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In this study of Syria and its role in the peace process several key questions are asked: How is it that Syria has emerged after five consecutive defeats on the field of battle, the most recent being in 1982 in Lebanon, to become such an important and influential player in blocking repeated attempts to secure a permanent and longlasting peace in the region? How is it that despite a damaging military setback in 1982 against the Israelis, and military conflict with the United States in 1983, the Syrians have emerged as a near hegemonistic power within Lebanon, while the U.S. has withdrawn from that country and the overt Israeli presence has been reduced to a small enclave just north of its border with Lebanon? What is the Syrian role as guarantor of the Palestinian quest for self-determination, and within this role, why have the Syrians on several occasions viciously turned on the PLO? And finally, as the only frontline Arab nation still in confrontation with the Israelis, how will the Syrians work the peace process to effect the return of the strategic Golan Heights to Syrian sovereignty. Seeing no progress, will the Syrians continue to be intransigent on all peace overtures proposed?

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THE ARAB-ISRAELI PEACE PROCESS

THE ROLE OF SYRIA

BY

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CPT USA

Special Seminar Paper submitted to the Faculty of the Defense Intelligence College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science of Strategic Intelligence

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INTRODUCTION

The Arab-Israeli conflict is unique in its complexity. Legions of diplomats, world leaders and scholars have for decades grappled with this on-going problem. Few efforts have attained success . The major issue is not merely historical, ideological, religious, ethnic, economic or territorial but rather a compendium of all these factors. Furthermore the importance of this turbulent region transcends local conflicts; it is in a crucible of superpower interest and supplies much of the world with needed energy. The constant conflict in the Arab-Israeli arena not only places great stress upon the local players but also dangerously destabilizes the world at large. A sucessful resolution of this conflict is key to local *and* global stability which is the major reason so much interest is placed on continuing the peace process despite its many setbacks. The ramifications of continued failure within the peace process are not attractive, indeed it is not irresponsible to suggest that continued friction could lead to renewed warfare, paralysis of the global energy system, a pandemic explosion of Islamic fundamentalism across the Middle East and most ominous of all, a superpower imbroglio.

This past summer (1985) there were several promising developments related to the peace process which as of this writing appear stillborn. Jordan and Arafat's Palestinian Liberation Organization were talking, the first Arab League summit meeting in

several years was meeting in Casablanca and even Israel was considering certain limited diplomatic options after withdrawing from most of Lebanon. Unfortunately, by September all these possibilities seemed to have reached a dead end. What happened? How is it that since the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty there has been virtually no success in the peace process?

The year 1985 ushered in the 15th consecutive year of Baathi rule by Hafiz Assad, President of the Syrian Arab Republic, an unprecedented tenure within a land traditionally wracked by political instability, dissent and capricious changes of power. During this span (1970-1985) and despite numerous setbacks, Syria has emerged as a key and central nation in the Middle East power equation and as of this writing may hold the key to the deadlocked Arab-Israeli peace process.

Daniel Pipes in a recent Wall Street Journal editorial asserted that "*the Arab actor that really counts is Syria*" in respect to the Arab-Israeli peace process.[1] It will the purpose of this paper to illustrate Syria's role in the peace process since 1967, to describe how Syria has evolved to its present considerable level of influence, and finally to support Dr. Pipes' thesis that without active Syrian cooperation in the peace process there will only be process but no peace, and that continued efforts to circumvent Syria in negotiations will be met by continued Syrian obstruction and consequently more failure.

Syria's record to date in blocking all attempts towards a peace settlement since 1979 has been conspicuously effective. Since the

Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty the Syrians have actively thwarted either overtly or covertly all peace related negotiations excluding Syria. This list includes the Reagan Peace Plan of 1982 when Jordan was intimidated into not participating by Syria, the encouragement of anti-Arafat PLO factions to break away from the mainstream PLO after Arafat showed signs of a willingness to recognize Israel, and the devastating response in Lebanon in 1983 when Israel and Lebanon under U.S. guidance signed their ill-fated accord.

More recently, the apparent failure of the Arab League in Casablanca (August 1985) to reach a consensus on how to approach the Palestinian question and the overall Arab-Israeli peace process underscores the increased political and coercive strength of Syria. Riven by factions and boycotted by the radical bloc led by Syria, the Casablanca Summit represented the most recent attempt among many to reestablish what appears to be a hopelessly fractured Arab unity.

Direct Syrian culpability can be traced to the difficulties faced by King Hussein and Arafat in their West Bank autonomy talks. Faced with unrelenting pressure from Syria which has included violence and terrorism, Hussein and Arafat have been forced to exercise extreme caution and consequently have been unable to advance very far in attaining any tangible results.[2] Assad's harangue promising "unlimited support for the national forces that oppose the plotting of King Hussein and Arafat" vividly demonstrates the Syrian position.[3]

Syria's support for anti-Arafat PLO factions, its involvement in Lebanon and its opposition to any peaceful initiatives conducted by Jordan are key indicators that Syria has every intent of becoming a

hegemonistic power over the area it refers to as "Greater Syria". Furthermore, contrary to general belief, it will be shown that Syria has little interest in an independent Palestinian homeland; rather, it will continue to attempt to control and dominate the PLO. One key conclusion of this paper is that the PLO has lost its claim to be the key Arab element governing the success or failure of the peace process. It is now Syria, not the PLO, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq, the U.S.A., or even Syria's key ally, the U.S.S.R., which makes the major decisions of war and peace in the region, excepting of course Israel.

As recent events have shown, and as this paper will explain, the current state of affairs between Israel and Syria remain hostile and intractable. Without constructive dialogue between these key confrontation states, the peace process will remain an exercise in futility. Although Assad's line towards Israel's right to exist has softened somewhat, Syria remains Israel's most dedicated enemy. Without Syrian recognition of Israel, or Israel's return of the Golan Heights to Syria, prospects for a comprehensive peace in this troubled region remain dim.

In this study of Syria and its role in the peace process several key questions come to mind: How is it that Syria has emerged after five consecutive defeats on the field of battle, the most recent being in 1982 in Lebanon, to become such an important and influential player in blocking repeated attempts to secure a permanent and longlasting peace in the region? How is it that despite a damaging military setback in 1982 against the Israelis, and military conflict with the United States in 1983, the Syrians have emerged as a near hegemonis-

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These are but a few of the many questions posed in this study of Syria within the context of the Arab-Israeli peace process. Although many of Assad's policies will appear contradictory and self-defeating at first glance, this paper will show that through the determined and methodical pursuit of distinctly Syrian interests, he has effectively manipulated other nations and factions to Syria's advantage.

SYRIA AND THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

Within the study of Syria and the Arab-Israeli Peace Process there are several revolutionary stages along which the conflict had developed. The first was the initital struggle for Palestine which opened with the Balfour Declaration and closed with Israel's dramatic victory against seven invading Arab armies, including Syria's, in 1948. The second phase was that of the 1948-1967 interim which closed with the decisive defeat by the Israelis of the Arab armies in the Six Day War. The third phase, the one with which we begin our study, saw the eruption of two wars: the war of attrition on the Suez, and the Yom Kippur war of 1973. This phase closed with the Israeli evacuation of the Sinai and the normalization of relations between Israel and Egypt through means of the Camp David process. The fourth phase, in which we are now engaged, encompasses a vague status quo with many initiatives yielding limited results.

The focus once again has turned to the quest of Palestinian statehood in part of the land of Palestine. The immediate issues are the future of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.[4] To the Syrians, however, the primary issue is the return of the Golan Heights to Syria; short of this, it is clear that Assad will try to obstruct any peace process until Syria receives satisfaction.

KEY ISSUES

Upon his assumption of power in 1970, President Assad inherited a multitude of fundamental problems from previous governments, several of which were critical to the interests not only of Syria but to the Arab world in general. Saddled with the legacy of the 1967 war, Assad had four primary fronts upon which to focus his considerable diplomatic talents. They were: first and foremost, the recovery of occupied territory, in particular the strategic Golan Heights; second, a resolution of the Palestinian question; third, Syria's role (or lack there of) in inter-Arab relations; and fourth, and critical to Assad's political survival, intra-Syrian relations which were, and are now, difficult at best.[5]

U.N. RESOLUTION 242

Out of the intense political negotiations that followed the Six Day War came the United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 of November 22nd, 1967. This resolution, the basis for peacemaking efforts down to the present day, marked a watershed in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In effect, the Security Council determined that Israel and the neighboring states should not return to the armistice agreements which had governed their relations since 1949, but should conclude definitively and conclusively peace among

themselves.[6]

In the wake of the 1967 war, Arab views focused on "the liquidation of the consequences of the Israeli aggression."[7] At the Arab Summit Conference at Khartoum in August 1967, Egypt secured a mandate to seek a political settlement, but on the condition that there be no recognition, no peace and no negotiations with Israel. Taken literally, the "Khartoum formula" would have clearly precluded any settlement agreeable to either Israel or the U.S.[8] At Khartoum with characteristic hyperbole, the Arab bloc resolved to unite their political efforts so as:

> ...to eliminate the effects of the aggression and to ensure the withdrawal of the aggressive Israeli forces from the Arab lands which have been occupied since the aggression of 5 June.

