Syria to attend this conference. Among these reasons, Syria's desire to improve its relations with the United States was significant. Syria's participation in the conference brought new opportunities for this country to end its isolation in the region and to some extent adjust its foreign policy to the new circumstances in the Middle East.

In the early 1990s, new changes in the international and regional arena diminished Syria's political and military positions. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Syria lost its main patron; it, therefore, could no longer pose any tangible military threat to Israel. The collapse of the Soviet Union brought enormous uncertainties to Syria. These uncertainties made Syria more vulnerable to U.S. hegemonic power in the region. These circumstances marked the emergence of a new political and regional system in the Middle East. Syria had no option but to adopt its foreign policy to the new changes in the region. Syria, therefore, participated in the U.S.-led coalition against the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and agreed to attend the Madrid peace conference, hoping to improve its relations with the United States and achieve its goals through diplomatic initiatives. On one hand, without participating in the conference, the Syrians would have no hope for playing an important role in the Middle East peace process. On the other, the United States, as sponsor of the conference, could have enormous difficulty in bringing the Arabs and Israelis to a negotiating table without Syria's participations. Therefore, mutual interests brought the two countries to the point at which, with cooperation at the regional level, they could achieve their goals.

Because of the importance of cooperation with the United States, Syria retreated from its previous position. The Syrians earlier wanted Israel to commit to full withdrawal from the Golan Heights before they would agree to attend the Madrid peace conference. Moreover, Syria agreed to attend the conference despite the fact that they were frustrated by the events that discouraged them and other Arab parties from participating in the conference. These events included Israel's refusal to trade land for peace, Israel's rejection of Palestinian participation in the conference as an independent partner, and the building of new settlements in the occupied lands.

Chapter 4: The Oslo Peace Process

Despite its vague references to the main issues of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Oslo Accords were the beginning of numerous rounds of talks between the Palestinians and Israelis. Although these negotiations brought expectation that they would lead to a reconciliation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, they were derailed because Israel was extremely reluctant to recognize basic Palestinian rights. The less ready Israelis were to recognize the Palestinians legitimate rights—especially when Binyamin Netanyahu came to power in May 1996—the more frustrated Palestinians became in regard to the implementation of the Accords. The Israelis deliberately excluded substantive issues of their disputes with the Palestinians and postponed them to the future negotiations. The Accords brought neither security nor prosperity for the Palestinians. It, therefore, significantly led to the frustrations among them. The frustration increased uncertainties among the Palestinians and was one of the main causes of a cycle of violence on both sides.

While the Accords led to the improvement of Israel's relations with many countries, it slowed down the progress in the Syrian-Israeli track. Syria explicitly objected the Accords on the grounds that the Accord undermined Arab's positions on the negotiations with the Israelis. Syria's objection deteriorated the already poor relations with the Israelis. The immediate consequence of the Accords for Syria was that Syria had no option but to revive its policy toward peace. Syria was excluded from the negotiations

on behalf of the Palestinian issues; therefore its emphasis on the concept of comprehensive peace was pointless. Syria, therefore, focused on the recovery of its own territory.

In spite of its negative impacts on Syria, the Oslo Accords once again placed Syria in a position that it could play an important role in the peace process through its leverage over opponent Palestinian groups who resided in Syria. Both Israelis and Americans wanted Syria to silence Palestinian opposition to the Oslo Accords. Although reluctant to do so, Syria showed a willingness to see whether the implementation of this agreement would lead to normalization of relations between the Palestinians and Israelis.

Chapter 5: Slow Progress After the Oslo Accords (1993-1994)

During the period between the initial phase of the Madrid peace conference in October 1991 and the conclusion of the Oslo Accords there was little progress along the Syrian-Israeli track. In the aftermath of the Oslo Accord, Syria rather preferred to show the insufficiencies of the Accords and the fact that such a unilateral solution would not lead to a just and honorable peace between the Palestinians and Israelis.

