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LEGITIMACY AND HAFEZ AL-ASAD

by

Mark M. Huber

June, 1992

Thesis Advisor:

Glenn E. Robinson

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Legitimacy and Hafez al-Asad

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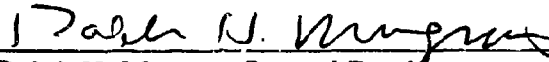


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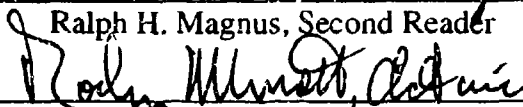
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ABSTRACT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION 1

II. ASAD'S ALAWI ANCESTRY--IMPEDIMENT TO LEGITIMACY . 10

III. TOOLS FOR LEGITIMACY-BUILDING 20

 A. THE BAATH PARTY 20

 B. PAN-ARABISM 31

 C. THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE 39

 D. THE GOLAN HEIGHTS 48

 E. THE SYRIAN ECONOMY 54

 F. CHARISMA 61

IV. ISRAEL'S LEGITIMIZING FUNCTION AT WORK 65

 A. THE RAMADAN WAR 65

 B. THE 1973 CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS 70

 C. 1978-1982: BATTLING THE MUSLIM BRETHERN . . . 74

V. THE COUNTER-ARGUMENTS 84

 A. SYRIA ENTERS LEBANON IN 1976 84

 B. SYRIA AND THE GULF CRISIS 89

 C. THE PEACE PROCESS 97

VI. CONCLUSION--IMPLICATIONS FOR US POLICY	103
A. SYRIA AFTER ASAD	104
B. WHILE ASAD IS STILL AT THE HELM	106
REFERENCES	114
INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	122

I. INTRODUCTION

The tenure of Hafez al-Asad is perhaps the most enigmatic aberration in the post-World War II history of Syria. Emerging from a legacy of failed coups and political instability, Asad has managed to retain a stranglehold on power for over two decades. Indeed, Asad's long-established presidency might lead one to posit that the string of coups and counter-coups that prefaced his rise to power were in fact the real aberration in Syria's recent history.

Whatever the case, Asad's longevity is that much more noteworthy when one considers that "the entire Asad tenure has been accompanied by Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights, and that after 1970 Syria experienced one major Middle East war, attained and then lost an important degree of regional leadership, and lived under the domination of a small and unpopular religious minority group." [Ref. 1]

It has been taken for granted--for too long, by too many--that Hafez al-Asad relies exclusively upon an iron fist to perpetuate the survival of his regime. Close scrutiny of Asad's presidency betrays the inadequacy of this explanation. Unbridled cruelty and repression are certainly utilized against those who dare to challenge Asad, but it is unreasonable to believe that these are the only means--or the most effective ones--at Asad's disposal.

Conventional explanations for the evident stability of the present Syrian regime are for the most part inadequate. Although there is little doubt that the current leadership relies heavily upon the armed forces to maintain its domestic predominance, it seems implausible to argue that Hafez al-Asad and his associates rule the country through brute force alone. [Ref. 2]

By what means, then, does Asad maintain his position? It is the ambition of this essay to demonstrate that Syria's conflict with Israel is the primary legitimizing agent for Asad's minority-Alawi regime. The absence of a militant confrontation with Israel poses risks which the present Syrian leadership has been unwilling to assume. This condition acts as a restraint upon certain types of foreign policy activities and initiatives which Asad might otherwise elect to pursue.

Asad's dependence upon Israel as a legitimizing agent not only explains Syria's continuing intransigence regarding peace negotiations, for example, but also raises a number of important and pertinent questions regarding US foreign policy conduct. Among them: Is a meaningful Syrian-Israeli peace a realistic goal of US policy? And what are the implications for the US vis-a-vis a successor to the chronically ailing Asad?

These questions and others will be addressed in greater detail later, the first priority being to establish the veracity of this paper's argument. In this pursuit, several topic areas must be discussed. First, one must appreciate why legitimacy is a commodity that is important to Asad, and yet, at the same time, so difficult to obtain. Because of his

Alawi background, Asad's legitimacy is constantly challenged despite any success his policies might enjoy.

Second, the contest with Israel is not the only legitimizing agent available to Asad. Indeed, he has endeavored to use a variety of institutions, ideas, and ambitions to achieve a degree of legitimacy with the Syrian people; these include, among others, the Baath party, pan-Arabism, and the notion of Greater Syria. It will be demonstrated that these alternative legitimizing agents are either insufficient for the task, and have proven themselves so in the past, or otherwise derive their strength through attachment to anti-Israeli sentiments, thereby making the conflict with Israel primary in the hierarchy of legitimizing themes.

Third, Asad's dependence upon anti-Israeli themes during periods of crisis will be elucidated. These crises include the confrontation with devout Muslims during the creation of the Syrian constitution in 1973, and the period of uprisings which led to the infamous slaughter at Hama in 1982 and the attendant suppression of the Muslim Brethren.

Finally, Asad has pursued a number of activities which seemingly contradict the argument of this paper. Among these are: Syria's armed intervention in Lebanon in 1976; Syrian participation in the US-led international coalition opposing Iraq's invasion of Kuwait; and Syria's involvement in the subsequent peace process. It will be demonstrated that none

of these policy actions, in fact, contradict the exposition offered in these pages, or diminish its strength. Indeed, refuting these points will buttress the argument that Israel is the primary source of legitimacy for Asad's regime.

Only after having accomplished these tasks will it be appropriate to discuss implications for US policy. But before diving headlong into this process it would be wise to clarify the meaning of a term which, heretofore, has been bandied about all too recklessly. That term is *legitimacy*.

Legitimacy is rarely discussed in the context of Syrian politics because of the predisposition to view Syrian leadership as dependent upon coercive measures to maintain power. Because this widely-held assumption will be challenged in the course of this essay, it is imperative to understand what is meant by "political" legitimacy. In its most simple form, political legitimacy "refers to the basis on which the exercise of political authority is established. A system is legitimate when its decisions are generally and widely accepted as just and proper by major groups in the system." [Ref. 3]

This generic definition fails to convey with sufficient urgency the importance of legitimacy to the stability of any government, not to mention those which are prone to chaos and disorder--as is Syria's. David Easton's writings on the subject do it greater justice:

The inculcation of a sense of legitimacy is probably the single most effective device for regulating the flow of diffuse support in favor both of the authorities and of the regime. A member may be willing to obey the authorities and conform to the requirements of the regime for many different reasons. But the most stable support will derive from the conviction on the part of the member that it is right and proper for him to accept and obey the authorities and to abide by the requirements of the regime. It reflects the fact that in some vague or explicit way he sees these objects as conforming to his own moral principles, his own sense of what is right and proper in the political sphere. The strength of support implicit in this attitude derives from the fact that it is not contingent on specific inducements or rewards of any kind, except in the very long run. [Ref. 4]

Although not delineating a straightforward definition of legitimacy, Easton's discourse provides a better overall sense of the important role legitimacy plays--where it exists--in maintaining the good order which is a prerequisite for the authoritative execution of government policy.

Michael Hudson proffers thoughts on legitimacy more relevant to the context of Arab politics:

A strong personal leader may generate legitimacy for a regime or an entire system. The regime or opposition movement that succeeds in identifying itself with a highly salient ideological program may win positive support. Certainly in the Arab world those leaders who successfully associate themselves with the fulfillment of abstract but highly valued goals pertaining to sacred obligations, corporate identity, or deeply valued principles are likely to last longer and perform better than those who can induce compliance only on the basis of fear or expediency. [Ref. 5]

Hudson's reflections on legitimacy are certainly applicable to Syria. Asad is unquestionably a "strong personal leader." Furthermore, Asad strives to associate himself with certain "ideological programs," namely pan-Arabism, and, to a lesser

extent, Baathism. Asad also endeavors to cultivate the perception that his fidelity to certain core concerns or "sacred obligations"--achieving the return of the Golan Heights, and securing a homeland for the Palestinians--is above reproach. How each of these is inextricably tied to his contest with Israel will be addressed in due course. What matters here is understanding that Asad hopes to create a situation within Syria where inducing compliance "only on the basis of fear" is ultimately unnecessary.

A discussion of legitimacy would be incomplete without incorporating certain relevant observations made by Max Weber. In *The Theory of Economic and Social Organization*, Weber describes the possible motives for attributing legitimacy to any given "order."

The legitimacy of an order may be guaranteed or upheld in two principal ways: (1) from purely disinterested motives, which may be (a) purely affectual, consisting in an emotionally determined loyalty; or (b) may derive from a rational belief in the absolute validity of the order as an expression of ultimate values, whether they be moral, esthetic or of any other type; or (c) may originate in religious attitudes, through the belief in the dependence of some condition of religious salvation on conformity with the order; (2) also or entirely by self-interest, that is, through expectations of specific ulterior consequences, but consequences which are, to be sure, of a particular kind. [Ref. 6]

Not all of these means of inspiring legitimacy are available to Asad. It will become clear in these pages that Asad does not possess the affectual attributes necessary to engender legitimacy, nor can he rely upon religious attitudes for this purpose. In fact, Syria's religious milieu makes Asad's

legitimacy-building task all the more difficult. Asad, then, must instead motivate the Syrian people to accept his regime either for reasons of self-interest, or because his regime is perceived to be an "expression of ultimate values." The ultimate "value" that Asad has chosen to promote is his regime's unrelenting opposition to Israel.

Besides motives for attributing legitimacy to an order, Weber has also identified three "types" of legitimacy: traditional, charismatic, and legal rational. It would be impossible to conceive of "traditional" legitimacy in Syria simply because--like many third-world countries--it is too young to have had an opportunity to create the institutions and symbols necessary to create political traditions. Charismatic legitimacy is similarly difficult to imagine, but only because Asad himself is not endowed with the personal qualities required to create it. This will be discussed in further detail later. A legal-rational foundation for legitimacy is also not applicable for Syria under Asad; Asad's ascendancy to office was not based upon legal procedures. Like those before him, Asad seized power. As far as the exercise of political authority is concerned, Asad may cloak his decisions and directives in so-called "legal" procedures and institutions, but this does not disguise the fact that he is anything other than a dictator. The law is at Asad's disposal, and is therefore ultimately irrelevant. In this

respect, Weber's analysis fails to satisfy those observers of Syrian politics who seek a precise definition of legitimacy.

In the specific context of Syrian politics under Asad, legitimacy is best defined by describing how it is realized: Syria's political leadership achieves legitimacy by demonstrating a minimum level of fidelity to those concerns which weigh most heavily upon the collective psyche of Syria's citizenry. These "concerns" can be variously described as prevailing moral principles (Easton), highly valued goals pertaining to sacred obligations (Hudson), or an expression of ultimate values (Weber). Asad's government is legitimate in the eyes of Syria's citizens when its decisions regarding these concerns are accepted as proper. It will become evident in the course of this essay that the primary concern of Syria's people is their confrontation with Israel. All other concerns--even economic--are subordinate to the contest with the Jewish state.

Asad's search for legitimacy, as it has been described, is of utmost importance. "While the stability of an order may be maintained for a time through fear or expediency or custom, the optimal or most harmonious relationship between the ruler and the ruled is that in which the ruled accept the rightness of the ruler's superior power." [Ref. 7] Like all political leaders, Asad has an agenda of goals and objectives. He realizes that these aspirations are better served if the Syrian people "harmoniously" accept him as their leader. At

the top of this agenda is his own political survival. Asad seeks to retain his position as Syria's president indefinitely. Thus, Asad's quest for legitimacy is really a quest for longevity.

Asad finds himself handicapped, however, in his search for legitimacy. His handicap is one he ignores only at his own peril, for it invites the bitter animosity of most Syrians. That Asad has maintained his position in spite of this handicap is remarkable testimony to his political acumen. This handicap is his Alawi heritage.

II. ASAD'S ALAWI ANCESTRY--IMPEDIMENT TO LEGITIMACY

"Most Syrians share a common culture, religion, and language, and yet Syria is plagued by a lack of homogeneity." [Ref. 8] The resentment directed at the Alawi minority is perhaps the best illustration of the divisive nature of Syrian society. Because Asad is an Alawi, the political implications of this widespread umbrage are profound. "Indeed, he [Asad] has spent much of his adult life trying to escape from identification with his minority background, but the fact that his regime is still widely seen in these terms suggests he has been less than successful" [Ref. 9] That lack of success makes his drive for legitimacy on alternative levels all the more imperative.

An examination of the Alawi minority is necessary to depict the gulf which separates Asad from the greater part of the Syrian population. This depiction will further generate a greater understanding of the monumental task which confronts Asad in his pursuit of legitimacy, as well as highlight the specific obstacles which stand in his path.

Anti-Alawi sentiments are not a recent phenomenon in Syria, nor are they a direct by-product of Asad's political position. Although Asad's presidency has certainly exacerbated anti-Alawi animosities, these sentiments have for a long time been entrenched in Syrian culture. Approximately

one million Alawis currently reside within Syria. The largest of Syria's minorities, they comprise 12 percent of the total population. The precise origin of the Alawi tribes is uncertain; most anthropologists agree that certain elements constitute what was left over from an ancient Canaanite people who cherished their insular existence in the mountains of Syria. But according to the Alawis themselves, their lineage can be traced to the ancient tribes of Arabia. Fleeing persecution, their ancestors found temporary refuge in the Jabal Sinjar, a mountainous area between the Tigris and Euphrates in modern-day Iraq, before ultimately relocating to the mountains of Western Syria several hundred years ago. In present-day Syria, Sunni Muslims, who constitute a majority of roughly 70 percent, live scattered throughout the country, whereas the Alawis congregate in particular areas, forming local majorities. Most Alawis continue to reside in the Jabal al Nusayriyah--a mountain range which hugs the Mediterranean coastline in the northwest province of Latakia.

Despite this remote location, contacts with the Byzantines and the crusaders left an indelible imprint on the Alawi practice of Islam. In fact, most Sunni Muslims insist that the Alawis are not Muslims at all.

Elements of Alawite beliefs, such as the transmigration of souls, the divinity of A'li, and a trinity put Alawis on the fringes of Islam. These practices and beliefs have provided the historic pretext for Sunni persecution of Alawis in Syria and have distanced Alawis from less heterodox Shia sects in Iraq and Iran. [Ref. 10]

Most observers consider the Alawi practice of religion to be more closely associated with Christianity. The Alawis celebrate many Christian holy days including Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and Palm Sunday. Furthermore, Alawis honor a number of Christian saints. In addition to their affinity for Christian traditions, the Alawis reject many of the tenets of Islam, including the Shari'a, sacred Islamic law.

Alawis ignore Islamic sanitary practices, dietary restrictions, sexual mores, and religious rituals. Likewise, they pay little attention to the fasting, almsgiving, and pilgrimage ceremonies of Islam; indeed, they consider the pilgrimage to Mecca a form of idol worship. [Ref. 11]

Not surprisingly, Alawi religious practices long ago provoked the wrath of neighboring Muslim populations. The resulting persecution had the effect of making the central tenets of Alawi belief a highly guarded secret. Reflecting this furtiveness, Alawis have no public religious structures or places of worship, and to this day only a select few Alawis are fully indoctrinated into the faith. Hand-in-hand with this persecution and secretiveness, the practice of *taqiyah*--hiding one's religious beliefs to avoid suffering--has been perpetuated. Because Sunni Muslims consider *taqiyah* a cowardly tactic, its acknowledged practice only invites more resentment and abuse.

Taqiyah has also allowed the Alawis a certain flexibility. Prior to the First World War the community was known as the Nusayriyah, after its founder Muhammad ibn Nusayr, who in A.D.

859 declared himself the "gateway to truth," or *bab*, an important figure in Shi'i theology. (Hence the Islamic foundation for Alawi religious beliefs.) The Nusayris adopted the appellation "Alawi" during the years of the French mandate.

The change in name--imposed by the French upon their seizure of control of Syria--has significance. Whereas Nusayri emphasizes the group's differences from Islam, Alawi suggests an adherent of 'Ali (the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad) and accentuates the religion's similarities to Shi'i Islam. Consequently, opponents of the Asad regime habitually use the former term; supporters of the regime use the latter. [Ref. 12]

French influence of the Alawi community would transcend this simple name-change, and, in fact, still reverberates in modern-day Syria. Besides dividing the country geographically, the French cynically and intentionally inflamed sectarian differences so as to consolidate their control over the area. In doing so the French created the *Troupes Speciales du Levant*, a local army comprised of "reliable" minorities--Armenians, Circassians, and Alawis. These minorities were unaccustomed to the privileges lavished on them by the French, and quite understandably leaped at the opportunity to improve their situation even--perhaps especially--if it was at the expense of the dominant Sunni majority. In due course, the Sunnis came to resent the collusion of these minorities with the French overseers. Many of these sentiments linger to this day. Interestingly, President Asad's grandfather, a local notable in the years of

the Mandate, is known to have cooperated with the French, a fact that has been carefully muted within Syria.

