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# Syria's Negotiations With Israel

Lieutenant Colonel  
John T. Wigington  
U. S. Air Force

*Faculty Research Advisor*  
Dr. C. Richard Nelson

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ABSTRACT FOR  
SYRIA'S NEGOTIATIONS WITH ISRAEL

by

Lt Col John T. Wigington III

This research project is in the form of a draft National Intelligence Estimate and assesses the Syrian negotiating positions in the on-going Middle East peace talks, which the United States is sponsoring and participating in as a facilitator. It covers the period through April 1993 and considers the recent trends in Syrian policy and the domestic and external elements which influence the stance Syria takes on key negotiating issues. The Estimate identifies key issues for Syria in negotiations with Israel and anticipates the positions the Syrians may accept on particular issues.

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# **Syria's Negotiations With Israel**

**Lieutenant Colonel  
John T. Wigington  
U. S. Air Force**

*Faculty Research Advisor*  
**Dr. C. Richard Nelson**



**The Industrial College of the Armed Forces  
National Defense University  
Fort McNair, Washington, D.C. 20319-6000**

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## SCOPE NOTES

This draft Estimate is in the form of an Intelligence Community assessment of the Syrian negotiating positions in the on-going Middle East peace talks, which the United States is sponsoring and participating in as a facilitator. It covers the period through April 1993 and considers the recent trends in Syrian policy and the domestic and external elements which influence the stance Syria takes on key negotiating issues. The Estimate identifies key issues for Syria in negotiations with Israel and anticipates the positions the Syrians may accept on particular issues. However, the Estimate does not review the specific approach which the Syrian delegation may take when negotiating each issue.

This Estimate is based on unclassified, open source information.

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## KEY JUDGMENTS

The Intelligence Community believes that Syria wants to achieve a negotiated settlement to end the years of hostility between Israel and Syria and to end the threat of Israeli military operations against Syria. This is a major reversal of a Syrian foreign policy position established after the Camp David Accords in 1979. The peace process will be slow, probably showing little results in 1992 because of the difficult issues, the strong emotional views held by the Syrians and the Israelis, and the US and Israeli elections in 1992. Although President Hafez al-Assad will be frustrated at times, Syria will likely continue to participate in the peace talks.

Because of domestic political constraints, it is unlikely that Syria would sign a separate peace with Israel. If Syria and Israel reach agreement, Assad would not formally sign a peace treaty until Lebanon, Jordan, and the Palestinians are also ready to sign. This policy of "no separate peace" is a key element in Assad's strategy. He fears that if another Arab participant makes a separate peace with Israel, Syria's negotiating position will be greatly weakened.

From the Syrian perspective, the major issues to be settled in the peace process are the return of the Golan Heights, political autonomy for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the removal of Israeli military forces from Lebanon. The likely Syrian positions are as follows:

--Syria will settle for nothing less than return of the Golan Heights with recognition of Syrian sovereignty. Syria will probably accept a demilitarized zone in the Golan and United Nations peacekeeping forces to patrol the area. Also, Syria will likely agree to a water sharing plan which

provides water to Israel as long as the plan also assures adequate water resources for Syrians in the Golan Heights. If Israeli settlers remain in the Golan, Syria will want them to be subject to all Syrian laws.

--Syria probably will not take a hard line demanding the formation of an independent Palestinian state. Instead, Syria will support an arrangement between the Palestinians and Israel, as long as it is generally acceptable to mainstream Palestinians. However, Syria doesn't want an autonomous West Bank and Gaza Strip to evolve into a Palestinian state encompassing Jordan because of the potential impact the Palestinians could have on Syrian domestic issues.

--Under Syrian guidance, Lebanon probably will not sign an agreement with Israel unless it results in the withdrawal of Israeli troops from south Lebanon. Depending on the stability of the Lebanese government, Syria may be willing to withdraw its forces simultaneously with an Israeli withdrawal. However, Syria will insist that Lebanon not sign a formal peace treaty with Israel until the other participants were ready to do so.

To reach these objectives through the peace process, the Syrian delegation will base its negotiating arguments on United Nations resolutions and international law. Assad will use all possible leverage over Israel: the most significant leverage is US influence on Israel.

Syria likely will delay discussions on key substantive issues until after the US and Israeli elections are over--in the belief that a newly elected Israeli government may be more flexible in agreeing to the Syrian position and the US administration may be able to exert more pressure on Israel to accept the Syrian negotiating position.

Although Syria probably will not participate in the third phase of the peace process dealing with regional issues until substantial progress has been



made in the bilateral talks, Syria stands to benefit from agreements on several issues. Once Syria has achieved its objectives by using its military strength for negotiating leverage in the bilateral talks, Syria likely would agree to regional arms control.

Assad views the negotiations as a win-win situation. Thus, Syria is unlikely to be the first participant to drop out of the talks because Assad wants to paint Israel as the "spoiler" if the current efforts fail to achieve peace. If Israel backs out of the talks, Syria hopes that Israel will jeopardize its relations with the United States and much of the world.

Syria will emerge from the peace talks, whether the talks fail or succeed, with greater political influence in the Middle East. Assad has ended the isolation policies of the 1980's and is now a major participant in important Middle East issues. Syria's relative military strength and its leadership of the Arab cause in the negotiations will give Syria greater influence in Arab political circles.

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## DISCUSSION

### INTRODUCTION

In a significant breakthrough, the October 1991 Madrid Peace Conference signaled the start of face-to-face talks between the antagonists in the decades old Arab-Israeli dispute. In Madrid, each Middle East participant--Israel, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan--presented its initial negotiating points for the world's television cameras. The second phase of the peace process got underway in Washington DC in December 1991 with much less fanfare. There, the negotiators met to talk with one another rather than to address their home audiences through the world electronic media.

Of the Arab participants, Syria is the most influential, stemming from its strong military posture, its influence in Lebanese politics, and its potential influence on Jordan and the Palestinians. Since the Camp David Accords of 1979, Syrian President Hafez al-Assad has attempted to control whether the Arabs made peace or continued conflict with Israel. During the 1980's, Assad rejected negotiations with Israel. But to further Syrian interest and to strengthen his regime, Assad shifted his position on negotiations and is participating in the peace process.

This Estimate will focus on Syrian negotiations in the Middle East peace process and will examine the following points:

- The strategic shift that brought Syria to the conference table
- Domestic and external factors that frame Syria's negotiating position
- Syria's negotiating objectives and positions on the key issues
- Implications of the negotiations for the United States
- Possible events that could affect Syria's negotiations.

## SYRIAN POLICY SHIFTS WHICH LED TO MADRID

Syria came to the peace table only after major shifts in the long-stated position of rejecting negotiations. Syria, a member of the Rejectionist Front throughout the 1970's and 1980's, took a hard line against negotiations with Israel. The following initial Syrian positions were unacceptable to Israel and ensured that talks would not occur:

- No peace talks until Israel returns to pre-1967 borders
- No partial solutions or separate peace
- No direct bilateral talks with Israel
- No formal peace treaty.<sup>1</sup>

During the period of 1989-91, Syria changed its position on several key procedural issues which previously blocked the start of peace negotiations. Syria dropped the condition that Israel withdraw from Syrian territory in the Golan Heights before the talks could begin. Instead, Syria demanded an Israeli commitment to the principle of exchanging land for peace and explicit recognition of United Nations (UN) Resolution 242\* as it applies to the Golan Heights.<sup>2</sup> However, Israel refused to accept UN Resolution 242 as the basis for negotiations. In 1990, Assad said Syria would attend an international peace conference in which the UN had an active role. However, Syria accepted the current peace conference format which includes the UN only as an observer. Also, Syria modified its condition of no direct bilateral talks with the Israelis by accepting the structure of the second phase of the talks--

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\*UN Security Council Resolution 242, November 22, 1967, calls for the "Withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict . . . for achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem . . . [and] for guaranteeing the territorial inviolability and political independence of every State in the area, through measures including the establishment of demilitarized zones. . ."

simultaneous, bilateral talks between Israel and each Arab delegation.

