CHAPTER V

Syria and Her Non-Arab Neighbours
A basic thrust of Syria's foreign policy in the last two decades has been to develop a coherent strategy that could serve to contain what it regards as Israel's hegemonic designs in the area and to regain Arab lands lost to the Israelis. Underneath these two factors is the conviction that the struggle with Israel is not merely political or territorial but a collision of destinies affecting the fate and future of the region. Thus, the Syrian approach has been an effort to combine some rational objectives and the instrumentality of force with a broader ideological base.

The Syrian politico-strategic doctrine has been based on the call for strategic parity with Israel based on the following aspects. Keeping in mind the situation in the area and the limited prospects for functional military cooperation with any major Arab state, Syria should build up its military strength and potential until the gap with Israel is narrowed or overcome. This would mean a general expansion of Syrian armed forces. The narrowing of this gap would allow for a limited Syrian military initiative to regain some positive political or territorial gains. This would also allow Syria to withstand possible Israeli attacks.

A second basic aim has been the hope that a strong Syrian army would lead to a credible deterrent posture. An Israeli military adventure could be warded off if Syria was strong enough to make the adventure costly for Israel. Such a deterrent capability could allow for a Syrian strategic posture based more on the threat of force than actual recourse to it.
The doctrine of strategic parity also grew out of the political and strategic developments in the area, for instance, the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and the general move towards a political resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Syria has held, throughout the years, that no just and durable settlement with Israel is possible, considering Israel's military preponderance and overall superiority. Therefore, to rectify the imbalance it is imperative to mobilize all available Arab resources to match Israel's advantages and overcome them. Once the Arabs acquire strategic parity, the Arab negotiating position would definitely be much stronger.

It is the Palestine Question which is the root cause of the Arab-Israeli conflict and of the Syria-Israel hostility. But, over the years, Syria-Israel relationship has acquired a dynamic of its own.

Since the day of inception of Israel, Syria has been in an active state of continued conflict with it. Syria, like other Arab states, refused to accept the existence of Israel and has consistently striven to annihilate the entity called Israel. In fact, the Syro-Israel hostilities precede the creation of Israel. It was the Syrian nationalists who led the movement against the Zionist takeover in Palestine. They called the Balfour Declaration an Imperialist-Zionist plan to take away part of their land.

Syria entertains a special relationship with the Palestinians. The area of Palestine was often referred to as "southern Syria" and before a separate Palestinian nationalism was born, the Arabs of Palestine often called themselves southern
Syrians. Syria, the cradle of Arab nationalism, has always regarded itself as the vanguard of Arab nationalism, especially in the struggle against Zionism. Due to these reasons, Syrians have always regarded the establishment of Israel as the greatest wrong done to the Arabs.

When the United Nations passed the Partition Resolution, cutting Palestine into two states, one Arab and one Jewish, Syria was in the forefront of the Arab states who condemned the resolution. Preparations were made to nullify the resolution by military force and Syria took part in the Arab assaults on Jews and on the newly formed Zionist state.

When the Arab Prime Minister's conference took place in Cairo on December 16, 1947, the Syrian government was given the responsibility of training and organising the Arab forces for armed intervention in Palestine. Thus, the "Arab Liberation Army" was trained and equipped in Syria. The first forays by this army were systematic attacks on isolated settlements with mixed populations. Jewish settlements in the north were cut-off and very soon the Arab Liberation Army was clashing with Haganah, the Jewish force.

On May 14, 1948, the state of Israel was proclaimed. Seven Arab armies invaded the newly created state on the night of 14 May and Syria was one of these Arab states. Syrian troops met with considerable success. They occupied the eastern shore of Lake Kinneret and managed to hold a narrow strip on the shore of the lake and a small area next to the northeast corner of the Syrian-Israeli border, two areas
that were situated in territory which had been allotted to the Jewish state under the partition plan. When ceasefire came about, initially Syria was reluctant to enter into armistice negotiations since it would imply the acceptance of the state of Israel. The first ceasefire of 1948 was used by Syria to establish its hold on the Golan and in consolidating its positions. Armistice negotiations which followed were protracted and difficult. In 1949, Syria agreed to withdraw its forces on condition that these areas be demilitarized.

The armistice agreement was finally signed in July 1949 but it was not effective enough to solve the day-to-day problems along the Israeli-Syrian borders. These armistice disputes over small, yet strategically significant, patches of land were critical in shaping relations between Syria and Israel during that period.

Syria had reasons to be confident. Topographically, it was better off. Its territory lay on an average of some 1,509 feet above Israeli territory for almost the entire length of the 47 miles of the two states' common border. The Israeli side had civilian population while the Syrians had mainly armed fortifications. Therefore, it was easy for the Syrians to disrupt Israeli civilian life by use of artillery fire and without the necessity of concentrating large forces.

Between 1948 and June 1967, the area of the Israel-Syria Armistice demarcation line was consequently the scene of constant and serious fighting and shooting incidents. There were several different spheres where hostilities existed. The armistice agreements did not contain provisions establishing normal relations
between the signatories but were instead only of a purely military character, intended to provide a transitional stage between the truce and a final peace.¹

Foremost among the disputes were those regarding the legality of civilian activities in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). The Armistice Agreement had decided that areas occupied by Syrian forces and some adjacent areas would constitute the DMZ i.e. an area of less than 100 square miles, from above Lake Huleh to south of the Sea of Galilee. The concept of DMZ was interpreted differently by Syria and Israel. The Israelis claimed sovereignty over these areas and Syrians felt they were entitled to participate in the administration of the DMZs and to intervene on behalf of its Arab inhabitants. They were opposed to any Israeli development projects in these zones. Syria challenged Israel's right to pursue the Huleh Drainage and Bnot Yaakov projects in the zone. The Israelis' plan was to drain the Huleh swamps to construct the Bnot Yaakov irrigation project for diversion of part of Jordan's waters. Syria protested since topographical changes so affected by Israel would create a military advantage for Israel, in contravention of the Armistice Agreement.

Syria also opposed a third Israeli development project executed outside the demilitarised zone - the Lake Kinneret-Negev Project (Israeli national water carrier plan) on the ground that it violated International Law and was prejudicial to the security and interests of the Arab states. This project of leading water from the Sea of Galilee to the Negev desert became operational in 1963 and in January 1964, in the

¹ Tevlik Rustu Aras, Chairman of the Conciliation Committee for Palestine, Official Records of the UN General Assembly, September 2, 1950, Document A/1367.
First Arab Summit Conference, the Arab states passed a resolution to divert the sources of the river in Syria and Lebanon.

Another major area of dispute was over the issue of cultivation of land by the Israeli and Syrian residents in the zone. Both claimed their respective farmers had the right to extend their cultivation and many fields became the subjects of contention. These disputes gave rise to a number of shooting incidents. Both sides tried to establish *faits accompli* by cultivating lands in the DMZs. Constant incidents and shootings led to penetration of Syrian forces into the Southern DMZ in January 1960. Israel retaliated in February 1960 by an attack on Syrian positions at Tawafiq.

Syria objected to the patrolling by Israeli police boats near the north-eastern shore of Lake Kinneret. Syria considered these boats as naval craft whose presence in an area defined in the Armistice Agreement as defensive was prohibited. Another cause of friction in the area of Lake Kinneret was a long-standing dispute over the right of Syrians to fish in the lake. Israel objected to Syrians fishing in her waters without holding fishing permits issued by Israeli authorities. Syrians asserted that fishing permits to Syrian fishermen should be issued by the Chairman of the Mixed Armistice Commission and not by Israel.

Israel's creeping annexation of the DMZ was based on five factors: Since the Armistice Agreement was purely military in nature, it followed, therefore, that parts of the DMZ could not be separated from the sovereign to which they formerly belonged, namely from "Israeli sovereignty"; since Israel's "sovereignty" over the
zones remained unimpaired, all laws in force in Israel were in force in the DMZ, and this entitled Israel to perform "non-military" duties in the area; the Mixed Armistice Committee (MAC) had no jurisdiction in the zone except limited authority granted to the MAC Chairman by Israel alone; Israel possessed "sovereign rights" in the DMZ whereas Syria had only water-related interests in the sector.

Thus Israel made best use of the ambiguous wording of the Armistice Agreement, in order to minimise its obligations. Along with military pressure, Israel tried to impose its sovereignty over the DMZ by other avenues like extension of Israeli cultivation, erection of fortifications in central and southern sectors of the DMZ, by planting of mines and minefields in the DMZ and restricting movement of UN military observers.

Large scale clashes took place in December 1955, March 1962 and August 1966. Several minor clashes also occurred over the border demarcation lines and, at the beginning of 1965, a new cause of friction occurred with the beginning of infiltration and sabotage operations inside Israel by Palestinian commandos actively supported by Syria.

Syria's policy towards the DMZ was an amalgam of two variables - the legal and the political. The legal variable involved three arguments: the Armistice Agreement stipulated that the DMZ was neither under Syrian nor under Israeli

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2 UN S/2389, November 8, 1951, S/2833, October 30, 1952.
3 UN, S/3659, Sept. 12 1956; S/3815 April 28 1957; S/3844 July 1 1957.
sovereignty; since the area was not Israeli territory, Syria was entitled to check with all its strength any Israeli incursion in the zone; the armistice agreement gave the MAC broad jurisdiction over military and non-military matters in the zone.

After 1964, Syria formulated and began implementing a plan to divert the headwaters of the Jordan River which channelled a large part of Israel's water supply into Lake Kinneret. These efforts were soon frustrated and by July 1966 Israeli air raids eight miles inside Syrian territory led to the closing down of Syria's water division canal.

On 23 February 1966 members of the Ba'ath party staged a successful coup and most of the new ruling elite were young army officers. Born in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the war of 1948 was for them a formative experience and their nationalism found expression in radical and extreme terms. Two tendencies became conspicuous in their foreign policy. There was acceleration in rapproachment both with the Soviet Union and with Egypt. The USSR declared that it would not tolerate any act of aggression against Syria and that it had to intervene in events happening so close to its own southern borders. Meanwhile, the progressive group of Arab states was formed, led by Egypt and Syria who were opposed to the reactionary group led by Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Egypt and Syria signed a mutual defence pact on

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4 UN S/1353 special supplement no.25 July 20, 1949; S/2833 Nov.4, 1952.
5 UN S/2300 August 17, 1951; S/4124 Dec 8, 1952; S/3122 Oct 23, 1953.
6 UN, S/2389 Nov.8, 1951; S/4270 Feb.23, 1960.
November, 1966. This pact was almost a guarantee of Egypt's immediate military reaction in the event of an Israeli attack on Syria.

Another cause of consternation for Israel was Syrian encouragement to growing *fedayeen* activities. Syria responded to Israeli charges by declaring the *fedayeen* activities legal and by denying any responsibility for them. As expressed by the Syrian Ambassador to the U.N. in a Security Council meeting "Syria cannot see it as its role to defend what Israel considers to be its borders".

The radical regime in Damascus placed its struggle against Israel on ideological grounds. In April 1966, it adopted the doctrine of a "popular war of liberation" as its official guideline. The enemy was the "unholy alliance between imperialism, Arab reaction and Israel". The spearhead of the popular liberation were the Palestinians, with the *fedayeen* as their vanguard. Hafez al Assad, who was the defence minister then, proposed an aggressive strategy to be undertaken by the Syrian army in cooperation with *fedayeen* activity. Subsequently, the situation along the Syrian-Israeli border deteriorated significantly. These incidents ranged from low-intensity conflict, including infiltration, clashes with small arms, and strategic challenges involving the unlawful erection of fortifications to large scale military engagements in April 1967.

On April 7, 1967, one of the most serious military clashes between Israel and Syria took place on their border as a result of a cultivation dispute. Many hours of fighting came to an end after the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation
arranged a cease-fire. The Israeli air strike in this clash and the subsequent Israeli attitude of war mongering led the Arab governments to pledge their support to Syria.\(^7\)

On May 15, Nasser put the Egyptian armed forces on alert and on May 16, on an emergency footing, he begun to move large numbers of troops to the Sinai area.\(^8\) At the same time Egypt requested that the UNEF units leave their positions along certain parts of the demarcation line so that the Egyptian soldiers could take over. On 22 May Nasser announced that the Gulf of Aqaba was henceforth closed to all Israeli ships and to all other vessels carrying strategic materials to Israel.\(^9\)

As the Arab armies concentrated near Israel's borders, and Arabs intensified their clamour for war and the Gulf of Aqaba was blocked, Israel's apprehension increased and mobilisation was hastened and talks of a "preventive war" by the Israelis in turn accelerated Arab military preparations.

On the morning of 5 June 1967, Israel initiated warfare. Israel launched devastating air strikes on Arab military airfields and destroyed most of the Arab planes on the ground within the first hours of the war. This was one main cause of the Israeli victory.

On the southern front the Israelis overpowered the Egyptians and took over Gaza Strip, Sharm al-Sheikh and parts of Sinai Peninsula, Jordan lost territory on the West Bank of River Jordan. Once these fronts were secured, Israel turned towards Syria. When UN sponsored cease-fires came into effect on the Jordanian and Egyptian fronts, Israel launched its offensive on Syria, concentrating their whole airforce and a major chunk of their ground force against Syria. Fighting lasted till 11 June though Syria had agreed to a ceasefire on 9 June. Israel persisted in its invasion so that they could conquer Syrian territory.

It is true that Israel deliberately launched a large-scale assault on Syria, despite a ceasefire. The motivation for this stemmed from designs (a) to seize the strategically important Golan Heights and the headwaters of the Banyas River, (b) to deal a crushing blow to that Arab country which led the Arab effort to "exterminate" Israel, and (c) to discredit the militant Syrian regime so badly that it would be overthrown. Israel was aided in its invasion by the US, who deliberately delayed the Security Council action to allow Israel time to conquer more Syrian territory.\textsuperscript{10}

Syria lost additional territory in the war. Israel had captured a further 845 square kilometres on the Golan Heights and with the loss of territory came the loss of prestige.

It would be pertinent here to review briefly the strategic importance of Golan Heights, since, till date, no Syria-Israel peace is possible till Golan Heights is returned to its rightful owner, Syria.