Additionally they stated that this:

> ...will be done within the framework of the main principles which the Arab states abide, namely no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with it, and insistence on the rights of the Palestinian people in their own country.[9]

Within Ba'athist Syria, the traumatic 1967 defeat discredited the radical socialist regime of Al-Jadid. The defeat strengthened the hands of both the moderates and the rightists and, together with Syria's poorly judged intervention into Jordan, was the catalyst for Assad's successful play for power in 1970.[10] The 1967 defeat widened

the gulf between the regime and the people - many of whom refused consider themselves part of such a disaster not of their making. Consequently a large portion of the Syrian population divorced itself from the regime and its mis-exercise of power.[11] It is indeed surprising that the Al-Jadid regime survived as long as it did "despite a thousand different reasons why it should fall at any given moment"[12] in the words of Malcolm Kerr.

Like the other defeated Arab regimes, the Syrian government insisted upon calling this greatest defeat in modern Arab history "the setback," To overcome "the setback" its strategy was to pursue an uncompromising line towards Israel and the overall Peace Process. Though Syria was the only confrontation state to send its head of state, Nur al-Din Atasi to the Emergency Session of the U.N. General Assembly after the 1967 war, it intransigently opposed the Security Council's efforts to achieve a peaceful solution, in particular as defined in Resolution 242. In Syrian Premier Z'ayyen's words, to accept Resolution 242:

> ...would be to relinquish all previous U.N. resolutions in favor of the Arab people in Palestine and to completely disregard the Palestine cause and the people of Palestine.[13]

In this period Syria's opposition to Resolution 242 was obdurate. It likewise reacted negatively to the five-point general peace plan advanced by the Johnson administration on June 19, 1967; it also refused to accept the reactivation of the negotiations as provided

for in 242 through the auspices of U.N. representative Gunnar Jarring. Later it still refused initiatives sponsored by the Nixon administration, especially the Rogers Plan of June 25, 1970. The newly in power President Assad, while being interviewed by the Lebanese paper, Al-Bayrak on Dec. 5, 1972, retorted:

> The Regional Command of the Ba'ath Party, in its official statement on 16 November 1970 castigated 'Surrender Solution plans', especially the Rogers Plan in reference to the Arab-Israeli conflict...
>
> We must alert Arab minds to Israel's boundless ambitions - namely, the establishment of a greater Israel from the Euphrates to the Nile within the framework of studied, scientifically-programmed, long-range planning... Israel's non-occupation of Lebanese territory does not mean that it does not want this territory.[14]

Compounding Syria's obstinacy was the position it took concerning any peace settlement, whether under the auspices of the U.N. or not, and its resistance towards absorbtion of new refugees. To the first, Assad stated that any peace guaranteed by an external power or by the U.N. would be tantamount to "another form of occupation." With regard to refugees, Assad took the position that any attempt to resettle or rehabilitate them would prejudice their right to repatriation and would be tacit acknowledgement of Israel's existence. To Syria, its border remained the armistice demarcation line along which a state of war, including terrorist activities, continued to exist.[15]

Until 1973, Syria had maintained no dialogue with nor recognition of, Israel. Its primary goal during the Yom Kippur War was to regain the strategic Golan Heights; this, and the assuaging of Syrian pride motivated Syria to attack Israel in collusion with Sadat's Egypt.

THE ISRAELI - SYRIAN DISENGAGEMENT ACCORD

The aftermath of the Yom Kippur War and the events leading to the Israeli-Syrian Disengagement Accord of May 31, 1974 are extremely important in any analysis of Assad's Syria. Though at the present time (1985) prospects for dialogue and any agreement between Syria and Israel seem hopeless, the study of this disengagement process may suggest the opposite. In fact, since November 1970, when Assad gained power, the Israelis and Syrians have reached, through U.S. mediation, one signed and two tacit agreements.[16]

On October 22, 1973, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. reached agreement on United Nations Agreement 338, which called for a ceasefire, negotiations for peace and the implementation of Resolution 242. From the Israeli point of view, the most significant aspect of 338 was the fact that unlike 242 it called for *direct* negotiations between the warring parties. The Arabs, in contrast, were most interested in the Israeli withdrawal from occupied territory. The inclusion of Syria

(though it boycotted the Geneva Conference) in the negotiating process was a significant step in the U.S. approach toward a Arab-Israeli peace settlement. Having viewed Syria incorrectly as a Soviet client beyond the reach of American diplomacy, the U.S. came to recognize that just as Syria was part of the Arab-Israeli problem, it had to be part of the solution.[17]

The negotiations leading to the Disengagement Accord were agony for all involved, especially for U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who in the latter stages of the talks shuttled between Tel-Aviv and Damascus no fewer than 17 times in 31 days. The Accord was finally reached after this prodigious political effort and only consumated in the final hour. Assad, time and time again would make a compromise at the last moment and only when facing pressure to accede from all sides. He proved to be a tough, canny negotiator who haggled over each and every point. The key fact is that contrary to all expections, Assad *did* negotiate, *did* compromise, and *did* sign a binding agreement with the Israelis which to this day, and despite the confrontation in Lebanon, the Syrians have scrupulously abided by.

Before Assad dealt with the Israeli enemy, he was determined to show to the Arab world that, unlike Sadat's Egypt, he was not negotiating under duress. A great fear of Assad, which ultimately proved true, was a suspicion that the Egyptians, as shown by their First Sinai disengagement in January 1974 , would be willing to reach a separate peace with Israel. Consequently Sinai I proved a powerful incentive to bring Assad to the bargaining table.

To deal with the hated Israel was a great political risk for Assad. It must always be remembered while addressing contemporary Syrian politics that Assad's mandate rests on a very slender Alawite minority , whose main tactic in maintaining political control is force, intimidation, and constant espousal of the pan-Arab cause . Popular Syrian resentment has increased dramatically towards the Alawite-dominated government in the late 1970's and the 1980's especially among the large Sunni majority and the Moslem Fundamentalists. As long as Assad's Ba'ath Party continues to be, in the words of Stanley Reed "a clan masquerading as a political party" Assad in his Middle Eastern foreign policy will be walking a political tightrope.[18]

Henry Kissinger, in his fine memoir Years of Upheaval gives some cogent insight to the Syrian mentality at the time. In comparing the Syrians with the Egyptians and Israelis he writes:

> ...as much as both Syrians and Israelis will resent me for saying this - they both were more similar in attitude and behavior than either was to Egypt, for example. The Eqyptian leadership is suave, jaded, cosmopolitan. Egypt is accustomed to leadership in the Middle East; there is a certain majesty in its conduct and in its self-assurance. Syria fights for recognition of its merit, it consumes energy in warding off condescension. Israel shares many of Syria's qualities.[19]

Kissinger further adds that in 1974:

> Hafez al Assad was entering the negotiating process for the first time. For so controversial a move as

> a negotiation with Israel, he had to build a consensus daily, maybe even hourly. Even had he been disposed he could not dare the great gesture of Sadat, who sacrificed tactical benefit for long term gain. The Syrian President needed to win every point if he wished to retain his authority; he could yield only to overwhelming "force majeure." The Israeli leaders, for wholly different reasons, were in the same position. [20]

- THE GOLAN HEIGHTS-

The Golan issue will continue to be the most difficult of all the occupied territories to resolve in the peace process. Regaining the Golan is a source of unceasing national concern in Syria. The legitimacy of the Assad regime is politically predicated on the hard line he maintains on this issue; the second most important issue is the Palestinian cause.

The Golan disengagement was far more complicated to work out than the First Sinai Accord signed in January 1974. Much less territory was available over which to bargain; every mile of hard fought territory could be construed as having strategic significance. From the geographical apex, Mt. Hermon, one can look Northeast into Damascus a mere 25 miles away - or South into Israeli Galilee.