The domination of the present-day Syrian army by Alawi officers is frequently credited to the toehold gained in the *Troupes Speciales* by their forefathers under the French. This supposition may oversimplify the situation. A more likely explanation for the ubiquitous Alawi presence in today's Syrian army is that the traditionally poor Alawis saw military service as the best available means by which to improve their otherwise squalid existence, while the Sunni majorities viewed military service with contempt. Hanna Batatu, writing in 1981, supports this hypothesis:

The pre-independence character of the army, this is, its character prior to 1946, cannot account for its 1963 or its present composition, at least in any decisive sense. The reason must be obvious. In 1963 Syria had standing armed forces of about 65,000, and now has nearly a quarter of a million men under arms, whereas the Syrian contingent of the *Troupes Speciales* that it inherited from the French in 1946 counted only 7,000, and was by 1948 reduced to 2,500 men, because the ruling landed and mercantile families of the day regarded the contingent as too large and too financially burdensome. . . . At any rate, it is clear that the strong foothold of the Alawis in the *Troupes Speciales* cannot explain their present dominant influence in the army. A more significant causal factor that was at work as relentlessly in the postindependence period as under the French was the depressed economic condition of the Alawis. . . . Also relevant as an explanation for the superior numerical weight of the Alawis, at least among the rank-and-file draftees, is the matter of the *badal* ("financial substitute"). Prior to 1964 Syrians were permitted to buy exemption from military service. . . . [Ref. 13]

Despite these facts, there is a widespread perception among Syria's Sunnis that Asad's monopolization of power is an

enduring by-product of Alawi complicity with the French during the years of the mandate--and it is the perception which matters most. This makes the yoke of Alawi domination--thus linked to colonialism--that much more reprehensible. Asad, the consummate politician, recognizes this liability.

Asad has systematically endeavoured to avoid an image of his regime as being based on confessional-military support, or a junta of Alawi army officers. He has sought to bring legitimisation and consensus to his rule and to project himself as a national-popular leader with the interests of the Syrian people at heart." [Ref. 14]

Asad has tried to discourage sectarian affiliations by secularization of Syrian government and society. His efforts have not been wholly effective; many Sunnis have resisted secularization, recognizing it as a means by which Asad attempts to legitimize Alawi rule. Devout Muslims see secularism as contrary to the precepts of Islam, while other Sunnis cynically consider it a "convenient cover for the Alawi monopolization of power." [Ref. 15] In addition, certain developments have only served to highlight Alawi-Sunni differences:

Since coming to power, Asad had succeeded both in playing down the sectarian character of his regime and in giving it a more popular appeal, despite heavy reliance on the army and security forces. The events of 1978-1982 reversed this process and reinforced the division between the Sunnis and Alawis. The Sunnis will find it difficult to forget the events of Hama. [Ref. 16]

Anti-regime disturbances of this sort are especially problematic when one considers the composition of the officer corps. "It is important to recognize the fact that although

the officer corps of the army is heavily laden with Alawis, the rank and file remains Sunni, which complicates the problem of policing internal disorder that is at base anti-Alawi." [Ref. 17]

Making matters worse for Asad is a willingness among some Sunnis to embrace conspiracy theories which seem to confirm Alawi maleficence. To wit: "Sunni rumors throughout the Middle East attribute the loss of the Golan Heights to an Alawi 'deal' with Israel involving a large sum of money in exchange for the Heights." [Ref. 18]

This persistent anti-Alawi agitation has put Asad in the awkward position of advocating secularization and simultaneously advancing claims that Alawis are true Muslims.

[Asad] "has taken a number of steps to blur the Alawi-Sunni distinction--changing the presidential oath, spotlighting his participation in the activities of the Syrian Islamic community, and encouraging Sunni ulama to portray the Alawis as Shi'a Muslims, a highly debatable proposition." [Ref. 19]

Neither campaign has made Alawi leadership any more palatable to the Sunni majority. Indeed, efforts to depict the Alawis as Muslim may only further inflame Sunni indignation.

Asad has made use of other devices in his endeavor to quiet the Sunni masses. In the aftermath of the 1973 war with Israel, Asad publicly dismissed a number of Alawi soldiers who had failed to meet their battlefield obligations. The appointment of Sunni and non-Alawi officers to important

positions likewise received generous publicity. Asad's political machinations are complicated by the fact that the potential exists for cleavage even within the Alawi community itself, as evidenced by his willingness to openly humiliate his fellow Alawis.

The Alawis may be divided geographically into two groups: the Alawis of the mountains, and the Alawis of the plains. More commonly, the Alawis are broken down into four main tribal confederations. "Alawis today are not always comfortable with the subject of tribal affiliations as the Ba'thist state has striven to replace such categories with the modern notion of citizenship, but if pressed every village boy could tell you to which tribe his family belongs." [Ref. 20] A more recent development has been economic stratification of the Alawis.

Since their rise to power, an upper class has been differentiating itself from the rest of the community and, within the ranks of this class, even a group of millionaires, waxing rich from fat commissions on state contracts, has reared its head. This may under certain circumstances weaken the attachment to the regime of the least favored segments of the sect. Significantly enough, in 1969 when Alawi peasants launched a rising in the Ghab district over debts owed to the Agricultural Bank, the Alawi rulers did not sympathize with them but put them down by force. [Ref. 21]

The fact that rivalries exist within the Alawi community has led some to speculate that perhaps Asad is most vulnerable to a cabal of disenchanted Alawi officers. This seems an unlikely scenario. Despite any differences which might exist,

most Alawis have a stake in maintaining the status quo; an attempt to overthrow the guardian Asad might be suicidal.

The Alawis are not about to attempt such folly, let alone permit it to happen, for it might set in motion a chain of events that could eventuate in the loss of Alawi dominance in the power structure, a development dreaded by almost every Alawi. Thus, for now and the immediate future, there appears to be an overriding cohesion among Alawis based on fear of the consequences that might ensue for them should the existing Alawi regime be overthrown. [Ref. 22]

Internequine quarrels notwithstanding, the Alawis can be expected to submerge their differences for the sake of Asad's regime.

In summary, Asad's Alawi heritage makes his quest for legitimacy an unrelenting challenge. Several factors overwhelm Asad's best efforts to confront the problem. First, the Alawis have suffered pariah status in the Muslim world throughout their history; anti-Alawi sentiments have endured for centuries. Second, Sunni Muslims contemptuously see Alawi religious practices as a heterodox form of Islam--at best. Third, Sunni Muslims have not forgotten Alawi complicity with the French during the years of the mandate. Fourth, it is widely--and correctly--perceived that the Alawis are disproportionately represented at all levels of government.

If there is any doubt that Asad's Alawi background is a liability, then it should be dispelled for two reasons. First, Asad's concern is reflected in his efforts to address the problem, as evidenced by his strident attempts to portray the Alawis as genuine Muslims, and by his willingness to

sacrifice "disposable" Alawis. Second, the Alawis sense their own vulnerability, which is revealed by the priority placed on group cohesion despite intra-Alawi differences.

That Asad has ruled for over two decades implies that he has had some success in overcoming the formidable obstacle of his Alawi heritage. The question which naturally follows is: How, precisely, has he managed to do this, assuming as we have, that brute force alone is not sufficient or desirable? The evidence suggests that Asad has used a number of vehicles, each with varying degrees of success. Each of these vehicles--or "tools" for legitimacy-building--may be grouped into one of three categories: institutions, ideas, or ambitions. The task at hand is to examine each of these tools and determine whether or not it has contributed to Asad's staying-power. In those instances where a tool has been used with some efficacy, the specific feature which makes that tool valuable must be identified.

III. TOOLS FOR LEGITIMACY-BUILDING

A. THE BAATH PARTY

Political parties might serve any number of purposes, but a party's precise responsibilities are dependent upon the context in which it operates. Traditionally, party functions include interest aggregation, mass mobilization, and political socialization. As far as these matters are concerned, the Baath party is no exception. It is, however, unique. In addition to these functions, evidence suggests the Asad has tried to use the Baath party to sanction the legitimacy of his regime. As such, the Baath is correctly categorized as an institutional vehicle of legitimization.

The situation is ironic since certain characteristics of the Baath party make it an unlikely candidate for this role. Unfortunately for Asad, he fails to understand that the party's legacy makes the Baath a poor choice for the purpose of building legitimacy.

First of all, the Baath began not as a political party, but more correctly as an opposition movement. In fact, one of the party's founders, Michel Aflaq, originally conceived of the Baath as a skeptic of the government, rather than an advocate for it.

Aflaq saw his movement as a critique of government, closer to the people than to any regime. Indeed, it was a

dispute over the nature and role of the party that, after the 1963 revolution, set Aflaq against the young officers of the clandestine Military Committee founded by Salah Jadid, Hafez al-Asad, and others in Cairo during the life of the United Arab Republic. Aflaq wanted to preserve the party's watchdog role over government, whereas they wanted it to be an instrument of government. [Ref. 23]

Part of the Baath's original appeal can be credited to its attractiveness as an opposition movement. Obviously, any political support it enjoyed as such was not wholly transferable once it became a government cheerleader.

Furthermore, the Baath, for all its success as an opposition movement, was precisely that: an opposition movement. Consequently, it inevitably and quite naturally alienated the people against whom it was positioned. At the most fundamental level, the Baath agenda forced a showdown between urban and rural interests. "In the 1960s, the Ba'th became a vehicle of rural revolt against the city, pursuing land reform and socialist policies challenging the hold of the city over the economy and the village." [Ref. 24] The Baath was not a populist or mass-based party, but an ideological one. Though it promoted more widely popular ideas such as pan-Arabism, its embrace of socialism threatened the interests of the landed elite while appealing to the nascent rural elite, thus pitting one against the other.

During the 1940s and 1950s, the Baath message of pan-Arabism appealed to many levels of Syrian society, but its socialist or social justice message was most attractive to those who believed that they were not receiving a fair share of the state's resources. In Syria, a state that lacked an industrial proletariat of any size, that meant rural people. [Ref. 25]

Ultimately, the Baath can credit its success to the urban-rural strife it engendered.

"Essentially, the rise of the Ba'thists and the fall of the old regime were a product of two dovetailing developments: a conflict of lord and peasant, and the rise of a salaried new middle class challenging the landlord." [Ref. 26]

Asad recognized the divisive nature of the Baath's rise to power, and eventually sought to repair some of the damage that was done. "This policy of class struggle deliberately polarized society. In the aftermath of the 1967 war, however, Syria could no longer afford internal conflict and a wing of the Ba'thist Party under General Hafiz al-Asad demanded an end to this strategy in favor of its opposite: national unity." [Ref. 27] Asad thus foreshadowed a strategy he would pursue later as president. But his efforts to reconcile the Baath to those Syrians damaged by its success, and accordingly strengthen the party's legitimizing powers, have been futile.

If one is not persuaded that the urban population was so disaffected with Baath ascendancy that the party forfeited its ability to act as an effective legitimizing agent, then one should be reminded that these same urbanites eagerly supported the uprising of the Muslim Brethren in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The core support [of political Islam] is concentrated in the traditional urban quarters among merchants, artisans, and the laboring elements under their influence. . . This part of Syrian society, from large notable to small trader, paid the heaviest costs of Ba'th policies in the sixties. Moreover, having failed to establish political institutions capable of absorbing broad participatory

demands, the Ba'th cannot win the unchallenged legitimacy needed to deprive Islamic counterelites of their mass support. [Ref. 28]

That these urban populations would support the Muslim Brethren even though they had little affinity for the Brethren's Islamic zeal is further testimony to their long-lasting bitterness. The urban populations supported the Brethren simply because they were the most effective means by which to confront their nemesis: Asad and his Baath cronies.

The confrontation with the Muslim Brethren also serves to highlight another factor which inhibits the Baath from serving as an effective legitimizing agent: "One characteristic of the Baath party that has led to problems in Syria is its secular nature. There has been an attempt by the party to separate church and state." [Ref. 29] The Syrian constitution which was written under the aegis of the Baath party in 1973 does not recognize Islam as the state religion. Although the Baath party leadership certainly recognizes the importance of Islam in the lives of most Syrian citizens, party advocacy of secularization is not unrelated to the fact that Baath ideology is the brain-child of a Syrian Christian, Michel Aflaq. "It is true that Islam has an important place in Ba'thist thought--not, however, because of the truth of Islam's social and religious teachings, but because it is a vital constitutive element in Arab nationalist consciousness." [Ref. 30] But the very fact that Baath ideology fails to appreciate Islam's social and religious teachings is what

makes the Baath repugnant to a certain sector of the Syrian population. Cynical manipulation of Islamic values has not alleviated Baathist shortcomings, only exacerbated them.

Although these characteristics of the Baath party would predispose one to dismiss it as a viable legitimizing agent, there is reason to believe that Asad has nevertheless tried to use it in this manner, and not without some success. Asad first foreshadowed his willingness to compromise strident Baath ideology for other purposes in the 1960s.

Intra-Baath politics in Syria settled into a contest between two factions. That led by Salah Jadid espoused a doctrinaire socialist system domestically and support externally for a Palestinian war of national liberation against Israel. Jadid had resigned his post as army chief of staff in 1965 and directed the Baath regional party bureaucracy with the aid of many like-minded civilians. His challenger was Hafiz al-Asad, who was more concerned with results than with doctrine in domestic affairs. [Ref. 31]

Asad realized that a Baath party which clung tenaciously to dogmatic socialism stood little chance of effectively mobilizing the sentiments necessary to legitimize his rule. Consequently, soon after taking power, Asad "inaugurated a wide-ranging policy of 'rectification' (*tashih*) [sic] in order to broaden his regime's legitimacy. His policies included a retreat from the radical socialism of earlier regimes by introducing economic liberalization to attract the support of the urban Sunni entrepreneurial classes." [Ref. 32]

Complementing this liberalization, Asad used the Baath party to establish a system of local government, an "Asad

innovation." It appears to have been a genuine attempt to link the party more closely to the people. "Before him [Asad] there was no local government to speak of, and everything, however trivial, had to be decided at the center. Beginning in 1972, a system of local government was introduced, which has been considerably refined since then, and which is probably the most nearly democratic of Syria's institutions." [Ref. 33]

Baath involvement in legitimizing institutions is not limited to local government. Every four years the Baath convenes a regional congress. Altogether, 770 elected delegates, representing every division of the party, meet for as long as two weeks to discuss government-related matters. These regional congresses appear to serve as a kind of "safety valve." "By all accounts, these congresses are the prime occasion for rising Young Turks in the party to challenge their elders--but not of course the president--in a robust atmosphere of 'party democracy.'" [Ref. 34] These regional congresses also serve socializing and feedback functions. Not only is it the responsibility of the attending delegates to explain and justify the regime's policies to the public, but party leaders also depend on the delegates for "local knowledge of conditions and attitudes." [Ref. 35]

To further expand opportunities for Syrians to participate in the government and Baath party politics, Asad created the 173-seat People's Assembly in 1971. The original members were

nominated, but after 1973 representatives were "elected." Its purpose is to function as a forum to which government ministers will be accountable. The Baath party dominates this institution, but other political parties are allowed to participate.

Over the years the assembly was generally considered little more than a rubber stamp until, with presidential encouragement, it surprised everyone in the fall of 1987 by directing sharp criticism at three ministers and withdrawing its confidence from them. As a result, the government of Dr. 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Kasm was brought down after seven years in office. [Ref. 36]

This development notwithstanding, the People's Assembly can hardly be considered a democratic institution, though Asad certainly wishes the Syrian people to see it as such.

Other institutional arrangements reveal Asad's desire to use the Baath to legitimize his regime. The party boasts both a National Command, the supposed government of the future Arab nation, and a Regional Command, which is charged with all party activity within Syria. The National Command is comprised of twenty-one members--half of them Syrian, and the other half coming from other Arab states. On the other hand, the highest-ranking members of Asad's cabinet comprise the Regional Command. Naturally, Asad leads both Commands. Presumably, the National Command sits at the apex of the Baath party structure, and the Regional Command is subordinate to it. This, however, is not the reality. Asad understands that there is little chance that a united Arab nation will come into being. As a result, the National Command is a relatively

impotent body which lacks any real influence. More importantly, Asad realizes that the National Command does little, if anything at all, to strengthen his regime.

The Regional Command, however, is another story altogether. Beneath the Regional Command sits the Central Committee and nineteen branch commands which are responsible for directing party activity at local levels. Within the military, the Regional Command oversees a party structure which permeates the army even at the battalion level. "This type of organization and party discipline has made the Ba'th the primary tool of political socialization and stability in Syria since Asad's ascent to power." [Ref. 37]

The final institution related to Baath party politics is the National Progressive Front. Its existence is a token gesture toward permitting political pluralism. The National Progressive Front is a coalition of left-leaning parties including the Baath, which, not surprisingly, is the dominant member. Officially, then, Syria is not a single-party state. By permitting other political parties to exist, Asad may claim a greater measure of legitimacy for the Baath party, and thus for himself. At best these are pretentious maneuvers. "Even accredited members of the National Progressive Front are not allowed to recruit followers in the army or at the university, both of which are exclusive preserves of the Ba'th. Nor do they have nationwide organizations to compare with that of the Ba'th." [Ref. 38]

What these various establishments reflect is Asad's conviction that he can add to his regime's legitimacy and longevity through the Baath party and its accompanying institutions.