GOLAN HEIGHTS

The Golan, a Syrian mountainous plateau with an average altitude of 1,000 meters, covers an area of 1,750 square kilometres. In the 1967 war, Israel captured about 1,250 square kilometres of Golan. In the 1973 war which led to the Syrian-Israeli disengagement agreement, Israel returned to Syria about 100 square kilometres.

The strategic importance of Golan is due to the fact that it offers a commanding position overlooking southern Lebanon, much of southern Syria and northern Israel. To the west, the Golan plateau overlooks Israeli metropolitan centres. To the east, it offers downhill access to Galilee in the west and Damascus in the east. For the last two decades, Israeli army has been stationed 35 kilometres from Damascus while the Syrian army is 250 kilometres away from Tel Aviv.

The importance of Golan is also because of its regional water sources. Mount Hermon contains the headwaters of the Jordan River. Also, the Baniyas spring which is a major source of River Jordan is located on the lower slopes of Golan. To the south, the sea of Galilee and the Yarmouk River constitute yet another two major regional water sources.
Syria has long borders which have no natural boundaries. Therefore, from a geo-strategic point of view, Golan, for Syria, is a critical natural defence against Israel.

The continued Israeli occupation of the Golan presents strategic liabilities. The Israeli army is only 35 kilometres away from Damascus. With no natural barriers to protect the capital, the country's strategic situation is vulnerable. Thus, in terms of geo-strategic importance, Golan in Syrian hands provides a defensive depth that is indispensable for the security of Syria, while a Golan controlled by Israel poses a direct threat to the capital.

Then there is the psychological aspect. It takes only an hour to drive down south from Damascus to the Golan. The flat terrain offers a view of the Israel troops equipped with state-of-the-art weapon system, positioned in the Golan. These elements have an impact on the Syrian psyche. When the enemy, with more sophisticated weaponry, is actually visible, it causes nervousness and insecurity.

Another aspect is the demographic changes being effected in the Golan. In the pre-1967 period, Golan had a population of around 130,000 people in around 139 towns and 61 farms. Today, less than 16,000 remain in the five Arab villages. To top this, Druzes form an overwhelming majority among the remaining Syrians. On the other hand, Golan has now more than 35 Jewish settlements with a population of

around 15,000. This is viewed by the Syrians as an intrusion into the Syrian landscape. These settlements are almost military outposts intended to create a spatial asymmetry in the territorial balance in favour of Israel. In 1981, the Begin government extended Israeli law, jurisdiction and administration to Golan, thus justifying Syrian fears about territorial greed of Israel.

Syria also has water related interests in the Golan. Possessing Golan would mean being a riparian state in the Jordan-Yarmouk basin. The water situation in the region has deteriorated significantly and so Golan has attained vital importance for both Israel and Syria.

Most important for Syria in attaining Golan back is to push Israel back to its pre-1967 frontiers. Thus Golan has become a part and parcel of Syria's demand of "total peace for total withdrawal". It is unquestionable that Syria will concede to Israel any part of Golan. In Syrian perception, Golan remains an integral part of the Syrian state.

For Israel, Golan is not just a question of security. It is also a question of settlements, water and domestic politics. Security wise, Israel maintains that Golan is a source of threat to its very existence, since in a ground attack, Israel becomes especially vulnerable due to its small size and it being surrounded by Arab states. Moreover, Israel is dependent on the water resources which spring from Golan. Another factor is the fate of Jewish settlements in Golan. The future of their settlements is still an open question in Israel, many opposing the dismantling of the
settlements and others realising that evacuation of these settlers would have to be an inevitable price to be paid for reaching a peace agreement.

Post 1967 period

After the war, Syria stood isolated in its opposition to what it called a "political solution" to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The war was followed by U.N. Security Council Resolution 242 of 22 November 1967, which called for a final settlement of the conflict, an Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories, mutual recognition, and Israel's right to free passage through the Gulf of Aqaba and the Suez Canal. Syria effectively rejected this resolution and maintained its commitment to a reunified Palestine. Syria boycotted the Arab Summit Conference held at Khartoum in August 1967 and in September the Ba'ath Party rejected all ideas of a compromise with Israel. It also reacted negatively to President Lyndon Johnson's five-point general plan for peace put forward in 19 June 1967.

Syria had entered the 1967 war due to the strategy formulated by the radical Ba'athists that although Israel was militarily superior, the Arabs could prevail in a long-drawn out "war of popular liberation" in which the numerically superior Arab masses, the Arab armies and Arab oil would be mobilized to fight Israel. Unfortunately, the war not only led to the defeat of the Arabs but also to the appropriation of more Arab lands by Israel. The legitimacy of the radical Syrian regime was discredited by the defeat and the loss of Syrian territory.
Assad had been a part of the Ba'athist leadership that had hot-footed into the war but gradually he developed second thoughts about the viability of such a policy. As the Defence Minister, he was particularly sensitive to the military risks and costs of provoking Israeli attacks on an unprepared Syrian Army. Therefore, in 1968, Assad came to head a faction which advocated a change of course. Assad was convinced that Syria could not afford to go for a costly long-drawn out guerrilla war with Israel. On the contrary, he advocated that Syria should concentrate on more realistic goals of recovering, through limited conventional war, the lost territories. "As a professional soldier, he could understand very well the Israeli argument that their security lay in continued occupation of the Golan Heights... so the logical outcome was that Israel could only be dislodged by force." 12

Assad's strategy was four-pronged: (1) All guerrilla activities should be reduced and a conventional Syrian army should be built; (2) Syria should work for a close alliance with Egypt and other eastern front Arab states who could be effective partners in any war against Israel; (3) A rapprochement with the traditional Arab oil states who alone had the money to finance an Arab military build up; (4) The call for revolution inside and outside Syria should be ameliorated since it divided Arabs and diverted efforts which should be dedicated to the struggle against Israel.

The radicals in Syria opposed this and condemned the priority accorded to recover occupied territories since it meant subordinating the liberation of Palestine

and also declared that unless the revolution came all Arab resources can never be mobilized.

The conflict between the "radical" and "realist" faction in the Ba'ath intensified and culminated into open disagreement in 1970 over the question of providing help to the fedayeen in Jordan. Assad refused to let the Syrian air force intervene. The party leaders tried to punish this insubordination but the coup of 1970 disposed of the radical elements and Assad came to power. Then began a new foreign policy based on realpolitik.

At the Eleventh National Congress of the Ba'ath Party in 1971, Assad made obvious the turn in Syria's policy, _vis-a-vis_ Israel. The objective of mobilisation of all resources and manpower became "the liberation of the occupied territories." "The liberation of Palestine" was replaced by demand for "Palestinian Rights". His first priority was a major buildup in the Syrian forces so that lost territories could be recovered through regular military action against Israel. For this, he also needed to acquire arms and cultivate military allies.

Soviet Union had been edged out of Egypt and now veered closer to Syria. By 1972, Soviet arms began to flow into Syria, making it possible to challenge Israel militarily. The causes for this were many. Syria was proving to be loyal. It agreed with the Soviet view that political settlement with Israel should be possible. The Soviets also wanted to show Sadat that expelling Soviet advisors from Egypt would
cost him dear. Partly it was to recompense for the use of certain Syrian facilities by Soviet forces. Most of all, it was Moscow's effort to help the cause of its Arab friend.

To acquire money to facilitate the military buildup, Assad built new alliances with the Arab oil states on the basis of all-Arab solidarity. Soon, the oil states were generously making large contributions to Syria's defence budget.

Militarily, Assad had realised that only a two-front strategy against Israel would lead to victory. In the 1967 war, Jordan, Egypt and Syria had fought separately, without coordination and Israel had easily defeated each of them one by one. In the next war, Assad planned to make Israel fight on two fronts simultaneously.

Egypt was militarily the most powerful Arab state and was indispensible in any war against Israel. Assad's first step was to announce Syrian adherence to the idea of the Federation of Arab Republics, the alliance of Egypt, Libya and Sudan. This gave Syria greater inter-Arab standing and consolidated its alliance with Egypt. Under the cover of these Federal Summits, Assad and Sadat plotted their strategy. In August 1973, Assad and Sadat took the decision of launching the war in the month of October. In September, Jordan was welcomed back into the Arab fold.

Syria was now prepared to go to war against Israel. It had accumulated a huge armoury of modern and highly mobile anti-aircraft and anti-tank missiles and also offensive weapons like the frog missile and the T-62 tank. By October, Syria had
1,400 tanks against a combined Israeli force of 180 and Syrian artillery outnumbered Israeli artillery.

The 1973 War

On the afternoon of 6 October 1973 Egypt and Syria launched a war against Israel. Due to the element of surprise, the Arabs had a strong initial advantage but could not retain it. Syria failed to recover the Golan and even had to cede some additional ground before accepting a ceasefire.

It is rather interesting to note the difference in the way the Arabs and the Israelis regard the outcome of the war. The Arabs see the war of 1973 as an avenge of the 1967 defeat. They feel that it was the 1973 war which brought them to a position to demand "land" in exchange for "peace" that proved to Israel its military vulnerability.

On the other hand, the Israelis were furious that the Arabs actually dared to attack them. It made a dent on their perception of Israel as a regional superpower. They became more adamant in their denial to seek a comprehensive settlement involving the return of territory on all fronts.

The UN Security Council passed Resolution 338 on 22 October 1973. It called for all parties to cease fire and terminate military activity, implementation of
Resolution 242 in all its parts, and for the start of negotiations between parties under appropriate auspices to establish a just and durable peace in the Middle East.

The resolution was drafted by the US and the USSR and it was expected that Syria, a Soviet client, would agree to its terms. But Syria did not. Syria's post-war objective was to translate the leverage won in the war into comprehensive settlement under international auspices.

Adhering to the Resolution, the Geneva Conference was convened on 21 December 1973, where the foreign ministers of Egypt, Jordan and Israel met but Syria was represented by an empty chair and a name plate. Moreover, these talks did not qualify to be called "peace talks" since only disengagement procedures were discussed. Syria outrightly rejected the idea that Arab states would have to recognize Israel or sign a peace agreement with it in accordance with Resolution 242 and refused to go for face to face negotiations with Israel.

Syria's attitude of rejection was based on a number of reasons. It had lost additional territory in the war - Israel had captured a further 845 square kilometres on the Golan Heights. Syria was also apprehensive that Egypt, despite President Sadat's assurances that any settlement achieved with Israel had to be tied to a similar settlement with Syria, might renege and work for a separate disengagement agreement. A weapon Syria used was the 60 odd Israeli Prisoners of War that Syria held and refused to release "unless this was part of a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories."
While the US, the USSR, Egypt and Saudi Arabia tried to convince Assad to enter into a disengagement agreement with Israel, Syria announced a "war of attrition" against Israel. Fighting began again on the Golan on 11 March 1974, while the negotiations on disengagement were on. Assad tried to prove that Syria was not going to the negotiations under duress. But the reality which prompted him to go for disengagement was the presence of the Israeli army roughly 25 miles from Damascus.

The Syria-Israel disengagement agreement was finally signed on 31 May 1974 at Geneva. Israel gave up the salient captured in October and a narrow ribbon of territory which looped around Qunaytra. Israel and Syria agreed to limit forces and armaments within 25 kilometres of their front lines and not to position SAMs within 25 kilometres. In the UN buffer zone, the strength of the UN force was raised to 1250.

Assad may have regarded this disengagement as the first step towards peace. He made it clear that he was ready for peace with Israel and announced his willingness for the first time to negotiate with Israel within the framework of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. His reinterpretation of Resolutions 242 and 338 was an end to the state of war in return for Israel evacuation of all Arab lands and the creation of a Palestinian state on the West Bank. His conditions for peace were Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967 and the restoration of Palestinian rights.
By early 1975, Assad realised that his hopes for a comprehensive settlement would come to nought. Israel had no intention of implementing Resolution 242 and the American pledges to do the same were mere false promises. He also realised that the Israel-Egypt *rapprochement*'s main objective was to isolate Syria.

Syria reacted by turning to another front of attack; it wrested from Egypt the role of the champion of Palestinians and insisted on not just comprehensive Israeli withdrawal but guarantees for Palestinian rights. This was publicly announced on 8 March 1974; when, on the occasions of the eleventh anniversary of the Ba'ath Party's rise to power, he said "... return of all territories captured in June 1967 and the return of the rights of the Palestinians. Syria will accept nothing less..."

This emphasis on the Palestinians' rights at that period was because of two reasons. Assad wanted to promote the PLO as a party in the peace process (which seemed to be in the offing). Secondly, with Egypt weaned out of the Arab fold, it was necessary that Syria and the PLO be together.

Though Syria's disengagement had committed it to the negotiation process, it was wary of the US policy of arranging agreements between Israel and the separate policy gradually hardened against step-by-step diplomacy. Syria and PLO even formed a "joint political command" and declared that Palestinian and Syrian demands could not be separated and that they would make peace together or not at all.
Sinai II compromised Syria's bargaining power since Egypt would no longer be a part of the Arab army in future confrontations. Israel, subsequently, refused to make any kind of territorial concessions to Syria or on the West Bank. Meanwhile America was pouring arms into Israel. This greatly increased the threat to Syria's security, specially since Israel's southern front was neutralised.

To counter all there, Assad began to build an alliance in the Arab East with Lebanon, the PLO and Jordan. This bloc would keep Israel from trying to outflank Syria militarily through Lebanon or Jordan. This would also help in resisting pressure to join Egypt or the rejectionists and would also give Syria the pride of place as a champion of the Palestinian cause. It also gave the chance for Syria to mobilize Arab opinion against Egypt.

SYRIA AND ISRAEL IN LEBANON

A constant feature of Israeli policy has been to intervene in the political affairs of the neighbouring Arab states. These interventions, direct or indirect, overt or covert, have been part of the Israeli effort to keep the Arabs weak and divided and to influence the internal politics of individual Arab states. Israel has often forged links with religious and ethnic minorities of an Arab state, groups which find themselves in opposition to the existing social and political order or the regime in their country.

Of all the Arab states, Lebanon was the most tempting for Israel to intervene. The fragmented Lebanese political system, the various ethnic and religious minorities,
the endemic conflicts among the communities, and the weakness of the central
government have always permitted and invited external intervention. Israeli
intervention in Lebanon hinges around four major themes: security of Israel's northern
border; alliances with the Maronite community; Israel's relation with Syria and
Lebanese water resources, especially from the Litani River.