Central to the Golan Disengagement Accord and to an understanding of any future Peace Process is that over a three month period the Syrian and Israeli negotiating stances did change despite rhetoric to the contrary. The positions changed from the total

intransigence of two proud nations, neither willing to give in, to the reality of these two antagonists making significant territorial and psychological concessions with one another. For example, the minimum Syrian position at the start was that Israel abandon all Syrian territory captured in the 1973 war and half of that from the 1967 war. By the end of the negotiations both Israel and Syria had granted major concessions. The Syrians regained all of its 1973 territorial losses and a small strip of 1967 territory including the shattered town of Quneitra; the Israelis received a U.N. backed guarantee of peace on the Golan. Syria also gave up what it viewed as a major concession, a tacit (but unwritten) agreement that the Fedayeen would not be permitted to cross Syrian territory to attack Israel. The key factor, however, was that Syria and Israel, two bitter enemies, then and now, were willing to negotiate.

In pressing his argument to a reluctant Israel, Kissinger defined the benefits of an accord with Syria as follows:

> What Israel gets out of the Syrian negotiations is to have a radical Arab state sign a document with Israel. It is to remove the pressures on Egypt, which only really Syria can generate... It gives the moderate Arabs... an opportunity to legitimize their cause. And from then on every argument with the Syrians will not be a question of principle but a question of tactics. And finally with Syria having been drawn into this negotiation, the frantic Soviet effort to get itself involved will be thwarted for at least - since we are living here in a six month crisis, any six months period I consider an asset.[21]

A number of important events came out of the successful

Israeli-Syrian Disengagement Accord:

1. It was the first time the Israelis and Syrians had negotiated over any issue of importance.

2. There was a substantial thaw in U.S.-Syrian relations perceived at the time to be at the U.S.S.R.'s expense.

3. Contrary to expectations, Syria emerged as a nation which would press and compromise in attaining a disengagement if it perceived such to be in its interest.

4. The U.S. attained a central role in the Middle East Peace Process with the Soviets relegated to non-player role, even with regard to its client state, Syria.

5. Syria's tacit willingness to muzzle the Fedayeen operating in the Golan, a position risky for Assad.

6. Retrospectively, eleven years of tense but stable peace on the Golan Front.

Though the localized Golan Accord was signed and maintained, the Syrians and Israelis remained as implacably hostile as ever towards one another. In November 1975 the government controlled Damascus Radio reported:

> Syria is working to mobilize all the Arab resources, including the sabotage organizations, both militarily and on the oil front, to open up an all Palestinian war against Israel whose purpose is to free Palestine from the radical Zionist entity, and this by relying on the internationally supported strategic depth... Syria's firm stand is the rock on which Israel shall be destroyed together with all imperialist, racist and Zionist plots.[22]

THE ROAD TO CAMP DAVID

The Arab Summit Meeting in Rabat during 1974 was significant to the Peace Process. By designating Yassir Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people" in all liberated Palestinian territory, a decision in which Syria actively participated, the prospects for future Arab-Israeli peace negotiations were severely clouded. This was because Israel had stated repeatedly that it would not negotiate with the PLO, and the PLO had persistently refused to recognize Israel's right to exist.[23] The Rabat Conference, by taking away Jordan's mandate to negotiate on the Palestinian's behalf, for all intents and purposes removed Jordan from an effective role in the peace process. This change mirrored the significant hardening of the Pan-Arab line after the 1973 War. According to former U.S. envoy Harold Saunders, this setback to U.S. aims in the Peace Process was a result of a myopic obsession in 1974-5 with the issue of immediate withdrawal from the Sinai and the Golan at the cost of neglecting the pervasive Palestinian issue.[24]

At this juncture it is necessary to describe briefly Syria's up and down relationship with the PLO. After the Golan issue, that of the Palestinians remains the most difficult hurdle to an Israeli-Syrian

peace. It must be remembered that identification with the current Syrian state has yet to take the form of an exclusive Syrian nationalism. Rather, Syria's special identity is Arab: The Syrians consider themselves the most Arab of the Arabs, the "conscience of the Arabs" and the main champions of the Arab cause.[25] Consequently because Syria more than any other Arab state regards itself as the "beating heart of Arabism", the birthplace and incubator of Arab nationalist ideas, Syria is extremely sensitive to every twitch of the Arab world.[26]

Syria regards Palestine as a lost part of itself and Palestinians as its oppressed Southern cousins.[27] Its interest and professed legitimacy in the Palestine issue are rooted in the fact that the Syrian nationalists, in their grandest dreams, not only consider Lebanon to be a part of "Greater Syria" but also consider Palestine to be "Southern Syria". At a minimum, Syria has pretentions to strong regional influence. Syria's hard pro-Palestinian line is reinforced by fragile rule of the heterodox Alawite minority, who dare not appear to be less patriotically pro-Palestinian than the Sunni majority. Defense of the Palestinian cause has been and probably will remain crucial to the survival and legitimacy of any Syrian regime.[28] Furthermore, as leadership in the Arab world has become inextricably linked to the espousal of the Palestinian cause, any such claim, as Assad has made, would be severely damaged by opposition or indifference to the Palestinian cause.[29] Also, Damascus holds the Palestinian issue hostage for the sake of being able to bargain for the Golan Heights, fearing to be isolated either to fight or to negotiate with Israel.

Furthermore, the current Syrian feud with Jordan means that if Syria were to stop trying to lead and control the Palestinian national movement, the Jordanians may regain their right to negotiate the issue (which had been lost at the Rabat Conference 1974).[30] This is key to understanding the seemingly fratricidal conflict between the Syrians and the different PLO factions emerging from the Lebanese intervention in 1976.

In 1974 Assad, taking advantage of Sadat's non-linkage of t Palestinian issue to Egyptian disengagement diplomacy, became the erstwhile champion of the Palestinians, demanding in a speech celebrating the eleventh anniversary of the Ba'ath Party's rise to power in Syria:

> ...(the) return of all territories captured in June 1967 and the return of the rights of the Palestinians. Syria will accept nothing less...The Israeli authorities would do well to be reminded that we view Palestine not only as an inseparable part of the Arab nation, but also part of Southern Syria.[31]

In 1974, after the tragic Maalot terrorist attack on an Israeli school in which 14 children were killed by Fedayeen who had infiltrated from Syrian territory, the Syrian government in a communique stated:

> There are some points which Syria refuses to discuss, such as the question of the Fedayeen. He who wishes to discuss this subject must solve the Palestinian

issue and debate the problem with the Palestinian leadership. Any other attempt is a waste of time.[32]

Significantly, as noted above, these terrorist attacks from Syria ceased with the implementation of the May 31, 1974 Disengagement Accord.

To summarize how interwoven the Palestinian question is with the Syrian position and to illustrate why the Syrians cannot divorce the Palestinian-territorial-political problem from their own, here are several key points:

1. Palestine was originally part of the Greater Syria concept that for many Syrians is a still a more real object of loyalty than the present day Syrian state. A speech by Assad in 1975 stated this clearly:

"It might be useful to those in power in Israel that Palestine is not only part of the Arab homeland but is a principal part of Southern Syria...Palestine will remain part of the liberated Arab homeland and part of our country - Arab Syria."[33]

2. There are many Palestinian refugees in Syria, many of them wealthy and influential; if alienated, these pose a potential threat to the Alawite dominated regime.

3. The Syrians are proud of their role as the Arab conscience: more than any other Arab regime, they profess to have remained loyal to the Palestinian cause.

4. Syria has laid claim to the title of leader in the fight against Israel, a claim that integrates, or at least has integrated, the Palestinian (hence Syrian) conflicts with Israel.

5. The linkage of the Golan Heights issue so as to prevent separate negotiations on the West Bank to take place without Syrian involvement.[34]

In the near term there is virtually no prospect of the Syrians relinquishing their self-proclaimed role as the preeminent paladin of the Palestinian cause. With regard to the Peace Process, especially in view of the current (1985) Jordan-PLO-USA initiative, it is highly unlikely that the Syrians (as with the Israelis) will budge on the issue, even if prodded by the USSR.