The slow progress and frustration, which resulted from the prolonged deadlock in the bilateral negotiations between Syria and Israel, brought more uncertainty about the future of the whole peace process. Fearing that increasing uncertainties would make the resumption of the negotiations more difficult, the United States, therefore, emphasized on the importance of Syria's role in the peace process. In order to facilitate the negotiations, the U.S. took various diplomatic initiatives. President Clinton's meeting with Hafiz al-Asad in Geneva in January 1994 and his visit to Damascus later that year in October were attempts to assure the Syrians that their role was vital to the conclusion of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

During this period, there were various events that triggered more violence in the region, and consequently derailed the peace process. Among these events was the Hebron

Massacre of February 1994. The immediate effect of the massacre was the suspension of talks by all Arab parties to the peace process. The Palestinian opponents of the peace process took advantage of the events to show that peace would be impossible. Realizing the difficulties of the peace process, Syria persuaded other Arab parties to resume their talks with the Israelis. Syria continued to hope for the conclusion of a comprehensive peace with Israel at the time that those extremists on both sides tried to sabotage the peace process. Syria's goal was to demonstrate its willingness to help the Americans to facilitate the peace negotiations, hoping it would lead to both the improvement of their relations with the United States and progress in their negotiations with the Israelis.

But another setback stalled further progress in the Syrian-Israeli track. The Jordanians decided to ease their relations with the Israelis through a separate, unilateral agreement. From Syria's point of view, the treaty severely damaged Arab unity, Arab interests, and Syria's credibility in coordinating Arab positions. Syria could no longer insist on a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Because of all these ramifications, Syria viewed Jordan's treaty with Israel as a betrayal of the Arabs.

The conclusion of separate peace deals with Israel by the Palestinians and Jordanians with Israel created more pressure on the Syrians to conclude an agreement with the Israelis on their own behalf. Given the fact that other parties to the peace process had already reached an agreement with Israel, how could Syria coordinate a comprehensive peace between the Arabs and Israelis? Understanding their own restricted alternatives, Syria had to shift its foreign policy to bargaining for recovering of the Golan Heights.

This revisionism was a remarkable breakthrough in Syria's foreign policy. Up to that point, Syria refused to talk explicitly about the nature of and pre-requisites for peace. At this time, Syria showed more willingness for the negotiations to be resumed, hoping they could reach an agreement with the Israelis. There was remarkable progress in the Syrian-Israeli track afterward, although both countries failed to conclude a peace treaty.

Chapter 6: Progress on the Syrian-Israeli track (1994-1996)

Under American auspices, the Syrian-Israeli track achieved remarkable progress in the sporadic negotiations that took place between December 1994 and March 1996. Several rounds of talks convened in the United States between high-ranking officials on each side, providing a framework for the achievement of a general agreement on security issues and related disputes. After the conclusion of a separate peace agreement between Israel and both the Palestinians and Jordanians, the United States and Israel focused their attention on the Syrian track, hoping to end the prolonged stalemate, which resulted from enormous differences on basic issues of the peace process.

Maintaining that progress on the security issues would make it easier to progress on other issues, Syria and Israel's chiefs of staff met in Washington, in December 1994. Although the meeting failed to produce any tangible progress, it furthered confidence-building measures between the two countries. In this phase, although Syria agreed to both a demilitarized zone and a limited force zone, the negotiations failed to reach a concrete conclusion on the grounds that Israel sought to remain in some strategic parts of Syria's territory for security reasons. For the first time, Syria showed more flexibility on disputed security arrangements and agreed to normalize their relations with Israel if the later withdrew from the entire Golan Heights.

After another hiatus stalemate in the Syrian-Israeli track, the negotiations were resumed under American auspices at Wye Plantation. The assassination of Yitzhak Rabin provided new momentum for the Syrian-Israeli track. At the time that Shimon Peres took office, the two countries appeared to show more flexibility in order to reach an agreement. Various issues of the peace process such as normalization of relations and other issues related to the future of Syrian-Israeli relations were discussed during these rounds of negotiations. The achievement of these negotiations was greater than that of the four previous years. But before the completion of the third round of talks, the

negotiations at Wye Plantation were suspended by Peres on March 4, 1996 and remained deadlocked until Barak came to power.

Chapter 7: Deadlock In The Syrian-Israeli Negotiations (1996-1999)

Following the suspension of the Syrian-Israeli talks, the election of Binyamin Netanyahu exacerbated the already strained process between Syria and Israel. Netanyahu deliberately tried to set new terms and conditions for the negotiations that undermined the achievement of previous rounds of talks. The Syrians were frustrated when Netanyahu proposed a policy of peace for peace, negotiations without preconditions and the retention of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights. The Syrians were extremely disappointed when they realized that the United States was either reluctant or unable to put pressure on Israel to pursue the achievement of the previous rounds of talks. Whatever was behind the U.S. policy, the result was, at least from Syria's point of view, that the United States could not be an honest broker.