Israel's contacts with Lebanon precede the date of formation of Israel as a
state. The Jewish Agency had maintained relations with the Maronite leaders of
Lebanon even in the 1930s and 1940s. This was a local alliance which was used to
counter local opposition to Israel's creation. Maronite leaders perceived a
commonality with the Israelis since both Maronites and Zionists saw themselves
battling against the twin pressures of Islam and pan-Arab nationalism. Maronite
leaders came out openly in favour of the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.
They believed that the creation of an additional non-Muslim state in the
neighbourhood would strengthen the Lebanese Republic and their own position inside
it vis-a-vis the Muslims. In 1946, an agreement was signed by Dr. Chaim
Weizmann, the World Zionist Organisation's President, and Patriarch Antun Arida,
reciprocally recognising the Jewish demand for independence in Palestine and the
independent "Christian character" of Lebanon.

These early links played a major role in consolidating Israeli-interference in
Lebanese politics. In the period following the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948, Lebanon

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proved to be one of Israel's quieter neighbours. Israel understood that Lebanon's domestic considerations prevented its leaders from divorcing themselves from the Arab world and signing a peace treaty with Israel. The two countries had an undisputed border which was policed by means of the Israel-Lebanon Mixed Armistice Commission.\textsuperscript{14}

Circumstances took a turn in mid-1960s, when waves of Palestinian refugees and guerrillas settled in Lebanon. The border began to prove a trouble spot, a place where the Palestinian guerrillas mobilized themselves. \textit{Fedayeen} attacks increased and cross-border commando incursions escalated. The 1967 war brought this tension to the level of conflict.

In 1970-71, Palestinian commando factions were ejected from Jordan and most got relocated in South Lebanon. \textit{Fedayeen} activities increased and south Lebanon became a major target of Israeli commando and air attacks; Israel's anti-\textit{fedayeen} activities shifted from its frontier with Jordan to South Lebanon. In May 1970, the Israeli Army conducted its first large-scale sweep of the region which was followed by similar incursions in 1972. In the early 1970s, the Palestinian commando attacks were limited in scope and had limited impact on northern Israel. But by 1974, the situation changed. \textit{Fedayeen} strikes became frequent and caused large number of Israeli casualties and, accordingly, the Israeli retaliatory measures assumed greater dimensions.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
The conclusion of the Sinai II agreement coincided with the outbreak of the civil war in Lebanon. Syria was already working on building a Syrian-led bloc in the Arab East. At the initial stages of the civil war, Syria wanted to protect the position of the Palestinians in Lebanon. Syrian arms and diplomatic intervention in favour of the Leftist forces was hoped to forestall the formation of an anti-Palestinian military government. Syria was also acting as a mediator, trying to restrain its clients and manoeuvre an agreement. Syria's main aim was to contain the crisis and to establish a Syrian presence in Lebanese politics.

The year 1975 came to an end and the crisis, instead of fizzling out, took an ominous turn. Syrian apprehension grew at the prospect of a partitioned Lebanon and an Israeli intervention. Syria began to overtly assert its interest in Lebanon and warned that if Lebanon cannot stay united, it will have to return to Syria. In early 1976, Lebanese rightist forces launched an offensive aimed at creation of a Maronite mini-state. Syrian-controlled Palestine Liberation Army forces crossed the border, defeated the rightist forces and imposed a ceasefire. Then Syria put forth a peace plan which provided for a redistribution of power in favour of the Muslims and a disengagement of Palestinians from Lebanese affairs, in return of Maronite acceptance of their presence. Syria thought that this was an impartial peace plan which would be accepted by both the contenders.

The Lebanese left rejected the plan since they demanded a secular state and greater redistribution of power. The radical Palestinians rejected the plan since they wanted to turn Lebanon into a base for struggle with Israel. A Palestinian-leftist
counter-offensive put the country again in jeopardy and ended the Syrian peace plan. Syria then turned diplomatic and military pressures on its traditional allies and entered into a tacit alliance with the Maronites. As the conflict escalated, Syrian military intervention increased.

There were many factors at work which made it inevitable for Syria to intervene in Lebanon. Knowing that Israel is innately expansionist, the Syrian regime was convinced that a partition of Lebanon would give Israel the excuse to move into southern Lebanon and occupy the area up to the Litani River. Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon would increase Syria's strategic vulnerability since it would provide Israel a new front in any future confrontation. The Israelis would fight the Syrians at two fronts, Golan and the exposed Beqaa Valley in Lebanon.

In Assad's perception it was clear that Syria and Israel were engaged in a contest for the Levant as a whole. The Syrians knew that Lebanon, if fragmented and partitioned, would be used as an example by the Israelis for exposing the conceptual and practical weaknesses inherent in the highly publicised goal of creating a secular democratic Palestine.

The Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister stated that Syria knew from the beginning of the civil war that "Israel would vigorously use the sectarian conflict in Lebanon to vindicate the Israeli refusal to democratize its system and accept the Palestinians back into a secular state". In other words, the Israelis could argue that if the Arabs

15 Quoted in Adeed Dawisha "Syria in Lebanon - Assad's Vietnam" Foreign Policy, Fall 1988, p.34.
themselves could not coexist in one country because of religious differences, then why should the Palestinians and Syrians expect Israeli Jews and Palestinian Muslims and Christians to live harmoniously in a future secular state?

Due to the historic indivisibility of Syria and Lebanon it is difficult to draw a line between Lebanon's and Syria's security. Due to this, the Syrians had to discourage religious conflicts in Lebanon for fear of any spillover into Syria's own sectarian schisms.

Syria, traditionally, perceives itself as the guardian of Arab nationalism and Assad has remained one among the diminishing breed of Arab leaders who genuinely and determinately adhere to the concept of Arab Nationalism. Therefore, Syrian leaders were firmly opposed to any possible Balkanisation of any Arab state. Ba'ath Party's ideology reinforces this trend and thus the party and the President were dragged into the Lebanese imbroglio.

Syria's intervention in Lebanon, in favour of the Maronites came as a shock to many. There were a number of factors which led to this departure from traditional Syrian policy. Syria held that a leftist military victory would succeed only at the cost of embitterment of Maronites against the Arab world. It could drive the Maronites straight into the arms of Israel. It could bring about a partition and Balkanize the Arab world. A radical state in Lebanon, which sponsored guerrilla warfare against Israel would only give the Israelis an excuse to evade pressures for a peace settlement, destroy the fedayeen presence in southern Lebanon and the area might fall into Israeli
hands. Most dangerous was the possibility that in response to the Maronite invitation, Israel would intervene and drag Syria into a war on terms favourable to Israel in which Syria's western flank would be threatened.

This military security threat was without question the main factor which prompted Syrian armed action in Lebanon. In place of a radicalized Lebanon, Damascus wanted a scenario in which it could play the role of balance between two rival communities and hence exercise hegemony in Lebanon.

There were certain other factors at play. When the Palestinian and leftist leaders defied Syria, hostility for them grew in Damascus. The Syrian regime was outraged that their junior allies were not just proving to be ungrateful but were also defying Syria and even attacking the Syrian army, an army that had sacrificed so much for the Palestinian cause. This gave cause to Syria to want to chastise the Palestinians and the leftist forces.

Syrian military intervention in Lebanon in favour of the Maronites was preceded by a very vital unsigned and unavowed agreement between Syria, Israel and the USA, an accord which came to be known as the REDLINE Agreement.\footnote{Ze'ev Schiff, "Dealing with Syria", Foreign Policy, No. 55 (Summer, 1984), p.42.} Henry Kissinger was in the midst of his Middle-East shuttles when the civil war in Lebanon took place. Initially, he made it known that US would disapprove of Syrian intervention but then he changed tactics. He decided it would be far more profitable if Syria is used to crush the Palestinians, driven by the Syrian fear of partition of
Lebanon. This plan augured well for Israel. First, entry of Syrian forces into Lebanon would weaken the Syrian army and divert it from Golan. Secondly, Syria would bear the stigma of fighting the Palestinians. Thirdly, the Palestinians would be suppressed, and the left in Lebanon would be curbed. Israel was convinced by Kissinger that it should not contest Syrian action in Lebanon.

Thus the US-Syrian-Israeli agreement came about whereby Israel agreed to the entry of Syrian troops into parts of Lebanon but Syrian troops south of Damascus-Beirut road could not exceed one brigade and could not bring in SAMs and that there would be limited Syrian air and naval deployment.\(^\text{17}\) The Redline Agreement was an open invitation to Syria to go to Lebanon. It assured that Israel would not join in. This unwritten, unsigned and often unavowed agreement was the last factor which prompted the Syrian troops to move into Lebanon against the Palestinian and Leftist forces.

While Syrian troops fought the Palestinians and the Arabs community condemned the "lion of Arabism slaughtering Arabism's holy cow", Israel watched the unfolding events with satisfaction. Israeli Prime Minister observed that he saw no need to disturb the Syrian army in its killing of "Arafat's terrorists".\(^\text{18}\) Israel waited and watched Egypt, Iraq and other Arab states condemn Syria and the Soviet criticism of Syrian action.


\(^{18}\) BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, ME/5225, 11 June 1976
The outcome appeared to be a Syrian victory in Lebanon. A military defeat was inflicted on the Palestinians and the leftist forces. Syria's "peace-keeping" role in Lebanon was accepted. But the Syria-Maronite alliance could not bear the exigencies of diverse objectives. Syria could not win Maronite trust nor could it thrust a lesser Christian role in a Lebanon integrated into the Arab world under Syrian patronage. The Maronites insisted on their dominance in a "mini" Lebanon linked to the West. They even resisted the deployment of Syrian "peace-keepers" in Christian areas. Disagreement occurred over Palestinian presence and the disposition of Southern Lebanon. By mid-1977, the Maronites tied up with the Israeli-backed militia of Saad Haddad against leftist and Palestinian presence.

Israel, so far, had been indulging in its own version of the Nixon Doctrine, of arming overseas allies but not fighting with them. Their aim was to help their Lebanese allies to help themselves; arm the Christian militia but not to commit troops to fight on their behalf.

In 1977, the Likud came to power in Israel and the policy of limited liability bloomed into one of full partnership with the Maronites. Israeli weapons, advisers and cash flowed to the Maronites and southern Lebanon was rebuilt to Israel advantage. A pro-Israeli militia led by Major Sa'ad Haddad begun functioning as Israel’s early warning system along the whole border. Haddad’s forces, renamed Southern Lebanese Army took control of Southern Lebanon and fought severely with
the Palestinians and the Leftist forces. Thus the fighting became a war by proxy between Israel and Syria, fought with Lebanese players on Lebanese soil.

Prime Minister Menachem Begin proclaimed that Haddad's Militia was necessary to save the Christians from "genocide". "Israel", he asserted, "would never abandon the Christian minority across the border." This signalled the re-starting of the Israeli policy of capitalising on Lebanon's sectarian differences through Israeli support for establishing sectarian enclaves in Lebanon.

In March 1978, Israel launched a major incursion into Lebanon, Operation Stone of Wisdom, following a fedayeen attack on an Israeli bus south of Haifa. The Maronites decided to join Israel and this marked the end of the Syrian-Maronite alliance. Syria initially did not join the fighting and matched Israel's consolidation of a southern zone under Haddad. But when the rightist militia began challenging Syrian control of strategic positions in the mountains and East Beirut, Syria responded by force.

Syria demanded entry for its peace-keeping forces into all Lebanese areas and insisted on the right to cooperate in the reconstruction of the state, the non-sectarian reform of the army, the purge of those who had collaborated with Israel, i.e. Haddad, the extension of state authority to the south and an end of the Maronite collaboration with Israel. In the ensuing battles, Syrian forces pushed the Maronite militias back, seized strategic points and carried out a punishing bombardment on East Beirut.

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Finally, a ceasefire was accepted, the front with the militia was ceded to a Saudi buffer force and left the south to the Right. Thus emerged Maronite enclaves openly aligned with Israel which became grave obstacles to reconstruction of a united Lebanon and a threat to Syrian security. Israel secured the role of protector of Christians and had an arbitrary role in Lebanon.

In 1979 and 1980, Syria supported Palestinian efforts to reestablish a southern presence and made spurts of efforts to challenge regular Israeli incursions into the area. In 1981 Syria pushed back a Maronite drive to extend their control into Syrian-held areas. When the Israeli air force came to the defence of the Maronites Syria moved anti-aircraft missiles into eastern Lebanon. The Redline Agreement collapsed and a crisis brewed when Israel threatened to destroy them but American restraint helped in containing the crisis. The US initiated PLO-Israel ceasefire also dampened the conflict in the South.

In 1980, Israel decided to go beyond helping the Maronites to help themselves and assumed an open-ended commitment to help the latter come to an independent position. Ariel Sharon, the Israeli defence minister, began using Lebanon as an instrument of a grandiose scheme of Israeli hegemony in the region. Israeli propaganda begun to dwell on the security threat posed by the PLO presence in Southern Lebanon. They were convinced that an invasion of Lebanon was essential for securing permanent Israeli mastery over the West Bank. To annihilate the PLO in Lebanon, the Palestinian movement would be broken and would also make Israel the dominant power in the Levant if the Syrian protectorate over Lebanon is replaced by
an Israeli one. By using military power, Israel could establish a politico-strategic revolution around Israel's eastern and northern borders. Israel began its invasion of Lebanon on 6 June 1982.

This invasion was well-planned and its objectives were clear. Destruction of PLO in Lebanon would also lead to a peace treaty with Lebanon modelled after that with Egypt. The timing was orchestrated to coincide with the termination of the presidency of Ilyas Sarkis and the onset of Bashir Jumayyil victory in Lebanon, a person who would be more receptive to the prospect of expulsion of Syria from Lebanon.

Israeli scholar Rabinovich summed up the real goals of the war into four major headings: (a) to destroy the PLO military infrastructure in Southern Lebanon and create a security zone of 40 kilometres; (b) destroy the PLO position in rest of Lebanon, particularly Beirut, to eliminate its hold over Lebanese political system and Arab-Israeli conflict; (c) to defeat the Syrian army in Lebanon to effect its full or partial withdrawal from Lebanon and to preempt the possibility of a Syrian-Israeli war; (d) this would facilitate the reconstruction of the Lebanese state and political system under the hegemony of Israel and its allies - Bashir Jamayyil and the Lebanese Front.²⁰

Within two weeks of the invasion, Israeli forces drove the Palestinian resistance and their Lebanese leftist allies out of southern Lebanon and laid siege to

West Beirut. The Syrians, who actually believed Israeli statements and US assurances that Israel was not interested in fighting a war with Syria, were driven out of southern and central Lebanon. The Beirut-Damascus highway fell under Israeli control up to the city of Sawfar. Bashir Jumayyil, under the protection of Israeli guns, was elected President.