He [Asad] wants people to believe in his institutions: the popular organizations, the people's assembly, the National Progressive Front, the local government bodies and above all, the legitimacy of his own election to the presidency for three seven-year terms [now four]. The backbone of the system is the party--the civilian party to mobilize, indoctrinate, and control the population, and the party in the army as the cure for the old malady of factionalism in the officer corps, in Asad's view the only real guarantee that Syria will not again fall prey to coups d'etat. . . [Ref. 39]

Has Asad been correct in assuming that these Baath party arrangements have added to the legitimacy of his regime? Certainly there were pockets of support in Syrian society which welcomed the access these institutions created. "Asad's program of political and economic liberalization was well received. By expanding the Ba'ath's societal base and establishing a popularly elected People's Assembly, Asad was able to stabilize Syrian political life to a significant degree." [Ref. 40] Patrick Seale goes one step further, claiming that Baath party loyalties made a critical difference in the events which culminated with the Hama revolt.

A visitor to Syria in the early 1980s, for example, could not deny the fervor the party inspired when Ba'athists in arms were risking their lives in the struggle against the Islamic underground. One got the sense that they considered the state to be theirs and were ready to defend it. Indeed, had the party not been strong and its members not committed, it is doubtful whether the regime would have survived that ordeal. Asad won the contest, in Hama, Aleppo, and elsewhere, not only because he used force and

great brutality to crush the uprising, but because the party stood firm. [Ref. 41]

The events at Hama will receive greater attention later. For purposes here, suffice it to say that had Asad's ambitions for the Baath party been realized--that is, had it adequately performed its legitimizing function--the events at Hama and Aleppo would never have occurred. The mere fact that the uprising transpired casts serious doubt on the party's ability to legitimize Asad's rule. It should also be remembered that the Alawis permeate all government institutions--including the Baath party. How many of those "dedicated party workers" and "inspired Ba'thists in arms" Seale describes were Alawis who not only stood to gain so much social advancement via participation in the Baath party, but simultaneously stood to lose so much if Asad were removed from power?

There are other reasons to question the Baath party's utility as a legitimizing agent. Party membership has grown at an impressive rate under Asad. It is not clear, however, that this explosion in party membership reflects any real affinity for Baath ideals. "Membership in the Ba'th has virtually become a qualification for high office as well as a means of getting ahead more quickly. Consequently, the party has attracted its fair share of opportunists who care little about its original socialist and reformist goals." [Ref. 42] Seale himself admits: "Any ambitious man in Syria today would be ill-advised not to join it." [Ref. 43] John Devlin notes

that disingenuous enrollment in the Baath is a problem not confined to Syria, while also making the more important point that people sometimes feel compelled to join simply to avoid unwelcome government scrutiny:

Under the authoritarian rule of the past two decades, the Syrian and Iraqi Baath organizations have grown enormously. As of the mid-1980s, the parties have 100,000 full members and 400,000 candidates in Syria. Over the same period, however, vitality has drained out of each. People join for party benefits--jobs, access to places in the university--or merely to avoid suspicion of disloyalty. [Ref. 44]

Furthermore, while the Baath party and its companion institutions have offered superficial opportunities to increase mass political participation, a substantial portion of the population cannot overcome their cynicism to take advantage of these "opportunities" unless more profoundly motivated to do so. "The turnout at elections was generally low until citizens were required, in dealing with government departments, to produce proof of having voted." [Ref. 45] Finally, the absence of Baath ideological zeal in the conduct of Syrian foreign policy exposes Asad's use of Baath rhetoric for what it is: a useful domestic tool. "[Asad] uses Baath rhetoric but deals externally through the Arab League, other regional groupings, or bilaterally." [Ref. 46] Indeed, the most recent gathering of the Damascus-based National (pan-Arab) Congress took place long-ago in 1980.

To conclude, the Baath party does not and has not served as an effective legitimizing agent for the regime of Hafez al-

Asad, despite his best efforts to take advantage of it as such. The early history of the Baath has rendered it useless as an institutional vehicle of legitimacy. In its formative years the Baath was an opposition movement, and it proved itself more adept as a revolutionary organization than as a traditional political party. As an opposition movement, the Baath fed off of urban-rural conflict and forever alienated a significant portion of Syrian city-dwellers. Furthermore, the Baath has never been a mass-based party; instead, it was an ideological one, and its ideological underpinnings--even when tempered by Asad's "corrective movement"--make it unappealing to too many Syrians. Likewise, the Baath's promotion of secularization angers devout Muslims. Finally, the Baath and its companion institutions have not engendered any real enthusiasm for mass participation; as a result, many Syrian citizens appear motivated to seek Baath party membership only for personal gain.

Luckily for Asad, the Baath party has not been the only means at his disposal to build the legitimacy of his regime. Coincidentally, an idea espoused by the Baath has also been utilized by for these same purposes. That idea is pan-Arabism.

B. PAN-ARABISM

As a tool for legitimacy-building, pan-Arabism has proven more useful than the Baath party. This does not, however,

necessarily mean that its usefulness eclipses that of Israel's. In fact, it is the onerous presence of Israel in the Arab world which makes pan-Arabism available as a legitimizing agent to Hafez al-Asad. Without Israel, it is difficult to imagine pan-Arabism as a useful instrument to Asad's regime.

Ironically, pan-Arabism, like the Baath party, can credit its emergence in the Arab world as an opposition movement.

Arab nationalism arose as an opposition movement around 1900 and accelerated after 1908, once the Ottoman Committee of Union and Progress began to enforce administrative centralization, streamline the provincial bureaucracy, and install Turks in a number of critical posts. A growing number of Syrian notables lost their positions in the Ottoman system, and it was they who first turned the idea of Arabism into a vehicle for expressing their grievances with Istanbul and for regaining their positions. [Ref. 47]

Unlike the Baath, however, pan-Arabism does not suffer from those characteristics which rob it of utility as a legitimizing agent. Pan-Arabism, as an opposition movement, distinguishes itself from the Baath because it pits the Arab people collectively against an external foe, rather than dividing the Arabs into competing factions. In the early part of this century, that foe was the Turks; today the Turks have been replaced by the West. Israel, in turn, is the most onerous manifestation of the West.

The earliest forms of pan-Arabism were particularly attractive to Syrians for two reasons. First, just as pan-Arabism is a useful device for Asad in modern-day Syria, it

likewise proved valuable to the political elites in the final days of the Ottoman empire:

The point to underscore is that by World War I, Arabism had become the ascendant idea and movement of the times in Syria. During the war, when many notables began to jump from the sinking Ottoman ship, they grabbed, as they fell, the rope of Arab nationalism. They really had no other choice. It was this rope that enabled them to swing into the interwar years with their political and social influence intact. [Ref. 48]

Second, pan-Arabism derived its appeal to the Syrian people as a means by which to express frustration with colonialism as experienced under the French mandate. Syrians were enraged with the French dismemberment of their country.

France ceded to Turkey Syria's northern wheatlands, two of its oldest cities, and the northern hill country. Lebanon, which had been merely a Christian district, was enlarged at Syria's expense to include all the Muslim areas it could reasonably dominate. . . These moves also left Syria with a bitterness toward the West that has yet to run its full course. . . Young Syrian intellectuals, embittered by the circumstances of independence and with loyalties to a much larger geographic entity, sought identity and direction in the idea of pan-Arabism. [Ref. 49]

It is little wonder that pan-Arabism continues to play such a significant role in the Syrian psyche when one considers the corresponding parallels to Israel. Most Syrians adamantly believe that Palestine is part of "Greater Syria," and that an aggressively imperialist Israel has not only stolen Palestine, but the Golan Heights as well. Consequently, Israel has inherited the wrath once directed at France, thus perpetuating the pan-Arab movement in Syria. Just as it did years ago, pan-Arabism unites Syrians against an external enemy.

Pan-Arabism distinguishes itself from the Baath party as a legitimizing agent in another substantive way. As noted earlier, the Baath party has ceased to be a serious foreign policy asset for Asad; it is useful exclusively as a domestic device. Pan-Arabism, on the other hand, derives its worth as a domestic device by the strength it gives Syria in the international arena: "Whatever one calls it, Syria's strategy in the area flows from the assumption that Syria is the 'beating heart' of Arab nationalism and therefore has the right and obligation to play a central, pivotal role in the region." [Ref. 50] Without question, this appears to be a well-founded assumption. One of Syria's strengths is "a tradition of intellectual leadership in the Arab world that has given Syria disproportionate influence over the ideas and sentiments of a broad Arab constituency." [Ref. 51] Accordingly, pan-Arabism provides justification for Syria to meddle in the affairs of other Arab states. "Interference in the internal affairs of other Arab states is considered appropriate in order to further coordination among the various regions in the Arab nation: 'No Arab region can improve its condition in isolation from the other regions.'" [Ref. 52] Lebanon is, of course, vivid testimony to this reality. Interestingly, pan-Arabism and the conflict with Israel seem inextricably linked in Syria: "Syria's main assets in the inter-Arab arena are its self-appointed status as guardian of Arab interests, its position as the main confrontation state

against Israel, and its obstructive power." [Ref. 53] This is no mere coincidence. Pan-Arabism would lose whatever potency it enjoys without an external target, in this case Israel.

Pan-Arabism potentially serves a legitimizing function on a more discreet, subliminal level as well. It is conceivable that Asad has tried to use pan-Arabism to create something which Syria lacks--a national identity. There is little point in belaboring the fractured nature of Syrian society. Alawi-Sunni differences have already been described in detail. Suffice it to say that many more ethnic and religious cleavages exist within the artificial construct that is Syria. Syria's heterogeneous character is the inevitable result of its geographic position; as a crossroads between continents for competing empires, Syria has a long history of occupation by foreigners. As some populations were displaced and others settled, Syria became the mix of peoples it is today. The legacy for Syria is country where too few citizens identify themselves as "Syrian." "Sharp distinctions among the desert, the village, and the city, and differences among the peoples and the ideas that come from them, have always worked against the kind of cohesion necessary for Syria's political integrity and military defense." [Ref. 54] Moshe Ma'oz, respected Israeli scholar of Syrian affairs, more succinctly describes the situation: "The patriotism of the Syrian is confined to the four walls of his own house; anything beyond them does not concern him." [Ref. 55]

It seems improbable that a leader as astute as Asad would actually believe that pan-Arabism could help Syrians forge a national identity. By definition pan-Arabism seeks to transcend attachments to a nation-state in favor of a more universal body--the entire Arab world. More likely, Asad realized that fanning the flames of pan-Arabism contributed to the steadiness of his regime. By emphasizing the anti-Israeli side of the pan-Arab message, Asad could persuade Syrians of various religious and ethnic persuasions to set aside their differences. Even before Asad came to power, it had become evident to careful observers of Syrian politics--and this, no doubt, would include Asad himself--that Pan-Arab "ideas were sufficiently powerful to usher in greater stability in Syria, but they discouraged a specifically Syrian national identity." [Ref. 56]

It is impossible to know whether Asad genuinely embraces pan-Arab ideals. It can be said with greater certainty, however, that Asad has deliberately manipulated the pan-Arab message for the benefit of his regime. According to Ma'oz, the Syrian "mass media and the national educational system have been mobilised to stress constantly the importance of the unity of the Arab-Syrian nation behind the leader-president, Hafez al-Assad." [Ref. 57] Other followers of Syrian politics insist that the pan-Arab message rings hollow in Syria; "The idealism of the post-independence era has clearly waned. . . . Recent Syrian leaders have approached the notion of Arab unity

cynically for short-term gains, not out of conviction." [Ref. 58] Any arguments contrary to this notion are difficult to reconcile with Asad's decision to side with Iran during its war with Iraq. If Asad placed any priority on the pan-Arab principles he publicly espouses and promotes, he would not have elected to betray the rest of the Arab world (Libya excepted), which sided with Iraq.

Asad's hypocrisy during the eight-year war unmasked the real reason he so frequently preaches the virtues of pan-Arabism: Asad considers Syria's pan-Arabism an effective vehicle for mobilizing regime support by rallying the Syrian public to his side in its contest with Israel.

As testimony to this fact, when Syria's pan-Arab message is delivered, it frequently contains a heavy dose of anti-Israeli sentiments. The following example, extracted from a government newspaper, is illustrative:

Syria, with this [pan-Arab] stance, attracts all those Arabs who believe in the need to liberate occupied Arab territory and who have the will to work on behalf of liberation no matter what the sacrifice or how high the cost. Equally, Syria represents, through its stance and pan-Arab principles, the true adversary against the imperialist and Zionist reality, with all that their plots encompass. Therefore, it was said of Damascus that it is the future of the Arabs, and no Arab can assume a hostile stance against Syria, unless he is opposed to the liberation and against the pan-Arab future. [Ref. 59]

Several observations about this statement are worth making. First, and most importantly, pan-Arabism is linked to confronting the Israeli threat. Second, the statement depicts Syrian leadership as essential if the contest with Israel is

to be won. The reader is thus led to conclude that fidelity to Syria is the yardstick by which loyalty to pan-Arab ideals is measured; to oppose Syria is to support "Zionist plots." Finally, no limit is set on the sacrifice that must be made by those truly devoted to defeating Israel. As a result, economic privation and repressive government measures may be justified for the sake of the battle with Israel.

The following government statement more closely relates pan-Arabism to Asad who, it is implied, is unrelenting in his efforts to defeat Israel.

As regards foreign policy, Syria's position has been characterized as principled, firm, and fully committed to the Arab nation's higher pan-Arab interests. Thus, we have seen the liberation war of 1973, and the victory scored by our people under the leadership of struggler President Hafiz al-Asad by restoring self-confidence and the ability to face up to the Israeli challenge as well. [Ref. 60]

Syrian intransigence in peace developments is also described as necessary if allegiance to pan-Arab principles is to be maintained.

We are making progress on all levels and in all areas, struggling on behalf of liberating the occupied territory and regaining our usurped rights. Syria, in the words of our leader Hafiz al-Asad, is neither frightened nor afraid. Syria is a country that holds fast to its pan-Arab principles. No one will forcibly drag us into positions that are incompatible with what we want. This is what our leader has stressed, and this is what in fact we shall do. [Ref. 61]

These statements contain motifs so frequently used by the government media that they might more accurately be labelled political mantras of the Asad regime.

As regards the fundamental argument of this essay, the effectiveness of pan-Arabism as a legitimizing agent is ultimately irrelevant. Even if it should be the case that pan-Arabism works to Asad's advantage by perpetuating his regime, Syria's articulation of its pan-Arab principles is clearly dependent upon anti-Israeli themes. Although pan-Arabism was born before it came into existence, the state of Israel has given Asad an opportunity to sustain the articulation of pan-Arab principles for the sake of his regime's survival. Were it not for Israel, Arab nationalism would be of little use to Asad's government; indeed, were it not for the West, Arab nationalism might very well disappear completely from Syria's political lexicon.

Pan-Arabism is not the only legitimizing agent dependent upon the perceived evil of Israel. Asad similarly manipulates the Palestinian cause for the purpose of building his regime's legitimacy.

C. THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE

There is little doubt that Asad uses the Palestinian cause, in some measure, to engender support for his regime. But this does not mean that he uses it effectively--on many occasions Asad has acted contrary to Palestinian interests. And even if Asad had not conducted himself so, it would not necessarily follow that the Palestinian cause is or could be a primary legitimizing resource for Asad. Moreover, any

utility the Palestinian cause has as a legitimizing agent, like pan-Arabism, derives its strength via the contest with Israel. In the final analysis, however, there are peripheral concerns Asad has vis-a-vis the Palestinians which eclipse his interest--if not his ability--to manipulate the cause for purposes of legitimacy-building.

Asad must appear faithful to Palestinian ambitions for two reasons. First, Palestinian refugees residing within Syria, despite their small numbers, represent a potentially disruptive element. Second, recovery of a Palestinian home is part and parcel of both pan-Arabism and the notion of Greater Syria. Specifically, in Asad's quest for the return of the Golan Heights, Syria "must seek parallel moves on the Palestinian front, if only to avoid charges of betrayal that it hurled at Anwar Sadat in the 1970s". [Ref. 62] On the other hand, Asad chooses to use the Palestinian cause for a number of reasons which subordinate the importance of its legitimizing function. First, beating the drums of the Palestinian cause is a source of both money and international esteem. Second, various government-sponsored Palestinian bodies--most notably al-Sa'iqah--provide instruments by which Asad may influence Arab politics. Third, Asad sees the recovery of the Golan Heights, his most important goal after regime survival, as inextricably linked to creation of a homeland for the Palestinians; that is, Asad fears that

progress towards a mini-state on the West Bank will jeopardize Syria's chances of ever recovering the Golan.

Asad's devotion to the Palestinian cause is predominately--if not entirely--motivated for reasons of self-interest. Foremost among Asad's concerns is the latent threat posed to his regime's security by the Palestinian community. Failure to support Palestinian interests might inspire collusion between the Palestinians and the Muslim Brotherhood. "The regime has been aware that a volatile Palestinian minority could resort to violence against Syrian officials or have a catalytic effect on the predominately Sunni opposition." [Ref. 63] To thwart such a possibility, Asad has continued a policy of integration established soon after the initial influx of Palestinian refugees in 1948. At that time approximately 90,000--100,000 Palestinians took refuge in Syria. Presently more than 250,000 Palestinians continue to reside within Syria, a mere 2-3 percent of the total population. About 70 percent of these live either in Damascus or in nearby camps. [Ref. 64]

Syrian treatment of their refugees is unique among the Arab states which harbor displaced Palestinians. As early as 1949, "the Syrian government began to issue what eventually developed into a series of laws that placed Palestinians on virtually equal footing with Syrian nationals." [Ref. 65] Asad has continued the tradition of extending to the Palestinians all rights that ordinary Syrians enjoy--with the

obvious exceptions of citizenship and the right to vote (for whatever that is worth).