An important factor prevented Syria and Israel from reaching an agreement for the resumption of talks during Netanyahu's government. Syria insisted that the negotiations must be resumed from the point at which they were suspended by Peres in March 1996, meaning that they had reached an agreement with the previous Israeli governments: full peace in exchange for full withdrawal. But Netanyahu refused to commit his government to the unwritten agreement, and insisted on the resumption of negotiations without any conditions.

Chapter 8: Shepherdstown Talks (January 2000)

After series of frustrating stalemates in the Syrian-Israeli track, the election of Ehud Barak in May 1999 created new momentum for the resumption of the peace process between Israel and other Arab parties. Barak's announcement that he would withdraw Israeli troops from southern Lebanon produced an encouraging impetus for the Syrian-Israel track.

Because of continuing disagreements over procedural matter between Syria and Israel, the United States played an important role to convince both sides to resume their negotiations. The problem was that Syrians maintained that they had reached an agreement with the Israelis regarding full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights in return for full peace. The Syrians were anger that the United States did not support Syria's position, maintaining there had not been such a commitment made by the Israelis as Syria claimed. The negotiations finally resumed after tremendous diplomatic efforts. Fearing a unilateral withdrawal could lead to escalation of violence in southern Lebanon, The Israeli government wanted to reach an arrangements with Syria prior to their withdrawal, hoping the Syrians could restrain Hezbollah in southern Lebanon.

The meeting between the highest ranking of Syrian and Israeli officials in December 1999 provided an opportunity that under American auspices Syria and Israel could reach an agreement. The negotiations continued in Shepherdstown but the talks were soon interrupted because of enormous disagreements over the same procedural matters that had prevented Syria and Israel previously from reaching a reasonable agreement over their disputes. Although the United States facilitated the negotiations between Syria and Israel, they failed to build confidence between the parties, or at least to assure them that their basic and fundamental demands would not be sacrificed to the other side's demands.

The talks in Shepherdstown stalled right at the beginning. Israel was reluctant to discuss the scope of its withdrawal from the Golan Heights before Syria identified the nature of peace and the extent of its future relations with Israel. At the same time, Syria maintained it would be pointless to discuss these issues unless they knew whether Israel was willing to withdraw from the entire Golan Heights. Americans proposed simultaneous negotiations on main disputed issues, but the Israelis appeared reluctant to continue the talks within this framework.

The Syrian-Israeli negotiations were suspended once again because of mistrust and rigidity on both sides. Neither Israel nor Syria appeared to be willing to compromise

on a conceptual framework for the establishment of a peace agreement between them. Although they could assure the Israelis that peace would not jeopardize Israel's national security, the United States was reluctant to put pressure on Israel to concede to Syria's demand. Due to the Israeli lobby in the United States, it was not clear to what extent the Clinton administration could pressure Israel to pursue the negotiations, even if the administration had been willing to do so.

The United States, however, succeeded in convincing the Syrians that it was in their interests to be more flexible in the negotiations with the Israelis. Syria showed that they were ready to make peace with Israel if the latter agreed to withdraw from Syria's territory. Syria, therefore, made various concessions to both U.S. and Israel. Among these concessions were the key issues of security arrangements, normalization of relations, and establishment of early warning stations on the Golan Heights.

Chapter 9: Syrian Perspectives on the Main Issues of the Peace Process

There are several issues that have long been most important in the Syrian-Israeli negotiations. These issues include Syria's insistence on Israel's withdrawal from the entire Golan Heights, normalization of relations, the nature of peace, and security arrangements.

The Golan Heights

Syria explicitly made any progress in negotiations with the Israelis contingent on the unconditional return of the entire Golan Heights. Syria, however, appeared to accommodate Israel's demands for security arrangements if the latter would not demand any presence on the Heights. It was an important concession when Syria endorsed the plan under which the United States and France would control the warning stations in order to meet Israel's concern for security.

Due to the rigidity of both sides, the Golan Heights remains an intractable obstacle in the Syrian-Israeli negotiations. None of the Israeli governments committed to total withdrawal, although the Labor Party periodically hinted that Israel might partially withdraw from the Golan Heights. The correlation that the Israelis made between the withdrawal and normalization of relations complicated the negotiations and made them the most intractable obstacles in the negotiations for peace during the 1990s.