As in 1978, Syria initially tried to avoid collision with Israeli forces, thinking that the invasion would be of limited scope. Finally, Syria tried to regain a foothold and inflicted losses on the Israelis in major tank engagements but the destruction of its air defence umbrella rendered the Syrian armour vulnerable to air attack. When finally ceasefire was accepted, Israel had pushed Syria out of southern sectors.

More than a military setback, it was a political defeat for Syria. It reopened old wounds in Syrian-Palestinian relations. Avoiding confrontation with Israel and its acceptance of a ceasefire, while the PLO was still fighting, cast a shadow of doubt over the efficacy of PLO-Syrian strategic alliance. Syria always claimed a sort of protectorate over the PLO, but in 1982, it failed to live up to the responsibilities of a protector. More importantly, it had grave consequences on Syria's anti-Camp David strategy. Demonstrating the impotence of Arab power, it seemed to vindicate the stand of the capitulationist forces in the Arab world.

Bashir Jumayyil's assassination on 14 September, knocked the main pillar on which Israel had based its grand design. *Operation Peace for Galilee* collapsed. In desperation, with Israeli encouragement, the massacre of Palestinian civilians in the
Camps of Sabra and Chatila was carried out. This was an act which greatly undermined Israeli standing in Lebanon and intensified resistance to its presence in Lebanon. Thus, though militarily it was a victory, politically it was almost a disaster for Israel, especially when compared to its original goals. Military superiority could not be translated into lasting political achievements.

The United States sponsored face-to-face negotiations between Lebanon and Israel aimed at withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon. These negotiations culminated in the 17 May 1983 agreement. The terms were the termination of a state of war between Israel and Lebanon and establishment of diplomatic relations. It also provided for normalisation of relations and economic exchange and the setting up of a security belt stretching 28 miles into southern Lebanon which would be patrolled jointly by Lebanese and Israeli troops. This was a major victory for Israel since it was almost tantamount to a peace treaty and could transform Lebanon into an Israeli satellite.

The accord catapulted Syria to a violent opposition and it set out to scuttle the accord. Rearmed by Soviet Union and a new approach, Syria insisted on Israel's full and unconditional withdrawal from Lebanon in compliance with Security Council Resolutions 508 and 509. Syria pointed out that it was in Lebanon by invitation while Israel was there by invasion. Syria struck an alliance with the Druze and Lebanese leftist forces and the combined militia restrained the Amin Jumayyil government from consolidating its power in Lebanon. American threats to unleash the Israelis and even direct intervention of American guns and planes on behalf of the Jumayyil regime and
against Syria failed to deter Syria. A costly attack on U.S. Marine positions by a group allied with Syria and the downing of American bombers flying against Syrian targets proved to the Americans that its involvement would be very costly. Israel troops had to retreat from the Shuf area and their placement behind the Awwali river in Southern Lebanon sparked off another civil war between the Druze and the Phalangists. The Druze drove the Christian militia and the Israeli American backed Lebanese army from Shuf. The government soon lost West Beirut to the opposition. After the loss of 259 American lives, the Reagan administration evacuated the US Marines. By mid-February 1984, the victory of Syria and its Lebanese allies was complete and, in March, Amin Jumayyil announced the annulment of the 1983 accord with Israel.

Syria thus demonstrated that it could defeat a separate partial peace in the Arab East that ignored Syrian interests. It successfully checkmated Israel's efforts to expand its clientage network in Lebanon. It enhanced its prestige in Arab opinion by its defiance of Israel and America in the name of Arab rights. It diluted the capitulationist Arab opinion which prevailed at that time. In 1984, it again emerged as the main power-broker in Lebanon.

The first half of 1985 brought a series of successes of Syrian policy in Lebanon which neutralised its previous failures. Most important, Israel, under guerrilla pressure from the Syrian backed Shiite resistance, gradually withdrew southward. The military threat to Syria's Western flank was largely ended, spelling an end to the Israeli hopes of keeping Syrian forces off the Golan front. Although Israel
and its proxies remained entrenched on the Southern border, Israel had to give up its
bid to replace Syria as the arbiter of Lebanon. The Christians in Lebanon gave up
hope of a fruitful alliance with Israel. The alliance with Israel was declared a mere
"passing cloud" and that it was time for the Maronites to "return to the Arab fold". The same Maronite President who had signed the 1983 accord invited Syrian troops to
Beirut to restore order.

In November 1985, Syria and Israel clashed directly in Lebanon again when
Israeli planes overflying eastern Lebanon clashed with Syrian planes and two Syrian
planes were shot down over Syrian territory and Syria deployed ground to air missiles.
Through December 1985 and January 1986, the danger of a large-scale Israeli-Syrian
collision remained but it was avoided since both were not interested in a collision.

The period after the mid-1980s has witnessed a gradual consolidation of
Syrian power in Lebanon while edging out the Israeli presence and restraining it to
southern Lebanon.

Israel's attempts to reach an informal understanding with the Syrians on
security arrangement in Lebanon through U.S. mediation were rejected. The Syrians
stepped up their support for the Shiite resistance in South Lebanon and successfully
prevented Israel from establishing a security zone under the South Lebanese Army.

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Israeli policies regarding Lebanon changed gradually. A constant failure of Israeli policy makers to correctly evaluate the complex situation in Lebanon led to a radical change. The basic mistake was the attempt to establish a "new order" by intervening politically and militarily in favour of the Christians against their opponents in Lebanon and against Syria.

Once Israel backed out of Lebanon, Syria seemed convinced that Israel's deterrent capacity had diminished and it was on the way to achieving strategic parity with Israel. Syria claimed to have proved to the Arab world that there is an alternative to Camp David which could force Israel's withdrawal without major Arab concessions and certainly without the kind of peace treaty that Egypt had signed. For many Arabs, Israel after its failure in Lebanon appeared to be less of a threat.

Syrian policy after Camp David was aimed at containing the threat of an Israel strengthened and emboldened by the withdrawal of Egypt from the conflict, preventing the legitimization of the Camp David process in the Arab world, and claiming the support which Syria was entitled as the only remaining front-line Arab state.

In retrospect, the first principle that emerges as a component of Assad's policy with regard to the Arab-Israel conflict is Syria's refusal to be dragged into a war when the time and place of battle is not decided by Syria. This attitude was a result of the adventurist policies of his predecessors, on whom Assad blames the loss of the Golan. Assad has restrained all provocation by Israel to be dragged into a war till Syria is not
in a position to achieve victory. This was demonstrated in Lebanon in both 1978 and 1982.

Assad has also successfully resisted the PLO's doctrine of *tawrit*, dragging Arab regimes into a confrontation with Israel against their will. This was demonstrated again in Lebanon where numerous battles were fought by Syrian troops *against* the Palestinians.

Israel and its protector, USA, lost much ground and prestige by locking horns with Syria, especially in Lebanon. This was due to the tendency of underestimating Syria and ignoring Syria's position and role in Lebanon in particular and the region in general. The trend was gradually reversed when it was realised that Syria was in a position to obstruct efforts of others, including the U.S., to come to a solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Since the mid-seventies, President Assad had given certain subtle signals that Syria is not completely averse to the idea of peace with Israel. In March 1972, Assad gave a qualified acceptance of UN Security Resolution 242. Ten years later he endorsed the eight-point Fez Plan and the concept of a negotiated peace, and during a visit to Moscow in 1987 a joint Soviet-Syrian state called for an international conference under UN auspices. For the past two decades, Syrian observance of the terms of the 1974 Disengagement Agreement with Israel has been exemplary. But he made it clear that negotiations would be conducted only when Syria is in a position of strength and after attaining strategic parity with Israel. President Assad had also made it clear that Syria would be ready to negotiate for peace, but only in the context of a
collective Arab agreement, preferably under the aegis of an international conference. Syrians wanted peace, but were prepared to wait for their terms of peace to be acceptable. They want a just and comprehensive settlement involving full Israeli withdrawal and implementation of Palestinian national rights.

The main prop behind Assad's stand in the Arab-Israeli conflict is the nature of the Syrian political system. Syria's hard line on the Arab-Israeli dispute is not just territory but is also bound up with the regime's legitimacy. To make Syria the leading regional power, policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict is an integral part because Syria regards itself as the leading Arab state and champion of the Palestinian cause. To accept a solution a la Camp David would irreversibly jeopardise Assad's Arab credentials and encourage the rejectionists to oppose Syria. Unlike what the western media portrays, the people of Syria are highly opinionated on political matters, and the Palestinian question remains high on the emotional and political agendas of most of the Syrians. Assad would not go out to make peace with Israel if his people do not back him. Assad would never agree to be remembered as a leader who forfeited Arab and Syrian rights to go to the bargaining table with Israel.

At the dawn of the nineties, participants and observers of the Middle East Conflict were coming around to accepting the adage that in the region, there could be no major Arab-Israeli conflict without Egypt and no Arab-Israeli Peace without Syria.
Then a tumultuous event shook the Arab world. Iraq invaded Kuwait on 2 August 1990 and this brought about a drastic change in the regional *status quo*. The result of the invasion and occupation of Kuwait brought half the world to the region to fight a war and the exigencies and the results were such that it finally brought Israel and Syria to the negotiating table.

**SYRIA-IRAN**

The state system in West Asia is distinct and different from that of the developed world. The state borders are fragile, the roots of the states are weak and crisis of legitimacy of ruling regimes is a common element. Added to these are other factors like praetorization of the militaries, the radical shifts in the ruling elites and the strong influence of the oil factors. All these factors have combined and led to an interaction between Middle Eastern states which is marked by as Ghassan Salame states "immediate present or immediate future and not strategic considerations of old nations." Therefore, in this area, historical hostilities were, and still are, expressed in non-state terms with highly emotive meanings and with high potential for manipulation by regional and extra-regional powers. Iran's foreign policy too is often dictated by such regional exigencies.

An analysis of Iran's relations with its neighbours reveal two dominating trends: "an effort to restore and maintain its territorial integrity and the quest for

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independence." Thus, Iran's security challenge has been to guard its territorial integrity and independence from hostile, and often stronger powers. This trend has been reflected in various strategies explicitly designed to resist the encroachment of foreign powers, be it Amir Kabir's strategy of "positive equilibrium" to protect Iran from the manifestations of the Russo-British rivalry or by the "negative equilibrium" of Mossadeq to deny rival powers excessive privileges or the more recent posture of non-alignment adopted by Iran.

In his book on Iranian foreign policy, Professor R.K. Ramazani states that Iran's relations with Arab states are multidimensional and one cannot understand this relationship by emphasising exclusively only on one aspect like military, ideology, political or economic. "Both the challenge of Revolutionary Iran and the response of other Middle Eastern states to Iran's challenge are multidimensional." This observation holds true in most cases of Iran-Arab relation.

Most politics in West Asia is regional. Religion, ideology, ethnicity, large disparities in wealth, competing strategic ambitions and historical rivalries compel Middle Eastern states to deal with and be influenced by one another on a regular basis - no state can survive like an island in the area. Therefore, foreign relations of these states are often restricted to regional interactions.

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Iran is not an exception to this phenomena. For a number of reasons, a dualism exists in Iranian foreign policy - aggressive policies towards some of the region's actors and a conciliatory attitude towards others. Iranian policy makers, concerned about Iran's possible isolation in the region, have often taken steps to extend an olive branch to a chosen few. Syria has been one country which has enjoyed a good relationship with Iran, especially in the recent decades.

Iran and Syria seem to have found a common ground with regard to a number of issues. At a glance, one can question that, how can two countries tied down to two different ideologies find a common ground? While the Syrian regime professes a secular, socialist-oriented pan-Arabism, Iran believes in a supra-national pan-Islamism. Both formulate and present their foreign policy in tandem with their ideologies. They, nevertheless, have found some commonalities to base a relationship upon closely-related interests and the need to address contradictory ideological visions has formed the bedrock of this relationship. Since the Islamic Revolution, Syria-Iran relations have been amazingly amicable. But before the Islamic Revolution which brought Ayatollah Khomeini to power in Iran, this relationship had not been as amicable.

SYRIA-IRAN RELATIONS BEFORE 1979

In the 1960s and 1970s, a constant feature of West Asian politics was the disagreement and disharmony between the Syrian Ba'ath regime and the Iranian Shah's regime. A lot of factors were responsible for this hostile state of affairs - Iran
was a Western stooge while Syria was pro-Soviet; Syria's foremost enemy was Israel while Iran found a friend in the Zionist state; they disagreed over the status of Khuzestan/Arabistan; Arab countries friendly to Iran were not among Syria's friends; the Shah wholeheartedly backed Sadat's peace initiative, which was anathema to Syria.

A lot of flak was generated due to the Shah's anti-Arab partnership with Israel. His subservience to the United States was resented. It was not that Syria did not try to keep Iran away from Western and Israeli influence. In December 1975, Assad travelled to Tehran and tried to persuade the Shah to put pressure on Washington not to take sides in the Arab-Israeli dispute. Instead of paying heed to this, the Shah participated wholeheartedly in the weaning of Sadat away from the Arab fold. Syria realised that the Arabs were being squeezed in the vice-like grip of the Israel-Iran alliance and did not shy away from trying to break this grip. During the mid-seventies Iran cultivated friends from among the Arab-bloc who were not very popular with Syria. Damascus resented the pro-Western axis which was being formed by Iran, Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

For all these reasons, Syria threw in its lot with Ayatollah Khomeini when he emerged as a serious threat to the Shah. Assad always regarded the Middle East as one entity and his geostrategic hindsight went beyond the Arab heartland and spilled over to peripheral non-Arab countries too. He realised that it was fatal if Iran remained pro-Western and pro-Israeli and vital that Iran should be on the side of
Arabs in the Arab-Israeli disputes. Israel was getting stronger and Iran, with its new dynamic force, could tilt the balance of power against Israel.