The major shift in Syria's stance on negotiations resulted from a significant change in Assad's perception of Syria's domestic and international situation.

#### Catalysts for Syria's Foreign Policy Shift

Three critical factors were the catalysts for the change in Assad's view of the domestic and international environment:

- The loss of Syria's Soviet patron
- The realization that Israel would continue to exist as a state
- The weakening Syrian economy.

These factors led Assad to seek closer relations with the West and become an active and accepted participant in world politics. They will continue to influence Syria's foreign policy and the negotiations in the current peace process.

Demise of the Soviet Union. Assad relied on the Soviet Union to support his regime. Soviet aid helped Assad remain in power by providing an economic base which kept the Sunni Moslem majority relatively satisfied and by enabling Assad to build a strong, loyal military to ensure internal as well as external security. The aid enabled Assad to weather political isolation in the Arab world resulting from the following controversial Syrian policies:

- Support of Iran in the Iran-Iraq war
- Refusal to support the PLO
- Military involvement in Lebanon
- Opposition to the moderate regimes in the Middle East.

Also, Assad and his military commanders believed that the Syrian-Soviet Treaty

of Friendship, signed in 1980, provided a guarantee of protection from Israeli aggression.<sup>3</sup>

With the start of the transformation in the Eastern Bloc, Assad realized that he could no longer depend on Soviet support. The Soviet Union, with its bankrupt economic system, was attempting to convert to a market economy and was in no position to provide economic assistance to Syria. Soviet arms shipments to Syria dropped 50 percent between 1985 and 1989.<sup>4</sup> When Syria attempted to buy arms from the Soviet Union, the Soviets demanded that all payments for the weapons be in hard currency, which was beyond Syria's financial means. Assad faced the possible deterioration of his military capability because he could not purchase the Soviet spare parts to maintain the desired readiness levels.

With the Soviet Union no longer in a position to provide a political and military deterrent to an Israeli attack and the prospect of a weakening military capability relative to Israel, the idea of a negotiated settlement with Israel became more appealing to Assad.

Realities of the Israeli State. Many Arabs, including Assad, who had long refused to recognize the State of Israel now realize that they must deal with Israel as a member of the community of nations. They hoped Palestine could be returned to the rightful Arab owners, ending the decades-old conflict between Arabs and Israelis. Assad hoped to achieve Syrian policy objectives through strength and without recognizing the existence of Israel. But upon recognition of the political realities of Israel, Assad changed his strategy.

Assad hoped to achieve a form of parity with Israel which would allow him to confront Israel. This unspecified parity was most easily quantifiable as the balance of military arms, but parity also included world public opinion

and the diplomatic potential of the Arab world vis-a-vis Israel.<sup>5</sup> The potential loss of the numerical advantage in conventional arms which Syria held over Israel signalled to Assad that his goal of parity with Israel was slipping out of reach. In a broader comparison of the Arab-Israeli military balance, Israel continued to gain military strength, as noted in the following table, decreasing Arab military advantages in key measures of combat power.

**TABLE 1                      COMPARISON OF ARAB-ISRAELI MILITARY COMBAT POWER<sup>6</sup>**

	<u>1983</u>	<u>Ratio</u>	<u>1986/7</u>	<u>Ratio</u>
ARMY FORCES				
<u>Total Personnel</u>				
Arab	1,653,000	3.75:1	1,555,000	3.5:1
Israel	440,000		440,000	
<u>Divisions</u>				
Arab	27	2.45:1	26	2.2:1
Israel	11		12	
<u>Tanks</u>				
Arab	9,860	2.73:1	8,205	2.1:1
Israel	3,600		3,790	
<u>Mortars &amp; Guns</u>				
Arab	7,115	7.1:1	5,500	5:1
Israel	1,000		1,200	
AIR FORCES				
<u>Interceptors (high quality)</u>				
Arab	100	2.5:1	210	1.2:1
Israel	40		173	
<u>Strike/multi-role</u>				
Arab	1180	1.87:1	662	1.3:1
Israel	630		509	

	<u>1983</u>	<u>Ratio</u>	<u>1986/7</u>	<u>Ratio</u>
Attack Helicopter				
Arab	215	5.1:1	239	3.1
Israel	42		77	

The 1991 Persian Gulf War also affected Assad's view of the military equation with Israel. First, he saw that the United States was firmly committed to the security of Israel as evidenced by the rapid deployment of Patriot missile batteries to Israel, along with the US forces needed to operate them. Second, Assad and his military saw first hand the effectiveness of US weapon systems--which make up the majority of Israeli armaments.

Assad also began to realize that Israel was not vulnerable to low intensity conflict waged within areas controlled by the Israeli government. The "intifada," or Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and Gaza against the Israeli occupation, shifted the threat to Israel from the surrounding Arab states to the Palestinians in the occupied territory. But, the intifada did not become a serious threat to Israel. The world-wide attention which the intifada brought the Palestinian cause ended when the Palestinians supported Iraqi SCUD attacks on Israel during the 1991 Gulf War. Although the intifada did raise the awareness of the world community and many Israelis concerning the plight of the Palestinians, that awareness did not lead to any dramatic changes in Israel policy. Thus, the intifada was not a viable alternative to conventional conflict and neither could be realistically considered as Arab options against Israel.

In the past, the Arabs believed that time was on their side--that demographics in Israel would eventually bring about political changes which would lead to solutions to Arab-Israeli problems. The Jewish majority makes



up 60 percent of the population in Israel and the occupied territory. Because of the higher Palestinian birthrates, estimates indicate that Jews would no longer be a majority early in the next century.<sup>7</sup> However, with the influx of Soviet Jews into Israel, the demographic projections began changing. In January 1989, 250 Soviet Jews immigrated to Israel; in April 1990, 10,000 Jews immigrated; and 35,000 Jews arrived in Israel in December 1990.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the Arabs began to realize that the Arab population may never outnumber the Jews living in Israel.

With the influx of Soviet Jewish immigrants, the Israelis stepped up the construction of settlements on the Golan Heights. Israel annexed the Golan Heights in 1981 and the government plans to double the Israeli population there to 24,000.<sup>9</sup> Syria fears that more settlements will solidify the Israeli claim to the land and complicate future efforts to regain the Golan Heights.

With military action no longer a viable option and time no longer on the Arab side, Assad realized that Israel's existence could no longer be threatened. Thus, he sought another strategy to achieve his ends--diplomacy.