Palestinian rights

Syria has long viewed the Palestinian-Israeli dispute as the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Syria, therefore, insisted on a comprehensive plan that would address all Arab-Israeli disputes. But both the Palestinians and Israelis, however, opposed any possible Syrian role in their negotiations, and therefore, tried to exclude Syria from negotiating on behalf of the Palestinians. The conclusion of a separate agreement between the Palestinians and Israelis within the context of the Oslo Accords disappointed the Syrians. Syria, consequently, retreated from its previous position and appeared to become neutral toward the Palestinian-Israeli talks. Syria moderated its policy thereafter, maintaining that the Palestinians could make whatever arrangements would serve their interests. Syria, therefore, neither hindered the agreement nor restrained the other Palestinian opposition groups from sabotaging the agreement.

Comprehensive Peace

Syria has long insisted that peace should be comprehensive. For Syria a comprehensive peace means the peace in the Middle East should address all Arab-Israeli disputes; agreements should be based on the relevant UN resolutions; and that the Arab parties should coordinate their positions and avoid making separate, partial agreements with the Israelis. Syria viewed the Arab-Israeli conflict as intertwined disputes, maintaining any plan should include Israeli evacuation of the Arab lands that were occupied by Israel in the June 1967 War and provide the Palestinians self-determination

in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Although Syria insisted on the comprehensiveness of the peace process, it recognized that comprehensive does not necessary mean concurrent.

Normalization and the nature of peace

Syria once proposed full peace for full withdrawal, but refused to define what it meant by full peace. The Syrians made pronouncing their definition contingent upon Israel's commitment to full withdrawal to the line of their positions prior to the outbreak of the 1967 June War. But the Israelis wanted Syria to state the exact nature and the scope of the peace that the Syrians offered before they would even discuss issues of withdrawal.

The Syrian-Israeli negotiations were deadlocked because both sides were unwilling to discuss the very basic issues of their disputes. Syria maintained it would be pointless to clarify the aspects of peace as long as they do not know whether the Israelis would remain on the Golan Heights. The Israelis tried to use the issues of withdrawal as leverage to put more pressure on the Syrians to reveal their meaning of peace and to normalize their relation with Israel. Syria originally maintained that peace means an end to the state of war. The Syrians argue, based on the relevant UN resolutions, Syria was neither obliged to define the meaning of the nature of peace nor to normalize their relations with Israel.

Withdrawal

Syria does not recognize any border with Israel. Historically, there are two lines that have been marked to separate Syria and Israel: the 1923 demarcation line, which was drawn by the British and French in the aftermath of World War I, and the 1949 armistice line, which was the result of the first Arab-Israeli ceasefire. Neither of these lines is recognized by Syria as a border. However, Syria insisted that Israel withdraw to the line of June 4, 1967, which marked the Syrian and Israeli positions prior to the outbreak of the 1967 June War. Syria insisted on this line for two reasons: in the case where no

demarcation line is recognized by both Syria and Israel, a return to their positions prior to eruption of the 1967 June war would be reasonable. Second, although the demarcation line of 1923 did not provide Syria access to Lake Tiberias, Syria took advantage of the territorial ambiguities in this region and extended its access to the lake. In negotiations with the Israelis, Syria insisted on territorial integration of this area and, therefore, wanted to restore its access to the Lake.

Contrary to Syria's position that clearly defined its border with Israel, the latter refused to define the extent of its border with Syria. Israel, however, once hinted that in a case of withdrawal, Israel would withdraw to a secure border, which meant Israel's intention to remain on parts of Golan Heights for security reasons. On several occasions, Israeli officials declared that the depth of withdrawal from the Golan Heights would be based on the depth of peace with Syria. Syria strongly rejected such a vague formula and refused to agree to any territorial concessions.