The right to work and to join labor unions, equal access to government services, including education, and the duty to serve in the army have combined with strong popular Arab nationalist sentiment in Syria to allow for a greater degree of socioeconomic and, in some cases, political integration than in any other Arab state but Jordan. [Ref. 66]

By holding fast to the notion that Palestine, like Lebanon, is only one part of Greater Syria, Asad further tries to discourage the expression of a separate Palestinian identity. For example, Damascus Radio announced in June 1980 that "Syria views Palestine--according to historic, cultural, and geographic factors--as its own southern province." [Ref. 67]

Asad himself has made statements which attempt to blur the line between national identities. Speaking to PLO representatives in 1976, Asad told them:

You do not represent Palestine as much as we do. Do not forget one thing: there is no Palestinian people, no Palestinian entity, there is only Syria! You are an integral part of the Syrian people and Palestine is an integral part of Syria. Therefore it is we, the Syrian authorities, who are the real representatives of the Palestinian people. [Ref. 68]

Asad's remark is, of course, contradictory: In one breath he insists that there is no such thing as a Palestinian people, and in the next he states that the Syrian authorities represent the Palestinians. While one might wonder how the Syrian authorities manage to represent a non-existent people, what should be noted is Asad's stated conviction that the Palestinians are a Syrian people--and have been a Syrian

people for some time. This also explains why Asad takes pleasure in startling Western visitors with the revelation that "Jesus Christ was a Syrian Jew." [Ref. 69]

Asad must also remain faithful to the Palestinians for the sake of pan-Arab principles, not the least of which involves the return of Arab lands from Israel. This poses a minor problem for Asad. Return of the Golan Heights is a high priority, but not one which can be divorced from the Palestinians' aspirations.

Having made the Palestinian cause a central plank in Syrian domestic and international policy for the past 20 years, diplomats say, Mr. Assad could scarcely abandon it now. "Assad feels he is the custodian of Arab virtue on Palestine," says [a] European diplomat. "Just getting your bit of the Golan back is not a worthy goal for a great Arab leader. Getting what the Palestinians want would really mark him out." [Ref. 70]

Former ambassador to Syria Talcott Seelye notes that as important as the Golan Heights is for Asad, there is no reason to believe that he would sell out the Palestinians to get back that piece of land: "It is a constant of Syrian policy to link the fate of the Golan with that of the Palestinians. That is, Syria does not intend to make peace with Israel over the Golan without parallel movement on the Palestinian front." [Ref. 71]

Although some of Asad's policy decisions regarding the Palestinians are driven by unforgiving realities, others are of a more opportunistic nature. By promoting himself as a spokesman for the Palestinians, Asad hopes to maintain the

relevancy of Syria in Arab and world politics. Without the primacy of the Palestinian cause on the Arab agenda, Syria's self-declared role as Palestinian advocate is largely meaningless, and Syrian influence in the Arab world ebbs. This relationship between Syrian authority and Palestinian ambitions is well illustrated by the Palestinian intifada. "The most significant factor in returning Syria to prominence in Arab politics may be the Palestinian uprising in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza, which moved the Arab-Israeli conflict back to the top of the Arab agenda and revived Syria's role as the principal Arab country confronting Israel." [Ref. 72]

Syria has traditionally supported a number of Palestinian organizations in order to exploit this association. Originally Syria promoted al-Fatah as a counter to the PLO, created by Nasser in 1964. Syria also supported George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and continues to assist its splinter organization, Ahmed Jibril's PFLP--General Command. Furthermore, the Palestine Liberation Army's Hittin and Qadisiya Brigades were subordinate to the Syrian Ministry of Defense when they entered Lebanon in 1976.

Asad has continued this tradition of support principally through the Vanguard of the Popular War of Liberation, more commonly known as as-Sa'iqah--"Thunderbolt." Shortly after assuming power Asad purged the ranks of Sa'iqah, which had been

created in 1966, and placed a reliable Baath friend, Zuhayr Mushin, in charge of the organization. Asad hoped to promote Sa'iqqa as the primary voice of the Palestinian cause and thus expand his own influence. Sa'iqqa's *raison d'etre* is clear. A classified 1979 report by the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) labelled Sa'iqqa a "Trojan horse maneuvering for Syria within the Palestinian movement," and described its objectives as "identical with those of Syria . . . All [Sa'iqqa's] exploits in the Middle East and Western Europe were authorized, and perhaps planned, by the Syrian Army G-2 [intelligence]." [Ref. 73]

Sa'iqqa and the PFLP--GC, like the PLA brigades, were used by Asad when he elected to invade Lebanon in 1976. But they have also proven themselves reliable allies in Asad's constant efforts to undermine Yassir Arafat. If Asad placed higher priority on using the Palestinian cause to build his regime's legitimacy rather than its influence, it is more likely that he would set his sails to the prevailing winds of Palestinian sentiments, and therefore would have spent the better part of the last ten years supporting Arafat rather than feuding with him.

The reconciliation that took place between Asad and Arafat in May of 1991 should not be mistaken as an attempt by Asad to appeal to these Palestinian sensibilities. The arrangement between Asad and Arafat smacks of a simple *quid pro quo* made

necessary by political developments which came with the Gulf crisis.

Arab analysts say Syria and the PLO were compelled to reconcile in hopes of easing their isolation following the Gulf war. The two were on different sides in the war, but Syria's role as advocate of pan-Arab nationalism was damaged when it joined the US-led coalition against Iraq, and the PLO was discredited in the West and among the Gulf states (its major financial backers) when it sided with Iraq, they say.

Syria hopes that by securing Palestinian backing it will regain some of its lost pan-Arab credentials and be able to pose as the major Arab player in the peace process. The PLO hopes that, with Syrian support, the US will find it hard to exclude the organization from the talks. [Ref. 74]

Despite this mutual accommodation, Syria and the PLO are a long way from becoming completely reconciled to one another. It is worth remembering that Asad's antipathy for Arafat--which is, of course, reciprocated--goes back over twenty years; in 1966 Asad jailed Arafat and some of his associates who were bristling under the restraint of their Syrian guardians. Furthermore, those Syrians not partisan to traditional Islam share Asad's misgivings with the PLO leader because of Arafat's early sympathies for the Muslim Brethren.

In spite of the friction that exists between himself and Arafat, Asad feels a sense of obligation to the Palestinian cause, and therefore would not consider recovery of the Golan without similar progress on the West Bank. However, this obligation dovetails with his perception that he may not be able to achieve the return of the Golan *without* attaching it to the return of Palestinian land. One of Asad's greatest

fears is that an agreement between the Palestinians and Israel would not only make the chances of recovering the Golan even more remote, but would humiliate his regime as well. These fears were particularly profound, Itamar Rabinovich observed, two years into the Intifada:

Syria did express support for the intifada, but PLO leader Yasir Arafat and the PLO remained Syria's bitter rivals, and their success and enhanced stature in Arab politics were ominously received in Damascus. Syria was even more alarmed by the prospect of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations or a settlement. Any progress toward a Palestinian-Israeli settlement would have underscored Syria's failure to regain the Golan Heights. [Ref. 75]

Thus, failure to address the Palestinian cause poses a threat to Asad's regime, but not always on the merits of the Palestinian cause per se; rather, Asad must avoid Palestinian gains in the absence of progress on the Golan Heights, lest his government be depicted as an impotent player in Arab or international politics. This factor continues to be an important consideration in the conduct of Syrian foreign policy, and thereby explains certain Syrian behaviors witnessed throughout the current peace negotiations which began in Madrid last December.

To conclude this section, Asad is pre-occupied with manipulating the Palestinian cause to further his ambitions, but he recognizes the limited utility the Palestinians have as regards his primary ambition: regime legitimacy and survival. While Palestinian aspirations are not completely devoid of usefulness as a legitimacy-building tool, he is more concerned

that they will be used against him by exposing his government as incapable of making progress on an issue of utmost importance to the Syrian people--the Golan Heights, which, incidentally, is the next legitimacy-building device worthy of scrutiny.

D. THE GOLAN HEIGHTS

The Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights is Asad's most reliable and effective asset vis-a-vis Israel for building his regime's legitimacy. Because it is Asad's most potent legitimizing agent, the return of the Golan is Syria's number one foreign policy objective. This reflects the fact that the Israeli presence on the Golan pre-occupies the thoughts of nearly all Syrians. The urgency of regaining the Golan has the unusual if not rare impact of uniting the Syrian people, and is therefore also useful to the regime for the purpose of discouraging ethnic, class, and political differences. Furthermore, Israeli settlement of the Golan reinforces Syrian "demonization" of Israel. At the same time, however, Asad must tread carefully when using the Golan to justify the conduct of his government, for he himself shares in some of the blame for the loss of the Heights. Nevertheless, fanning the flames of Syrian indignation over the Golan is Asad's best device for obtaining the backing of the Syrian people.

In fact, Asad's war for the Golan in 1973 served as his "touchstone" for legitimacy, but that is something which is

more appropriately discussed later. Likewise, the Golan is a recurring theme--along with other anti-Israeli devices--during times of crisis, and when Asad is explicitly challenged by those who wish to replace or remove him. Similarly, these subjects deserve specific and separate attention and will not be addressed here. Instead, this section endeavors to demonstrate the inherent value of the Golan as a legitimizing agent rather than its actual use as such.

Frankly, a good deal of the Golan's value to Asad results from Israel's unwitting complicity in making it a reservoir of political capital for their enemy in Damascus. First, the seizure of the Golan by Israeli forces in 1967 came several hours after Syria had requested a ceasefire on June 9, and well after Egypt had accepted an unconditional ceasefire the same day. The Israelis, concentrating their forces on defeating the Egyptians, whom they perceived as a more profound threat to Israel, had for all purposes left the Syrians alone on the Golan during the first days of the war. After Egypt was taken out of the contest and the Israeli army had repositioned forces to the north, Moshe Dayan apparently decided to attack the Golan, and did so without consulting his civilian superiors in the Israeli government. The Israelis did not relent until they had seized a strongpoint on Mt. Hermon on June 10. Whatever the Israeli rationale or motivation for waiting to attack Syria along the Golan Heights, the Syrian perception is that Israel's attack was

unjustifiable insofar that it came after a ceasefire was offered. The Israelis similarly provoked Syrian wrath in the aftermath of the 1973 war. As part of a disengagement settlement on the Golan Heights, the Israelis agreed to abandon Qunaytra, the principal town on the Golan.

But before evacuating it the Israelis blew up and bulldozed buildings, water storage tanks and communication lines, as they had done in the Suez area, and were duly condemned for this at the United Nations. The destruction of the town confirmed the Syrians in their view of the Israelis as latter-day Vandals. [Ref. 76]

Israeli settlements on the Golan only exacerbate the depth of Syrian resentment, and thus contribute to the Golan's usefulness as a legitimizing agent. Indeed, the speed with which the Israelis began settlement efforts was itself a source of irritation. On July 15, 1967, little more than a month after hostilities had ended, the Israelis established Merom Golan, their first settlement in occupied territory. [Ref. 77]

Israel has continued to settle the Golan, and adamantly asserts its right and willingness to do so. In 1974 Yitzhak Rabin announced, "Israeli governments have not established permanent settlements in the Golan Heights in order to evacuate them or to let them exist in a non-Jewish state. If anyone has any doubts about that he should stop worrying." [Ref. 78] In April of 1979 Ariel Sharon, at the time Minister of Agriculture, tried to allay settlers' fears: "We will never leave the Golan for any price, not even for peace with

Syria." More recently, Sharon, in his capacity as Housing Minister, promised to accelerate building efforts: "We are now in the process of building 1,200 housing units in the Golan Heights, and I hope next year we will build some 1,200 more. All this is to increase the [Jewish] population in the Golan from 11,000 today to 20,000." [Ref. 79]

The most ardent supporters of settlements must be disappointed with the history of the Golan's settlement. Zionist planners once hoped for 50,000 settlers on the Golan, but currently little more than 12,000 live there. On top of that, the Golan settlements require substantial sums of financial assistance. Unlike the West Bank, the Golan has no religious significance to most Israelis. Although it does offer some excellent agricultural opportunities, this alone does not attract much settlement interest.

The recent influx of Russian Jews, however, may have renewed the hopes of those Israelis who believe settlement of the Golan is in Israel's strategic interests. "The Israeli Government moved 25 Soviet immigrant families into a patch of the northern Golan Heights on Monday, hours after Syria and Israel ended face-to-face talks in Madrid that failed to reach agreement on a time and site for further Middle East peace negotiations." [Ref. 80] Naturally, the timing of such moves only strengthens Asad by confirming the widespread Syrian perception that the occupation of the Golan serves Israel's imperialist interests.

Israel's official government pronouncements also play into Asad's hands. In December of 1981 Prime Minister Begin pushed through the Knesset a measure which formally annexed the Golan Heights. And in 1977 the Likud government's "Fundamental Guidelines" declared that "Israel will not descend from the Golan Heights, nor will it remove any settlement established there." [Ref. 81] As recently as November of 1991 the Knesset passed a resolution which not only reiterated Israel's position on the Heights as nonnegotiable, but which also encouraged further settlement there. No one should underestimate the importance of the Golan in the collective mind of the Syrian people. The following anecdote aptly illustrates the depth of feeling. Shortly after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait a newspaper reporter interviewed a Syrian restaurant cook in Damascus. When the reporter inquired the man about his thoughts on the "current" Mideast crisis--this was several weeks after the invasion had taken place--the man instinctively replied, "If the Zionists don't leave our land, we will have another war, for sure." [Ref. 82] Asad is of course well aware of these widespread sentiments, and does not hesitate using them to stir popular passions.

The public campaign to liberate the Golan has been unremitting. There is no evidence that a Ba'ath government, humiliated by its poor showing against Israel in 1967, has tried to soft-pedal the issue. Quite the contrary: Syrians were constantly reminded of the Israeli occupation and of the certainty that the occupied Golan would be retaken by Syria.

Thus, the primary issue with respect to the Golan has never been whether to accept its loss or to seek its

return. Instead, issues have concerned the means and timing of its recovery. Virtually all Syrians have accepted the need for force in the effort. [Ref. 83]

Asad is especially fond of quoting Moshe Dayan's speech to soldiers on the Golan Heights in 1973 as evidence of Israel's appetite for expansion: "Our predecessors made the Israel of the 1948 frontiers, our generation that of the 1967 frontiers, now its up to you to make Greater Israel." [Ref. 84] Asad is not above doing a little saber-rattling himself if it suits his purpose; he once declared: "If Israel has a plan to make the Golan its border, Syria has a plan to place the Golan in the center of Syria." [Ref. 85] Some Israelis naturally interpret Asad's statement as evidence that Syria is not only interested in regaining the Golan but would march into northern Israel if given the opportunity. "More likely, this is a typical Syrian rhetorical flourish, an example of Assad's seeking to emphasize dramatically the importance Syria attaches to the Golan. The speech reveals that Assad is determined that some day the Golan should be returned to Syria." [Ref. 86] In other words, Asad is simply asserting to the world--but especially to the Syrian people, to whom it matters most--that he places highest priority on recovering the Golan.

Asad's words are not empty rhetoric: Syria maintains considerable ground forces, the vast majority of which are deployed along the relatively small front facing the Israelis on the Golan Heights. [Ref. 87] While this deployment also

reflects Asad's determination to defend Damascus--which is a mere thirty miles from the Golan border--the number of Syrian ground forces dedicated to the Golan front obviates the possibility of a strictly defensive Syrian posture. In this way, words and deeds affirm Asad's determination to recover the Golan, the most basic litmus test of legitimacy the Syrian people could apply. In fact, it may be an even more important test for Asad than for any other leader who might one day fill his shoes; as chief of staff of the air force during the 1967 war, Asad feels particularly responsible for Syria's loss.

E. THE SYRIAN ECONOMY

Economic improvement is at the very core of any government's responsibilities. This being the case, economic growth can function as a veritable wellspring of legitimizing authority. On the other hand, economic contraction or privation might likewise strip away a government's moral claim to authority. In the case of Syria it is clear that while Asad has tried to improve his country's economic lot, it is an ambition which has been subordinated to other goals. It would be unreasonable to posit that Asad does not view economic growth as a source of legitimacy; evidence suggests that he has used it, like other legitimizing tools, for that purpose. But economic growth is not wielded as a primary source of legitimacy. Its selection for this purpose could be an unwise choice given Syria's economic endowments. In fact, economic

growth is pursued as a means by which to fuel the expansion of Syria's military capabilities--the very capabilities necessary if Asad is to present himself, and Syria, credibly in his confrontation with Israel.