Economic Weakness. While Assad saw the military and political setbacks blocking achievement of his foreign policy objectives, he realized that his Achilles' heel was the Syrian economy. If faced with economic hardship, the Syrian population could become discontent and threaten his regime. The economic problems of the late 1980's were a major catalyst for the policy shifts toward the West.

In the 1980's, the Syrian economy became dependent on commercial ties to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. For example, 29.7 percent of Syria's exports went to the Soviet Union in 1986 and by 1990 that figure had jumped to 44.3 percent of the exports.<sup>10</sup> As the communist economies began to falter,

the Syria economy also was affected.

During the 1987-89 period, the Syrian economy stagnated with the growth of the gross domestic product (GDP) averaging less than one percent a year.<sup>11</sup> Once a food exporting country, Syria had to import food, primarily grains. For example, the 1989 drought forced Syria to import 1.6 million tons of cereals during the 1989/90 agricultural season. The cost of living for the Syrians rose by an estimated 25 percent in 1990.<sup>12</sup> State owned factories were running at 40 percent of capacity because Syria had no hard currency to buy spare parts to keep the plants in production.<sup>13</sup>

Syria was a debtor nation, by 1990 owing at least \$5 billion to Western nations and \$14-15 billion to Eastern Bloc countries.<sup>14</sup> Assad depended on external sources of funds to make payments on the debts. But, in 1989, Syria experienced a significant decline in foreign aid receipts. The net official aid Syria received in 1989 was 64 percent below the previous year. Although reductions in Soviet aid did hurt Syria, the greatest impact was the sharp drop in subsidies from the Arab Gulf states. The ten-year Baghdad agreement, under which Syria received aid from Arab donors for its position as a frontline state with Israel, terminated at the end of 1988.<sup>15</sup>

Recognizing the weaknesses in the Syrian economy and the dependence on foreign aid, Assad understood that short- and long-term remedies were needed. Specifically, Syria needed an infusion of capital and outside aid to develop commerce and industry.<sup>16</sup> To secure that aid, Assad realized that he would have to end his isolation within the Arab world, particularly with the moderate regimes, and move away from the Soviet bloc toward the West. The European and Arab Gulf financial sources of aid and investment were influenced by Washington. Thus, better relations with the United States became a

financial necessity, which could lead to international investment and increased financial support from the Gulf states.

#### End of Isolation and Shift Toward the West

Evidence of the gradual shift in Syrian foreign policy began appearing in 1989 and has continued since, indicating that Syria has made a strategic shift in its foreign policy. Early examples of Syria's shift included:

- Reestablishing full diplomatic relations with Egypt and Britain

- Reducing anti-western propaganda

- Stopping support of terrorist attacks against Western targets and removing its terrorist mastermind from his military intelligence position.<sup>17</sup>

Assad's most notable shift toward the West was when he joined the United States-led coalition of nations against Iraq. Syrian support helped to legitimize the coalition efforts within the Arab world, making it harder for Saddam Husayn to disparage the Arab partners as stooges of the United States.

For his participation, Assad did reap several benefits. The states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) provided Syria with over \$2 billion in aid, Japan loaned Syria \$500 million, and the European Community contributed \$200 million to Syria. The increase in the price of oil also provided Syria with a \$200 million windfall from its modest oil production.<sup>18</sup>

Politically, participation in DESERT STORM signaled the end of Syrian isolation. In September 1990, Presidents Bush and Assad met to discuss a wide range of issues. Following this meeting, Syrian spokesmen indicated that the United States and Syria have interests in common. Assad left the meeting feeling that the United States acknowledges Syria's role in the Middle East, understands the Syrian position better, and would be more evenhanded in

dealing with Middle East issues.<sup>19</sup> Although President Bush did not change Assad's views on the fundamental issues, President Bush and Secretary Baker won a measure of Assad's confidence.<sup>20</sup>

Since the conclusion of DESERT STORM, Syria has continued to shift toward the West and to improve its image. As recently as December 1991, Assad reportedly pardoned 2,864 people who had carried out acts against the state.<sup>21</sup> Syria worked with Iran to pressure the terrorists in Lebanon who held the Western hostages to release the remaining US hostages. The hostages were released and the bodies of two US hostages, who were killed while in captivity, were returned. In return for its efforts in the hostage situation, Syria hopes that the United States will remove Syria from the list of states that harbor and encourage terrorist activities. If Syria is dropped from that list, it will open the door for increased US aid and improved financial relations.

The shift in Syrian policy on peace negotiations began in 1990 when Assad told former President Carter that he was willing to talk to the Israelis under certain conditions. With the improvement in US-Syrian relations, Assad believed that the United States would take an objective view of Arab-Israeli issues. Assad's confidence in President Bush and Secretary Baker was an important factor in bringing Syria to the peace talks. Also, Assad had seen the enforcement of UN resolutions against Iraq and it raised his hopes that international pressure could be put on Israel to follow UN Resolution 242.<sup>22</sup>

#### MAJOR INFLUENCES ON SYRIA'S NEGOTIATING POLICIES

A country's negotiating policies are often influenced by domestic and international factors. Although President Assad is the single most important

determinant of Syria's negotiating policies, there are many constraints placed on his decision-making latitude. He must consider several elements within his government as he determines Syria's negotiating objectives and positions. He must also consider the reactions of several groups within society, whose potential reactions to the negotiations can limit Syria's negotiating position.

Beyond the domestic factors, Syria's negotiating positions will be influenced by its relations with and perceptions of the other participants in the talks--Israel, Lebanon, the Palestinians, Jordan, and the United States as the principal co-sponsor and moderator.

#### Domestic Factors

President Assad. Assad's personal perceptions and overall policy thrust will greatly impact the Syrian negotiating position. He is noted for making harsh verbal attacks on Israel, which would lead one to believe that Syria will never come to peaceful terms with Israel. However, he takes a pragmatic position on most issues, leaving open the possibility of changes in policies. It was this pragmatism which enabled Assad to make the policy shift resulting in Syrian participation in the Madrid peace conference.

Assad will make the key decisions, giving the Syrian negotiating team little leeway at the conference table. An expert at brinkmanship, Assad is a tough negotiator who strives to exact the last available concession from the other side.<sup>23</sup> He will use his skill at political maneuvering which he honed while maintaining his domestic political power even though he is a member of a minority sect. Even though Syria depends on others for military support and financial aid, Assad is not easily influenced or manipulated by his major

benefactors.<sup>24</sup> As a result, the peace talks will likely continue to be drawn out negotiations.

Institutional Influences. Assad built his regime around three institutions--the Baath Party, the military, and the government bureaucracy--all of which he closely controls. He sits at the apex of power, using a series of checks and balances between the three institutions to prevent any one from consolidating power against him. His trusted advisors in each of the institutions, most of whom are from his Alawite sect, keep him attuned to his various constituency groups and consult with him in the decision-making process. Assad expects his advisors to demonstrate individual loyalty to him and to his presidency.