Though Syria's disengagement in 1974 committed it to the negotiation process, it was very wary of the US efforts to arrange political agreements between Israel and separate Arab states, an approach which weakened overall Arab solidarity and was likely to penalize or even ostracize those parties to whom the Israelis were least likely to make concessions - namely Syria and the PLO. Gradually Syrian policy hardened against step by step diplomacy. As Kissinger's intention to seek another Israeli-Egyptian deal became clear, Syria and the PLO formed a "joint political command" declaring that Syria and Palestinian demands could not be separated and that they would make peace together or not at all.[35]

SINAI II

The success of the Second Sinai Disengagement Accord in September 1975 did much to emasculate the Syrian and PLO position within the Peace Process. It signalled the beginnings of a crucial rift between Syria and Egypt, and for Israel, the temporary neutralization of its most formidable military enemy. Sinai II, by beginning to remove Egypt from the military equation, underscored a fundamental weakness in any Syrian confrontation with Israel: Syria's inability to fight Israel alone, which concomitantly reduced Syria's military credibility. The paradox here, however, is that although no effective military solution is possible without Egypt - at least for the forseeable future - the flip side is that no comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace is possible without active Syrian involvment. Thus the Syrians have made themselves a force to be reckoned with.

Assad viewed Sinai II as yet another Israeli-Egyptian step towards a separate peace, which would leave out Syria's interests in the overall Peace Process. In this judgement Assad was correct as the Israelis and the US essentially dismissed any idea of a Second Syrian disengagement because of Syrian insistence on linkage between the Golan and the West Bank.

While Sinai II was primarily military in nature, it also had important political significance. For example, under its terms, the US promised Israel not to recognize the PLO nor to enter into negotiations

with it until it accepted U.N. Resolution 242 and recognized Israel. Assad was also convinced this plan was designed to isolate Syria and put it into a position of weakness vis-a-vis Israel.[36]

According to the noted Israeli author, Zeev Schiff, Syria interpreted Sinai II, as it does most political moves in the region, as part of an anti-Syrian plot. Schiff makes the case that in the Syrian view, whatever Washington and Israel do in the Middle East, is designed to encircle Syria, which consititutes the heart of the Arab world.[37] From the insecure and paranoid Syrian viewpoint events partially bore out Schiff's analysis. The Israelis were being rearmed, and the disengagement allowed them to shift substantial forces to the Syrian front. Although Syrian leaders denounced Sinai II, there was little they could do to affect its outcome. Also, in the latest row between the two nations, Iraq had concentrated troops adjacent to Syria, which augmented its sense of encirclement.

Since another war with Israel without the support of Egypt was militarily untenable in the post-Sinai II period, Assad had little choice but to continue pursuing a political settlement. Feeling vulnerable and alone in facing Israel, the Syrians set out to build an alliance in the Arab East encompassing Lebanon, Jordan, the PLO and Syria. This move met with brief success. The Syrians were able to posture as champions of the PLO cause, to mobilize Arab opinion against Egypt, and most important, to signal to Washington and Israel the futility of a Peace Process which ignored Syrian interests. This policy of obstruction was to serve Syria well in the ensuing decade, and it is still the hall mark of Syria's approach toward the peace process today.

The subsequent apparent establishment of Syrian hegemony in Lebanon also strengthened Syria's limited hand.

The 1976 Syrian intervention in Lebanon was spurred by several reasons, the most salient were: the breakdown of internal order within Lebanon and Syria's desire to build a Syrian led bloc after Sinai II. The prospect of a partition of Lebanon and a potential Israeli intervention posed a grave security threat to Syria; however, more positively, the conflict presented an opportunity for Syria to arbitrate the disorder and to draw Lebanon (part of Greater Syria) under its political-strategic wing.[38] Of particular interest is the fact that initially the Syrians turned on the PLO to aid the Christians. Assad during this period reportedly told Arafat:

> You do not represent the Palestinians any more than we do. Do not forget there is no Palestinian entity. There is Syria. You are an integral part of the Syrian people: Palestine is an integral part of Syria.[39]

The left-wing Lebanese and the PLO reacted to Syria's intervention by succinctly stating:

> The Syrian presence is not intended to help solve the crisis as much as to control this country in order to strike the Palestinian revolution and the Nationalist movement and put and end to democratic freedoms.[40]

Paradoxically, the Maronite Christians against whom the Syrians would later turn stated:

> Any person can understand why Syrian troops entered Lebanon. It is not a provocation against anybody, but to bring this country back to normal life and control its security after the security of Syria, the Palestinians and the whole area became more threatened than that of Lebanon.[41]

Even the United States, who had tacitly encouraged the Syrian intervention, stated publicly in April 1976 that "Syria has been playing a constructive role." The U.S. believed the Syrian presence in Lebanon could produce some very important results. In retrospect, Washington totally misconstrued Assad's designs by presuming that his intentions were focused on ending the civil war and that Syria was an objective arbiter who would withdraw when the Lebanese mess was cleaned up. These assumptions naively overlooked the possibility that Syria, having its own interests in Lebanon might decide to remain in that country to exert control over Lebanese politics.[42] This would not be the only time that U.S. policy makers would severely misjudge Syrian aims in Lebanon.

CAMP DAVID

In 1977 President Carter, acknowledging the Palestinian issue to be the heart of the Middle East conflict, proposed an all party conference aimed at a comprehensive settlement. To the Syrians it seemed that this proposal might have been feasible if Arab solidarity

and the new U.S. approach could stand the test of time. Israel, however, promptly quashed this initiative; it refused to deal at all with the PLO, also it was unwilling after the Disengagement Accords to consider any more than mere cosmetic changes in the status quo.[43] At this juncture Syria may well have wanted to become part of the Peace Process, but events shortly thereafter ensured that it would not.

On November 19, 1977 Anwar Sadat shocked the world by traveling to Jerusalem to address the Israeli Knesset to promote the Peace Process. By this unprecedented act, Sadat abandoned the longstanding Arab policy of no direct talks with Israel. U.N. Resolution 242 had hitherto been regarded as self-implementing by those Arab states who accepted it. Resolution 338 had been interpreted as calling for talks between "the parties concerned" in the setting of an international, not Arab-Israeli conference. By Sadat's visit to Jerusalem and the later visit of Begin to Ismailia, Egypt went a step further; these were meetings at the highest level with no third parties present. In Syria's view, this exchange of visits, together with the pomp and circumstance of the accompanying ceremonies, in which national anthems were played and Israeli and Egyptian flags flown together, constituted a de facto recognition of Israel. This was intolerable to Syria.[44]

These actions caused a total break in the already tense Syrian-Egyptian relations. Assad refused Sadat's pleas to join him in the negotiating process. Sadat, by showing himself ready for peace at most any price at the expense of Arab solidarity, destroyed any confidence Assad may have had that the Egyptian leader could be held

to a common negotiating position. By "overtly" recognizing Israel and its annexation of Jerusalem, Sadat, in Assad's eyes, had shed any claim to the mantle of Arab leadership. In Assad's perception, to associate himself with this course would only legitimize a criminal undertaking; it would also make him vulnerable internally to Ba'ath militants who were demanding that Syria stand firm.[45]

Sadat's moves produced a spectacular shift in the intertwined policies of the Arab constellation from that which had existed earlier in the year. Initiating what would later become an almost unanimous chorus of recrimination, Assad lambasted the Egyptian move as "treasonous" and accused Sadat of trying to make a separate peace.[46] An article in the semi-official Syrian newspaper Tishrin commented:

> With the establishment of a separate peace there will emerge a new state of conflict in the area threatening all possibilities for establishing a separate peace.[47]

Assad during this period expended considerable energy trying to place Syria at the head of an anti-Egyptian bloc of States. These states met in Tripoli in December 1977, but when the Iraqi delegate attacked Syria for not being genuinely "rejectionist" and walked out of the meeting, the bloc lost much of its credibility. Syria continued the conference with Algeria, Libya, South Yemen and the PLO, and they together formed an entity called "the Front of Steadfastness and Opposition." Although Sadat was roundly denounced, Syria was careful not to entirely close the door against

the negotiating process in order to possibly reenter if and when the time suited her.

Especially galling to Assad, and to anti-Sadat unity, was the unraveling of Jordan's "special relationship" with Syria. Although King Hussein remained occasionally critical of Sadat, he refused to range himself alongside Syria. This undid four years of Syrian efforts to build a Middle Eastern sub-region centered on Damascus, embracing Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the PLO, and thereby set back Syria's search for a viable military option against Israel without Egypt's participation.