When the Islamic Revolution was brewing and Ayatollah Khomeini sprang into prominence, Syria wasted no time in showing its support for the revolutionary movement in Iran. In October 1978, when Ayatollah Khomeini was expelled from Iran and was looking for a base to operate from, the Syrians made him an offer of asylum in their country.25 Assad saw an ally in the Revolution. The fall of the Shah would deal a blow to the growing Israeli-Western menace in the region. Khomeini's Islamic internationalism was, after all, an indigenous movement poised against extraregional powers.

AFTER 1979

When the Ayatollah took over power in Tehran, Assad welcomed the change with a congratulatory telegram and a gift of an illuminated Quran. The Foreign Minister of Syria proclaimed that the Islamic Revolution was "the most important event in our contemporary history" and that Syria had supported this movement "prior to its outbreak, during it, and after its triumph."26


26 Interview in Kehyan, 19 August 1979, BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 21 August 1979.
After he came to power, Ayatollah Khomeini flagged off a very unconventional foreign policy. Both the United States and the USSR were branded as evil: as "arch satans" and "satans". The conservative Arab leaders were regarded as "corrupt" and the West Europeans as "neo-colonisers" and "exploiters" of the Third World. Most people branded this policy as a "negative rhetoric" but once adopting this stand, Iran stood isolated with no friends in the West and even in the Middle East. The only support seemed to come from Cuba, South Yemen, Libya and Syria and other far-flung non-aligned countries. The resurgence of Islam was an important factor influencing Iran's policy towards most of the Middle East. This threat of the export of the Revolution resulted in improved relations among Saudi Arabia, Iraq and the rest of the Gulf states. A flurry of activities brought Saudi Arabia and Iraq together to stop the spread of Islam out of Iran. Bahrain and Qatar promptly signed mutual security pacts with Saudi Arabia seeking protection to prevent the export of the Revolution in the Gulf. Conservative Arab leaders feared the appeal of the new force and about the possible alignment of Iran with Syria, or with the PLO. This would be a great boost for the radical Arabs and would cause a shift in favour of revolutionising forces in the region.

On the other hand, many Arabs welcomed the change because they appreciated the interjection of Iran into the politics of the Arab-Israeli dispute by breaking Iran's diplomatic ties with Egypt, renouncing its relations with Israel, announcing its support for the PLO, and halting oil shipments from Iran to Israel. On 18 February 1979, the official press agency of Iran, Pars News Agency, declared the
termination of all relations with Israel and full support of the PLO was called the cornerstone of Iran's foreign policy.

At this point of time, Iran regarded Syrian support as important. An important and strong Arab state, if allied with Iran, would be a useful friend and ally. Initially, two schools of thought existed in Iran regarding Syria. The first believed that Iran should support the rising anti-regime Islamic opposition in Syria while the second preferred a high-level governmental relationship with Syria since the region was a political swamp and Iran needed certain stepping stones, an alliance with Syria was regarded ideal. The Islamic Republic needed allies. The secular state of Syria could have thrown a spanner in the works but this obstacle was deftly sidestepped. It was justified that history bears evidence that the Prophet himself had sent messages to, or negotiated with, non-Islamic leaders. Therefore, since Iran saw a friend in strong Syria, there was no valid reason not to strike up a fruitful alliance. The second school of thought appealed more to the government in Tehran. Syria's unrelenting stand against USA, Israel and the Egyptian peace endeavour were reasons for Iran to ally itself with Syria. This Iranian conviction and belief in Syrian support stood vindicated when Syria announced its support to Iran during the hostage crisis in Iran.

Syria had reasons not to spurn this Iranian goodwill. The period from mid to late seventies was a difficult time for Syria. The Israel-Egypt Accord was a growing threat to Syria's position in the region. Relations with PLO were on a downward

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slide. The Syrian-Jordanian *entente* of mid-70s was fizzling out. The "Arab Front of Steadfastness and Resistance" was not really effective, since the partner countries, South Yemen, Libya and Algeria, geographically so far away from Syria, could not bring about a change in the regional *status quo*. Initiating reconciliation with Iraq was proving to be an impossibility for Syria. On the other hand, the new regime in Iran was anti-West, anti-Egypt, anti-Iraq and anti-Israel and Syria saw in Iran an ally who could tilt the regional balance of power in its favour. Moreover, Iran's influence over Lebanese Shi'is could prove fruitful for Syria. Another vital reason for Syria to close ranks with Iran may have been the necessity to fill the vacuum created by Egypt's departure from the Arab fold and its demise as a party in the conflict with Israel. Iran's considerable military power, economic clout and the huge population could tilt the regional strategic balance in favour of Syria and an Arab front.

Thus, "the most daring feature of Assad's foreign policy reshaped to confront the world of Camp David, was undoubtedly his alliance with Revolutionary Iran." 28 Arab opinion and even domestic opinion in Syria reacted to this alliance. Arabs could not understand the Syrian stance. After all, Nasser had preached that Arabs should unite only with Arabs and how could Assad, an adherent to Nasser's Arab nationalism, ally with a non-Arab power which was threatening Arab states across the Gulf. This alliance was seen by other Arab leaders as a typical characteristic of the Syrian regime. Assad was accused of stepping outside the Arab mainstream. "By joining hands with a state outside the Arab family and with a revolutionary Islamic

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28 Seale, n. 25, p.351.
movement challenging Sunni establishments, Assad displayed uncommon freedom from convention and rewrote the rules of the Middle Eastern power system."

Arabs all over the region followed the events unfolding in Iran with interest. Ayatollah Khomeini denounced the United States, dissolved the Shah's agreements with the US, broke-off diplomatic relations with Israel, put a stop to the flow of oil to Israel, withdrew from the Central Treaty Organisation, and as a symbol to Iran's commitment to the Palestinian cause, turned over the Israeli embassy in Tehran to the PLO.

On 22 September 1980, Iraqi forces crossed over into Iran and the first Gulf War started. After eight months and eighty skirmishes, a border conflict escalated into a long war. Many regional and extra-regional powers took sides and were pulled into the imbroglio. Syria could not stay isolated and it chose to support Iran in the war.

Assad condemned Iraq's role in failing to avoid war and called it "the wrong war, against the wrong enemy at the wrong time." He believed that it was a mistake to fight Iran, because it would mean depleting the Arabs' military resources, fragmenting the Arab ranks, and, most importantly, it would divert the Arabs from 'the holy battle in Palestine.' Instead of fighting Iran, Arabs should ally with Iran

29 Ibid.
and fight one greater evil, i.e. Israel. Initially, Syria tried to bring pressure on Iraq to stop the war but in vain.

The war led to new worries for Syria. In case of a quick Iraqi victory, Syria would be trapped between two hostile and triumphant powers, Iraq and Israel. Due to all these reasons, Assad, on a visit to Moscow shortly after the outbreak of the war, issued a joint statement with Brezhnev supporting "Iran's inalienable right to determine its destiny independently and without any foreign influence." 31

In the ensuing years, Iran-Syria relations were operational on the following three broad factors.

THE SHI'I FACTOR:

Many analysts trace the root of the Syria-Iran friendship to Assad's own background as a member of a community derived from Shi'ism and in the "fellow-feeling of a man of rural and minority origins for people... especially the deprived Shi'is of Lebanon, who had themselves long been oppressed." 32 In the mid-1970s, the stability of Assad's regime was endangered by the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. Their movement was based on condemning the regime as non-Islamic. This fundamentalist movement was of Syrian Sunni Muslims. The Islamic movement led by Ayatollah Khomeini was different from the Sunni fundamentalism in Syria. "Assad's rage at the guerrillas and at the Sunni establishments in the Arab world

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32 Seale, n.25 p.351.
which lent them overt or covert support may have been a factor in his decision to reach out towards Tehran.\textsuperscript{33}

Assad had already found a Muslim ally in Musa al-Sadr, the leader of the Shi'i community in Lebanon, a leader of Iranian origin who had settled in Lebanon as early as 1959 and since then was working for upliftment of the downtrodden Shi'is of Lebanon. In 1973, Musa al-Sadr proclaimed the now-famous \textit{fatwa} that the "Alawis were an authentic part of Shi'i Islam." This was a step which strengthened Assad's confrontation with the Sunni critics of his regime. Again, in 1967, he helped Syria by keeping the Lebanese Shi'is away from Kamal Jumblatt's leftist coalition which Syria was trying to curtail. Musa al Sadr's "good relations with Syria facilitated the establishment of co-operation between Damascus and Khomeini."\textsuperscript{34}

Thus was formed a "Shi'i axis" between Iran, Damascus and Lebanon. Although this axis did not ameliorate Assad's troubles with his domestic Sunni opposition, it did go a long way in helping the Syrian regime in enhancing its Muslim profile.

The new axis had an impact on the Lebanese situation too. Musa al-Sadr desired an alliance with Syria because Syria's help could be then counted on to better

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, p. 352.

the lot of the Shi'is in Lebanon. The Shi'is in Lebanon were pro-Syrian and this helped Syria a lot in maintaining its power in Lebanon.

In Assad's eyes, the Shi'is in Levant were mainly the deprived peasants of South Lebanon who had struggled for their livelihood in the fields of the feudal absentee landlords. This was similar to what the Alawis had suffered in Syria. The struggle of rural Shi'is for a better position in a Lebanese political system dominated by Sunnis and Christians could be identified with the Alawi struggle in Syria, a state dominated by a Sunni majority. Over and above these, was his friendship with Musa al-Sadr. Thus it was very easy for the Shii's in Lebanon to find a friend in Assad.

SYRIAN ROLE DURING THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR:

It was the Syrian animosity towards Iraq which made it easy to favour Iran. Syria and Iraq have a long-standing estrangement due to party schism, geopolitical rivalry and personal animosity between Assad and Saddam. Quarrels over economic affairs, division of Euphrates water and oil pipelines were frequent. Allegations of subversive activities of each other were commonplace.

On 28 July 1979, twelve days after Saddam Hussein took over power in Iraq, he announced that a plot against him was uncovered and he implicated some of his close colleagues and a "foreign side" (soon identified as Syria). The rise of Saddam

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put a stop to all hopes of a Syria-Iraq reconciliation which could have been used as a counter-force to the Egypt-Israel entente.

The success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran deepened the cleavage between the two Arab states. While Assad welcomed the change, Saddam feared the export of the revolution to Iraq. "On almost every aspect of the Iranian situation - the Shah, the Ayatollah, Shi'ism or whether or not the Arabs could live in good neighbourly relations with Iran - Syria and Iraq held opposing views." But the main Iraqi apprehension was the resurgence of Shi'is in Iraq. The community in whom Assad found a friend, Saddam regarded them a danger to the integrity of his country. In October 1978, Saddam Hussein had expelled Khomeini from Najaf in Iraq and Syria had offered him asylum.

It was because of Iraq's conviction that Syria was actively arming and helping Iran in the war that the Syrian embassy in Baghdad was stormed and most of the diplomatic staff expelled. On 12 October 1980, Iraq severed all diplomatic ties with Syria.

Syria retaliated by indirectly pressurising Iraq by encouraging subversive elements in Iraq and targeting Iraqi interests in Lebanon. On 15 December 1981, the Iraqi embassy in Beirut was stormed and destroyed. The ambassador and 29 others were killed. The attack was said to have been executed by Syrian and Iranian

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36 Seale n.35 p.355.
intelligence agencies. It was also alleged that Syria used Amal, the Shi'i militia, to exert pressure on pro-Iraqi sections in Lebanon.

The war had opened up avenues for anti-government elements in Iraq to rebel. The Kurds were one such group. Iran and Syria aided the Kurds in Iraq despite the problems both had with Kurds in their own countries. It was widely reported that weapons were supplied to the Kurdish faction led by Jalal Talabani. The high point of Iranian-Syrian-Kurdish cooperation was in 1983 when Iranian frontline pressure against Iraq was intense in the Kurdish areas of northern Iraq, where the Iranian military activities were aided by the Kurdish Democratic Party.

The Syrian stand during the war was definitely pro-Iran but the involvement was given a low profile. Iran encouraged Syria to apply military pressure against Iraq by mobilising Syrian troops on the Iraq-Syria border. Sporadic reports spoke of Syria supplying Soviet arms to Iran and that Syria was instrumental in bringing about the Iran-North Korea arms deal. In actuality, Syrian military help to Iran was negligible and irregular, because Syria possessed Soviet arms while the Iranians were armed with American equipment. To refurbish their weapon system, Iran needed American-made equipment and finally, much to Syria's dismay, bought them from their common sworn enemies, United States and Israel.


39 Ramazani, n.24, p.81.
Moreover, Syria had to devote the strength of its armed forces on the Golan against Israel and in Lebanon. This left only a smattering of Syrian troops positioned on the Iraqi-Syrian border.

Another factor which compelled Syria not to aid Iran overtly was the fear of political repercussions. Mobilising troops on the border of another Arab country would have been regarded as treason by other Arab states. This could lead to a loss of credibility of Syria, as a champion of Arabism. Due to all these reasons, Syrian military involvement remained sporadic.

Even before the dust had settled after the Hamah massacre, Syria and Iran signed an economic-cooperation agreement. Syria's Foreign Minister, Abd al-Halim Khaddam, visited Tehran and signed a barter deal. Iran agreed to supply Syria with 174,000 barrels of crude oil per day for one year, starting on 1 April 1982, in exchange for phosphates, textiles, glass, barley and other food stuffs.40

After this agreement, Syria, on 8 April, took a step which made the Syria-Iraq estrangement complete. Syria closed its border with Iraq and cut-off the passage of Iraqi oil via Syria through the pipelines of the Mediterranean.41 This closure of the pipelines proved damaging to Iraq which had no option but to construct new pipelines and expand the existing one through Turkey. This agreement released Syria from its

40 *MEED*, 13 March 1982.

dependence on Iraqi oil. It also marked the shift of Syria's stand of a friend to a strategic ally against Iran.

This state of affairs could not bear the brunt of certain realities. Syria had freed itself from dependence on Iraqi oil but was now dependent on Iranian oil. This total dependence exposed Syria to Iranian pressure. As this dependence grew, Syria's ability to influence Iranian policy weakened.