Although clearly in a position to dictate his decisions, Assad normally consults with those advisors who will be affected by an important decision. Through this consultation, Assad assesses the positions of the various political actors and the degree of support for what he wants to do. Recently, he established a more formal process with the consultative links through the National Front.<sup>25</sup>

As an Air Force officer who gained power through a military coup, Assad pays particular attention to the Syrian military to ensure its continued support. Assad relies on Alawites loyal to him to command key combat units. Also, he moves commands and officers around to prevent an officer or group of officers from developing a power base. Through an effective intelligence network within the officer corps, he is quickly alerted to discontent and potential trouble. Assad protects his power base by increasing the pay, benefits, and prestige of the officer corps. Through defense spending, he has sought to keep the military happy by increasing the size of the armed forces

(as indicated in Table 2 below) and the sophistication of its weapons systems. For example, in March 1991, Assad reportedly used \$2 billion received from GCC states to buy SCUD missiles from North Korea and T-72 tanks from Czechoslovakia.<sup>26</sup>

TABLE 2 SYRIAN MILITARY MANPOWER<sup>27</sup>

<u>Year</u>	<u>Active Duty</u>	<u>Reserves</u>
1967	80,000	--
1977	227,000	102,000
1985	500,000	340,000

Even with his controls on the Baath party, the military and the bureaucracy, Assad is unlikely to conclude an agreement contrary to the beliefs of those in the institutions which support him. Through consultations with these groups, Assad shapes the boundaries of the Syrian negotiating position. The military and the Baath Party will advise Assad to settle with the Israelis only if they return the Golan Heights. The military views the Golan Heights issue from the standpoint of a military threat to Damascus. Israeli forces are less than 50 miles from Damascus and the terrain provides a direct avenue of approach to the Syrian capital. The Baath Party views the Golan issue from the party's long held anti-Israeli position and the party's pan-Arab philosophy.

Potential Dissent Elements of Society. Although the Syrian public doesn't often oppose the regime, the seeds of dissent are present. The Sunni majority and the Palestinian refugees are not part of the consultative process, but Assad likely considers their views because of the potential for

these groups to raise dissent within society. Through his institutional support, Assad will try to influence the thinking of the Syrian population to prevent public opposition to the Syrian negotiating position.

One of the strengths of the Assad regime--his link to the Alawites--is also a potential weakness. The Alawites make up only 12 percent of the Syrian population and the Sunni Moslem majority resent the Alawite control of the government.

Another irritant for the Sunni majority is the government's secular policy which doesn't recognize Islam as the state religion.<sup>28</sup> Religious leaders and the Moslem Brotherhood\* believe the Baath Party and Assad use the secularization to reduce the power and authority of Islam.

Assad further alienated the Sunni Moslem majority by undertaking a military operation against Moslem fundamentalists in the city of Hama. Between 1979 and 1982, the Moslem Brotherhood played upon poor economic conditions and the Sunni's rejection of Assad's isolationist policy within the Arab World to stir up political opposition to the Assad regime which was the most serious threat to the regime to date. In 1982, Assad crushed the Moslem Brotherhood's rebellion through military action which destroyed parts of Hama and killed 10,000 to 30,000 people.<sup>29</sup> The memory of Hama remains in the minds of those who oppose the Assad regime.

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\*The Moslem Brotherhood is a Sunni fundamental, anti-government movement which opposed the Assad regime because of its sectarian favoritism. The Brotherhood membership was drawn from urban Sunni youth and reportedly received financial support from private sources in Saudi Arabia, the Persian Gulf countries, and Iran. In the 1960's and 1970's, the Moslem Brotherhood may have received weapons smuggled from Iraq and Lebanon and training from the PLO.



Recently, Assad worked to gain the support of the Sunni landowners, businessmen, and merchants, by relaxing some of the socialist economic restrictions of earlier Baath regimes, such as centralized planning and regulation of commercial transactions.<sup>30</sup> Also, he reaches out to the Sunnis by avoiding controversial domestic issues and he stresses foreign policy issues that are of interest to the Sunnis.

The Palestinians, numbering about 500,000 or 4 percent of the Syrian population, are another potentially divisive group within Syria. They would reject any Syrian attempts to make a separate peace with Israel--leaving unresolved the Palestinian issues concerning the occupied territory and the refugees who live throughout the Arab world.

Based on a common history and a sense of shared injustice, there is a bond between the Palestinians and the Syrians. Palestinians serve in the Syrian military and the government. They have access to schools and jobs and have equal rights under Syrian law. As an interest group within Syria, the Palestinians can produce strong sentiments in the Syrian population which sympathize with their cause.<sup>31</sup>

The refugees have not created problems for Assad because Syria was instrumental in the formation of the Palestinian resistance movement, and provides military and political support. However, 100,000 Palestinians who moved into Syria from southern Lebanon because of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon have more militant political views on Palestinian issues, than earlier refugees who are more fully integrated into Syrian life.<sup>32</sup> If the regime takes a position viewed to be detrimental to the Palestinian cause, the refugee population could become a problem for the Assad government.

Several Palestinian terror organizations are based in Syria, such as the

Palestine Front for the Liberation of Palestine--General Command, and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Although the Syrian government has kept a tight reign on the terrorist activities in Syria and the Syrian occupied areas of Lebanon, the groups could attempt to abort an agreement through terrorist activities outside of Syria.

It is difficult to get information on the public mood inside Syria. However, given past opposition to negotiating with the Israelis, it is likely that many of the Sunni majority may disagree with Assad's decision to enter the peace talks. But, unlike the public outcry against the Syrian participation in the coalition operations against Iraq,\* there has been no reporting of public opposition to the talks.<sup>33</sup>

Assad may limit the range of options he would accept in the peace negotiations to ensure that the Sunni Moslem and Palestinian populations don't vocally oppose the outcome of the talks. However, it appears that government public relations efforts have reduced the likelihood of a public outcry against the peace talks. In the press accounts of the negotiations and the positions taken by the government, Syria is portrayed as being in diplomatic combat with Israel, with the negotiators being fighters rather than capitulators.<sup>34</sup> The regime's ability to influence public sentiment about the peace talks and to keep dissent to a minimum will give Assad greater negotiating flexibility.

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\*The Wall Street Journal, Sept 27, 1990, p. A1+, reported that a BBC correspondent was expelled from Syria for reporting rumored riots against Syria's involvement in the coalition against Iraq. Daniel Pipes (p. 44) reported 50,000 Syria troops were deployed within Syria to prevent demonstrations during the Gulf War.

### External Factors

The perceptions of the other participants in the peace talks and Syria's relations with them will influence the positions the Syrians take on the various issues at the peace negotiations. Syria's view of Israel has a significant impact on Syrian policy and negotiating position. The allies in the talks--Lebanon, Jordan, and the Palestinians--will influence Syria's position; but, more importantly, Syria will try to influence the other Arabs to support Syrian national interest. Also, the Syrian perception of the US as the mediator and co-sponsor of the talks will influence the Syrian approach to the talks. Known external events--specifically the elections in the US and in Israel--may have an impact on the Syrian negotiations.

Israel. After over four decades of conflict, Syrians continue to view Israel as the primary enemy and have an intense hatred of Israel.<sup>35</sup> This perception will continue to be a key factor in Syria's approach to the negotiations. Syria sees Israel as:

--An expansionist power. Israel claims territory beyond its internationally recognized borders. Israel gives all Jews rights as Israeli citizens and encourages Jews to immigrate to Israel. The eviction of Arabs from their homes in Jerusalem and establishment of settlements in the occupied Arab lands is concrete evidence of Israel's expansionist policy.

--A racist country. The Israelis ignore Palestinian history, the Palestinian claim to their homeland, and Palestinian right to be considered a distinct culture.