While the Tripoli bloc decided only to suspend diplomatic relations with Egypt, it was Cairo which actually severed them. Sadat was then able, at least in the initial stage of his negotiations, to dismiss his Arab adversaries as "pygmies," to reject Arab interference with his policies, to scorn talk of Egypt being isolated and to assert emphatically that Egypt, and Egypt alone, was the key to peace or war in the region.[48]

In Syria's ruling Party organ, al-Ba'ath of Feb. 1, 1978, the following quotes capture the Syrian sentiment of the time:

> Egypt has made every concession to the enemy, including advance recognition of the Zionist entity because of the policy of activation, and Egypt has foundered in a swamp of humiliation and disgrace, and has failed to recover a single ursurped right...
>
> Since the Corrective Movement Syria has pursued a clear strategy of liberation, to which it has devoted all its human and material resources. This strategy is designed

to cope with all domestic complications as well as the Arab and international system...

The Corrective Movement did not regard peace with Israel - any possible peace - as an end in itself. The aim was and still is, to recover the Arab territories that were treacherously occupied in 1967 and to secure the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian Arab people. If diplomatic efforts can secure Israeli withdrawal and ensure the rights of the people of Palestine, the Syrian Political Command has frequently welcomed these efforts and expressed its readiness to cooperate to the full, in spite of its conviction that the Zionist state does not want peace, but on the contrary fears a real peace which would put an end to all her expansionist ambitions in the area...[49]

Some further insight may be gained on Assad's reaction to Sadat's unilateral accomodation with Israel. Former President Jimmy Carter in his book The Blood of Abraham recounts a conversation with Assad in May 1977 on this very subject. He writes:

After Sadat's visit to Israel, Assad's condemnation was so intense that many considered him just an obstructionist who would oppose *any* peace initiative and who therefore would be relatively insignificant in resolving Middle East conflicts through negotiations. In effect his response to the Arab-Israeli peace treaty was relatively quiescent: an attempt to avoid a confrontation with Israeli troops and acquire more Soviet arms to maintain some strategic military balance between Israel and Syria. Assad was biding his time, waiting for an opportunity to reassert Syria's role as a leader among nations in the Middle East.[50]

In the same discussion Carter tried to convince Assad that the Israelis were ready for peace if any Arab leaders were willing to deal with them directly and in good faith. In presenting Israel's emphasis and commitment to the security of their small nation and their need to be recognized and accepted as a permanent entity in the region, Carter provoked a major rebuttal from Assad. He describes Assad's reaction to Israel's desire for "secure borders" in these words:

> It is strange to insist on secure borders on other peoples' territory. Israel would like to take some from Syria, Syria would take some from Turkey, Canada might take some from the United States, and so on. The whole world would become a jungle. The Israelis claim that they took the Golan to protect their settlements, but then they build new settlements on the Golan, some of them only three hundred meters from our territory! Why should secure borders be fifty kilometers from Damascus but three hundred and fifty kilometers from Tel Aviv? To talk of secure borders does not rest on anything real. [51]

In the ensuing months between Sadat's Jerusalem visit and the signing of the Camp David agreement in September 1978, great difficulty was encountered in trying to bridge the gap between Sadat's pursuit of a comprehensive peace formula and Israels pursuit of a bi-lateral Egyptian-Israeli settlement. By the summer of 1978 the euphoria of Sadat's Jerusalem visit had worn thin, and the initiative was in danger of sputtering out. At this point Carter made the high-risk decision to invite Sadat and Begin to Camp David to thrash out an agreement. The Camp David process took 17 days; most of the

time was spent on Egypt's insistence on obtaining Israeli commitments with respect to withdrawal from other Arab territories, the Palestinian question and the status of Jerusalem. Of key interest to this paper is that the Syrian Golan Heights were *not* at Israeli insistence, mentioned by name, nor did Israel apply the principle of withdrawal to the Golan, the West Bank or the Gaza, as Egypt and the U.S. interpreted the ever more ambiguous Resolution 242.[52]

There were two agreements reached at Camp David: one dealt with Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai and the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt; the other provided a framework for settling the future of the West Bank and the Gaza. To reiterate, no mention of the Syrian Golan Heights appeared anywhere in either of the two agreements. Both documents called for Arab recognition of Israel, an act Syria implacably opposes, and the establishment of normal relations between Israel and the Arab states.

Though the Camp David Accord was reached in September 1978, it still took another half year for the Israelis and Egyptians to finally sign the decisive Peace Treaty on March 26, 1979. During the final negotiations, the talks appeared about to break-up at several key points especially over the so-called "Palestinian Question," that is, to what extent the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt would be linked to the West Bank and Gaza issues. Although the Treaty was finally signed, this issue was never entirely resolved.[53]

Led by the Syrians, Arab opposition to the Israeli-Egyptian accords reached a crescendo. At the Ninth Arab Summit Conference at Baghdad in November 1978 (to which Egypt was not invited), the

hard-line Arab countries once again charged Sadat with treason and then even offered Egypt 5 billion dollars if Sadat would terminate negotiations with the Israelis.[54] The Ninth Congress in effect turned into an all-Arab court trying Egypt in absentia and unanimously finding finding it guilty of acting "outside the framework of collective Arab responsibility." The Conference rejected the Camp David Accords and "all effects resulting from them," and called on Cairo to "abrogate" them and not to sign "any reconciliation treaty with the enemy."[55]

Unanimity in rejecting the Camp David accords and the establishment of a broader consensus on basic policies toward Israel resulted in a series of reconciliations among quarreling members of the Arab world, the most notable between Syria and Iraq. That October in an unprecedented move, President Assad went to Baghdad to meet with Iraqi President Bakr. In the ensuing several months the two former enemies began to speak of a "new economic and political union." However, in July 1979, Bakr resigned ostensibly for reasons of ill-health, and Saddam Husayn, Iraq's present strongman (1985) assumed the Presidency. The new regime promptly executed a number of Ba'athi officials, some sympathetic to Syria, who had allegedly organized a conspiracy with Syrian support to depose the new government. This was the turning point in the brief reconciliation of Syria and Iraq; the unification process aborted as the two states resumed with ever more vitrolic hyperbole their former confrontational relationship.[56]

This break with Iraq instigated a realignment of Syrian policy in favor of revolutionary Iran. This was of strategic importance to the

Syrians as their military forces at this juncture had become bogged down in Lebanon while still facing Israel on the Golan. Syria could not permit an unfettered Iraq to threaten its Eastern border. Thus, it is not surprising that as a counter-balance after Iraq invaded Iran in September 1980, Syria supported the Iranians. This alliance with the Iranians is especially manifested in Lebanon today where Iranian revolutionary guards and the Islamic fundamentalist Hizbollah, giving allegiance to the Ayatollah Khomeni, operate within the Syrian sector.

Other key trends came out of the Baghdad Conference of November 1978. There was a general rapprochement between the conservative Arab bloc led by Saudi Arabia (paradoxically Syria's greatest bankroller) and the radical Arab states. Iraq took steps to improve relations with Jordan, which today has almost developed into a full fledged alliance. Jordan, in turn, opened a new dialogue with the PLO which in 1985 showed brief signs of bearing fruit.[57]

Syrian polemics directed at Egypt were at their greatest during this period. Fearing that the threat of an Egyptian-Israeli peace would remove Syria from its "special" role as future patron of a Palestinian state led the Syrian publication Tishrin to reaffirm in 1978 that:

> Syria...is...the lung with which the Palestinian resistance is breathing....
>
> "Palestine and Syria are part of one homeland. The false borders established by the (1916) Sykes-Picot Agreement...are no longer acceptable. Therefore the question of Palestine is strictly a Syrian issue and (only next) an Arab security issue.[58]

Another article in Tishrin commented in November 1979:

> In Baghdad, (the Ninth Arab Summit Conference), the Arab nation has unanimously rejected As-Sadat's treason and adopted measures to wipe out As-Sadat's regime. That is because this regime constitutes a threat to the supreme Pan-Arab interests. Wiping out the As-Sadat regime would enable the Arab nation to wrest the initiative to fight its enemies.[59]

On December 22nd 1979 President Assad delivered a speech at the opening session of the Seventh Ba'ath Party Congress the first to be held in four years. He made some key statements illustrating the importance of the Palestinian issue to Syria.