"While Syria was happy to play the role of a spoiler of Iraq's war effort, the political management of cooperation with Iran became increasingly difficult." 42 Regional developments and the course of the war put a lot of pressure on Syria. Syria was, after all, an integral part of the inter-Arab system and its regional policy was not dependent on its animosity towards Iraq alone, but also on broader inter-Arab political exigencies. The war had led to a realignment in inter-Arab relations. The fear of the spread of the Revolution to their kingdoms had prompted the Gulf rulers to firmly support Iraq in the war. All these went against Syria's regional interests. To add to Syria's discomfiture, it was becoming apparent that since it was not an active participant in the war, its ability to influence the course was confined.

Syria's efforts to strengthen Arab solidarity were met with criticism that Arab solidarity against Israel could not be achieved since Syria was blocking Arab solidarity against Iran. Saddam Hussein fanned this flame by repeatedly announcing that Syria had "stabbed Iraq in the back." 43 Most of the Arab world resented Syria's

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42 Olmert, n. 34, p.175.
43 Radio Baghdad, 6 January , SWB, 8 January 1982.
support of Iran. The heaviest penalty Syria had to pay was when the Lebanese war of 1982 broke out. The Arab world remained passive and watched Syria's humiliation in Lebanon.

Certain other developments in the inter-Arab arena alarmed Assad. At the Arab summit in Amman in 1987, a large number of Arab states decided to resume diplomatic relations with Egypt. This was mainly because Egypt had sided with Iraq and the Gulf states in the war.

Syria was quick to react and respond to these developments. It tried to play the role of a mediator between Iran and the Gulf states. Syrian effort to mediate was sparked off by two incidents - relief of Abadan by Iranian troops and the bombing of Kuwaiti oil installations by the Iranian air force. Syria assured Kuwait its support in the event of an attack by Iran. Syria also speeded up its efforts in influencing Iran to end the war. In May 1982, when Iranian forces enjoyed a period of superiority, Assad tried to assure the Gulf states that Iranian aim was restricted to the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and not territorial aggrandisement and that Syria was against the prospect of Iran taking over Arab territory. 44 In May 1984, when the war escalated, Syria repeated that it was firmly against attack on the non-combatant Gulf states. 45

Soon after that Syrian and Iranian Foreign Ministers stated that they had developed "a complete understanding on the need to avoid expanding the area of the Iran-Iraq war,

and on preventing the involvement of any Gulf state in the War." Syria reiterated these when Iran occupied Fao in 1986 and when the Iranians launched the Basra offensive. When the Mecca incidents took place in July 1987, Assad personally conveyed his regrets over the incidents to King Fahd.

The gradual change in Syrian attitude during the war was reflected in its participation in the various Arab summits. The Amman conference of November 1980 where anti-Iranian resolutions were adopted was boycotted by Syria. The Fez Summit of November 1981 saw a low-level Syrian delegation but President Assad himself went to the Fez Summit of September 1982. This was basically a result of Syrian position after the Lebanese war. Assad made an effort to balance the role of Iran's side Arab-backer and that of an Arab frontliner state. Although Syria did not oppose the anti-Iranian resolution adopted in this summit, the official Syrian conference report omitted all reference to it, and Syria's information minister, Ahmad Iskandar Ahmad, travelled to Iran with the reassurance that Syria was still Iran's friend. By 1985, Syria had regained its position in the region and thus boycotted the Casablanca Arab Summit. In 1987, despite Iran's boycott plea, it attended the Islamic Conference held in Kuwait. Syria participated in the Arab summits of 1987, 1988 and 1989. The Amman summit of 1987 adopted a strongly worded, anti-Iranian

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47 MECS, 1985, 65 and MECS 1986, 616-17.
50 SANA, 14 September - SWB, 16 September 1982.
resolution which was not objected to by Syria.\textsuperscript{51} To assuage Iranian displeasure at this, official Syrian releases stressed that it was due to pressure from Syria that a call for complete break of diplomatic ties between Arab states and Iran was avoided.

Syrian-Iranian relationship was not without hiccups during the war years. After the outbreak of the tanker war Iranian oil deliveries became erratic and it could not supply oil to Syria as stated in the Economic Cooperation Agreement. Syria, faced with growing financial difficulties, was not able to pay even the concessional price and its debt accumulated to an estimated $1 billion by 1986.\textsuperscript{52} Payment was several times rescheduled until, by the end of 1985, Iran stopped its oil shipments completely. A renewed agreement was signed, but that was cancelled by Syria in summer 1986, evidently after the decline in world oil price below the concessionary price which Iran demanded.

It was becoming evident that Iranian oil shipments to Syria were serving as an instrument to signal displeasure over Syrian policies. For instance, Iran reduced shipments when negotiations took place in Lebanon in which Iranian-supported groups were left out; and again when the Syrian-Jordanian rapprochement took place at the end of 1985. Oil supplies were again significantly reduced when there occurred a vague perspective of a Syrian-Iraqi rapprochement in summer 1986.

\textsuperscript{51} Radio Amman, 11 November 1987.

\textsuperscript{52} MEED, quoted in Saudi Gazette, Riyadh, 7 January 1986, p.7.
In May-June 1986, after suspension of oil deliveries to Syria, talks of Syria-Iraq reconciliation were held through Saudi and Jordanian mediation. It soon fizzled out when Iran resumed oil deliveries and toned down its demand for Syria to repay its debt to Iran.

SYRIA AND IRAN IN LEBANON

Syria and Iran, both involved intricately in Lebanon, have entertained contradictory visions regarding Lebanon. Syria views its presence in Lebanon as a fulfilment of a historical duty. Moreover Syria's regional, political and security status is inextricably linked to Lebanon. Its role in Lebanon was/is vital to its own political stability, its hold over Palestinian affairs and its overall status in the Pan-Arab arena. Therefore, it was necessary to keep the Lebanese crisis localized, which meant keeping away other external actors' interference.

For Iran, export of the revolution was a bedrock of its policy. Lebanon has a large Shi'i population, who has been struggling to end its underprivileged status. Iran also tried to bring the Sunni Lebanese into its fold by arguing that Iran's revolution formed the vanguard of a wider Muslim one and that it alone expressed the true aspirations of all Muslims. Lebanon's closeness to Israel enabled Iran to claim a part in the jihad against Israel.

Thus, while Syria's policy in Lebanon was based on the premise of pan-Arabism, Iran's policy was dominated by its Islamic vision. Despite this primary
difference, Iran and Syria had a working combination going in Lebanon in the 1980s. This could happen due to three reasons: Syria viewed the Shi'is in Lebanon as a key element in its endeavour to dominate Lebanese politics; Iran needed Syrian cooperation to be operative in Lebanon since it had no border with Lebanon, and, thirdly, because more often than not both could close ranks against common enemies in Lebanon.

Syrian-Iranian involvement in Lebanon went through numerous ups and downs. In the first three years after the Islamic Revolution came about, Iranian impact in Lebanon was insignificant. Amal, the main Shi'i organisation, was led by people who did not believe that a 'Khomeinization' of Lebanon would bode well for the state of Lebanon with its pluralistic identity. By 1982, groups within Amal started favouring closer ties with Iran and as a result some of them broke away and formed a new group, the Islamic Amal.53 The original Amal remained pro-Syrian.

It was the Israeli invasion of Lebanon of 1982 which made it opportune for Iran to move into Lebanon. Two days after the invasion, an Iranian military and political delegation went to Damascus and announced the desire to wage a jihad against Israel.54 This was followed by hundreds of Iranians, enroute to Lebanon marching through the streets of Damascus chanting, "after Baghdad: Beirut and Jerusalem."55 Amal, in Lebanon, had tried to remain divorced from the 1982 war

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54 Ramazani, n. 24, p.156.
initially and restricted their efforts to public denunciations of the invasion. In no time 1,500 Iranian Revolutionary Guards reached Biqaa and began cooperation with local pro-Iranian Shi'i faction. This was said to be possible only due to the cooperation of Syria. The Biqaa was strategically vital to Syrian presence in Lebanon because of its proximity to Damascus. Under pressure due to the Israeli invasion, Syria did not try to oppose the mobilisation of Iranians in Lebanon. But this ultimately led to contradictions: while operational cooperation against common enemies was a success, Syria had to try and thwart Iranian attempts to turn Biqaa into a miniature model of an Islamic Republic.

Pro-Iranian elements in Lebanon launched attacks on Western installations in Lebanon. On 18 April, 1983, a bomb blast at the US embassy in Beirut claimed more than 40 lives. A Shi'i organisation claimed responsibility. On 23 October 1983, a bomb attack on the US and French contingents killed nearly 300 people. Another Shi'i group claimed responsibility for this attack. Such activities were taken as a proof that Syria was helping these groups. Iran's deputy foreign minister, Husayn Shaykh al-Islam, was said to have given the final order for the bombings to be carried out after consultations with the Syrian government.56

These excesses radicalized the Shi'i groups and realization soon dawned that these groups had moved beyond Amal's and Syria's ideological orbit. Nevertheless, these groups, Amal and Syria combined to fight external enemies. In February 1984, Amal occupied West Beirut and expelled the Multi-National Force. This was

56 Omert, n.34, p.181.
followed by President Amin Jumayyil's visit to Damascus and announcing the abrogation of the 17 May 1983 agreement with Israel.

Syria's crucial support to *Amal* during the battle for Beirut had brought about a change in the *Amal*’s attitude. They were now in an active state of hostility with Israel. Since spring 1984, the Shi'is backed by Iran and Syria in their persistent struggle against Israel were instrumental in the withdrawal of IDF from most of southern Lebanon.

Fissures soon emerged in the Syria-Shi'i and Iranian axis in Lebanon. The Shi'is and Iran saw no reason to support Syria's Damascus Agreement signed on 28 December 1985 between the Druze, *Amal* and the Maronites as they regarded it as an attempt by Syria to further the goal of *Pax-Syriana*.

Iran had been gradually expanding its power base in Lebanon. It intensified and diversified its activities in Lebanon. It began supporting the *Hizbollah* in the latter's competition with *Amal* and won the support of the Shi'i community in Lebanon, and gave them new hopes and new aspirations. The Shi'is found it appealing that despite its economic problems, Iran was channelizing substantial funds to Lebanon. Due to this, the *Hizbollah* grew in political and military strength.

The Iran-*Hizbollah* combine did not meet with Syrian approval. This combine signalled the precarious nature of Syrian hold in Lebanon. Secondly, Syria's image internationally came in for a lot of flak when it was revealed that it was involved in
the terrorist operations mounted by Hizbollah and other allied groups. Thirdly the
Hizbollah had started to attack the Syrian Liberation Army in the Security Zone.
There were signs that Syria was no more on the top of the situation and Syria feared
being drawn into a war with Israel over Lebanon at a wrong time. Unfettered
Hizbollah activities would inevitably lead to such a situation. Moreover, differences
arose when Syria was engaged in battling pro-Arafat forces in Lebanon. Iran and
Hizbollah argued that this war against the Palestinians pitted Muslim against Muslim
and diverted the effort from the liberation of Jerusalem.

It was in February 1987 that Syrian soldiers clashed with Hizbollah fighters
when the former took over West Beirut. Twenty-three members of Hizbollah were
killed. This event led to a lot of denunciations in Iran. The Syrian official account
that Hizbollah fighters had provoked the Syrian soldiers was widely disbelieved in
Iran. This episode left an indelible mark on Syrian-Iranian-Lebanese Shi'i relations.

From February to May 1988, there were intermittent clashes between Amal
and Hizbollah. Amal won in Southern Lebanon and South Beirut fell to the
Hizbollah. These events renewed Syrian apprehensions that its position in Beirut and
rest of Lebanon might be jeopardised and eventually intervened militarily in favour of
Amal. At this point of time both Iran and Syria were reluctant to part ways and either
side made efforts to repair the rupture for various reasons. Syria did not wish to
destabilise Lebanon further in a year of presidential elections. Secondly, Syria had
realised that a confrontation with Iran over Lebanon would spell an end to the Syrian-
Iranian relationship. At that point of time, Syria could not allow this to happen. Iraq
was regaining its strength and the Gulf states felt less threatened by Iran. Therefore, the Arab world was unlikely to bail Syria out with economic aid of the stature of the Iranian aid. On the other hand, Iran felt that a compromise with Syria on South-Beirut would help the Hizbollah retain whatever gains it had while a confrontation might result in Hizbollah losing its newly acquired gains and a lot of financial loss on the part of Iran. Such a loss would mean a loss of face too.

The Syrian-Iranian friction in Lebanon began to surface frequently, especially on the issue of hostages. Kidnapping had become endemic to the chaos of Lebanon. The wave of kidnappings directed at westerners in Lebanon was used to send political messages of warning or intimidation. Iranian groups were said to have carried out most of these kidnappings with Syrian help/knowledge. In 1982, David Dodge, the acting president of the American University of Beirut, was kidnapped and held by the Islamic Amal. He was released after a year due to the good offices of the Syrians. Gradually, a pattern was established - kidnapping, captivity and release at Assad's insistence and Western gratitude. This trend continued till the pace of kidnappings quickened and left Syria impotent in getting the hostages released. Finally, it was the arms-for-hostages deals cut by Reagan administration with Tehran which eventually pushed out Syria even as a token participant. Western diplomats argued that Assad could release the hostages if he cared to and that his security services were bound to know where the hostages were held and who was holding them. But Assad had little room for manoeuvres - if some were freed, the rest were likely to be killed. Thus the kidnappings and continued captivity was a direct affront to Assad and a constant test of Syrian influence.
Thus, though ideologically and politically, the Iranian and Syrian visions were contradictory, they managed to work out compromises whenever things came to a head in Lebanon. The crux of the dilemma was the fact that a *Pax Syriana* was incompatible with Tehran's aim to create an Islamic Republic in Lebanon.

Despite the contradiction in the self-interpretation of both partners in so far as it links a secular government and a militant theocratic one, the relationship lasted throughout the long-drawn Gulf war. Iran's attitude might be seen as another proof of its pragmatism which was manifested whenever it served the goals of the Islamic Republic, whereas for Syria the first priority was to weaken its rival Iraq and to this end Iran was a welcome partner. It was also a priority to fight Israel with Iran's help in Lebanon. But in both these areas Syria had to bear the brunt of allying with Iran. In case of the war, Syria was torn between its enmity to Iraq and its desire to be one with the Arab world. Backing Iran against Iraq made Syria more and more assailable during times like the Iranian occupation of Fao peninsula.