It would have been folly for Asad to have made economic growth the cornerstone of his regime's legitimacy after he came to power. Syria is not only a country which boasts few natural resources, but one which must overcome a number of liabilities. For example: "Without a river system like those in Egypt and Iraq, Syria was without an economic and communications network to unite the country. . . economies developed locally often had little connection with areas elsewhere in Syria." [Ref. 88] Among Syria's current, fundamental problems is its population's growth rate, which in 1986 was estimated to be 3.7 percent. As it is Syria cannot provide basic services for its present population of roughly 12 million. "Syria has shortages of housing, electricity and water and its population is expected to double, to 25 million, over the next two decades." [Ref. 89] Given the economic realities in Syria, it is difficult to argue that Asad, intelligent man that he is, would chose economic success--it being so difficult to achieve--as a fundamental source of legitimacy.

This does not mean that Asad will not use the economy when he can to engender support for his regime. It has already been mentioned that Asad is not the doctrinaire socialist as

was his predecessor, Salah Jadid. Not long after taking power Asad cut food prices, lifted restrictions on trade with Lebanon, and otherwise maneuvered to win the favor of the private sector.

. . . [Asad] knew he needed allies in the urban middle class, so, breaking with his political past, he tried to win over the shopkeepers, businessmen and artisans of the towns as well as the many citizens who had fled Syria since 1963, mainly Sunnis from the former leading families. [Ref. 90]

Similarly, Asad endeavored to buttress his rural support by promoting development in areas long neglected in favor of the cities. As Thomas Friedman has observed, these efforts paid important dividends.

These practices won [Asad's regime] a certain degree of legitimacy, which can be seen when one visits some far-flung Syrian village in which the relatively stable Assad government has built a new road, a medical clinic, a new school, extended electricity, and connected telephone lines. It is quite possible to find in such a village a Sunni Muslim villager who has hung a picture of Alawite President Assad on his wall, not simply because it will ingratiate him with the local party and intelligence officials, but also because he sincerely feels that this man Assad has behaved not just as an Alawite, and not just as a power-hungry autocrat, but as his own President, with a national interest in mind. [Ref. 91]

These exceptions notwithstanding, Asad clearly could not hope to create widespread acceptance of his regime based solely on economic factors.

In fact, some observers of Syrian politics and its economy think Asad has little enthusiasm for economic matters. "Asad has never taken a close interest in economic affairs--with the important exception of oil." [Ref. 92] It may be, then, that

Syria's economy suffers from, among other things, a certain amount of supervisory neglect. The absence of executive oversight is found in the ubiquitous corruption which infects Syria's political structure. Asad's tolerance of this corruption--or his inability to control it--unsettles the masses, and may potentially erode the legitimacy he has gained elsewhere.

The most salient domestic political issue, that of "official corruption," involves not simply the legitimacy of high-ranking state and party officials, but also the basis for collaboration among the forces making up the regime. To the extent that the costs of widespread collusion between Syria's commercial and industrial elite and the leadership of the Ba'th become politically or economically unmanageable, the ruling coalition will face fundamental internal difficulties. [Ref. 93]

While a permissive atmosphere has been instrumental in winning over key segments of the military, corruption has nevertheless had the effect of making Syria's economic maladies that much less tolerable to the general public. Consequently, one could well argue that the economy, in its current state, is more likely to debilitate Asad's efforts to build regime legitimacy, rather than add to it.

Syria's enormous military expenditures are a tangible manifestation of the priority placed on that country's contest with Israel. Between 1973 and 1985 Syria devoted 18 percent of its Gross Domestic Product to military purchases. Within the Middle East, Syria was surpassed in this category only by Iraq and Saudi Arabia. [Ref. 94] Syria has routinely earmarked fifty percent or more of its central government

expenditures for defense. The cost of keeping so many men under arms also impacts upon Syria's labor pool. In 1985, Syria's 400,000 troops represented one-sixth of the country's entire work force. [Ref. 95] The overall drain on the economy is profound.

Indeed, the imperatives of national security state [sic] take precedence over all else, and the confrontation with Israel continues to block any radical departure from etatism: the military absorbs a large portion of public revenues that might otherwise stimulate capitalist development, and the conflict diverts private investment from productive fields into short-term speculative ventures and makes Syria ineligible for foreign private investment on a serious scale. [Ref. 96]

The important question that needs to be asked is: Do the Syrian people object to the burden of these large military expenditures? The answer: Not as long as the monies are directed to defeating Israel. Public sentiment after the 1973 war is illustrative. The war brought extraordinary destruction on Syria's infrastructure. A *New York Times* correspondent, in Damascus as the fighting took place, made the following observation: "The political goal of recovering Syrian land occupied by Israel in the 1967 war is an issue charged with such emotion here that losses in lives and money appear to be shouldered willingly by the public." [Ref. 97] Even after the war had ended and Syrian forces had been repulsed, Syrians did not object to the economic setback they suffered.

Power cuts here are frequent. Many factories are unable to work full shifts for lack of electricity. Schools have gone to daylight classes only. Many housewives have

difficulty finding kerosene for cooking, and heat is missing in some houses with evenings getting colder.

But there is no noticeable grumbling. There is plenty of food in the markets at stable prices. It is hard to find a taxi at night, but restaurants and discotheques are lively. [Ref. 98]

Even when taking into consideration the intoxicating effect of victory--no matter how short-lived--against the Israelis, Syrian willingness to bear the brunt of an unrelenting military burden is remarkable.

Part of the Syrian public's quiescence regarding military spending, however, may reflect government efforts to present the Syrian burden as quite ordinary for the region. Specifically, anecdotal evidence suggests that many Syrians mistakenly believe that other Middle East citizens, particularly the Israelis, are worse off than themselves. Indeed, the following story suggests that many Syrians believe the Israelis are starving because of outrageously large Israeli military expenditures: In a move to counter domestic Syrian propaganda, a Syrian army captain who had been captured in the 1973 war was permitted to tour Israel freely before being repatriated. The Syrian army captain insisted on being taken to the market at Haifa. His appointed driver complied. "When they arrived in the crowded streets, the captain ordered the driver to stop, got out of the car, chose a small store at random, went in, and asked for eggs. When the merchant nonchalantly produced a carton, the Syrian was astonished. 'I believed you were starving,' he told his guide." [Ref. 99]

Such internal propaganda efforts persist in Syria. As recently as December of 1991, the Syrian Information Minister spoke of the (imagined) concern that all societies share concerning the acquisition of food.

[Minister Salman] spoke about the Syrian Government's eagerness to secure food security for the Syrian citizen, given that the question of food security has become the major preoccupation of all societies in view of the expected large increase in the number of the world's population. [Ref. 100]

While it is not disputed that a number of Middle East countries are rightfully concerned with feeding their populations, the minister's hyperbolic comments are nevertheless misleading. The subliminal message being sent by the minister was that Syrians should be thankful that they had enough to eat; it would then, of course, be ungrateful for the Syrian public to complain about wanting other, more material comforts.

Assuming that the Syrians were aware of their relative deprivation, would that make the importance of economic prosperity transcend Israel as a legitimizing agent? Given the depth of antipathy towards Israel, it is difficult to imagine that it would. While persistent economic hardship might make Asad's task of legitimacy-building more difficult, there is no reason to believe that, by itself, economic growth would substantially contribute to his cause--even if it were possible to achieve growth on the scale necessary to boost Asad's popular credentials, which it is not. It is possible,

however, that economic concerns could eclipse Israel as a legitimizing agent if anti-Israeli feelings were to eventually subside.

Finally, Asad's post-Gulf War spending habits reinforce the argument that Asad is more concerned with the confrontation with Israel than he is with elevating the economic well-being of his country. Saudi Arabia rewarded Syria with \$2 billion for its participation in the international coalition against Iraq. This was an enormous sum considering that \$2 billion also represents the amount spent by the Syrian government during its previous fiscal year. Rather than spending the money to develop its infrastructure or to pay off debt to Western lenders (to whom Syria is in arrears), Asad elected to reactivate an armored division and to purchase Scud-C missiles, T-72 tanks and Su-24 ground attack aircraft. To imagine that economic development or well-being has eclipsed Israel as Asad's primary legitimizing agent would be foolish.

F. CHARISMA

Charisma--a quality which grants certain individuals widespread devotion on the basis of "exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character"--is perhaps the most powerful yet intangible of legitimizing agents available to a leader. [Ref. 101] Among the traditional societies of the Middle East, personal leadership can be particularly important.

Nasser is the best example of a leader whose magnetism alone gave him a seemingly unchallengeable position of legitimacy. Bourguiba was another. Charisma, if a leader has it, gives that individual unusual freedom of movement in the political arena. But typically charisma is not something that a leader can develop--either he has it or he does not. Nasser is an important exception, but rare is the leader who can cultivate charisma where it did not exist, at least in some measure, beforehand. Whatever the case, Asad is not charismatic, nor is there any evidence to suggest that he has at anytime tried to become a charismatic figure. Thus, charisma can be dismissed out of hand as a source of any legitimizing authority for Asad.

A strong argument can be made that Asad may credit his personal style for his long and successful navigation of Syria's treacherous political waters. According to Moshe Ma'oz, "Assad's personal qualities and political skills largely account for the preservation of his position." [Ref. 102] Indeed, the superlatives come easily to mind when describing Asad: He is cunning and shrewd, patient and brilliant, tireless and calculating. But these personal qualities, and the many more which Asad does possess, do not necessarily endow him with any measure of charisma.

Asad certainly enjoys the respect and admiration of many of Syria's elite politicians. Asad's keen intellect, strong will, and confident bearing engender loyalty and affection

among those who sit just below Asad in Syria's political hierarchy. "He enjoys a unique personal stature among elites, respected for his combination of conciliatory pragmatism, ruthlessness, and shrewd audacity in the international arena." [Ref. 103] Seale notes that Asad, realizing this, has himself tried to encourage the creation of a "personality cult" among his colleagues.

Despite the adulation he might receive among his inner circle, Asad rarely travels or avails himself publicly to the Syrian people. For example, it has been over twelve years since he visited Aleppo, Syria's second largest city. Asad's reclusive nature could be the result of health or security concerns, but the fact remains that most Syrians see him mainly on television. Even if Asad were to venture out into the public more often, his personality is not inspirational.

[Asad's] public persona is not particularly appealing. He has always been formal and reserved, traits that the exercise of power have not eroded, without a gift for easy contact with people or the charisma and oratorical powers of a populist leader able to harangue the crowd. His style of public speaking is stilted, although his mastery of classical Arabic, considered the mark of a nationalist, is admired. Asad is probably cleverer than the late President Nasser of Egypt, the Arab leader with whom he best stands comparison, but he does not have Nasser's ability to move men's hearts. [Ref. 104]

Asad's aloof character has led Seale to speculate that Asad embraces Machiavelli's dictum that to lead men you must turn your back on them.

If he could, Asad would certainly elect to cultivate charisma for its powerful legitimizing authority. But alas,

charisma is typically an innate endowment, and so he cannot. Instead, Asad devotes his energies to building legitimacy with those devices which are at his disposal.

IV. ISRAEL'S LEGITIMIZING FUNCTION AT WORK

Simply eliminating Asad's alternative legitimizing agents by itself does not persuasively make the argument that he is dependent upon perpetuating his contest with Israel in order to perpetuate his regime. To accomplish this, it must also be demonstrated that the conflict with Israel has enhanced Asad's position as well as assisted him during times of crisis. Syria's participation in the 1973 War served to anchor Asad's presidency. Furthermore, Asad's use of anti-Israeli themes when his regime has been threatened corroborates the thesis that Israel is the primary legitimizing agent of his presidency.

A. THE RAMADAN WAR

Asad's very rise to power rested upon his conviction that Israel posed a significant security concern, one which his predecessor, Salah Jadid, was neglecting at Syria's peril.

The interrelated goals of Arab unity and war against Israel were indeed the major motivation and pretext of Asad's coups in 1969 and 1970 as well as the principal themes of his public speeches and political actions after his assumption of control. . . during the late 1960s Asad had strongly opposed the policies of the then Syrian leaders, Jadid and Atasi, who had rejected the concept of an all-Arab war against Israel because most Arab countries were governed by "rightist" or "reactionary" regimes. [Ref. 105]

It is no coincidence that Asad's first attempt at a coup d'etat in February of 1969 came on the heels of an Israeli air raid on Palestinian military camps near Damascus which revealed Syria's military impotence. Shortly after he took power, Asad reaffirmed his dedication to the struggle against Israel. Asad himself stated: "It is a fatal confrontation, of life or death, of existence or non-existence. . . It is not a struggle between Arabs and Jews. . . we do not hate Judaism as a religion but we hate Zionism as a colonialist invading movement." [Ref. 106]

There are several reasons, relevant to this essay, which compelled Asad to go to war with Israel in 1973. First, Asad himself felt a share of responsibility for the loss of the Golan in 1967 since he was then the air force chief of staff. In the immediate aftermath of that war a number of Baath party elites angrily demanded his resignation from the Defense Ministry and sought to expel him from the Regional Command. Asad was so despondent afterwards that he "went home and brooded over the catastrophe for three days, refusing to see anyone." [Ref. 107] Second, after having castigated Jadid for abandoning the confrontation with Israel, Asad had little choice but to put his army where his mouth was. Asad could not afford to have his anti-Israel protestations depicted as empty rhetoric. Third, the Syrian public, believing that armed conflict was their only recourse for recovery of the Golan, demanded--indeed welcomed--war.

From 1970, and even earlier, Egypt and Jordan had in their different fashions attempted to find a modus vivendi with Israel, reaching out a hand to it and offering real concessions, but Syria wanted to put the clock back to before Israel's conquests in the Six Day War. In this Asad was merely reflecting what his public demanded. Hardly reconciled to Israel's existence within its prewar frontiers, Syrians were outraged by its wartime expansion and believed that what had been taken by force could only be regained by force. [Ref. 108]

Finally, Asad knew that a well-conducted campaign would give him extraordinary latitude and strength in the post-war political arena--both domestically and internationally. The very decision to take to arms flowed from Asad's perception that his domestic position was slowly eroding. This precarious situation was one he shared with his partner in war, Sadat: "The International Institute for Strategic Studies, noting the waves of riots by workers and students in Egypt in 1972 and 1973 and Sunni Muslim protests in Syria in early 1973 argued that 'The very [political] weakness of Sadat and Assad were important factors in the decision to launch war on Israel.'" [Ref. 109]

Although neither Asad or Sadat would fully realize the territorial ambitions each entertained on the eve of the conflict (recovering some or all of the territory lost to Israel in 1967), both men would emerge from the war with renewed political vigor at home. "The brio, style and courage of the blows struck at the very start were to give both leaders something like a blank cheque on a fund of political capital allowing them much freedom of action thereafter."

[Ref. 110] The war also permitted Syria to reassert itself as a player in Arab and world politics. Syria had become a force with which to be reckoned. Syria's new international esteem only further boosted Asad's domestic political clout. "The 1973 war rallied wide sectors of opinion to the regime and endowed it with a new nationalist legitimacy. Finally Syria's new role in the front line with Israel won it Arab aid and loans, fueling a prosperity of which the urban bourgeoisie and middle class took best advantage." [Ref. 111] The 1973 War was so potent a legitimizing force that it won for Asad the begrudging--if temporary--respect of that group which Asad's Baath politics had inevitably alienated, the urban middle class.

Asad's conduct both during and after the war won him the admiration of the Syrian people. Asad put his very regime on the line by electing to go to war with Israel. Moreover, the Syrian public could not help but venerate Asad for carrying into battle ambitions which were more noble than those of their ally, Egypt. "Unlike Sadat--whose war aims were limited to crossing the Suez Canal, occupying the eastern bank up to the Sinai passes, and thereafter generating American pressure on Israel to give up the entire Sinai--Asad's goal was to reconquer the entire Golan Heights to the Jordan river and possibly occupy its bridges." [Ref. 112] When the war was over and disengagement negotiations began, Asad refused to appear weak, even though the Israeli army was perched just

outside of Damascus, and was restrained from marching into the Syrian capital only due to countervailing pressure from the US and the Soviet Union.

Before he dealt with the Israeli enemy following the 1973 war, Assad was determined to prove to the Arab world that, unlike Egypt, Syria was not negotiating under duress. . .

What tipped the scales in favor of entering the talks was the pressure resulting from the presence of the Israeli army roughly 25 miles from Damascus. Nevertheless, Assad began the negotiations by making far-reaching demands, as if he were the victor. But Assad did not shut the door tight.

His method paid off in the end. The agreement required Israel to give up not only the land occupied since the 1973 war but also the town of Qunietra on the Golan Heights, which was seized in 1967. [Ref. 113]

Asad's audacious behavior had the desired effect not just at the negotiating table, but at home as well. His determination to stand up to the Israelis and Americans was viewed with pride.

Asad's ability in the Ramadan War to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat gave him a firm foundation for his regime's legitimacy. Since then it has been to Asad's advantage to beat the drums of war and to reiterate the threat posed by "expansionist" Israel. But the passage of time has diminished the effectiveness of the war as a legitimizing agent of the regime: Given Syria's high birthrate, much of Syria's current population was either very young or not even born at the time of the 1973 war. Other Middle East developments have likewise decreased--but not erased--the value of the Ramadan War as a legitimizing agent.