> The Palestine issue has been the axis of our struggle as a party and a country. It has also been the axis of discussion in all our congresses, without exception. We can say that every congress of the Ba'ath Party was one of Palestine.
>
> I deem it fit to send on behalf of this Congress and all of you greetings to our people in occupied Palestine, Golan and Sinai. We stress to our kinfolk there that we will continue as usual to adopt a firm and solid stand until our territory is liberated, our people are returned and our rights are regained.
>
> I also welcome the representatives of the Egyptian national movement who are among us now. These are the people who are struggling with the masses of fraternal Egypt to rid that fraternal country of the capitulatory position in which As-Sadat put it.[60]

Yasir Arafat, in attendance at this Congress, had some interesting statements of his own to add. The very fact of his addressing the Ba'ath Party Congress illustrates the extreme capriciousness of the PLO-Syrian relationship. It must be remembered that in 1976 Syrian troops had fought the PLO in support of the Christians in Lebanon; several years later (1982-5) Syria actively supported leftist militias attacking the PLO and also fomented a rebellion within the ranks of the PLO which had the result of driving Arafat out of Lebanon. This consummate political survivor addressed Syrian-PLO solidarity in the following manner:

> Yes, brothers, it is not a coincidence at all that we are meeting here. It is also not a coincidence that the flag of the Ba'ath Party is also the flag of the Palestinian revolution (applause). We know, brothers, that the road is long and tough. I am saying this because I know that they are concentrating on Syria to make it bow. When Egypt left the Arab arena temporarily, they concentrated on Syria. This is because if Syria is cowed, then that what would be the end of steadfastness and confrontation would also be the end of our Arab nation. Therefore, I say that they will not be able to cow Syria or impose the logic of Camp David and capitulation on Syria. They will also not be able to impose the logic of surrender or Camp David on the Palestinian revolution.
>
> I tell them from here, from Syria - the heart of steadfastness and confrontation - that the Arab region will not bow or surrender. This region and this Arab nation will defy and fight until victory, victory, victory! (applause)[61]

The United States paid a substantial political price for sponsoring the Camp David process: the nearly complete alienation of Syria. Displeasure with the U.S. role was apparent in the cool reception given to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance in Damascus in December 1977 and in Assad's refusal to meet Carter in 1978, he asserted bluntly that Syria "has nothing to say" to the United States.[62] Alfred Atherton, Carter's roving ambassador, received similar treatment by being refused an invitation to Damascus on the basis that his Middle East tour did "not serve the cause of a just and lasting peace." In all these instances, however, Syria stopped short of a total diplomatic break with the U.S. in order to leave some options open.[63]

Assad, feeling isolated due to the Egyptian-Israeli Peace agreement, the relative failure of the Baghdad Conference and its alienation from Iraq and Jordan, moved with alacrity to ally with the other pariah rejectionist: Libya. In September 1980 Assad and President Qaddafi proclaimed a merger between their two nations. This initiative, though it brought initial apprehension to many in the moderate Arab bloc and to Israel, was never implemented; each country had different irreconcilable perceptions of the leadership of the Arab world. Qaddafi viewed himself as <u>the</u> leader of the Arab world; this, Assad could never tolerate.

THE FAHD PLAN

The next major peace initiative occurred in August 1981 at the initiative of Prince Fahd of Saudi Arabia. He called on the U.S. to recognize the PLO "because it is a fact and a reality and any comprehensive peace in the area must depend upon reality."[64] The salient points of the eight point peace plan were: an Israeli withdrawal from all Arab territory occupied in 1967; establishment of an independent Palestinian state; a complete regional peace; and an "implied" recognition of Israel. This plan was the first initiative offered by the fence-straddling Saudis, and it provided an alternative to the war rhetoric of Syria and the rejectionists and the Sadat-Camp David peace approach.[65]

Israel rejected the plan outright, stating that it was "a phased program for the destruction of Israel." Syria and the rejectionists also refused to participate in any such plan as they neither supported the basic premises of Resolution 242 nor would they consider recognizing Israel. By putting pressure on the other Arab states and cold shouldering Fahd's plan, Assad essentially derailed the Saudi proposal, continuing the Syrian trend of obstinacy and rendering true the statement: "no war without Egypt, no peace without Syria."

In October 1981 the assasination of Anwar Sadat in Cairo shook the Arab world. In Damascus his death was met with glee, and many thousands celebrated in the streets; his death cast a pall over the

entire Camp David Peace Process.

Throughout 1981 a series of events occurred which increased Assad's resolve to oppose any Arab-Israeli Peace Process. First, relations with the U.S. worsened. Secretary of State Alexander Haig, during a trip to the Middle East in the spring, visited various regional states considered friendly to the U.S. to attempt to form a united bloc against a Soviet threat. In his meetings with the Israelis, Haig used strong language against the Syrians leaving the Israelis with the impression that the Syrians were fair game in Lebanon. Begin later wrote Haig thanking him for agreeing that "our joint objective is to bring about the exit of the Syrians from Lebanon."[66]

In April fighting broke out in Lebanon between the Israeli and Syrian forces. The Syrians swiftly moved in additional military forces and material, most ominously, SAM batteries into the Bekaa valley. Though this conflict was adroitly defused by U.S. diplomacy, the Syrian missiles remained in the Bekaa, and seeds were sown for the larger conflict of the following summer.

On December 14, 1981 the Likud dominated Israeli Knesset voted 63-21 to extend Israeli law and jurisdiction to the Golan Heights (in effect an annexation). This was consumated despite the U.S. supported Security Council Resolution 497, which declared the Israeli action null and void and without international legal status.[67] The understandably outraged Syrians took this de facto annexation of the Golan Heights to mean that Israel had in effect slammed the door on all future negotiations for a peaceful return of Syrian territory. Under such circumstances it was impossible to persuade Assad to lighten his

stance in Lebanon or to reduce the increasingly suspect Syrian designs of keeping the region in a continual state of destabilization.[68] The annexation also gave Syria, as the aggrieved party, the opportunity to move out of its isolation, to mend fences with her neighbors and to reassert its position as the key Arab actor. Saudi Arabia issued strong statements condemning the annexation.[69]

The hardening of the Syrian attitude is evidenced in its change of position regarding Resolution 242. In March 1972 President Assad had declared:

> We support the Security Council Resolution when interpreted as providing for the withdrawal of enemy forces from the Arab territory occupied in 1967 and as a confirmation...of the rights of the Palestinian people.[70]

This was the standard Arab interpretation of Resolution 242; the same terms for peace were enunciated by Anwar Sadat before the Knesset in November 1977. After the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Syria had also accepted U.N. Security Council Resolution 338, which by implication incorporated 242 and its implied recognition of Israel. However, since the December 1981 Golan annexation by Israel, Syria has denied ever accepting Resolution 242 and thereby, its indirect recognition of Israel.

The fallout from the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon dramatically altered the constellation of power blocs across the Middle East. Although the Syrian forces in Lebanon were badly bloodied by Israeli force of arms, when the dust settled, Syria was able to retain a

large portion of her influence and power in the region. As time passed, Syria was able to capitalize from the new situation. It can be factually stated that the Israeli invasion and its subsequent consequences enabled Syria to move from isolation and humiliation to seize the power switch of Middle East diplomacy.[71] The 1982 invasion had several key results. One, Israel's role in the region weakened. Although still militarily dominant, Israel became uncertain and retrograde in its policies. Additionally, U.S. diplomacy, especially after the disastrous terrorist attack on the Marine barracks, was forced by domestic political revulsion to back off and reappraise an obviously poorly calculated involvement; the concomitant weakening of U.S. and Israeli influence opened new opportunities for Syria, and through its aegis the Soviet Union, to assert themselves in the region.

THE REAGAN INITIATIVE

To spur the deadlocked Camp David process President Reagan on September 1, 1982 launched a major new peace plan which built on the Camp David framework and was consistent with the U. N. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. This proposal called specifically for an interim period of self-government for the Arabs residing on the West Bank and Gaza to be followed later with negotiations between Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Arabs to determine the ultimate

status of the occupied territories.[72]

For the first time during his Presidency, Reagan acknowledged the kinship of the Arab-Israeli dispute to other strategic and economic interests of the United States. In his address he stated:

> The Lebanon War, tragic as it was, has left us with a new opportunity for Middle East peace. We must seize it now and bring peace to this troubled area so vital to world stability... But the opportunities for peace in the Middle East do not begin and end in Lebanon. As we help Lebanon rebuild, we must also try to resolve the root causes of conflict between Arabs and Israelis.[73]

In brief, the President's initiative was based on Camp David's two basic principles - self-government and security - ideally leading to a broad and lasting peace for all parties.[74] Recognizing the Palestinian's lack of a homeland as fundamental to the dispute, Reagan designated the crucial issue to be that of reconciling "Israel's legitimate concerns with the legitimate rights of the Palestinians."[75] Furthermore in a departure from previous U.S. policy statements, Reagan declared the U.S. would oppose both an independent Palestinian state and continued Israeli annexation of the territories, and instead, would support an association between Jordan and the West Bank and Gaza.[76] In Reagan's words:

> We base our approach squarely on the principle that the Arab-Israeli conflict should be resolved through negotiations involving an exchange of territory for peace...Self-government by the Palestinians of West Bank

> and Gaza in association with Jordan offers the best chance for a durable, just and lasting peace.[77]

The keystone of Reagan's peace initiative was the belief that Jordan's King Hussein would take an active role in the proposed negotiations in order to prevent the West Bank from being absorbed (as had the Golan) into Israel. Consequently, when the Hashemite King and the Palestinians failed to respond to this American invitation for a new round of talks, the plan was severely hobbled.