--Violators of international law. Israel disregards world opinion and resolutions passed by the United Nations by refusing to return lands taken through armed conflict.<sup>36</sup>

--Unwilling negotiators. Israel will not negotiate in good faith with the Arabs and is pursuing a strategy to negotiate separate peace agreements which will weaken the Arabs as a group. Israel wants to avoid making concessions to the Arabs and is unlikely to give up the Golan Heights unless forced to by overwhelming diplomatic pressure.<sup>37</sup>

Based on the Syrian view of Israel, the Syrian delegation will conduct prolonged, difficult negotiations with Israel, giving little ground on the key issues.

Lebanon. Lebanon is of strategic importance to Syria, particularly because of the Israeli military occupation in southern Lebanon. Syria has three primary interests in Lebanon:

--Removal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon and a break in the Israeli ties to the Maronite Christians

--Stability resulting in establishment of a strong central government authority

--A friendly government that follows policies that are compatible with Syria's policies.

The Israeli occupation remains a flash point for potential miscalculation between Israel and Syria and the Israeli presence radicalizes the Lebanese Shia Moslems, who could become a threat to Syria.<sup>38</sup> A weak Lebanon provides Israel with a route to outflank Syria's main defense line along the Golan Heights.<sup>39</sup> Syria will push to have the Israeli forces withdraw from south Lebanon, if possible without a simultaneous withdrawal of Syrian troops. However, given Israel's stated demand that Syria withdraw from Lebanon first, it appears that withdrawals may only occur if a stable Lebanese government can control the various factions in the country, including the

Palestinians, and if a coordinated withdrawal of Israeli and Syrian troops can be negotiated.

Syrian relations and military involvement in Lebanon during the last 15 years were based on Assad's belief that a fragmented Lebanon or a Lebanon friendly to Israel was a great danger to Syria.<sup>40</sup> Both countries have numerous minority sects and religious groups. Assad has relied on a secular government to control the potential for religious conflict and to maintain his minority-led regime in power. Fear of Lebanon's instability spilling over into Syria has been the basis for much of Syria's relations with Lebanon.

Syria plays an important role in the political life of Lebanon, as evidenced by the "Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation, and Coordination" signed by Lebanon and Syria on May 22, 1991. The treaty reflects a Syrian defensive attitude, rather than one of dominating Lebanon. The treaty states:

Lebanon will not allow itself to become a transit point or base for any force, state, or organization that seeks to undermine its security or that of Syria. Syria, which cherishes Lebanon's security, independence, and unity . . . will not allow any action that threatens Lebanon's security, independence, and sovereignty.<sup>41</sup>

The first Syrian recognition of Lebanon's independence, the treaty calls for close coordination between Lebanon and Syria on regional and international issues. A Foreign Affairs Committee made up of the two foreign ministers was formed as the basis for that cooperation.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, the treaty and the Syrian presence in Lebanon will give Assad great influence on Lebanese foreign relations, to include the negotiations with Israel. At Syrian insistence, Lebanon is unlikely to sign a separate peace treaty with Israel but would sign a treaty once all Arab participants have reached agreement with Israel.

Jordan. As the dominant party in Syrian-Jordanian relations, Assad will

be able to exert influence on King Hussein to ensure that the Jordanian negotiating position doesn't conflict with Syrian interest in the region.

Historically, there have been close links between Syria and Jordan. Because of political and geographic factors, Syria has dominated relations between the two countries. Without an outlet to the Mediterranean Sea, much of Jordan's trade and travel to Europe passed through Syrian territory or air space, increasing Jordan's dependence on Syria. When Jordan was cut off from Iraqi oil as a result of DESERT STORM, King Hussein turned to Syria for oil, with the first shipment arriving in March 1991.<sup>43</sup>

However, the Syrian and Jordanian regimes also have had their differences, which led to several Syrian-sponsored coup attempts, the massing of Syrian troops along the border on four occasions, and the 1970 Syrian invasion of Jordan.<sup>44</sup> Jordan's fear of Syria's military power has been a dominant factor in the relations between the two countries. The differences in recent years have revolved around Arab-Israeli issues, Jordanian relations with the Palestinians, and the willingness of Jordan to negotiate with Israel. Now that Assad's strategic thinking has shifted and Syria has entered the peace process, Syria and Jordan now share similar views of Israel and on Palestinian issues.

Jordan entered the peace talks with the position that a Palestinian West Bank and Gaza could not become part of a Jordan confederation. Given Syria's concern with the Palestinian potential for destabilizing the region and Syrian domestic politics, Assad would likely prefer that Jordan not become a Palestinian state and will encourage Jordan to maintain its separation from the occupied territory throughout the negotiations.<sup>45</sup>

Palestinians. Because of the strong psychological links between the

Syrian and Palestinian peoples, Assad will support the Palestinians in their negotiations with the Israelis. Although, Syria will have little direct influence on the Palestinian delegation's negotiating positions, Syria will maintain solidarity with the Palestinians, refusing to accept a separate peace with Israel.

The Palestinian negotiators at the peace conference are not formally members of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO); however, there is an informal link between the delegates and the PLO and the delegates are attuned to the views of the PLO. Syria's relationship with the PLO has been rocky--ranging from full support to direct combat in Lebanon. Many of the rifts between the PLO and Syria arise from Syria's desire to control the PLO, which conflicts with the PLO's fierce sense of independence. Relations between Syria and the PLO have improved and Yasir Arafat and Assad met several times in 1991 to forge an Arab/Palestinian negotiating front for the talks with Israel. However, the Palestinian delegation will exercise its independence but cooperate with Syria when it is to their advantage. The West Bank and Gaza Palestinians are not dependent on Syria and they realize that Assad pursues Syrian interest regardless of his supportive rhetoric.

United States. Syria will work to keep the United States involved as a mediator and to keep the talks in a location which will make it easier for the United States to exert influence on Israel. During the negotiations, Syria will continue to take a hard line position on the critical key issues, basing its position on international law and UN resolutions, and then expect the United States to push Israel toward the Syrian position.

The United States played a critical role in the start of the peace process. Assad entered the peace process because he believed that the United

States was taking a more evenhanded approach to Middle East issues. Although the United States has not assured the Syrians that the UN resolutions will be implemented, Secretary of State Baker's personal diplomatic efforts before the Madrid Conference led Assad to believe that the United States supports the implementation of UN Resolutions 242, rejects the Israeli settlement policy, and does not recognize the Israeli annexation of the Golan Heights.<sup>46</sup>

Syria's perception of the US role and US-Syrian relations will likely shape the negotiating tactics which the Syrian delegation uses to achieve its objectives. Given the image which Assad holds of Israel, he believes that an active US role in the peace process is critical to keeping Israel at the peace table and to convincing Israel to comply with the UN resolutions.<sup>47</sup> Assad expects the United States to pressure Israel into compromising on the return of the Golan Heights.

Elections in Israel and the United States. Israel and the United States will hold national elections during 1992. Because of the uncertainty of who will win in these elections, it is unlikely that Syria will change its negotiating positions because of the elections. However, the timing of the elections may affect Syrian tactics at the talks: they may draw out the talks, postponing the major issues until after the elections.

Syria may delay substantive discussions until after the Israelis June elections in hopes that a new government would be more likely to accept the Syrian position and may be more susceptible to pressure from the US and world opinion.