Syria fell under obligation to follow Iran's policies even if they contradicted some of its cherished positions as a leader of the Arab world. Iran also had to depend on the Syrian connection in view of its isolation in the region and beyond.

For the world, it was difficult to understand how a would-be leader of the Arab world could support the forces of Iran against the forces of another Arab state, or how could the secular Syrian government back the regime of revolutionary mullahs. But
within the borders of Syria, the alliance made sense. The essence of the alliance was their common hatred of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. Nevertheless, the mechanics of the alliance were much more complex than the old truism of politics that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." Syria used the alliance for economic sustenance and Iran tried to use it for political expansion. Another strong element which bound both to an alliance was their militant opposition to Israel.

Syria always defends its friendly relations with Iran - stating that Syria supported Iran against Iraq during the war because it was against aggression anywhere and Iraq had invaded Iran, and because it did not want Iran to think that the conflict was an Arab-Persian war but to see it merely as a quarrel between two states, and because Iran held a view of Israel similar to that of Syria.

Syria had withstood American pressure, in recent years, to end the relationship with Iran. "This relationship is bi-lateral and independent because both have benefitted from it. For Syria, Iran brought about a balance of power when the other regional states tried to boycott and isolate Syria. It is a mutually beneficial strategic alliance."57

As Syria's ambassador to US, Walid al-Moualem, explained: "Our relations with Iran are based on mutual respect, non-interference in internal affairs, and equality. We understand that Iran is an important state. It will continue to exist."58

57 Personal Interview with Khalil Jawwad, Director, Ba'ath Publications, Damascus, June 23 1996.
Adnan Umran, the deputy foreign minister, pointed out that strategically it was correct to align with Iran, a regional actor with enormous manpower and a strategic location. "There were similarities in the foreign policy orientation of both the countries in the post-1979 period. Both opposed foreign intervention and were committed to stop the Israeli aggression."\textsuperscript{59}

In August 1990, when Iraq invaded Kuwait, both Syria and Iran stood vindicated. What they had been saying all the time, that Iraq was an aggressor and an aggrandiser, was proved to the world. Kuwait, a main backer and financier of Iraq in its war against Iran, fell under the guns of Iraq.

In an interview to the \textit{Time} magazine, Assad was questioned about Syria's "special relationship" with Iran. He replied: "My opinion has been for a long time that understanding between the Arabs and Iran is in the interest of the security of the region. We have seen the outcome of the Iran-Iraq war. The result was big losses to Iran, bigger losses to Iraq. The Gulf states suffered losses too. This was harming countries inside and outside the region. Therefore, what is required is dialogue and understanding. If we are talking about peace with Israel, it is more appropriate to have peace with Iran. I believe that Arabs and the Iranians can make among themselves effective security arrangements which would weaken or even remove the prospects of war. Indeed, the Gulf is Arab and Iranian; one shore belongs to Iran, the

\textsuperscript{59} Personal Interview with Adnan Umran, Deputy Foreign Minister, Damascus, June 26 1996.
other to the Arabs. When we realise that it is neither in our interest nor in their to go to war, there will be no war.\textsuperscript{60}

**TURKEY-ARAB RELATIONS**

Any analysis of Arab-Turkey relations will be confronted by two contradictory adages: "Turkey is the only European country in the Middle East" and "Turkey is the only Middle Eastern country in Europe." This, in fact, is a dual reality, a result of Turkish geography, demography, history, religion, economy, political regime and security considerations. These very factors have been instrumental in shaping Turkish policy towards the rest of the West Asian countries.

Turkey, situated on the periphery of the Middle East, is sufficiently close to the Levant and Gulf to render its relations with these two regions important. For various reasons, these relations have been distinctly volatile in the recent past. Links with the Arab world are tinged with the memories of past Ottoman domination and the more recent friendliness of Turkey towards Israel. Turkey's pro-Western attitude is yet another reason for making its relations with Arab states extremely fragile.

Certain principles guide Turkish policy towards the Middle Eastern states. It has been difficult for the Arabs to erase the memories of the Ottoman Empire and *Pax Ottomana*. Turkey has tried hard to convince that it will not be pursuing irredentist aims in the Middle East. There are two factors compelling Turkey to give up on its

\textsuperscript{60} Interview of President Hafiz al-Assad to *Time*, 13 November 1992, Ministry of Information and Tishreen Foundation for Press and Publication.
'leadership' role. Arabs cannot bury the images of history which show Turkey in an imperialistic light; secondly, Turkey does not possess material means to play such a leadership role. Therefore, Turkey has tried to keep away from the rivalries, jealousies and leadership struggles in West Asia, a change from the time of the Ottoman Empire when they were deeply involved in intra-Arab squabbling and fighting.

Another major component of Turkish policy has been its double-edged policy of diplomatic ties with Israel and a show of political support for the Arab cause. This trend began in 1947 when Turkey voted with the Arab states in the UN General Assembly against the foundation of the state of Israel. But in 1949 Turkey became one of the first countries to recognise and establish diplomatic relations with Israel. Turkey justified its recognition of Israel by the assumption that Israel, a quasi-religious state, would remain within the boundaries set up by the United Nations and that it would be possible to arrange a conciliation between a peaceful Israel and its neighbours. Israel soon proved them wrong when it claimed that its security required the occupation of more land and more settlements. Turkey decried the result of the 1967 and 1973 wars but did not break off diplomatic ties with Israel. This Turkish policy of maintaining links with Israel caused sharp reactions among the Arabs. Merely supporting certain UN resolutions that call for the right of the Palestinian people to determine their destiny did not prove that Turkey was pro-Arab.

After World War II, Turkey threw in its lot with Western Europe and United States and became a member of the Council of Europe (1949), joined the Atlantic
Alliance (1952), and became an associate member of the European Economic Community (1963). These ties with the West and the reorientation of the Turkish nation as a European-style nation state exacerbated the existing anti-Turkish feelings of the Arabs after the onset of the Cold War.

The more radical among the Arab states criticized Turkey for acquiescing to the West. These criticisms ranged from denunciation of Turkey's membership in NATO, to Turkish lack of interest in its own region and its subservience to the West. Turkey seems to consider its place to be in Europe and in the Western bloc. Thus Turkey was blamed for being a defender of Western powers' policies and actions that ran contrary to Middle Eastern interests. Thus, it became difficult for cordial relations between Turkey, a member of the NATO and definitely pro-Western, and Arab states, members of the non-aligned group who excelled in anti-Western rhetoric and policies.

The Arab states essentially view Turkey as a part of the West; its sympathy for Israel and its loyalty to NATO render it impossible as an actor/mediator on the regional stage. It was Turkey who, even before Israel, became the first West Asian country who attempted to identify itself with Europe and the West and turned its back on its own region. This estrangement is yet to be resolved.

SYRIA-TURKEY RELATIONSHIP

After a long spell of rule over Syria and other Arab lands, the Turks were expelled in 1831 by Ibrahim Pasha, and the Egyptian expeditionary force. The
Syrians welcomed this 'liberation' from the Europeanizing reforms of the Ottomans under Mahmoud II. But the 'liberation' proved to be very short-lived and in 1840, anti-Egyptian revolts instigated by British and Ottoman agents, assisted by Anglo-Austrian forces ousted Egyptians and restored Ottoman rule.

Since this time the Ottomans had come back with European aid, Syria was laid open to unlimited European intervention, both economic and political. Subsequent Europeanizing reforms and growing European economic and political pressures provoked Syrian doubts about their relations to the Ottoman, who seemed to have given up on 'defending Islamic civilization' and were actually assisting its subversion! Syrians grew restive and by the late 1870s, secret societies demanding Arab autonomy grew active in Syria.

The Muslim Arabs sincerely mourned the diminished rule of the shari'ah. They blamed the Sublime Porte of being made up of degenerate Muslims and thus felt that it fell upon the Arabs to revive Islam under an Arab caliph. Connected to this grew a notion of a regional fatherland, watan as distinct from the larger and universal Ottoman Empire.

The anti-Ottoman activities of the secret-societies remained substantially the maximum Arab demand within the Ottoman system till the outbreak of the First World War.
Prior to the war, Ottoman alliance with Germany imposed on Britain a war strategy designed to open a breach between the Arabs and the Turks. In November 1914, the Ottoman Empire threw in her lot with Germany, prompting Asquith, the British Prime Minister to state, “The Ottoman Empire has committed suicide.” Britain made hectic contacts with the Arabs headed by the Sharif of Mecca. The British idea was to offer the Arabs some kind of independent muslim state in exchange for Arab revolt against the Turks.

The Husain-McMohan correspondence spanning the period from July 1915 to January 1916, defined the terms under which the Arabs would undertake a revolt against the Turks. Since the Turks were also trying to reach an accommodation with the Arabs, the British could hardly afford to ignore the Arabs and gave them a number of promises of self-determination and independence.

At the point of time, Syria was under Jamal Pasha, Commander-in-Chief of the Ottoman Fourth Army. His rule in Syria was oppressive. For example, in 1915 and 1916 he executed 34 eminent Syrian muslims and christians, depriving the Arab movement of its leaders. Moreover, the war had brought about hardships, compounded by arbitrary Turkish requisition of food and animals, destruction of fruit and olive trees and widespread corruption which ruined the economy. Famine and disease claimed 200-300,000 lives.

Just 18 days before the Arabs rebelled against Turkish rule, on 16 May 1916, the British and the French signed the infamous Sykes-Picot Treaty, which underlined
the partition of Arab territories under Ottomans - Russia was given the provinces of Erzerum, Trebizand, Van, Turkish Armenia and a slice of Kurdistan. French claim on the coastal strip of Syria, Aden and Cilicia was fully endorsed. Southern Mesopotamia, Haifa and Acre in Palestine was grabbed by the British And the remaining area was divided into British and French spheres of influence.

Unaware of the betrayal, the Arabs launched the Arab Revolt, carried out by tribal levies and a number of Syrian and Iraqi officers, contributed to the Allied victory in the First World War. The Arab army, under the command of Faisal, son of Sharif Hussein, tied down large Turkish forces in the Hijaz, harassed Turkish communications and protected General Allenby's right flank as he slowly advanced through Palestine. Following a decisive Turkish defeat at Megiddo in September 1918, all Syria fell to the Anglo-Arab armies. As the Turkish withdrew, Arab banners were raised in Syrian cities. Faisal even proclaimed 'an absolutely independent government embracing all Syria.' But this "independence" was just a mirage. On the eve of the Versailles Peace Conference, Britain and France agreed on the disposal of the Ottoman Empire's Arab provinces and applications of the mandate system.

Present Syria-Turkey relations cannot be understood without delving into history and tracing the alienation to the period of Ottoman rule. The first serious break occurred when the step-by-step separation of Iskanderun (Alexandretta) from Syria in favour of Turkey took shape. Syria was deprived of a part by the machinations of France and Turkey in sacrificing Syrian territorial integrity for their larger interests.
Situated in the angle formed by the eastern shore of the Mediterranean and the Turkish-Syrian frontier, the Sanjak of Alexandretta had a mixed ethno-religious and social composition of Arabic and Turkish speakers. When in 1920, the Treaty of Sevres fixed the Turkish-Syrian frontier too far north for the approval of Turkish nationalists, they rejected it and fought with French forces to wrest out a new agreement calling for the establishment of a special administrative regime for Alexandretta; a sanjak which in reality formed an integral part of the State of Syria. Arab nationalists pressed for the complete integration of the sanjak into the Syrian state.

In 1936, Turkish demands increased and they laid claims on Alexandretta. After inconclusive diplomatic exchanges, France and Turkey agreed to take the dispute to the League of Nations. In January 1937, a settlement was reached in favour of Turkey. It was decided to constitute the district of Alexandretta as a separate political entity with full internal independence under a statute and a fundamental law of its own. Its connection with Syria was limited to customs and monetary matters and its foreign affairs which were to be conducted by Syria after independence. In January 1938, the League appointed a new electoral commission, including Turkish and French representatives, to be sent out to the sanjak to supervise registration.

In the summer of 1938 when elections for an assembly were to be held under the new dispensation, France was more occupied with the larger problems of Germany and central Europe, and gave way to Turkish pressure on a number of vital matters including the cooperation of Turkish troops for the maintenance of order during the
elections. By this and other forms of rigging, the Turkish minority won 22 out of the 40 seats. When the assembly met for the first time, it elected a Turk for a Speaker, a Turk as head of the state, and renamed the territory the Republic of Hatay and appointed an all-Turkish cabinet.

Not satisfied with the machinations, Turkey exploited the strained world situation to an even greater extent and pressed for an annexation of Alexandretta. At that time, Britain and France were very eager to secure, if not a Turkish alliance, at least Turkish neutrality in the forthcoming European conflict. Britain persuaded France to sacrifice Alexandretta as a price for gaining Turkish goodwill. France capitulated and signed an agreement in June 1939, ceding Alexandretta to the Turkish Republic. This was a clear violation of Article 4 of the Mandate which stipulated that the mandatory was required to see that 'no part of the territory of Syria and Lebanon is ceded or leased or in any way placed under the contract of a foreign power.'

This completed the betrayal of trust by France and it was a blow to the Syrian nationalists. The French formally relinquished their control over Alexandretta. In return for annexation of this district, Turkey promised not to seek additional Syrian territory and to respect the Syrian frontier.

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61 For a detailed account of the steps that led to this, see A.J. Toynbee, Survey of International Affairs, 1938, (London, 1941), pp.479-92.
Thus, Turkey and France connived the illicit transfer of an integral part of Syria to Turkey. This act is still regarded as one of the worst crimes committed by France and Turkey and it had a deep effect on Syrians. Syrian feelings of outrage were reinforced by the arrival of Syrian refugees from Alexandretta.

The inter-war years saw the revival of a potent force, Arab Nationalism, in West Asia. Arab Nationalism is a doctrine that postulates the presence of a single Arab entity and hopes for the setting up of one Arab Nation. The initial burst of nationalism was aimed at driving out the imperialists like the Ottoman, the French and the British from Arab lands.

This form of nationalism did not end with the onset of independence of Arab states. On the contrary, it was manifested in the form of ideologies like Ba'athism. Arab nationalism became an all-encompassing phenomenon which had, within its fold, trends of anti-Western, anti-Israeli and even anti-Turkish feelings. Anti-Turkish emotions have been hard to erase from memories of people who had for long decades suffered under the yoke of Pan-Turanism.