Jordanian caution can in part be laid to the opposition of Syria. When Hussein in April 1983 held talks with Arafat on Reagan's proposals, word spread that Assad was furious. When in October of the same year Arafat mentioned reopening talks with Jordan on the issue, the Jordanian ambassadors to India and Italy were shot and several car bombs were found in Amman, the Jordanian capitol. Although these terrorist attacks were not conclusively linked to Syria, to Hussein the message was clear: do not deal with Arafat's branch of the PLO.[78]

THE FEZ SUMMIT

The positive aspects of the Reagan initiative failed to mitigate the more intractable problems of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The respective positions of Israel and the Arab states understandably

elevate certain issues at the expense of others. The Israelis stress the importance of secure borders, but fail to accede to the withdrawal clause of Resolution 242 or to satisfy the political aspirations of the Palestinians. The Arab position, reaffirmed at the Fez Summit, stated that an independent Palestinian state should be created in the Gaza and West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and, in contrast to the Israeli position, gave maximum attention to the withdrawal clause and to the political aspirations of the Palestinians. It did not mention the Israelis' perceived need for secure borders nor speak directly of a peace treaty with Israel.[79]

The crux of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been the mutual denial of the other's national identity.[80] Although Arafat's branch of the PLO of late has hinted that recognition of Israel may be within the realm of possibility, Israel remains consistently negative towards any recognition of the PLO. Furthermore, Syria, locked out of this debate, remains implacably hostile to any recognition of Israel, and, as indicated above, has attempted to "punish" any Arab state which attempts to break ranks on this issue.

The most important and significant event at the Fez Summit was the re-emergence of a revised Fahd plan. For the first time in the thirty-four years of Israeli existence, the Arab nations presented a set of proposals which hinted at coexistence and appeared to favor diplomatic over military solutions. Fez was a major change from the adamant "Three Nos" of Khartoum in 1967.[81]

As a response to the Reagan initiative, the Fez Summit rejected most of its tenets though identifying as "new" and "positive" certain

elements of the proposal. The major objection centered on the U.S. refusal to support an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. At Fez, the Arab leaders re-affirmed Arafat's PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians and refused to grant Hussein the required mandate to negotiate on the Palestinians' behalf, as per the 1974 Rabat agreement. [82]

The eight point peace plan offered at the Fez Summit was faithful to traditional Arab demands.

> 1. The withdrawal of Israel from all Arab territories occupied in 1967, including Arab Al Qods (East Jerusalem).
>
> 2. The dismantling of settlements established by Israel on the Arab territories after 1967.
>
> 3. The guarantee of freedom of worship and practice of religious rites for all religions in holy shrines.
>
> 4. The reaffirmation of the Palestinian peoples right to self-determination and the exercise of its imprescriptable and inalienable national rights under the leadership of the PLO, its sole and legitimate representative, and the indemnification of all those who desire to return.
>
> 6. Placing the West Band and Gaza Strip under U.N. control for a transitory period not exceeding a few months.
>
> 7. The Security Council would guarantee peace among all states of the region including the independent Palestinian state.

> 8. The Security Council would guarantee the respect of these principles. [83]

By signing the Fez agreement, Assad demonstrated a slight shift in tactics. It must be recalled that Syria had not supported the original Fahd plan in 1981. At Fez, Syrian Information Minister Iskander Ahmad affirmed that Syria included Israel among the states covered by Article Seven's phrase "guarantees for peace for all the states of the region,"[84] but this was not meant in any way to imply recognition of Israel.

There was, however, a more sinister side to Assad's tactics. The rejectionist elements of the PLO, which were actively supported by Syria, held a press conference in Damascus to denounce the Fez declaration and Arafat's accession to its proposals on behalf of the PLO. The main point of disagreement was Article Seven which the rejectionist Palestinian groups considered an implied recognition of Israel's right to exist. Illustrative of this viewpoint is the statement by Nimr Salih, a Fatah breakaway member allied to the Palestinian Marxists and the Syrian as-Saiqa faction:

> The endorsement of the clause has opened the way for the Jordanian regime to exercise the role assigned to it by American imperialism...liquidating the Palestinian cause and by-passing the PLO as the sole legitimate representatives of the Palestinian people. [85]

Against this background it is not surprising that Arafat's trip to Amman in April 1983 prompted a stormy response from Damascus.

The Syrians declared that Arafat was not authorized to speak for the PLO and shortly afterwards fabricated a statement ostensibly issued by five PLO groups stating as much.[86]

The question arises as to what exactly is Syria's real objective vis-a-vis the Palestinians. It is clear the Syrians do not want the very independent Arafat to lead the PLO, likewise, they do not want Jordan to regain its mandate to represent the Palestinians. Also clear is that the Syrians have attempted through their various proxies in the rejectionist branch of the PLO, especially in Lebanon, to usurp control of the movement. Furthermore, Assad derives great domestic and international benefit from his championship of the Palestinian cause. But the question persists: Are the Syrians really serious about setting up a truly independent Palestinian state? The preponderance of evidence indicates that the Syrians do not want a truly independent Palestinian state and are using the PLO as a ploy to advance their own hegemonistic ambitions in the region.

THE LEBANESE TRAP

During the fateful September of Reagan's peace initiative and the Fez Summit, events in in Lebanon became uncontrollable. First, Bashir Gemayel, the strong pro-Israeli and pro-U.S. Lebanese President-elect was assassinated; this provoked the retaliatory

Sabra-Chatila massacre which in turn was a cause of the Israeli retrenchment in Lebanon. To help fill the vacuum left by the Israelis, the U.S. Marines returned to Lebanon as part of the MLF. This set the stage for Syria's dramatic reattainment of ascendency in Lebanon.

During this period Syria's tactics were to gain time while it was rebuilding its military machine and to put off any serious peace discussions until in a position to capitalize on on such negotiations. Israel, by its intransigence in ignoring the then U.S. special envoy Philip Habib's advice and wasting several precious months by quibbling over marginal points of a new Israeli-Lebanese initiative, played into Syria's hands. As Syria's strength grew, its obstructionist tactics became more brazen and were evidenced in a wave of kidnappings, harassment and assasinations across Lebanon.

The United States appeared not to understand why Syria was involved in Lebanon. Rather than just aiding the various Moslem groups and establishing order in the region, both admittedly goals, *the purpose of Syria's presence in Lebanon is preeminently tied to the disposition of the Golan Heights and the future of the Palestinians*. It is therefore not in Syria's interest to pull out its forces from Lebanon unless such a move is linked to its regaining of the Golan and the settling of the Palestinian issue - to Syria's advantage.[87]

When the United States mediated a withdrawal agreement between Lebanon and Israel in May 1983, it committed a serious error in failing to address Syrian interests. One reason for this failure was probably due to the perception of Syrian military weakness; another reason was the naive belief that once the Israelis left Lebanon, the

Syrians would follow suit. In fact, at the end of June 1983 the Syrians had agreed to withdraw, but this was at a moment when the balance of power was held by Israel. As time passed and Assad's position in relation to Israel grew stronger, this agreement came to be reconsidered. [88] It is arguable, indeed probable, that Assad never had any real intentions to withdraw from Lebanon but appeared to acquiesce in order to buy additional time.