One of Assad's main assets, both internally and in the Arab world, has been his stand as defender of the Arab cause against Israel. But even here his ability to exploit the "Israeli threat" appears to be diminishing . . . An increasing number of Syrians, particularly Sunnis, may be realizing that the regime is exploiting the war against Israel to ensure Alawi domination. Despite strong criticism of its peace with Israel, Egypt's success in regaining the whole of the Sinai Peninsula from Israel through political negotiations has probably registered some effect on the Syrian public. For many Arabs, Israel, after its failure in Lebanon, appears to be less of a threat. [Ref. 114]

It is difficult to gauge precisely when Asad realized that the conflict with Israel was a legitimizing agent that could be used to his regime's advantage beyond the context of war. After all, Asad may have been aware of its utility long before he ascended to the presidency. It is much easier to pinpoint when Asad began to explicitly use anti-Israeli themes to support his regime and defeat its challengers. Coincidentally, this use came during the constitutional crisis of 1973.

B. THE 1973 CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS

The significant role that the 1973 War played in legitimizing Asad's rule becomes more obvious when one considers developments within Syria earlier that same year. It was briefly mentioned that Asad was confronted by serious internal opposition during the first months of 1973 and that the resultant weakening of his position played some part in his decision to wage war. This unrest was the apparent by-product of Sunni Moslem discontent with Syria's new

constitution. This opposition--which had been vociferous--completely dissolved after the war with Israel, thus demonstrating Israel's efficacy as a legitimizing force. To illustrate this point, it would be helpful to consider the particulars of that crisis.

The 1973 constitutional crisis was directly linked to the issue of Asad's religious convictions as an Alawi. Asad of course realized the liability of his heritage, and to stave off criticism made a number of moves immediately after taking power to silence would-be religious rabble rousers. To wit, Asad promoted 2,000 religious functionaries in rank and salary, and appointed an 'alim as Minister of Religious Endowments. Asad also encouraged the construction of additional mosques.

On a more personal level Asad tried to depict himself as a pious Muslim by participating in prayers and other religious services, going so far as to make the *hajj* to Mecca, albeit at an irregular time. Asad was assisted by the Mufti of Damascus who verified the president's authenticity as a Muslim. [Ref. 115] Asad's efforts to polish his public image as a Muslim did not stop there: "In June 1971, Assad restored to the Syrian constitution the previous formulation of the presidential oath, 'I swear by Allah Akbar,' which had been replaced by a secular format ('I swear on my honour and faith') in the 1969 constitution." [Ref. 116] Not all of Asad's various ploys were as sanguine. In 1972 the government

published a special edition of the Qur'an with a picture of Asad in uniform on the first page. Many devout Muslims were, quite naturally, offended. All of these gestures highlighted Asad's sensitivity to religious issues as well as an appreciation of his vulnerability. While Asad's endeavors may have had the short-term effect of quieting his Islamic opponents, it did not neutralize them. In early 1973 Asad constructed a new constitution that would endow him with substantial executive and legislative powers. Before the draft form of that constitution was offered in late January, Asad himself deleted a clause which stipulated that the Syrian president must be Muslim. Asad's deletion inflamed latent anger among religious elements of Syria's population. Many Syrians were also upset by the constitution's less-than-enthusiastic endorsement of the shari'a as the source of all legislation. The article concerning the shari'a "was inserted in no very prominent place, and its curt matter-of-factness was in striking contrast to the fervent Ba'thist rhetoric of the rest of the text." [Ref. 117] All this incensed dedicated Muslims who not only demanded a Muslim president, but also insisted that Islam be declared the state religion. "Viewing the constitution as the product of an Alawi-dominated, secular, Baathist ruling elite, Sunni militants staged a series of riots in February 1973 in conservative and predominantly Sunni cities such as Hamah and Homs." [Ref. 118] The rioting would continue into May. Before the dust settled,

a number of demonstrators were killed or wounded in clashes with Syrian troops.

In response to the unrest Asad made the compromise of inserting an article which stated that the president must be Muslim. To erase the contradiction of his Alawi ancestry, Asad recruited Musa al-Sadr, the Shi'i Imam of Lebanon, to declare that Alawis were in fact Shi'ite Muslims. Asad also enlisted the support of his fellow Alawis:

In a formal proclamation issued in 1973, 80 religious personages, representing the various parts of the 'Alawi country, unqualifiedly affirmed that their book is the Qur'an, that they are Muslim and Shi'i, and like the majority of Shi'is, Ithna Ashariyyah or Twelvers, this is, partisans of the 12 imams, and that whatever else is attributed to them has no basis in truth and is a mere invention by their enemies and the enemies of Islam. [Ref. 119]

Asad was nevertheless resolute in refusing to permit Islam to be the declared state religion.

What is ironic in all of this is the fact that at no time in the post-independence period of Syrian history had Islam ever been recognized as the state religion. Given this background information, Syrian unrest seems odd, but it is not without explanation: While the widespread protests against Asad were articulated in Islamic terms, the urban Sunnis who participated in these disturbances were really expressing their dissatisfaction with being excluded from the political process. The riots and disturbances were organized and led by members of the Muslim Brethren who played upon Sunni fears of an Alawi dominated state. Although the opposition to Asad

had, at its core, a group of devout Muslims genuinely dedicated to the creation of an Islamic state, most of those who took to the streets were more concerned with their position vis-a-vis the government.

Ultimately the Constitution would be "approved" by referendum in March of 1973. More importantly, all residual opposition to Asad evaporated after the war with Israel was fought, and would not surface again for three years.. This was no coincidence. By going to war with Israel Asad had managed to eliminate, at least temporarily, those who challenged the legitimacy of his regime. "The Islamic opposition fizzled during the October 1973 war amid heightened popular feelings of Arab nationalism as Syrians united behind their president to fight the State of Israel." [Ref. 120] This lesson was most certainly not lost on Asad. As a result, anti-Israeli themes were especially prominent during the most trying years of Asad's tenure, 1978 to 1982, the years of the Muslim Brethren uprising.

C. 1978-1982: BATTLING THE MUSLIM BROTHERS

Having reclaimed his legitimizing credentials in the war with Israel, Asad may have become over-confident in the years that followed. This self-assurance likely contributed to his decision to commit Syrian troops to Lebanon in 1976. Syria's entanglement in Lebanon's civil war would breath new life into the Muslim Brethren's dormant opposition movement. Asad's

motivations for entering Lebanon's embroglio will be addressed later; some might posit that Asad's decision to commit the Syrian army to Lebanon contradicts the notion that Israel serves a legitimizing function. That idea will be refuted. The more pertinent issue to be entertained here is whether anti-Israeli sentiments played a significant role in Asad's campaign to defeat the Brethren. There can be little doubt that many Syrians viewed Asad's policy choice in Lebanon as aiding Israel. This perception inevitably contributed to the development of the crisis which confronted Asad.

President Asad, as we have noted, restored his all-Arab legitimacy in 1973. But in 1976 Asad again moved to weaken, though not destroy, the Palestinian movement in Lebanon by intervening alongside the mostly Maronite Christian right wing to thwart the possibility of an even more militant, revolutionary Arab nationalist, anti-Israeli regime coming to power there. Unwilling to be outbid or threatened by such a regime, and undoubtedly worried about the Israeli response, President Asad again sacrificed all-Arab concerns for local interests. Significantly, however, his regime steadfastly reiterated its previous support of the Arab and Palestinian causes and insisted that its intervention in Lebanon was dictated only by a desire to preserve those causes from their misguided adherents. The question which Syrians, Palestinians, and all others concerned with the Arab-Israeli conflict were left to ponder was whether (or when) the Asad regime's seeming retreat on a core legitimizing issue would lead to a renewal of the internal instability of previous years. [Ref. 121]

The answer to the question is, of course, yes. But it would be misleading to suggest that it was the perceived abandonment of the confrontation with Israel which alone inspired the uprising against Asad.

Three other factors, which deserve brief mention, contributed to the crisis. The first of these three, an economic downturn, was a direct result of the intervention in Lebanon. Syria's economy suffered badly as its army became enmeshed in Lebanon's conflict. The economic pinch was particularly acute for Syria's urban middle class, a section of Syrian society which, when given cause, is predisposed to bristle under the leadership of an Alawi president. Second, the crisis was generated and sustained by the spread of corruption.

The Islamic insurrections at the turn of the decade were, in part, led by the notables of the ancien regime never reconciled to the Ba'thists and by scions of merchant and religious families, particularly from the northern cities, peripheralized by the growth of the state-controlled economy and lacking patronage connections to protect their interests. But the growth of corruption fueled resentment among all those left out. Sympathy for the Islamic challenge spread broadly among urban Sunnis, including the salaried middle class the regime had long worked to co-opt. [Ref. 122]

Finally, the Muslim Brethren were also buoyed by two external developments: the Islamic revolution in Iran; and the assassination of Sadat by fundamentalists in October of 1981. While the uprising cannot be completely credited to Syria's involvement in Lebanon, it was nevertheless the primary cause.

The Brethren officially declared jihad in 1976, not long after Syria's invasion. At first the Brethren employed hit-and-run tactics hoping to invite repressive reprisals by Asad's regime in order to inspire wider discontent with his rule. Significantly, Muslim Brethren rhetoric emphasized

those issues which they felt would most effectively undermine Asad's position--those relating to Israel. First, the Brethren castigated Asad for his failure to recapture the Golan Heights as well as for participating in talks, orchestrated by US Secretary of State Kissinger, which led to a disengagement treaty with Israel in May of 1974. Like it or not, Asad had given Israel de facto recognition by signing that treaty, a point not lost on the Brethren. Second, the Brethren labeled Asad an American and Israeli "stooge" for his decision to intervene in Lebanon.

Asad's actions vis-a-vis Israel had robbed him of legitimacy and re-invigorated the Islamic opposition, two developments not completely unrelated. According to Raymond Hinnebusch: "Islamic movements mobilize against a state suffering from a legitimacy crisis which is rooted in external threat or societal troubles--the breakdown of old identities, the rise of new inequalities. . .The more discredited the existing order, the more broad-based the Islamic movement is likely to be." [Ref. 123] Asad was keenly aware of the damage posed by the Brethren in 1976--both to his regime and to his person. It is no coincidence that he acquired his first armored Cadillac that same year.

The Brethren intensified their attacks on the regime in 1978. By 1980 Muslim Brethren activities had become so serious that Syrian authorities could no longer deny the problem to the outside world. In March of that year Prime

Minister Abdel-Raouf al-Kassem announced measures to be taken to curb government abuses. These included releasing political prisoners, easing martial law and purging corrupt directors of state-owned companies. What the Prime Minister did not announce was a campaign aimed at discrediting the Muslim Brethren by casting them as accomplices of the United States and Israel, while simultaneously reaffirming the regime's anti-Israeli credentials. That campaign--whether deliberate or spontaneous--was sustained by Asad himself. "As early as March 1980 he publicly accused the Central Intelligence Agency of encouraging 'sabotage and subversion' in Syria so as to bring 'the entire Arab world under joint US-Israeli domination.'" [Ref. 124]

The Muslim Brethren's verbal attacks on Asad's religious convictions seemed to have put the Syrian president on the defensive. Speaking at an anniversary rally commemorating the Baath Party's rise to power on March 8, Asad insisted he had always been a devout Muslim: "But they do not want to accept my Islam." Asad followed that remark with a sarcastic slap at his opponents: "Maybe I need a certificate of good conduct from their masters in Washington. To do that I need to go to Jerusalem to submit to the Israelis as Sadat has done." [125] Thus, Asad attempted to turn the table by painting the Brethren as accomplices of Israel.

Previously, Asad's Foreign Minister and longtime friend 'Abd al-Halim Khaddam had made similar contributions to the

cause. In an interview published in a Baath Party newspaper, Khaddam announced that the internal uprising was really a battle against Israel: "We are fighting a great national battle against Israel and Zionist and imperialist policy in the region." When the reporter queried Khaddam about the source of the terrorist activity in Syria, the Foreign Minister responded: "Our assessment is that Israeli intelligence is behind these operations. Of course it uses certain Arab tools. But these operations are carried out in the interest of Israel." In response to the reporter's suggestion that Syria's disturbances might grow to resemble the internal (and eternal?) problems of Lebanon, Khaddam said: "These are the dreams of Israel. Syria's national unity is not a subject of debate or doubt for any citizen in Syria, and those who believe that Zionism can toy with Syria's national unity are badly mistaken." [Ref. 126] Likewise, Prime Minister Kassem declared that while martial law might be eased, it could not be lifted entirely because "we are in a state of war with Israel." [Ref. 127]

The threat that the Muslim Brethren posed to Asad was very real. In June of 1980 Brethren terrorists managed to throw two hand grenades at Asad when he was waiting to receive a foreign dignitary at the government's Guest Palace. Asad himself kicked one of the grenades away while his body guard threw himself on the other, dying instantly. Asad immediately satisfied his appetite for revenge. The next day in Palmyra,

Asad's brother, Rif'at, led Asad's praetorian guard on a killing spree at a prison where Muslim Brethren were being held. Several hundred inmates were massacred.

The crisis would come to a boil--and to an end--in February of 1982 with the uprising at Hama. After the Brethren ambushed a government patrol, several thousand troops, with the support of armor and artillery units, rushed into the city to annihilate the insurgency. Before the fighting was over, anywhere from 10,000 to 25,000 of Hama's citizens had been killed. In an interview the following month, Asad was anything but repentant, and continued to point a finger at the United States and its "agent", Israel.

I have no doubt that this was an American intelligence operation. I have proof of US involvement. It is of three sorts. Some of the criminals have confessed their contacts with US agents. Secondly, at Hama we confiscated advanced communications equipment, and other equipment of American origin, which could only have reached the criminals with US approval and through the channel of US agents. Thirdly, it was the State Department--in obvious collusion with Muslim Brotherhood groups abroad--which first broke the news of the Hama fighting. [Ref. 128]

Asad continued to beat anti-Israeli drums in public. At a rally a month after Hama, Asad harangued the crowd: "Brothers and sons, death to the criminal Muslim Brothers! Death to the hired Muslim Brothers who tried to play havoc with the homeland! Death to the Muslim Brothers who were hired by US intelligence, reaction and Zionism!" [Ref. 129] Previously, Asad had similarly declared: "This criminal band which is called the Muslim Brotherhood every day is proving that it is

an organization which serves only the imperialists and Zionists." [Ref. 130]

Although brute force and anti-Israeli themes were an essential ingredient of Asad's campaign to defeat the Brethren, there were, admittedly, other factors at work which played a hand in the Brethren's demise. First, what success the Muslim Brethren enjoyed, as mentioned, had more to do with Asad's unpopularity than with the merits of the ideology the Brethren espoused. Second, the Brethren failed in their bid to replace Asad with an Islamic government due to internecine dissent, and the absence of charismatic leadership among the Brethren themselves. The Brethren leadership "constantly fragmented and it lacked a strong charismatic leader with unquestioned authority in the movement who could rally wide support: Syrian Islam had neither an al-Banna or a Khomeini." [Ref. 131] Third, the Muslim Brethren movement, despite any sympathies it enjoyed among the alienated middle class, was primarily a rural phenomenon. "Syrian Islam failed to reach many sectors of the large middle class, to link up with much of the working class and to bridge the urban-rural gap, an essential key to mass revolution." [Ref. 132] These failures, combined with Asad's dedicated ruthlessness, made the Brethren's defeat all but inevitable.

Incidentally, it is unclear what impact, if any, the Israeli annexation of the Golan Heights in 1981 had on the entire affair. On the one hand, the Knesset decision--at

Begin's behest--to permanently swallow up the Golan may have worked to Asad's advantage by reinforcing the perception of Israeli imperialism, thereby causing the Syrian people to rally around their president. On the other hand, Asad's inability to challenge the Israeli action may have only made him appear impotent, thus giving credence to Brethren claims that Asad was unworthy to lead the Syrian people because he had failed to recapture the Golan.

There are four points worth remembering regarding Muslim Brethren activities and Asad's response between 1978 and 1982 which are pertinent to this essay. First, many Syrians believed that Asad's decision to intervene in Lebanon played into Israeli hands. Misgivings with the president's conduct contributed to the development of the crisis. Second, Asad--having made the decision to intervene--knew that he was vulnerable to accusations of being in complicity with the Israelis. Consequently, Asad tried to pre-empt criticism by reiterating his dedication to the contest with Israel. Third, the Muslim Brethren--cognizant of Israel's legitimizing function--not only tried to use anti-Israeli sentiments to further their own cause, but also sought to exploit Asad's vulnerability on Israeli issues. Fourth, Asad deliberately tried to defeat the Brethren, and engender loyalty to his regime, by relentlessly depicting the Brethren as Israeli and American stooges.

Strangely enough, the Israeli decision to invade Lebanon later in 1982 had the effect of vindicating Asad, although by the time the Israelis moved into Lebanon the Brethren's defeat was already history. Nevertheless, the invasion gave succor to Asad's regime. Not only did it dispel the notion that Asad was somehow cooperating with Jerusalem, but it also gave the Syrian army an opportunity to engage the Israelis, thereby allowing Asad to reassert his anti-Israeli credentials. The Israelis unwittingly assisted their most implacable foe.