After Syria got its independence from the mandatory power, its ire was directed at Turkey due to the loss of Alexandretta. Moreover, once the Ba'athists came to power, Turkey was targeted since it was pro-Western and had turned its back on the region where it actually belonged.
Turkey's overtures of friendship towards Israel was another factor which acted
as an obstacle in setting up a cordial relationship with Syria. Turkey and Israel firmly
believe that they share certain fundamental interests and concerns. Both project
themselves as essentially modern democracies, secular and committed to the
development of multi-party democratic institutions. Both are definitely pro-Western
and they shared a basic mistrust of the Soviet Union's "global ambitions" and so
opposed the extension of Soviet influence in the region.

Both the countries share a common and disputed border with Syria and have
grabbed parts of it; Turkey took Alexandretta and Israel, Golan Heights. During the
Cold War, Turkey and Israel had been nurtured by the USA which was alarmed over
what it regarded as Soviet sponsorship of Nasserist and Communist groups. These
two countries have been working together overtly and covertly. While Turkey had
been prompt in recognising and setting up diplomatic ties with Israel, it had
maintained a veneer of support for the Arab cause by voting for anti-Israel resolutions
in the UN. This curtain was torn apart when a top secret programme, code-named
"Trident" became public knowledge after CIA documents were found by the Iranians
when the U.S. Embassy in Iran was seized. It revealed that the Turkish National
Security Service provided Israel with data on Arab agents and intentions in return for
information from Israel's Mossad intelligence agency on Soviet activities in Turkey.62
Arab states, including Syria, accused Turkey for breaking the ranks of Islamic
solidarity and of conniving with their sworn enemy, Israel, while trying to portray a
pro-Arab attitude. Turkey had to justify its support to Israel many a time. For

62 Joanne Omang, "Stiffest Battles are often fought among
instance, in 1984, Prime Minister Turgut Ozal said: "Turkey's relations with Israel will be maintained. They will neither improve, nor deteriorate... As I told our Arab friends, we are member of NATO and have close ties with the United States.... the strength of the Israeli lobby in the U.S. is well known."63

Syria and Turkey once again came to confrontationist terms over the Baghdad Pact. In the 1950s Turkey set out to actively woo Arab states to join in the "Northern Tier" Middle East Defence system that was being advocated by American Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles. Iraq was the only Arab state to join the Baghdad Pact. Syria castigated both Turkey and Iraq for allying themselves with agents of "Western imperialism and Zionism".

Turkey was already exposed to the USSR on its northern border and realised that Syria could be a possible strategic threat to its southern flank. Therefore, after joining the NATO in 1952, Turkey began to amplify the communist "build-up" in Syria in an attempt to depict itself as the West's outpost in the region against Soviet/communist expansionism. These allegations became acrimonious and by the late 1950s, Syria was forced to look towards Egypt as an ally - thus, sowing the seed for the formation of the United Arab Republic (UAR).

Another major cause of disharmony between Syria and Turkey has been the Kurdish Problem. The Kurds, an unhappy nation tribe of more than 16 million, are divided among Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. This spatial distribution of the Kurds has

63 Sam Cohen, Dispatch from Istanbul; London: Jewish Chronicle 2 March 1984.
created a problem affecting all four countries and no country can claim it to be an exclusively domestic one. Thus this issue has become a significant factor in the interstate relations of the region. At times, the Kurdish issue has been used by other states to weaken Turkey and has blighted bi-lateral relations and sometimes it has given these states a shared interest when they had little else in common. This extraterritoriality of the Kurdish problem has made it difficult for Turkey to determine the policy context in the south-east. It presents an existential challenge to the identity, composition and territorial integrity of Turkey. It also overshadows its foreign policy-making, having become a critical variable in Turkey's relations with its immediate Middle Eastern neighbours, including Syria.

Ankara has often been found to take cognizance of developments regarding the Kurdish issue in neighbouring states. For instance, Kurdish uprisings in Iraq over the years have encouraged many Turkish Kurds to embark on the same road. Next, the rebellion of Iran's Kurds in early 1979 after the fall of the Shah raised Kurdish expectations in Turkey, and added to the instability on the border.

As a result, Turkey is convinced that Kurdish separatists have been receiving help from other states, a part of a plan to weaken Turkey. In October 1981, Kenan Evren, the then President of Turkey, declared that the Kurdish problem stems from foreign incitement.64 Turkish national dailies carried reports which stressed that "it is a historical fact that there are ethnic groups in the Iraqi and Syrian border areas which

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64 "General Evren on Important Problems", Outlook (Istanbul), October 21, 1985, pp.4-5.
have been variously exploited, supported materially and morally, and provoked by foreign powers.\textsuperscript{65}

Turkey's relations with its neighbours have been adversely affected by the alleged support which they are said to be giving to various Kurdish groups. Turkey has claimed a number of times that Syria had been aiding and abetting Kurds in their strikes on Turkey, especially when the Soviets were still active in the Middle East. Syria was supposed to be acting under the backing and support of one superpower. Oblique comments were made on this supposed modus operandi, for instance, a Turkish Foreign Ministry official declared in 1985: "We have good reason to believe that the Russians are paying the bill for these guerrillas. It is easy for their agents to find a few hundred unemployed young men who will do this kind of thing for the sake of adventure.... It has a completely Marxist program. They can't foment terrorism anywhere else in Turkey now, but in the south-east they can keep the fires burning in the hope of heating them up in the future."\textsuperscript{66}

In an address to Parliament on October 17, 1984, Prime Minister Turgut Ozal said that Kurdish secessionist groups had obtained refuge in Syria and that the Kurdish fighters were trained in guerrilla camps in Syria.\textsuperscript{67} Turkey asked Syria against sheltering anti-Turkish terrorists but Damascus disclaimed any responsibility.

\textsuperscript{65} Ilhan Cevik, "Something's going on in East Turkey", Turkish Daily News, November 11, 1985, p.5.


\textsuperscript{67} Christian Science Monitor, 19 October 1984.
In 1985, Turkish sources revealed that the trials of Kurdish guerrillas featured proof of Syrian support to them and of their training in Syrian, Iraqi and Lebanese guerrilla camps.\textsuperscript{68} *Armenian Reporter*, an American weekly, carried a report which stated that "the Syrian intelligence service is providing both haven and assistance to a variety of international terrorists. Heading the list of radical groups now enjoying the protection of the Syrian rulers are the Kurds".\textsuperscript{69}

PPK militants based in the Bqaa valley were also said to be supported by Syria. With Syrian support, it was said to be easy for them to cross through Syria into Iraq than Turkey. Syria was asked time and again to prevent recurrence of Kurdish attacks on Turkish diplomats and targets. Ankara did not have any "hot pursuit" agreement with Damascus. This meant that Turkish forces could not pursue the Kurdish guerrillas into Syrian territory. Turkey blamed Syria for doing this to assert Syrian leadership status in the region of the cost of Turkey. This link-up forged between Syria and Kurdish groups was a danger to Turkey, especially the prospect of guerrilla attacks on the trans-Turkey pipeline carrying Iraqi oil to the Mediterranean.

Syrian involvement in Lebanon was of great concern to Turkey since it regarded this yet another effort to spread Syrian hegemony in the region. Turkish authorities wanted the anarchy in Lebanon to end since it was serving as a base of all


\textsuperscript{69} "Turks Claim Syrians Actively Assisting Terrorists from many Lands, Nationalists", *Armenian Reporter*, August 18, 1983, pp.1-12.
kinds of terrorist groups. Turkish press reported that when the Israel Defence Forces had taken over PLO bases in southern Lebanon in 1982 - documents were found that groups like the *Armenian Secret Army for Liberation of Armenia* (ASALA) were using it as a base to kill Turkish diplomats. Members of ASALA were said to have taken refuge in Syria after the PLO was driven out of Beirut. The Armenian problem was an issue which had haunted Turkey in the 1980s. Armenian nationalists have not forgotten that over a million Armenians were killed in World War I massacre by the Turks. The Turks admit the loss of only 200,000 Armenian lives during a forcible resettlement of the Armenian minority in Ottoman-occupied Syria. The Armenians launched a terror campaign, claimed 51 attacks on Turkish lives and property in the period 1976-1981. The Armenian campaign caused a hysteria in the Turkish media. It was an easy way out for Turkey to heap the blame on Syria for helping the ASALA.

Syrian policy-makers claim that Syria wanted a cordial relationship with Turkey. But Turkey allowed its internal problems to cast a shadow on its external relation. "Turkey's internal problems reflect on its foreign policy... they try to solve internal problems by creating external threats to divert its population."\(^7^0\)

Another geostrategic concern that has brought the two countries to the verge of conflict in the issue of water. According to the World Bank, the Middle East has the highest median cost of water supply and sanitation in the world. Capital costs of water reached a median of $300 per capita in 1985, about twice those on the American Continent and more than five times those in Southeast Asia. The Middle East is

\(^7^0\) Personal interview with Assad Kamil Elyas, Political Advisor to the Presidential Office, Damascus, 3 June 1996.
failing to confront overall water shortages. Water consumption for all uses is still less than available water. The challenges are to make water available at a reasonable cost in places where it is most needed and to dramatically improve the management of existing water resources.

Water security will soon rank with military security in the war rooms of Middle Eastern defence ministries. Their leaders are acutely conscious of the potential for conflict stemming from chronic water shortages.

Turkey has been in the process of initiating the massive South East Anatolian project, popularly known as the GAP (Guney Dogu Anadolu Projesi). GAP envisages a series of dams and the central objective of the project is to boost agricultural production and economic activity in the rural south-east region. GAP consists of 13 sub-projects along the Euphrates and Tigris rivers and many of their tributaries. It is aimed to introduce irrigation and hydroelectricity production capacity to a total land area of approximately 7 million hectares, roughly 9.5% of total national land area. Upon completion, the project will supply approximately 24 million kilowatt-hours of energy and open 1.6 million hectares of land to irrigated cultivation.

The *Ataturk Dam*, (World's fifth largest) and its reservoirs are instrumental in providing the necessary waters to feed nearly half of GAP's irrigation projects.

Turkey controls key water resources involving the river valleys of the Euphrates and the Tigris, sources of which rise in Turkey. These two rivers are also
the main suppliers of water for Turkey's southern neighbours, Syria and Turkey. Hence, Syria views GAP with a lot of apprehension - correctly assuming that it would divert water from its territory to the south-eastern region of Turkey. Thus, Turkey's GAP project continues to be a major source of regional conflict.

GAP has raised Syrian and Iraqi anxieties over the availability of water for their own agricultural and industrial projects. Syria fears that the Ataturk Dam could divert most of the Euphrates' flow into Turkey's Urfa Plain, forcing Syrian dependence on Turkish water. Syria feels particularly threatened because Turkey would be able to use the water issue for leverage on other matters. Turkey had built dams almost on the Syrian border. The Karkamis Dam is less than three miles from the Syrian border. The Euphrates Border Project is reminiscent of the popular phrase "good to the last drop" because this project is Turkey's last chance of using Euphrates before it flows into Syria.

On the other hand, Syria stresses that only a discussion on the water issue can solve the problem. Officials say that they will not accept afait accompli from Turkey when it says "the dams are built, we control the water and this is the amount of water we are giving you."

Turkey and Syria have clashed over the GAP project a number of times. Turkey reportedly uncovered an alleged Syrian plot to blow up the Ataturk Dam. In October 1989, Syrian MIGS on a training mission shot down a Turkish survey plane well within Turkey's borders. This was reportedly linked to the Syrian-Turkish
tensions over water. Throughout the 1980s Ankara had hinted time and again at a cut in the flow of Euphrates water to Syria over Syrian support for Kurdish terrorists.

Discussions over sharing of these waters have dragged on inconclusively since the 1960s. For instance, the Trilateral Commission on the Euphrates has met periodically but has discussed only technical matters such as river flow rates and rainfall data.

As a solution to this problem, the former Prime Minister of Turkey, Turgut Ozal, in mid-1980s had championed the concept of a Turkish water "peace pipeline" to serve both Gulf and Near East countries. The proposal was to take water from two rivers, the Seyhan and Ceyhan, that empty into the Mediterranean and transport it southward through Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia to the Gulf. Two massive pipelines would supply the water, one to Jordan and Syria and the other to Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Altogether this project could bring water to around 15 million people at a construction cost of more than $20 billion. This peace initiative might not be economically viable and the countries involved have been rather unreceptive to the initiative. They are not willing to sacrifice their water sovereignty.

Turkey proved the apprehension correct in November 1989, by announcing that it would hold back the flow of the Euphrates for one month, starting in January 1990, in order to begin filling the Ataturk Dam. This was compounded by the drought in 1989-1990 when the water level in Euphrates dropped drastically. These factors
combined with pollution from pesticides, chemicals and salt, forced the Syrian government to cut back on the supply of drinking water and electricity to Damascus, Aleppo and other cities. Syria reacted to Turkish intentions of holding back water by surges of diplomatic cables, visits and warnings.

A crisis arose in January-February 1990, when the dams sluice gates were shut for 30 days, to allow the reservoir behind the dam to begin filling. This reduced the flow into Syria and provoked sharp protests from Damascus.

In early 1993, a formal agreement was signed by Turkey to release 500 cubic metres a second of water across the border into Syria.71

Syria maintains that nothing but the application of international law regarding division of water and riparian rights can solve this problem.

Turkey-Syria relationship is difficult to characterise. Though it is not good or friendly, it can be termed as correct at the state-to-state level. The relationship has been marred by Syrian demands of redressa of annexation of Syrian territory by Turkey, Turkey's control over water resources and the resulting action of Syria to gain leverage over Turkey by supporting Kurdish and Armenian terrorist acts against Turkey. The post-cold war era has augured well for the relationship and there could be a thawing of relations between the two.

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But the old problems persist. Adnan Umran, Syria's Deputy Foreign Minister, spelt out the following elements of the relationship: "Turkey remaining a pawn of the West, its close alignment with Israel, its desire to keep more water than it actually needs, its unceasing allegations regarding the Kurdish issue are all continuing to mar this relationship."72

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72 Personal interview with Adnan Umran, Deputy Foreign Minister, Damascus, 26 June 1996.