Isolated once again by a U.S.-Israeli sponsored plan, Assad denounced the May 1983 agreement as "a Zionist-American hegemonistic plan...worse than the Camp David Accords."[89] The Syrians further characterized the agreement as a tool for ending Syrian influence in Lebanon and a means for separating Lebanon from the Arab camp. [90]

The totality of the U.S. miscalculation of Syria's intentions is well described by Michael Ledeen in Commentary:

> At this juncture there seems to have been a widespread American conviction that Syria, suitably grateful for our moderation and evenhandedness, would only be too pleased to cooperate with our overall objectives by withdrawing from Lebanon once we had arranged for the Israelis to leave. Assad, however, viewed the situation in far more traditional terms, and had a far more serious approach to foreign policy. He had been beaten by the Israelis but had not been expelled from Lebanon, and there was no sign of any force willing and able to do that. He had lost battles, even wars, in the past, but he had not altered his fundamental objectives, and the loss of hundreds or thousands of his fighting men was for him hardly a major strategic concern. Just a few years before he had ordered the slaughter of somewhere

> between 10,000 and 30,000 of his own people when the Islamic Brotherhood in the city of Hamaa dared to challenge his rule; nothing approaching that number fell to the Israelis. Once the Soviets replaced his tanks, airplanes and anti-aircraft missiles, he was prepared to take his revenge.[91]

It was inevitable that Damascus would take advantage of U.S. diplomatic clumsiness. In the words of Adam Garfinkle:

> ...by dropping the Reagan Plan into the Lebanese morass, Washington gave the Syrians, who were excluded from it, an incentive to use the Lebanese crisis to delay the Reagan Plan and ultimately to defeat it.[92]

THE ASSAD DOCTRINE

After the Israeli-Lebanese agreement of May 1983, Syrian tactics appeared to encompass what Zeev Schiff characterized as "the Assad Doctrine." Its basic tenet was that Syria reserved the right to take any action, *including the use of military force*, in order to prevent any of the parties included in the Greater Syria area - the Lebanese, the Palestinians and the Jordanians - from concluding any separate agreements with Israel.[93]

From May 1983 until the abrogation of the Israeli-Lebanese withdrawal accord in March 1984, the Syrians consistently tore down all constructive attempts at peace-making while they assiduously

reinforced their power position in Lebanon and the Middle East. The Soviet stake in Assad's resurgence was obvious; his missile defences were rebuilt with newer Soviet SAMs, including the formidable SA-5; his air force was upgraded with newer and better Migs; in effect, his entire military establishment was revamped.

In May 1983 internal dissent tore at Arafat's PLO and by December Arafat himself was on the run, forced out of Northern Lebanon by pro-Syrian Palestinian elements. In October 1983 the United States' attempt to hold together Lebanon was crippled by the terrorist bombing of the Marine barracks; by the following February (1984) convinced of the fruitlessness of their position, the U.S. Marines withdrew from Beirut.[94] Within Lebanon, acts of terror judiciously applied by terrorist bands, some sent by Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini (Syria's ally), others sent by Assad's ruthless brother Rifaat, wreaked vengeance against Syria's Lebanese opponents, thereby bringing the Shiite and Druse factions tenuously into line with Syrian policy.[95] Throughout this period the Syrians were active in reducing any tangible Jordanian-Palestinian accord, and their continued intransigence scuttled any hope for renewed Arab solidarity at Casablanca during the summer of 1985. In January 1985 the Syrians gained clear victory when the Israelis announced unilaterally their withdrawal from Lebanon.

Assad had few set-backs during this period; the greatest was the gradual reentry of Mubarak's Egypt into the Arab fold. Trends also seem to indicate that as Syria adjusts to digesting the political and military morass of Lebanon, it may over time have a bitter pill to

swallow. Although Syria may temporarily claim a victory in the restoration of Lebanon to its rightful place in Damascus' sphere of influence, Syria's deeper involvement with the Lebanese warring factions creates serious problems which could affect its entire strategy within the Peace Process.

In the spring of 1985 the Shiite attack on the Palestinian camps and the accompanying massacres helped rekindle a renewed sense of PLO solidarity - at Syria's expense. Pro and anti-Arafat PLO factions coalesced to fight what was widely considered to be a Syrian-backed attempt to usurp control of the PLO. These actions in the eyes of many Palestinians made a mockery of Damascus' claim to be the true champion of Palestinian rights and has threatened to undo Syria's efforts to create an alternative Palestinian leadership in an attempt to invalidate any moves by Arafat toward a fresh peace initiative with Israel in coordination with Jordan. Syria's view of such a dialogue was made clear by Foreign Affairs Minister Farouq-al-Shara in an interview with the Paris daily Le Monde:

> What is being worked out in Amman between King Hussein and Arafat does not serve the course of peace in the Middle East, and constitutes a new step in the course of the Camp David Accords. We are against the Amman agreements because we consider they will give the Israelis numerous concessions concerning the legitimate rights of the Palestinians.[96]

At the writing of this paper (summer 1985), Syria seems to be growing impatient as its claim to be warden of Lebanon appears to be

increasingly ignored by the ever more independent and militant factions. On July 30th the Syrian army turned over to Nabih Berri's Shiite Amal militia 50 Soviet T-54 tanks to buttress the Shiites in another clash with the Palestinians.[97] On July 28th Berri and Walid Jumblatt of the Druse, Syria's two main allies in Lebanon, had announced the formation of a National Union Front, whose primary aim was to break the strength of the Christian Phalange Party. This Syrian-sponsored alliance declared its aim to seek a "democratic and secular" Lebanon to replace the old power sharing arrangement between the diverse religious communities.[98] At the present junction the secular-minded Syrian leadership is nervous about two possible developments in Lebanon: the rise of a popular based Islamic fundamentalist movement and the spectre of a unified, anti-Syrian PLO.

CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

For the present, Syrian objectives within the Arab-Israeli Peace Process remain limited. Faced with the Israels total refusal even to consider negotiation over the Golan Heights, Syria appears to have relegated this issue for the time being to the back burner.[99] Its attention has been increasingly focused on the messy Lebanese situation and on the pursuit of obstructionist tactics as per "the Assad Doctrine" against any peace accords excluding Syria.

Syria's conditions for any peace initiative are summarized below as outlined in a 1984 Congressional study:

> 1. The peace must be just and comprehensive. It must be stable and durable.
>
> 2. The elements of such a peace are "defined by United Nations Resolutions relevant to the Palestinian problem," including Security Council Resolutions 242 and 388. The principle of withdrawal - the Syrians would say "total withdrawal" - is established in Resolution 242. This issue for negotiation in the Syrian view is only to establish the timetable for withdrawal to pre-1967 lines.
>
> 3. The negotiations should take place only within the United Nations framework.
>
> 4. Negotiations should be between an Israeli delegation and a united Arab delegation: the PLO would participate in the Arab delegation.[100]
>
> 5. The Soviet Union must be included in any negotiations.

These conditions are basically those agreed upon at the Fez Summit of 1982. Since Syria and Israel are virtually incapable of discussing the Golan, let alone the Palestinian issue, presently such a comprehensive approach to peace cannot hope to succeed. Indeed, antagonism toward Israel provides legitimacy for and diverts domestic ferment from President Assad. For Syria and Libya rejectionism remains a tool of self-aggrandizement within the Arab political arena.

Syria will continue to pursue its objectives through a mixture of military pressure and diplomacy. While rapidly building up its armaments and by sitting back and obstructing the entire Peace Process, Syria has been demonstrating its conviction that the solution of the Arab-Israeli problem must await the Arab(Syrian) achievement of "military parity" with Israel.[101] The realization of this goal could bring extreme danger to the Middle East: Israel would not tolerate the development of such a threat led by a militarily resurgent Syria, nor would the Soviet Union take lightly another defeat of its client state.

Much of Syria's assertive foreign policy and fragile internal stability is predicated on the sheer force of Assad's personality. An untimely death or dehabilitating illness of the often sickly Assad could activate a chain of destabilizing events within Syria and unravel the Byzantine web of contacts and coalitions he has assiduously built up across the Middle East. Though outside the purview of this paper, this event could radically alter Syria's role within the Peace Process.

Hafez Assad has fought his way to the top of the Middle Eastern heap largely by pursuing negative policies such as blocking or

destroying rivals and derailing agreements that did not include him, or that gave him a lesser place than he felt entitled to. In the pursuit of these goals he has shown great personal tenacity against severe odds and strong enemies.[102]

What could be intriguing would be if the ailing Assad chose the political path in attempting to solve these intractable problems. In the words of a foreign policy specialist in Damascus: "He is looking for an agreement that will assure his place in the Arab pantheon."[103] The negative approach though effective in blocking the Peace Process as recently demonstrated by the failure of the Arab Summit Meeting in Casablanca, will never give him the "Arab hero" mantle which Nasser and Sadat sought in vain.[104] For that ultimate accolade a great positive act may be necessary - and that can only begin by taking a statesmanlike approach towards finding a viable solution to the deadlocked Arab-Israeli Peace Process .

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