Security arrangements

Israel's main security concern was to prevent any possible surprise attack by Syria from the Golan Heights. Israel, therefore, insisted on remaining in strategic parts of the Golan Heights as well as dismantling Syria's capability to mobilize such an attack. Syria demonstrated its willingness to reach an agreement with the Israelis to assure them that such an attack would not happen. Although they first insisted on equality and symmetry of the demilitarized zones and areas of limited forces on both sides, Syria later compromised with the Israelis in order to further the negotiations. Israel, however, wanted a demilitarized zone extending deep into Syria's territory to within the vicinity of Damascus and that the Syrian standing army be significantly reduced. In negotiations for security arrangements, Israel maintained that Syria had the capability of using ballistic missiles and chemical weapons. Israel, therefore, insisted on dismantling Syria's ability to use these arsenals. Moreover, the Israelis argued that to prevent any surprise attack from Syria, they must maintain their long-range electronic surveillance equipment on some parts of the Golan Heights. Syria strongly rejected this demand based on the grounds that

such presence would be a symbol of occupation and a national humiliation. Syria, however, in an unprecedented shift, agreed to allow other countries, the United States and France, to maintain the early warning stations.

Besides the importance of its water resources, the military significance of the Golan Heights for Israel is more symbolic and psychological than real. Israel's ballistic missile capability and its military superiority have significantly reduced its vulnerability to any attack from Syria. Moreover, Syria agreed to allow the early warning stations to be operated on the Golan Heights, although not by the Israelis. Other technical surveillance such as U.S. satellites could also provide Israel with intelligence about Syria's military deployment. If an agreement were to be reached, Syria would have no objection to U.S. troops deployed in the demilitarized zones as peacekeeper. Therefore, this would help Israel to make sure that there would be no such surprise attack from Syria.

It is crystal clear that Syria would accept neither any territorial infringement nor agree any Israeli presence on the Golan Heights. However, Syria made great concessions on other issues such as security arrangements and normalization of relations in order to further the negotiations. But as a result of huge differences, they failed to reach a general conclusion although remarkable progress was achieved during the various rounds of negotiations between Syrian and Israeli delegations with American mediators.

General Conclusion

Realistically, there is little hope for peace between Syria and Israel unless the United States takes evenhanded, diplomatic initiatives to bring the Syrians and Israelis to the conclusion that peace—with all its pre-requisites—is in the interests of both countries. It is obvious that there can be no peace between Syria and Israel while Israel continues its occupation of the Golan Heights. It is unlikely that Israel will withdraw from the Golan Heights unless they reach an agreement with the Syrians that will secure their access to Golan's water and provide maximum needs for Israeli security. Even if

Syria agrees to Israel's conditions it is not clear that to what extent Israel will be willing to fulfill Syria's basic demands.

Therefore, any Syrian-Israeli peace is dependent on a variety of factors, functioning together in a complicated process. The United States could play an important role by assuring Israel that their security needs will be met and promising Syria that their lost territories will be return to them in its entirety. The United States also could strengthen confidence-building measures between the parties and assure them that peace will provide their basic needs, and in no way will the conflict be settled at the expense of either's interests.

Syria's position on the peace process is clear, straightforward. It is based upon the relevant UN Resolutions 242 and 338. These resolutions calls only to provide security guarantees to Israel but are in no way obliges Syria to fully normalize their diplomatic and economic relations with Israel prior to Israel's withdrawal from the Golan Heights. Taking the Israeli side, the United States did not emphasize the implementation of the relevant UN resolutions during the series of Syrian-Israeli talks in the 1990s, although in the beginning it apparently endorsed these resolutions be the basis for the negotiations of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Prior to Syria's acceptance of these resolutions, the United States strongly condemned Syria's position. But when Syria insisted that these resolutions be the framework for the reconciliation of their disputes with Israel, the United States failed to support Syria's request.

Without having an internationally recognized framework for solving their disputes, on the one hand, and being suspicious to each other's true intentions, on the other, both parties, particularly the Israelis, made demands ever harder to fulfill for the establishment of a possible peace treaty between themselves. There would be no hope for the reconciliation of the Syrian-Israeli disputes while the latter made depth of its withdrawal from the Golan Heights contingent upon depth of peace with Syria, which has neither a legal nor logical base. Basically, there could be no peace while Israel intended to remain on parts of the Golan Heights and insisted that Syria extend a demilitarized

zone deep into its territory, practically to the vicinity of Damascus. It would be pointless that the Israelis expected the Syrians to comply with their demands and show that they really wanted a genuine peace with Israel while they were not willing to reveal their plan for withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

Syria simply maintained that it was worthless to even negotiate the peace process in a framework in which they could not know whether the negotiations would lead to the recovery of their occupied lands. How could the Syrians agree to normalize their relations while Israel continued their occupation of Syrian territory? If confidence building is an important factor in the reconciliation of the Arab-Israeli conflict, how could that be possible while Israel demands to remain on parts of Syria's territory?