Considering the November US elections, Assad may also see reason to delay progress in the talks. He may believe that until the elections are over the Israeli lobby in the United States will have more influence on the role



which the United States plays in the peace process, possibly reducing the pressure that Washington is willing to put on Israel. Assad likely believes that if President Bush is re-elected, the United States may be willing to put more pressure on Israel to reach a peace agreement.

#### SYRIAN OBJECTIVES AND NEGOTIATING POSITIONS

Syria has a number of objectives it seeks to achieve through the negotiating process. The Syrian delegation has publicly outlined several of those objectives and Syria's opening negotiating positions. The primary objective is to regain sovereignty over the Golan Heights. Next, they hope to remove Israeli forces from southern Lebanon and end Israeli influence there. The third publicly announced objective is the establishment of political autonomy for the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.

Assad likely consented to the peace process, knowing that there was a good chance that the talks may break down. Thus, Syria likely has a set of unpublished objectives which it hopes to achieve simply through participating in the peace process.

There are also several potential issues which may come up in the peace talks but which are not central to Syria's objectives. Syria must be prepared with negotiating objectives and positions on those issues which may become part of an overall settlement. The status of Syrian Jews and water resources are topics Syria may want to avoid discussing, but Israel will likely put the two issues on the agenda. Another aspect of Syria's negotiations is the third phase of the talks which will focus on regional issues.

Syrian negotiations will be guided by the objectives it seeks; but, the phrase "no separate peace with Israel" will frame Syria's approach to the

negotiations. One of Assad's greatest fears is that unity among the Arab negotiators breaks down and Israel is able to work toward a separate peace with the Palestinians and each Arab country. Assad believes that this would weaken the Arab's negotiating positions and Israel may not have to give up occupied territory to achieve a peace settlement with its neighbors. More specifically, he fears that the Palestinian issue may be resolved and Syria would not be able to conclude an agreement with Israel for the return of the Golan Heights. Because of domestic political constraints placed on him by the Sunni Moslem community and the Palestinians, Assad is not likely to conclude an agreement for the return of the Golan Heights while the Palestinian issue remains unresolved. Thus, Assad is committed to a unified Arab stand and his central goal is a comprehensive settlement of Arab-Israeli issues.<sup>48</sup>

#### Return of the Golan Heights

Regaining sovereignty over the Golan Heights is a major Syrian national objective because that is one foreign policy objective on which all Syrians can agree. The Golan Heights represent one percent of Syrian territory and, today, only about 14,000 Arabs live there. The 1967 Arab-Israeli war displaced over 125,000 Syrians from the Golan.<sup>49</sup> There is little economic value to the Golan Heights, but the area is militarily important because of its proximity to Damascus. Therefore, Syrians feel they are under a major threat from an expansionist power. Also, many Sunni Moslems believe that the Syrian government all but abandoned the Golan Heights in the 1967 war.<sup>50</sup> Thus, failure to take a strong stand on the return of the Golan Heights could lead to political instability which might threaten the Assad regime.<sup>51</sup>

The stated Syrian position is that Israel must return the Golan Heights

as required by UN Resolution 242. However, Assad recognizes the Israeli concerns about the potential security threat from the Golan Heights and, in 1990, he proposed a demilitarized zone be established in the area.<sup>52</sup> The Syrian government and population would likely accept a phased return and demilitarization of the occupied land, as long as it leads to Syrian sovereignty over the Golan. The precedence for a peacekeeping force was set in 1974 and there are currently 1300 troops of the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) stationed in the Golan Heights demilitarized zone separating Syrian and Israeli forces in the Golan Heights.<sup>53</sup> Also, Syria may be willing to reach an accommodation concerning the 13,000 Israeli settlers to allow them to remain in the Golan, but Assad would likely require that they be subject to Syrian law.<sup>54</sup>

#### Israeli Withdrawal from Lebanon

Because of the strong influence Syria has over the Lebanese government, Syrian interest will be a major factor in the resulting settlement between Israel and Lebanon. Assad will insist that Israeli forces leave Lebanese territory and would accept the expansion of the UN forces in Lebanon to secure a demilitarized zone. The degree of stability of the Lebanese government and the reestablishment of Lebanese police and military forces will influence Assad's willingness to agree to a timetable for withdrawal of Syrian and Israeli troops.

In the past, Assad did not want to link Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon to Arab-Israeli peace talks.<sup>55</sup> Thus, the removal of Israeli forces could possibly be resolved outside of the current peace negotiations because it does not involve the return of occupied lands. However, such an Israeli

withdrawal is contingent on Israeli security concerns being satisfied, which is unlikely outside of an overall peace solution to Arab-Israeli issues.

#### Resolution of the Palestinian Issues

Syria's main interest in the Palestinian-Israeli issues is that some progress be made to help defuse the potential destabilizing impact the issues have on the region. Because Assad doesn't have great influence on the Palestinian delegation or on the PLO, Assad will likely accept any agreement which is acceptable to the mainstream of the Palestinian people. Assad may push for some agreement with Israel on the status of Palestinian refugees living in Syria and the other Arab countries.

The Palestinian issues in the peace talks focus on establishing Palestinian political autonomy in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and resolving the Palestinian refugee problem. Assad supports the Palestinian desire for a homeland for several reasons:

- To preserve Arab unity at the peace talks, preventing a separate peace
- To satisfy the Sunni Moslem majority in Syria
- To depoliticize Palestinian issues in Syrian domestic politics.

While there are many possible variations on the type of entity which might be formed, Assad would likely support any political arrangement that is acceptable to the mainstream of the Palestinian people. However, he would not like to see Jordan transformed into a Palestinian state, which might be founded upon Islamic fundamentalism and could potentially lead to domestic political problems for Assad's regime.<sup>56</sup>

Although proposed as a topic for the regional talks, the issue of Palestinian refugees is likely to be brought up in each of the bilateral

talks. Palestinians make up approximately 60 percent of Jordan's population, 5 to 10 percent of Lebanon's population, and 4 percent of Syria's population. Those Palestinians who have not assimilated into society in the countries where they live often have the most radical political views. Thus, the return of the militant Palestinians to their homeland would reduce the Palestinian influence on Syrian politics. Syria may negotiate with Israel to allow Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland; however, this is not a "must have" point for Syria. Assad would not let it stand in the way of achieving his major objectives, but would pursue the issue in the regional talks.

#### Secondary Objectives

Regardless of the outcome of the peace negotiations, Assad likely sees the peace talks as a win-win situation for Syria. If the talks are successful, Syria will regain the Golan Heights and stability in the region will be increased. However, as Assad has stated, if the talks fail, "Israel's intentions will be exposed to the world, and the Israeli rulers will be exposed as expansionist invaders who are hostile to peace. This will be a gain for the just Arab position and for the peace partisans of the world."<sup>57</sup> Thus, it is clear that Assad has objectives which he feels he can achieve by participating in the peace negotiations.

One objective is to improve Syria's international image. Once a member of the rejectionist front, Syria worked to prevent Arab negotiations with Israel. Now, Assad would like Syria to be seen as a nation willing to pursue peace through negotiations. An improved international image could lead to political and economic benefits for Syria.