V. THE COUNTER-ARGUMENTS

Not all of Asad's policy choices neatly fit into the paradigm described thus far. That is, some of Asad's decisions appear to contradict the thesis that his regime is dependent upon Israel as a source of legitimacy. There are three specific items which naysayers would insist debunk the argument as it has been made. They are: First, Asad's decision in 1976 to enter Lebanon. Second, Syria's participation in the international coalition opposing Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. And finally, Syria's participation in the subsequent peace process. A superficial consideration of these subjects would indeed cast a shadow of doubt over the thesis of this essay. A more penetrating treatment of these topics will, however, handily reconcile them to the reality of Israel's legitimizing function.

A. SYRIA ENTERS LEBANON IN 1976

At a glance it seems odd for Syria to enter the Lebanese civil war in 1976 on the side of the Christians if Asad were indeed dependent upon Israel as a source of legitimacy for his regime. On the surface, the invasion appeared to serve Israeli interests while it simultaneously damaged those of Syria.

To begin with, the decision to commit Syrian troops necessarily meant the diversion of troops and resources away from the Golan front facing the Israelis. Prior to 1976 the Israelis had declared that they would not countenance a Syrian incursion into Lebanon. In fact, the Israelis had gone so far to state that such a move would be considered a *casus belli*. But in 1976 Mordechai Gur, Israeli Chief of Staff, and Shlomo Gazit, Chief of Military Intelligence, had a change of heart. "Gur and Gazit argued that the entry of Syrian forces into Lebanon was not dangerous for Israel. They pointed out that the two-front deployment of the Syrian army would benefit Israel and they were convinced that Lebanon's complicated problems would divert Syrian attentions from the Golan Heights." [Ref. 133] By dividing his forces Asad appeared to be aiding and abetting the Zionist occupation of Syrian territory by weakening the Syrian position facing the Golan.

Furthermore, Syria's intervention appeared to come with US approval and Israeli encouragement. Both parties wished to see Lebanon's civil war come to an end. To facilitate Syria's intervention, the US mediated an undeclared but nevertheless very real accommodation between Israel and Syria which became known as the 1976 Red Lines agreement. Asad agreed to three conditions: The Syrian army would not enter southern Lebanon, thus giving tacit recognition to Israel's security interests there; Syrian forces would not deploy surface-to-air missile batteries; and the Syrian air force would not be used against

Lebanese Christians. Such apparent collusion with Israel, no matter how discreet, was impossible to keep from--and equally difficult to justify to--the Syrian public.

Even more difficult for Syrians to understand was Asad's decision to enter Lebanon on the side of the Christians. By moving to crush the Palestinians, Asad appeared to be doing Israel's bidding. If Asad were really interested in securing his regime's legitimacy, why would he do Israel the favor of betraying the Palestinians?

Finally, Asad also sacrificed good relations with the Soviet Union when he crossed into Lebanon. Soviet backing had long been considered necessary if Syria was to pose a serious challenge to Israel. By irritating the Soviets Asad was jeopardizing Syria's ties with the one country which could act to counterbalance Israel's patron, the United States.

Advocates of this counterargument fail to appreciate the complex nature of Asad's decision to enter Lebanon, nor do they stop to consider the possible repercussions of Asad having chosen a different course of action. Asad's decision did not boil down to a simple choice of either helping or hurting Israel. The very nature of the situation was such that whatever Asad chose to do, it would--in the short term--work to the advantage of the Israelis, and therefore be to Asad's detriment. But Asad is not shortsighted leader. If he were, he would have passed from the scene of Middle East politics long ago.

What Asad feared most of all was an Israeli invasion of Lebanon, a very real possibility in the absence of Syria's incursion. Anything less than an ephemeral Israeli presence beyond southern Lebanon would have posed a greater long term threat to Asad's regime. An unchallenged Israeli presence in Lebanon in 1976 would have humiliated Asad by underscoring Syrian impotence vis-a-vis Israel. But Asad was not ready to confront an Israeli thrust into Beirut in 1976. It should not be forgotten that Asad's highest priority was and is regime survival. Failure to confront an Israeli incursion into Lebanon would, in the long run, have triggered an even more profound crisis of legitimacy than that created by the Syrian intervention. But had he risked a confrontation with Israel in 1976 by challenging their invasion of Lebanon--had an Israeli invasion come to pass--Asad might well have endangered the very existence of his regime. It was only three years earlier that the Israeli army had stopped twenty-five miles short of Damascus. Ultimately, of course, Asad's regime was put at risk because his decision to go into Lebanon acted to re-invigorate the Muslim Brethren. The threat posed by the Brethren, however, was more difficult to anticipate; an Israeli invasion not only appeared more certain, but also more menacing. Moreover, Asad considered Lebanese-Syrian security to be indivisible. An Israeli presence in Lebanon (north of Sidon) was to be avoided at whatever cost.

Even had the Syrian people permitted Asad to stand by passively while Israeli swallowed up part of Lebanon--which they would not--Asad would have surrendered his ability to influence events in what he views as Greater Syria. If the Palestinians were to be reined in, better that he should do it than the Israelis.

Events in Lebanon would ultimately vindicate Asad's foresight and decision-making. Although the Syrian air force was humiliated, the army made a surprisingly good showing of itself in its clashes with the Israeli Defense Forces after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Moreover, Asad's adroit political maneuvering was directly responsible for the abrogation of the US-crafted Israeli-Lebanese agreement of May 17, 1983. In the long run Asad gained considerable political capital and legitimacy because of his handling of events in Lebanon. Syria's continued presence in Lebanon is vivid testimony to this reality.

Asad never abandoned Israel as a legitimizing tool when he entered Lebanon in 1976. It was inevitable that Asad's anti-Israel credentials would be tarnished to some degree, but that was bound to happen regardless of the path he chose. On the horns of a dilemma, Asad's challenge was to select the lesser of two evils, and history shows that he chose wisely.

B. SYRIA AND THE GULF CRISIS

Eight days after Saddam Hussein's tanks and armored personnel carriers had rumbled into Kuwait and made it Iraq's "nineteenth province," Syria--at a hastily called emergency Arab summit--voted, along with eleven other Arab states, to condemn the invasion, and added its voice to the world chorus demanding Iraq's unconditional withdrawal. This was not a surprising course for Syria to take, and so it drew little attention. Asad of Syria, after all, had for some time been at loggerheads with Hussein of Iraq. Each man considered himself to be in a publicity contest with the other for the leadership of the true Baath Party, and the pan-Arab movement. Asad had long sought to diminish Saddam's stature in the region, and to do so had even given Syrian support to Iran in its eight year war with Iraq. Thus, Asad was behaving in a predictable fashion when Syria condemned Saddam's invasion.

Less than a week later Asad expressly endorsed the deployment of US troops to the region--troops that would join Syrian forces promised just three days before. This announcement was not blithely overlooked by spectators of Middle East politics. More importantly, the Syrian people took notice, and they were unquestionably displeased. With the United States and Israel being inextricably linked in the Syrian mind, Asad's cooperation and *participation* in a US-led effort against an Arab state was too much for many Syrians to stomach.

This unanticipated development, some would say, robs the Israel-as-legitimizing-agent argument of its strength. It is assumed that if Asad were truly dependent upon Israel to legitimize his position, he would not have steered such a seemingly contradictory foreign policy course during the Gulf crisis and war. Instead, it is posited, Asad would have chosen to align himself against the country which underpins "Zionist imperialism," and would have cheered as Scuds rained down on Tel Aviv. Such muddled thinking oversimplifies the situation. A more careful examination of Syria's role in the Gulf Crisis actually lends credence to the argument: Closer scrutiny reveals how important opposition to the United States--Israel's ally--is to the Syrian people. And that same scrutiny also illustrates Asad's appreciation of that reality, and how that constraint fit into his calculations and maneuvering. In the end, the veracity of Israel's legitimizing function will be reinforced.

Syria is a country where public opinion stays very private. Nevertheless, Syrians were outspoken in their opposition to the deployment of the Syrian army to the Saudi peninsula. Many Syrians reacted with hostility, and in some cases violence, to the idea of Syrian troops serving alongside American troops. According to one Syrian: "We are not ready to defend American interests in the Gulf. I would rather die with honor fighting on the side of one Arab leader who dares challenge the United States." [Ref. 134] Accordingly, Asad's

decision to side with Israel's patron earned him the scorn of the Syrian public.

There were some very tangible signs of this widespread displeasure, as well as corresponding indications of insecurity among the leaders in Damascus. Posters of Asad were defaced throughout the Syrian capitol. Leaflets critical of the Syrian alliance with the US were anonymously distributed. As a result, the government barred Palestinian groups sympathetic to Iraq from circulating their literature. A BBC correspondent who reported the outbreak of riots in Syria was expelled from the country. In fact, some government authorities in Damascus quietly confided to foreign dignitaries that an estimated eighty-five percent of the Syrian public were opposed to Asad's Gulf policy. [Ref. 135] While these figures may have been exaggerated in order to make Syrian requests for Western financial assistance more persuasive, there can be little doubt that Syrian disenchantment was profound.

Why were the Syrians so upset? Several reasons for Syrian anger are pertinent, illustrative, and therefore worth enumerating. First of all, the Syrian reaction was reflexive. For decades the Syrian government had fed its citizens an unrelenting diet of anti-American and anti-Israeli propaganda. But after Iraq's invasion, that very same government had incongruously positioned Syrian troops, figuratively, shoulder-to-shoulder with the vile, pro-Zionist forces of the

US--against fellow Arabs no less! Indeed, that Asad had removed the elite 9th Armored Division from the front facing Israel along the Golan Heights, and had sent it to Saudi Arabia made Syria's participation in the international coalition that much more unpalatable.

Second, the sight of "infidel" military forces arriving in the Holy Land infuriated many Syrians, even those who did not claim to be devout Muslims: "I am not a pious Muslim, but this US military force in Saudi Arabia makes me feel deep anger." [Ref. 136] Asad's endorsement of the US presence made him an accomplice in the defilement of Islam's sacred ground.

Third, a number of Syrians expressed their opposition to their country's Gulf policy as an indirect means by which to articulate their dissatisfaction with Asad. In other words, many Syrians supported the Iraqi strongman simply because he was Asad's opponent.

Fourth, Syrians found Saddam Hussein an attractive figure because Saddam had successfully cultivated an image of himself as--at least in Syria--an Arab leader who was ready to put his army where his mouth was. On the other hand, Asad, who had not waged all-out war on Israel since 1973, was trying to discourage the idea of an imminent conflict with the Jewish state.

The government's response to the ubiquitous misgivings of the Syrian people is revealing. Asad's name in Arabic means "lion," and it is manifest that he is no kitten.

Consequently, Asad reacted aggressively to counter the undercurrent of resentment his policy had inspired. Asad waged an energetic campaign to shape the public's view on Gulf events, much in line with his oft-quoted adage that "It is not public opinion that makes government, but government that makes public opinion."

Asad directed Baath party leaders to dispatch teams throughout the country to emphasize certain points to the Syrian people. These points were: Syria--not Iraq--is the custodian of the pan-Arab ideal; Syria had deployed troops to the Saudi peninsula so that the crisis would not be exclusively in the hands of foreigners: the Syrians were not there to fight Iraq--the troop movement was strictly defensive.

More significant was a state-controlled media blitz orchestrated by Asad. The Syrian media continued to bitterly attack the US for its support of Israel. In fact, in order to satisfy the public, a dedicated anti-American campaign was launched in October. It was so successful that some Western analysts feared it foreshadowed Syria's withdrawal from the coalition.

The logic behind Asad's Gulf policy is relevant to, and supportive of, the argument proposed in this essay. Among the reasons Asad chose the policy he did was his conviction that Saddam's action threatened Asad's long-term legitimacy concerns vis-a-vis Israel. Specifically, Asad believed that

the invasion made it that much more difficult to achieve his number one foreign policy objective: the return of the Golan Heights--potentially Asad's greatest legitimacy-building device. According to former Ambassador to Syria Edward Djerjian: "Asad feels that Saddam has acted to undermine the principle of the inadmissability of the acquisition of territory by force. If that's left unanswered, it will do much to undermine the efforts of Asad to negotiate the return of the Golan." [Ref. 137] In other words, if it was acceptable for Saddam to take Kuwait by force, then it would likewise be acceptable for Israel to take territory--the Golan--in the same manner. Asad, then, had little choice but to oppose Iraq's action. Asad also believed that Saddam had recklessly jeopardized Syria's security by inviting a regional war that would likely involve Israel. Asad realized that risking his regime for the sake of building its legitimacy made no sense whatsoever.

Asad also hoped to exchange his blessing of the US presence in Saudi Arabia for a favorable negotiating position with Israel in case of post-war peace talks. In doing so Asad was sacrificing the short-term legitimacy of his regime for the prospect of long-term gains. Although the possibility of sitting down with the Israeli enemy to negotiate for the return of the Golan had its own inherent, de-legitimizing risks (as opposed to waging war to reclaim it), the prospect of eventually getting back that Syrian land is conceivably--

and paradoxically--the greatest legitimizing prize for which Asad could aspire.

Finally, Asad understood that Syria could exchange its acceptance of the US presence in the region for financial rewards which would substantively improve his military position versus Israel. Syria's greatest reward came from the Saudis who contributed \$2 billion, an enormous sum when one considers that Syrian government budget for the previous year had also been \$2 billion. The Kuwaitis promised up to \$500 million which had been withheld from Syria during the Iran-Iraq war because of Syria's support for Iran. In addition to these pledges, the Syrians worked to improve relations with the West in order to unfreeze \$150 million that was being withheld by the European Community because of Syria's sponsorship of terrorism. These monies supplemented that which Syria earned as a result of the crisis itself. Unlike most Arab countries which suffered economically from the invasion, Syria had no trade with Iraq which had to be severed; and few workers there who had to return home; because of the resultant increase in the price of oil, Syria actually made at least \$200 million in surplus profits on its daily net export of 130,000 barrels of oil during the crisis.

An alarming percentage of Syria's windfall was devoted to arms purchases. In the months after the war Syria contracted for the delivery of more than 150 North Korean Scud-C ballistic missiles at an estimated cost of \$500 million. This

purchase was apparently made specifically with the Saudi money--and with Saudi approval. T-72 tanks and Su-24 ground attack aircraft were also purchased with Syria's Gulf crisis money. Not surprisingly, Asad made no move to repay the more than \$1 billion of Syrian debt, which is in arrears, to Western lenders. These newly acquired weapons are obviously intended to strengthen Asad's hand in negotiations with the Israelis and, barring that, ultimately contribute to the forced reacquisition of Syria's Golan Heights. Thus, Asad was able to substantially improve his regime's ability to regain the Heights, and thereby solidify its legitimacy.

Overall, several lessons may be gleaned from Syrian behavior over the period of the Gulf crisis. First, the contest with Israel is a touchstone of legitimacy for the Syrian people. If a government is conducting itself in such a manner that the Syrian people sense it is surrendering an advantage to the Israelis, or squandering an opportunity to defeat the Jewish state, Syrians will articulate their displeasure even under a dictator as repressive as Asad. Second, Asad is keenly aware of Syria's political landscape, but unlike the Syrian people at large, he is guided in his decision-making by pragmatism and calculation, not passion. Third, Asad's foreign policy decisions are ultimately predicated upon how they will affect Syria's position versus Israel. Although Syria's conduct during the Gulf crisis may

have seemed extraordinary at the time, in fact it would have been surprising had Asad chosen any other route.

C. THE PEACE PROCESS

Like the Syrian invasion of Lebanon in 1976 and Syria's role in supporting the international coalition opposing Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Syria's participation in the recent peace talks would seem to contradict the notion that Asad is dependent upon perpetuating his country's contest with Israel. If that were indeed the case, it is imagined, certainly Asad would not jeopardize his position by making peace with Israel. There are a number of reasons to discard this challenge. To begin with, this idea is founded upon the false supposition that Israel and Syria define "peace" in the same terms. In reality, the peace Syria seeks is very different from that which Israel hopes to achieve. For Israel, "peace" means more than simply a state of non-belligerency. Besides removing the threat to their national security, the Israelis also seek diplomatic and commercial ties. For the Israelis, these are essential manifestations of Israel's acceptance by, and in, the Arab world. Ultimately, Israel's international legitimacy rests upon Arab endorsement of the Jewish state's right to exist. As far as the Israelis are concerned, Arab endorsement is measured in terms of diplomatic and commercial relations. The mere absence of a threat will not suffice.

Syria, on the other hand, does not appear ready to extend these privileges to Israel under any circumstances--at least not as long as Asad sits in office.