There was a variety of reasons that prevented Syria and Israel from reaching a peace treaty during the several rounds of negotiations under American auspices in the 1990s. Besides unresolved issues such as the Golan Heights and Syrian and Israeli rigidity on their positions, the biased role of the United States in the Syrian-Israeli talks left the process at an intractable impasse. Prior to the start of the negotiations, the United States proposed that they be based upon the UN Resolutions 242 and 338. But once the negotiations began in November 1991, the United States, perhaps under Israeli pressure, and due to the impetus of domestic politics, demonstrated that they were reluctant to conduct the Syrian-Israeli talks within the framework of the relevant UN resolutions. On their side, the Israelis were not only reluctant but strongly resistant to the idea that the Syrian-Israeli peace process to be based upon UN Resolutions 242 and 338.

Because it was not clear what the basis of Syrian-Israeli negotiations to be, Syria and Israel spent much of their time arguing about procedural matters and what issues should take priority in the negotiations. During this period, although the United States facilitated the negotiations between the Syrian and Israeli delegations, they clearly failed to take an evenhanded policy, urging both Syrians and Israelis to comply with the basic and logical needs of peace—pushing the Israelis to withdraw from Syrian territory that they occupied in 1967 in return for full peace, and urging the Syrians to moderate their

positions, allowing new demarcation of border. A reasonable guarantee by the Syrians that they will not jeopardize Israel's security after Israeli withdrawal from Syria's territory and the acceptance of a logical security arrangement by the Israelis could further the negotiations.

In order to advance the negotiations, the United States should have taken concrete steps to prevent the negotiations from being derailed over procedural matters. The Americans could play a constructive role on what issues should take priority in the negotiations. Instead they demonstrated they were a facilitator that could not settle the differences, using every possible means available to them to reconcile the disputes. If Syria was key to the peace process, it was rational that the United States improved its relations with Syria in order to further the negotiations between the parties. But the United States did not change its policy toward Syria in spite of the fact that peace in the Middle East was in the interests of the United States and that Syria could play an important role toward the achievement of a comprehensive peace in the region. The United States, however, explicitly made the improvement of its relations with the Syrians contingent upon progress in the peace process between Syria and Israel. The progress that was unlikely without a good relations between Syria and the United States. Moreover, because of huge differences between Syria and Israel over the nature of peace, on one hand, and both the Israeli and Syrian rigidity in compromising the basic needs for making a just and comprehensive peace, on the other, only the United States could bring a breakthrough to the Syrian-Israeli track.

But the domination of the U.S. Congress by the pro-Israeli lobby, on one hand, and the pro-Israel bias of the U.S. administrations, on the other, restricted any maneuverability for the improvement of U.S.-Syrian relations. The peace process, however, was perhaps the most important avenue open to Syria to seek better relations with the United States and to convince U.S. officials that Syria's role was indispensable to the process. Syria displayed willingness to enter into a process that would definitely further U.S. interests in the region. Syria appeared to be more flexible, and willing to conclude a peace treaty with Israel if the latter agreed to withdraw from Syria's territory.

But Israel was reluctant and even opposed to making such a commitment and the United States failed to urge Israel to comply with the basic requirement of relevant UN Resolutions on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Consequently, these difficulties enormously complicated the Syrian-Israeli peace talks, and further strained U.S.-Syrian relations.

In general, the Syrian-Israeli talks passed through a difficult and complex process. The Israelis did not take these negotiations seriously while they negotiated a peace treaty with other Arab parties. The negotiations came to several stalemates, some of them lasting for a rather long period of time. The rigidity of both Syria and Israel and mistrust between the two countries complicated the whole process. This situation continued even after Hafiz al-Asad died in June 2000. When Bashar al-Asad succeeded his father, he reconfirmed in his first interview that there would be no change in Syria's position on the peace process.