Assad would also like to strengthen Syria's political position in the

Arab world. Because of Iraq's defeat in the Gulf War, Syria is the strongest Arab military force in the region. However, to further develop Syria's national power and influence in the region, Assad realizes that he must also increase Syria's political power. By pursuing a coordinated Arab approach to the peace talks, Syria is trying to influence the negotiating positions of all of the Arab delegations. If Syria displays leadership among the Arab negotiators, this could lead to greater Syrian influence on Arab issues beyond the peace talks.

A third objective of participating in the peace process is to begin reaping the economic benefits of the tilt toward the West. Improved perceptions of Syria may open the door for economic assistance from western nations and the international community. With the significant aid Egypt received as a result of the Camp David Accords as the example, Assad is also hoping to receive "off-the-table" agreements from the United States for economic aid. Assad may take a hard line on many issues hoping that the United States will offer to link aid to Syrian compromises.

#### Jewish Emigration from Syria

Although not debated in public as part of the peace talks, a potential issue for negotiation between Syria and Israel is the degree of freedom the Syrian government affords Syrian Jews, who number about 3,000.<sup>58</sup> Syria does not allow the Syrian Jews to travel freely and, as reported by Amnesty International, has jailed Jews who travel illegally outside of Syria, particularly to Israel.<sup>59</sup> The government restricts the Jews' travel and emigration primarily for political reasons.<sup>60</sup>

In the past, Israel tried unsuccessfully to negotiate with Syria through

third parties seeking approval for the entire Jewish community to emigrate to Israel. Although Syria would likely resist putting this issue on the agenda because it is a domestic political issue, Syrian Jews are not central to Syria's objectives and Syria may use the issue for leverage on Israel.

#### Water Resources

Although water resource issues will be discussed in the third phase of the peace process, water is the critical resource in the Middle East and can not be separated from discussions about territory. Water has been the catalyst for secret cooperation and armed conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors. An Arab project to divert headwaters of the Jordan River through the Golan Heights to the Yarmuk River led to Israeli air strikes on the project and was a major factor in the start of the 1967 War.<sup>61</sup>

Israel, which is facing a water crisis, will likely refuse to relinquish control of the Golan Heights unless there is agreement on water issues which support Israel's survival needs. Israel's concern is to protect the flow and quality of the water going into the Jordan River from the Golan Heights, the Yarmuk River, and the Hasbani River, which are highlighted on the map on page 30. The insert on page 31 contains additional details on the water issues.

Syria will likely agree to a water allocation plan which meets Syrian needs in the Golan Heights. Concerning the water from the Yarmuk River and Lebanon, Syria will resist Israeli claims to the water and potential restrictions on Syrian use of the water, but Syrian will likely accept an allocation which would support future Syrian needs.

This map illustrates the Golan Heights region, a disputed territory between Syria and Israel. The Golan Heights is shown as an Israeli-occupied area, with the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) Zone established along its borders. The map details the surrounding countries: Lebanon to the north, Syria to the east, and Israel to the south and west. Key cities and towns are marked, including Hama, Latakia, and Quneitra in Syria, and Haifa and Tel Aviv in Israel. The Mediterranean Sea is to the west, and Lake Tiberias (Sea of Galilee) is to the south. The Jordan River is shown flowing into the Dead Sea. A legend in the bottom right corner identifies symbols for Israeli settlements, roads, and railroads, and includes a scale bar in kilometers and miles. The map is labeled with 'GOLAN HEIGHTS (Israeli occupied)' and 'United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) Zone'.

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## NEGOTIATIONS ON WATER RIGHTS: SYRIA'S VIEW

Golan Heights Water Resources. In any agreement returning the Golan Heights, Syria will want to ensure the availability of the water to meet Syrian requirements.

The Banias River is a spring-fed river beginning in the northern Golan Heights and makes up about 24 percent of the upper Jordan River flow.<sup>62</sup> Other than the Banias River, water resources in the Golan Heights are limited. Although the Israelis transfer water from the relatively water-rich north to the southern part of the Golan Heights, 80 percent of the water which supports the Israeli settlements comes from the Sea of Galilee. Also, Israel has built a series of small reservoirs in the Golan.<sup>63</sup>

It is unlikely that Syria would put itself in the position of relying on Israel for water. Therefore, Syria will bargain for the majority of the water allocation from the Banias River and the right to divert water from the Yarmuk River or Lebanon, if needed, to meet water demands in the Golan Heights.

Yarmuk River Basin. A portion of the Yarmuk River forms the boundaries between Syria and Jordan, the Israeli occupied Golan Heights and Jordan, and 10 kilometers of the Israel-Jordan border near the confluence with the Jordan River. As a result, three countries use water from the Yarmuk River in quantities as follows:

--Syria:	90 MCM/year*	22.5% of flow
--Jordan:	158 MCM/year	40% of flow
--Israel:	100 MCM/year	25% of flow <sup>64</sup>

Because of the significance of the Yarmuk River to Israel and Jordan, Syria, Jordan, and Israel may have to reach an understanding on the use of Yarmuk water before the Israel-Syria and Israel-Jordan bilateral agreements can be finalized. Such cooperation is not without precedent, the three countries participated in the development of the Unified Plan for allocation of water in the Jordan River system in the mid-1950's.<sup>65</sup> Jordan proposed the Unity Dam project on the Yarmuk River to increase storage capacity, to provide water for irrigation of Jordanian crop lands, and to provide Syria with electrical power. The project is in mediation between Jordan, Syria and Israel.<sup>66</sup>

With about 80 percent of the Yarmuk River watershed in Syria, the Syrian delegation will try to preserve Syria's right to use water from the Yarmuk as it sees fit. However, Syria will likely accept a fair apportionment of water which meets Syrian needs.

Diversion of Water from Lebanon. Lebanon has an abundant water supply because of the rainfall in the mountainous areas of the country. Syria has proposed a project to divert water from the Hasbani River, a tributary of the Jordan River, for water supplies and irrigation in Syria.<sup>67</sup> Diversion of water from the Jordan River system will be opposed by Israel, whose delegation at the peace talks will likely want to settle the issue with Syria and Lebanon before relinquishing control of the security zone in south Lebanon. Also, Israel has long had interest in diverting water from the Litani River into the Jordan River. And, Israel will try to prevent Lebanon or Syria from taking

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\*Million cubic meter of water per year (MCM/Year)

action that may pre-empt Israel's possible future use of Litani water.<sup>68</sup>

Syria's objective of having Israel leave southern Lebanon will be closely tied to assurances Syria and Lebanon are willing to give on the future of Israel's water supply.

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### Negotiations on Regional Issues

The third phase of the peace process began in Moscow in January 1992. This phase called for regional talks between Middle East countries to seek agreement on cooperative efforts on regional problems such as water sharing, arms control, economic development, environmental issues, and the Palestinian refugees. Syria did not participate in the regional discussions. Syria contends that by doing so they would be giving in to Israel's negotiating strategy to gain Arab recognition without having to give up the occupied territory in exchange. Given the likelihood that little or no progress would be made in the near term toward solving the complex regional issues, Assad likely sees little risk in not participating in the regional talks. Two of the proposed topics for the regional talks--water resources and arms control--could have a great impact on Syrian national interests. And, if Syria joins the third phase of the peace process in the future, Syria will actively negotiate to ensure its interest.