On a number of occasions [Asad] has reiterated Syria's commitment to a comprehensive peace. He has accepted U.N. Security Council Resolution 242 (subsumed in Security Council Resolution 338 of 1973) calling for peace with Israel in return for Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories. But privately he has said that the state of peace cannot include diplomatic and commercial relations with Israel because, he says, Zionism is racist. [Ref. 138]

No one should be surprised with Asad's highly conditional definition of peace; depending upon the context, the very use of the term is problematic for Asad. When attempting to put together the Madrid conference Secretary of State Baker stated that the US objective of the conference was "peace treaties" between the conflicting parties. Asad protested, however, insisting that the term "peace treaties" was unacceptable. Consequently, the term was deleted from the diplomatic lexicon leading up to the talks. [Ref. 139]

Asad is so sensitive to the particulars of language and meaning because he is ultimately encumbered by the Syrian public's reaction to talks with Israel. Unlike Egypt in the 1970s, Syria is completely devoid of any internal pressures for peace. This fact should not be misconstrued to mean that the Syrians would necessarily object to a political solution. "In certain circumstances they would perhaps be willing to accept such a solution, provided it would ensure the restoration of all Arab territories including the Golan

Heights, and provided it did not require Syrian recognition and normalization of relations with Israel." [Ref. 140] Nevertheless, Asad must appear somewhat intransigent and unwilling when it comes to talking peace, otherwise he risks provoking an internal backlash against his regime. "Syria's hard line on the Arab-Israeli dispute is not only about territory but is bound up with Asad's search for legitimacy, with his ambitions and with the survival of his government." [Ref. 141]

With this in mind, Syrian behavior during the Madrid conference makes considerable sense. The Syrians were, without question, the most uncompromising of the Arab delegations present in Madrid. Syrian rhetoric was strident and confrontational. Significantly, Syria's Foreign Minister, Farouk al-Sharaa, was the only representative who addressed the gathering in Arabic, despite the fact that he speaks excellent English. During his address, the Syrian Minister waved a "Wanted" poster of Yitzhak Shamir that had been issued by the British during the years of the mandate. Unlike other delegations, the Syrians did not exchange smiles or even handshakes with the Israelis.

Syria's demands were similarly inflexible. Farouk al-Sharaa insisted that there was nothing to discuss until the Israelis agreed to relinquish "every inch" of occupied Arab land and grant self-determination to the Palestinians. "Declaring that 'We love freedom,' and that Arabs have always

treated Jews in their land with 'grace and dignity,' the Syrian offered no hint of any softening in the virulently anti-Zionist position Damascus has long championed." [Ref. 142] Syria's position was in stark contrast to the more conciliatory tones struck by the other Arab delegations.

The Syrian delegation was also reluctant to participate in any of the bilateral discussions which followed the initial conference. Without the persuasive abilities of Secretary Baker, Syrian participation at Madrid might have come to a quick close. Although the Syrians eventually agreed to sit down with the Israeli delegation, the meeting produced no results. "Yossi Ben-Aharon of the Israeli delegation said the meeting was 'cause for much frustration' and that Syria said it would not discuss anything until Israel withdraws from annexed and occupied territories." [Ref. 143]

The intransigent nature of the Syrian position invited a good deal of criticism from the Western press. This, in turn, provoked a noteworthy reaction from the Syrian Foreign Minister: "I think the Israelis as a people desire peace. They are looking for peace. Israel is a special case where the government is more hawkish than the people. In the Arab world, it is just the opposite. We are more flexible than the Arab people." [Ref. 144] Although Sharaa's remark was tailored for the Western press, it nevertheless revealed a fundamental truth. Asad, pragmatic leader that he is, would certainly welcome some kind of modus operandi with Israel--if

the Syrian people were willing to accept it. Syria's publicly articulated positions throughout the peace process are carefully crafted insofar that they reflect two competing elements: Asad's pragmatism and his people's strong anti-Israeli stance. "If Syria's attitude towards the Arab-Israeli conflict has been based on President Asad's pragmatic assessment of what Syrians would accept, it has also been influenced by what he could hope to achieve." [Ref. 145]

Asad also makes Syrian participation in peace talks sufficiently palatable to the Syrian people by simultaneously reiterating his willingness to use force should the talks fail. His rhetoric conveniently dovetails with his desire to negotiate from a position of strength. The large post-Gulf War arms expenditures are the most visible manifestation of this strategy.

The important issue for Asad is to convey the notion of military threat to Israel. This appears to be succeeding, as most of the reports about Syria's armament programme are coming from Israel. The message is that Israel must choose between a war to destroy Syria's military threat or a peace settlement in which some key Arab demands are met. Asad evidently hopes that there will be strong enough international opposition to another war in the region and support for UN resolutions calling on Israel to withdraw from occupied territory to ensure that the peace option prevails. [Ref. 146]

Because Syria is not prepared to go to war immediately on the heels of failed peace talks--if that event should transpire--Asad will, in the interim, pointedly put the blame for the failure on Israel's doorstep. This facile demonization of Israel ultimately works to his regime's advantage.

It is impossible to know, but the breakdown of the peace talks may very well be what Asad is banking on. Should the talks fail, the "threat" that peace with Israel poses for Asad will no longer exist. It is also possible, however--and perhaps more likely--that Asad senses that the best opportunity for peace, as he defines it, is possible only by cooperating with US efforts in the region. And if those efforts fail, his cooperation with the US may assist him in compensating for that failure by undergirding alternative sources of legitimacy.

With an eye on the strategic long term, Asad has calculated that his interest in finding a new source of legitimacy for his minority Alawite regime based on Syria's civil development would be better served by securing Syria's place in the new US regional order--which the Madrid process could help shape--than by risking exclusion. [Ref. 147]

It is too early to know if this is in fact the case. For the time being, Syria's foreign policy path throughout the peace process has clearly been designed with domestic considerations in mind. To have done otherwise would have risked diminishing Asad's already tenuous credibility, and legitimacy, at home.

VI. CONCLUSION--IMPLICATIONS FOR US POLICY

The reality of Israel's legitimizing function has a significant impact on the formation of US policy choices in its relationship with Syria. These choices have been made more complex, however, by the recent changes in the international system. With the loss of its patron, the Soviet Union, Syria seems poised--if only by necessity--to engender better ties with the Western world. Should the US give Syria what it wants? Or is that even possible? If the US chooses to take a more accommodating approach with Syria, what--if anything--can the US reasonably expect in return? Policy planners must necessarily consider Israel's role in Syrian politics if they are to properly craft the answers to these important questions.

There is a related subject, however, which is all too frequently overlooked in discussions which aspire to influence the character of US-Syrian relations. Alarmingly, that subject is a rudimentary one; the primary concern in discussing it revolves around determining the merits of a long term approach versus a short-term one. That subject is Asad's succession.

A. SYRIA AFTER ASAD

Obviously US policy should not be predicated upon the assumption that Asad will remain in power indefinitely. While Asad's regime appears immune to the threat of a coup d'etat, it is much more vulnerable to the fickle nature of Asad's health. The Syrian President suffers from a number of ailments, including diabetes. In November of 1983 Asad was hospitalized for exhaustion, although some suspect it may have been for a heart problem. Asad's sedentary lifestyle, combined with an irregular diet and long work hours have taken a physical toll. Although he is only sixty-one years old, Asad's health is so poor that he could succumb at any time. This raises an important question: Will Asad's successor similarly depend upon Israel as a legitimizing agent? If not, Syria's freedom of action in Middle East affairs and US opportunities to encourage stronger ties to Syria would be simultaneously advanced with Asad's demise.

The answer is completely contingent upon who Asad's successor is. It is impossible to finger a specific individual because Asad has deliberately avoided picking anyone. Nor has he permitted any individual to position himself as a possible successor. The task of anticipating a successor has been made more difficult because Asad has "carefully rotated many of the leading Alawi officers and played them off against one another to ensure that they do not build up enough power to threaten him. But if there is no one

powerful enough to threaten him, logically there is no one powerful enough to succeed him." [Ref. 148] There is some speculation that Asad's son Basil is being groomed as a possible successor. In December of last year the thirty-two year old army major was entrusted with an official state visit to Saudi Arabia. Although Basil is well regarded in certain political circles, if Asad were to die in the very near future, it seems unlikely that his son would be adequately prepared to step into his place.

Because the upper hierarchy of the Syrian army is dominated by Alawi military officers, it is most likely that Asad's replacement will emerge from that organization. Asad's replacement need not necessarily be an individual, however. According to Alasdair Drysdale, Syria might for some time be ruled by a collective leadership of Alawi officers who would chose a Sunni officer to front for them, much like Jadid had done with Atasi in the 1960s. The likelihood that such an arrangement would persevere for any length of time seems doubtful. Eventually--and probably sooner than later--a single individual, almost certainly an Alawi, would emerge from this collective body to rule Syria. Like Asad, he too will need to legitimize his position.

Unfortunately, it is less likely that this individual will possess the political acumen of Asad. Given Syria's tradition of frequent coups prior to Asad's rise to power, Syria could be at risk of falling into this pattern once again.

Consequently, anyone who follows Asad may feel compelled to solidify his position by endearing himself to the Syrian people. A military confrontation with Israel could be the preferred means by which to accomplish this. As it is, the Syrian army leadership is much more eager to engage Israel than Asad has been. "The Syrian army demonstrates relative solidarity on issues such as the strategy of confrontation with Israel. Generally, Syrian military personnel favor greater military action and fewer concessions in the conflict with Israel." [Ref. 149] These circumstances, combined with the arsenal Asad has thus far amassed, makes a post-Asad Syria a greater menace to Israel's security.

The urgency of reaching a Syrian-Israeli accommodation before Asad passes from the scene is therefore great, but it may not be very realistic. After all, what can be done to circumvent the impediment of Israel's role in Syrian politics?

B. WHILE ASAD IS STILL AT THE HELM

Waiting for Sunni Moslems to rise up and overthrow Asad or his successor--or even encouraging it--before the US seriously tries to cultivate ties with Syria is an available policy option. A Sunni led government would be in a better position to take international political risks without alienating the Syrian people. But electing to stand passively on the sidelines and wait is a defeatist and potentially catastrophic policy choice. Moreover, Asad could conceivably live another

twenty years, or even longer. And as long as he is in power he will be able to rock the Middle East boat whenever he believes that doing so serves his interests. Most disturbing is the possibility of war if Asad senses the failure of the current peace talks. US attempts to isolate Syria might only exacerbate the situation and could provoke Asad to lash out in order to maintain Syria's relevancy. Therefore, the best course of action is to engage the Syrians if for no other reason than to avert disaster.

Despite all the good reasons for doing so, courting Asad is not without its substantive risks. Certainly his cooperation is needed to restore and maintain order in Lebanon, and an Arab-Israeli peace, however it is defined, is impossible without him. Moreover, he is a cautious politician, and when he makes agreements he can be relied upon to keep them. Nevertheless, the "Lion of Damascus" has blood on his paws, and cultivating a close relationship with him is an unsavory task for the United States. It was not long ago that cooperation with the "Butcher of Baghdad" was rationalized in similar terms.

The US must do business with Asad. On that point there can be no question. The more pertinent issues are: first, how to do it without repeating the mistakes made with Saddam Hussein and Iraq; and two, how to do it in spite of Asad's need to use Israel as a legitimizing agent.

The best long term course for the US to take would be to encourage Asad to divorce his regime's legitimacy from Israel. In its place Asad should emphasize the economical development of Syria. It has already been mentioned that economic well-being can serve as a "veritable wellspring of legitimacy." But the careful reader will also recall the caution that it would be "folly" for Asad to pursue economic goals as his primary source of legitimacy. For the better part of Syria's history under Asad this was certainly true; the Cold War and Soviet sponsorship made the idea of basing his regime's legitimacy on economic development a fool's choice. Although the Soviets were involved in some projects to improve Syria's infrastructure, this was certainly not their primary concern. In any case, the old rules no longer exist. As the shadow of the Cold War recedes, new opportunities are available to the leadership in Damascus, and Washington.

Replacing Israel with economic development as the primary source of legitimacy in Syria is, admittedly, a goal replete with shortcomings. It is enormously ambitious, perhaps idealistic. It requires consistency in foreign policy, a sometimes rare commodity in the US where political leaders are predisposed to work for the short-term gain. Measuring results is problematic, maybe impossible. After all, legitimacy is not tangible, and therefore defies calculation. Finally, long-term plans may be undone, as they are subject to the capricious politics and instabilities of the Middle East.

Nevertheless, cultivating greater concern for the economy among Syria's political leaders is no less ambitious than trying to make peace between Israel and the Arabs--indeed, it is considerably more modest--and to do the former may in fact contribute to accomplishing the latter. Making the economy instead of Israel Syria's primary legitimizing agent is a two-part proposition: First, Asad must de-emphasize Israel; second, the Syrian economy must correspondingly be revitalized. Both parts of this strategy must be implemented if it is to succeed. The economy, for example, no matter how prosperous, could never supersede Israel as a legitimizing agent as long Syrian attitudes towards Israel do not change.

To accomplish the first part of this strategy, the US must pursue two specific aims. First, the US must discourage Israeli conduct which perpetuates prevailing Syrian images of the Jewish state and its leadership. Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights in 1981, and its constant settlement activities in the occupied territories, for example, only play into Asad's hands. If the Israelis were really interested in undoing Asad's regime, more accommodating behavior might very well have the desired effect. (Of course, it is quite possible that Israel prefers that Asad be in control in Damascus. There may be a mutually dependent, legitimizing, and stabilizing relationship at work--albeit unspoken--between the hard-line regimes in Jerusalem and Damascus.) Renouncing Israel's annexation of the Golan would be a no-cost confidence

building measure--at least in terms of security--for a newly elected Israeli government to take. But such a move could only realistically be expected with a Labor party victory, and perhaps not even then given prevailing public sentiment in Israel. Although detailing specific inducements the US could offer to encourage such an Israeli move is beyond the scope of this essay, it should be noted that financial arrangements have proven useful in the past. At the same time, US resistance to the continuing settlement activity is necessary in order to rob Syria of Israel's utility as a legitimizing agent.

Second, the US must insist that the government-controlled Syrian media tone down and eventually eliminate inflammatory and strident anti-Israeli/US rhetoric; no more dedicated anti-US campaigns. Asad need not shower Israel or the US with compliments, but the government must stop demonizing Israel. Although it would be unrealistic to expect the Syrian government to rehabilitate the Syrian image of Israel or the US, the government need not encourage or provoke the articulation of anti-Israeli sentiments.

The second part of this strategy involves granting Syria a number of economic awards in return for certain behaviors which serve US interests. For example, Syrian sponsorship of terrorism has long been an impediment to US-Syrian ties. If Syria is serious about coaxing US investment, it is reasonable for the US to expect cooperation with the enforcement of UN

sanctions on Libya. In recent days the Syrian government has flirted with the possibility of ignoring the UN action. Although this may reflect Syrian complicity in the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103, ignoring the UN sanctions is unacceptable behavior and the US should accordingly convey its displeasure with the prospect of Syria flaunting them. In addition, Asad should expel those terrorist groups who presently have sanctuary within Syria. Most notably, this includes Ahmed Jibril and his Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine--General Command. In November of 1990 when President Bush met Asad in Geneva, Asad was queried about Ahmed Jibril by the American delegation. The Syrian leader was asked why he was harboring the terrorist. "Mr. Asad responded with a 'tongue in-cheek speech' about how if Mr. Jibril were extradited to the US, he would probably get out on bail, hire a high-priced defense lawyer, and if acquitted, ask for a green card." [Ref. 150] Such light-hearted side-stepping of so serious a subject is obnoxious, and the US should make it clear to Asad that progress on this issue is a prerequisite for US economic assistance.

Other US expectations should include: Eventual Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in accordance with the Taif accords; payment on the more than \$1 billion in debt to Western lenders; and the redirection of Syrian resources away from arms purchases and towards indigenous economic development, particularly for projects relating to Syria's infrastructure.

A secretly coordinated quid pro quo arrangement between Israel and Syria whereby Israel renounced its Golan annexation in return for the drawdown of some Syrian forces deployed along that front would be a way of linking some of the specific parts of this strategy together. It is not unreasonable to expect Syrian cooperation on most of these points. Most of the issues--terrorism, the Taif Accords, and repayment of debt--do not threaten Asad's legitimacy with respect to Israel.

There is another reason to approach these ambitions with optimism: After long but unremitting pressure, Asad was recently persuaded to give Syria's 4,000 Jews the right to travel abroad. This foreign policy success is demonstrative of US ability to encourage desirable Syrian behaviors.

The US is not without the means to influence Syrian behavior. Daniel Pipes detailed some of the economic "carrots" the US has at its disposal in a recent issue of *Foreign Affairs*:

Damascus remains a beneficiary of the Generalized System of Preferences, a program that allows poor countries to export manufactured goods to the United States with reduced duties, though it may fail the provisions concerning workers' rights and terrorism. The Syrians are not required to reciprocate for commercial benefits they already enjoy, particularly access to American oil fields. The Syrians seek money on the American financial markets and in American commercial investment in Syria and trade. These can be denied. In addition credits can be withheld, most-favored nation status denied and government-backed insurance refused. [Ref. 151]

In addition, the US could convince other Arab nations to assist US efforts with Syria. Specifically, the Saudis might be persuaded not to contribute to Syrian arms purchases in the future; recall that it was Saudi money which subsidized the purchase of Scud missiles for Syria after the Gulf War.

This strategy is not without its risks for all parties involved. But diplomatic rewards are rarely forthcoming in the Middle East in the absence of risk. Unfortunately, the most laudable of US goals--a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace--is unattainable without certain changes in the political landscape of the region. One of the features that must be changed is Israel's legitimizing function in Syrian politics. Altering that feature of the political landscape will take time, patience, and unremitting effort. But without that change, a lasting and true peace will remain elusive.

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