Documents

Resolution 242 (1967)
of 22 November 1967

The Security Council,

Expressing its continuing concern with the grave situation in the Middle East,

Emphasizing the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and the need to work for a just and lasting peace in which every State in the area can live in security,

Emphasizing further that all Member States in their acceptance of the Charter of the United Nations have undertaken a commitment to act in accordance with Article 2 of the Charter,

1. *Affirms* that the fulfillment of Charter principles requires the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East which should include the application of both the following principles:

(i) Withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict;

(ii) Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force;

2. *Affirms further* the necessity

(a) For guaranteeing freedom of navigation through international waterways in the area;

(b) For achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem;

(c) For guaranteeing the territorial inviolability and political independence of every State in the area, through measures including the establishment of demilitarized zones;

3. *Requests* the Secretary-General to designate a Special Representative to proceed to the Middle East to establish and maintain contacts with the States concerned in order to promote agreement and assist efforts to achieve a peaceful and accepted settlement in accordance with the provisions and principles in this resolution;

4. *Requests* the Secretary-General to report to the Security Council on the progress of the efforts of the Special Representative as soon as possible.

Adopted unanimously at the 1382nd meeting.

Resolution 338 (1973)
of 22 October 1973

The Security Council

1. Calls upon all parties to the present fighting to cease all firing and terminate all military activity immediately, no later than 12 hours after the moment of the adoption of this decision, in the positions they now occupy;

2. Calls upon the parties concerned to start immediately after the cease-fire the implementation of Security Council resolution 242 (1967) in all of its parts;

3. Decides that, immediately and concurrently with the cease-fire, negotiations shall start between the parties concerned under appropriate auspices aimed at establishing a just and durable peace in the Middle East.

Adopted at the 1747th meeting
by 14 votes to none. 1/

U.S.-Soviet Invitation to the Mideast Peace Conference in Madrid, October 18, 1991[490]

After extensive consultations with Arab states, Israel and the Palestinians, the United States and the Soviet Union believe that an historic opportunity exists to advance the prospects for genuine peace throughout the region. The United States and the Soviet Union are prepared to assist the parties to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement, through direct negotiations along two tracks, between Israel and the Arab states, and between Israel and the Palestinians, based on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. The objective of this process is real peace.

Toward that end, the president of the U.S. and the president of the USSR invite you to a peace conference, which their countries will co-sponsor, followed immediately by direct negotiations. The conference will be convened in Madrid on 30 October 1991.

President Bush and President Gorbachev request your acceptance of this invitation no later than 6 p.m. Washington time, 23 October 1991, in order to ensure proper organization and preparation of the conference.

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[490]. William B. Quand, The Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli conflict since 1967 (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution; Berkeley: University of California Press, c1993), Appendix N.

Direct bilateral negotiations will begin four days after the opening of the conference. Those parties who wish to attend multilateral negotiations will convene two weeks after the opening of the conference to organize those negotiations. The co-sponsors believe that those negotiations should focus on region-wide issues such as arms control and regional security, water, refugee issues, environment, economic development, and other subjects of mutual interest.

The co-sponsors will chair the conference which will be held at ministerial level. Governments to be invited include Israel, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. Palestinians will be invited and attend as part of a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation. Egypt will be invited to the conference as a participant. The European Community will be a participant in the conference, alongside the United States and the Soviet Union and will be represented by its presidency. The Gulf Cooperation Council will be invited to send its secretary-general to the conference as an observer, and GCC member states will be invited to participate in organizing the negotiations on multilateral issues. The United Nations will be invited to send an observer, representing the secretary-general.

The conference will have no power to impose solutions on the parties or veto agreements reached by them. It will have no authority to make decisions for the parties and no ability to vote on issues or results. The conference can reconvene only with the consent of all the parties.

With respects to negotiations between Israel and Palestinians who are part of the joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, negotiations will be conducted in phases, beginning with talks on interim self-government arrangements. These talks will be conducted with the objective of reaching agreement within one year. Once agreed the interim self-government arrangements will last for a period of five years. Beginning the third year of the period of interim self-government arrangements, negotiations will take place on permanent status. These permanent status negotiations, and the negotiations between Israel and the Arab states, will take place on the basis of Resolutions 242 and 338.

It is understood that the co-sponsors are committed to making this process succeed. It is their intention to convene the conference and negotiations with those parties who agree to attend.

The co-sponsors believe that this process offers the promise of ending decades of confrontation and conflict and the hope of a lasting peace. Thus, the co-sponsors hope that the parties will approach these negotiations in a spirit of good will and mutual respect. In this way, the peace process can begin to break down the mutual suspicions and mistrust that perpetuate the conflict and allow the parties to begin to resolve their differences. Indeed, only through such a process can real peace and reconciliation among the Arab states, Israel and the Palestinians be achieved. And only through this process can the peoples of the Middle East attain the peace and security they richly deserve.

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