Water Resources. Although water resources cannot be separated from the land issues being discussed in the bilateral talks, water issues are probably more important to Syrian national interest in the regional context because more than 80 percent of Syria's water resource comes from the Euphrates River.<sup>69</sup> An agreement between Syria, Turkey, and Iraq on the use of the Euphrates River will continue to be a critical issue in the region.

Arms Control. A comprehensive arms control arrangement in the Middle

East will be difficult to negotiate, not because of unwilling participants, but because of the complexity of the issue. Arms control will have to consider multiple arms races--Arabs versus Arabs, as well as Arabs versus Israel. The difficulty will lie in agreeing upon levels which will satisfy the participants' security requirements. Syria will probably agree to a Middle East arms control treaty as long as it includes reduction of Israel's nuclear capability and Syria retains its military strength relative to other Arab nations.

On May 29, 1991, President Bush announced a Middle East arms control initiative, which Syria rejected. He proposed freezing exports which could contribute to the production of unconventional weapons, banning sales of surface-to-surface missiles, establishing supplier guidelines on conventional arms exports, and banning the production of nuclear weapons materials.<sup>70</sup> However, Syria believes the proposal would enhance Israel's military superiority at the expense of weakening Arab security because Israel has a domestic defense industry for conventional and unconventional weapons.<sup>71</sup> Also, the Syrian rejection was influenced by the proposal to stockpile US weapons in Israel for contingency use in the Middle East. The availability of such a stockpile for Israeli use would further tip the scales toward Israeli superiority.<sup>72</sup>

However, Syria is in favor of any plan to ban weapons of mass destruction from the Middle East and the reduction of conventional weapons, linked to the end of Israeli occupation of Arab lands and a solution to the Palestinian problem.<sup>73</sup> This position is consistent with the Syrian effort to make a comprehensive peace with Israel the first step in the negotiating process. Given the potential for a decline in Syrian military capability in

the future, Assad likely believes that an arms control agreement would be to his benefit, once he has used his military strength as leverage to achieve Syria's primary objectives in the bilateral peace talks. Syria will insist that the regional talks on arms controls consider Israel's nuclear weapons.

The greatest potential for agreement is on control of unconventional weapons. Syria has signed the Nonproliferation Treaty. Although Syria does not permit the "fullscope" safeguard inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Syria recently decided to begin talks with the IAEA on establishing procedures for the safeguard inspections.<sup>74</sup> Israel has proposed a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East, insisting that safeguard inspections be done by the mutual parties. With the increased concern over the proliferation of nuclear weapons capabilities, the suppliers of equipment and technology may be willing to cooperate in halting transfers to the Middle East.<sup>75</sup> The public statements by Syria and Israel supporting the limitation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East indicate that arms control may be an area of possible agreement.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

Syria is taking a hard line position on the issues in the peace talks. Given their view of Israel, the Syrian delegation will likely give little ground on most of the issues between Israel and Syria. When stalemate occurs, Syria will look to the United States to pressure the Israeli delegation to compromise their position. Because of close relations between Israel and the United States, Assad likely believes that US pressure will not alienate the United States from Israel and reduce US influence on Israel.

Also, Syria entered the talks recognizing that the successful outcome of

the Camp David negotiations was influenced by "off-the-table" economic agreements. Assad may be expecting to reap similar benefits from a peace settlement with Israel; but, he also realizes that the United States may not be able to come through with those benefits because of budgetary constraints or political opposition to the aid. If additional funds are not available, Assad could call on the United States to reallocate to Syria a portion of the aid funds currently earmarked for Israel and Egypt. Such a reallocation could complicate US relations with Israel and Egypt. If the United States does not provide promised or implied aid to Syria, the United States will likely lose influence with Syria.

The United States could also lose political capital if the Middle East peace talks fail. The polarized views the Israelis and the Syrians hold on the key issues could lead to a breakdown in the talks. If either Syria or Israel breaks off the talks, the United States may lose influence with Assad. If Syria breaks off the talks, Assad will likely blame the United States for failing to maintain an evenhanded policy on the issues and for failing to exert pressure on Israel to accept the Syrian position. If Israel breaks off the negotiations in reaction to US pressure, US-Syria relations may not be hurt. However, if Assad feels that the United States should punish Israel for its failure to negotiate in good faith, Assad's confidence in the United States may drop.

If the peace process succeeds or fails, increased terrorism is a possibility. Several of the radical Palestinian splinter groups could renew terrorism in reaction to bilateral agreements with Israel. The focus of those attacks would likely be the signatories to the agreement. Thus, because of the ease of access to the Middle East participants, most of the attacks would

occur in that region. However, if the talks break down, worldwide terrorist action could be renewed with support from Arab governments and the PLO.

#### POSSIBLE EVENTS WHICH WOULD AFFECT SYRIA'S NEGOTIATIONS

This estimate reflects the most likely scenario for Syrian participation in the peace process and the negotiating positions Syria is likely to take on the important issues. Although less likely, events in the Middle East could result in differing outcomes.

##### Change of Syrian Political Leadership

A change of regimes in Syria may have an impact on the Syrian negotiation at the talks. Assad, who is 64, has been in questionable health since he had a significant heart attack in 1983. He could leave office because of similar circumstances in the future. In such a situation, power would likely pass to a likeminded member of the Alawi ruling elite, possibly President Assad's son, Basil, who is becoming more involved in the political affairs of Syria.<sup>76</sup> As a result of such a transfer of power, there would likely be little change in Syria's negotiating positions at the peace talks.

Given President Assad's grip on political power in Syria, it is unlikely that there would be a forceful overthrow of his regime by the military or a popular uprising in the streets. Yet, if such an overthrow were to occur, it would likely be the work of radical Sunni Moslems. In this scenario, the government would likely break off the talks with Israel, force Lebanon to abandon the talks, and try to sabotage the Palestinian delegation's efforts to reach agreement with Israel.

### Separate Palestinian Peace with Israel

If the Palestinians were to reach a separate peace with Israel, Syria may react in one of two ways, depending on the progress the Syrians and Israelis had made at the time. First, if progress was being made, Assad may elect to continue the talks. If progress was stalled, Assad may believe that his leverage on Israel had been reduced and he may be willing to compromise on some of the secondary issues to reach agreement on return of the Golan Heights. He may also accept a phased return of the Golan. If Syria and Israel had made no substantive progress, Assad may choose the second option-- to walk out of the talks and try to disrupt the Palestinian-Israeli agreement.

### Palestinian Control of Jordan

If Jordan's King Hussein were to be ousted and replaced with a government led by Palestinians, it would complicate the peace negotiations and relations between Syria and Jordan. Because of concern about the possible influence of a Palestinian-run Jordan on Syrian domestic politics, Syria and Jordan may not have the best of relations. If the new government was not radical in its views toward Israel, Israel may pursue its previous effort to link the West Bank and Gaza to Jordan. That could lead to a possible separate peace between the Palestinians, Jordan, and Israel, as in the above scenario. However, if a new Jordanian government opposed the existence of the State of Israel, Jordan may refuse to participate in the peace talks. If Syria was making progress in its talks with Israel and the Palestinian delegation representing the West Bank and Gaza Strip continued to participate in the talks, Assad may decide to stay in the talks in an attempt to regain the Golan Heights.

## ENDNOTES

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3. McLaurin, p. 17.
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