CHAPTER VI

Syria and the Superpowers
The Third World has been the arena of an endemic competition of the United States and the Soviet Union. Indigenous developments in Asia, Africa and Latin America encourage and sustain external involvement in regional politics. Opportunities to interfere in regional conflicts were seen as means of geopolitical advancement by both superpowers. After the World War II, it was a bipolar world that emerged and "in a bipolar world there are no peripheries." With only two powers capable of acting on a world scale, anything that happens anywhere is potentially of concern to both of them. Bipolarity extends the geographic scope of both powers' concern. The result is, both become interested and involved in political and economic developments in the Third World nations.

This structural imperative to intervene in the affairs of developing nations is intensified by a perpetual desire to improve self image. Superpowers claim a sense of obligation to promote their values, ideals and interests which are divergent and incompatible in the developing societies, albeit very different ones. This leads to competition in political and ideological fields, encouragement and support to rival groups since each is convinced that the other is the source of turmoil and instability, repression and reactions. Both regard their own action to be legitimate and the adversary's illegitimate.

Either operates under the cloak of moral rectitude, oblivious of the different situations. As soon as the political and military stabilization of inter-bloc relations took place in Europe, superpower rivalry shifted to the Third World.
Both superpowers perceived the Third World as a proving ground, as an arena where revisionist political aspirations could be promoted or opposed, where ideologies would clash. On the other hand, the Third World itself has provided a relatively permissive and attractive environment for superpower competition, due to its fermented and polarised state. Internal power balance shifts often lead to a change in foreign policy alignments, thus embroiling external power who react by engaging in pre-emptive, preventive and reactive actions.

The superpower clients also have availed the opportunities to exercise varying degrees of reverse influence on their patrons: the vulnerabilities of the strong to give in to the weak has been proved. The superpowers have been often dragged into direct confrontation thus making the Third World a major arena of active East-West competition.

The technological breakthroughs of the modern age have brought the nations of the world close together. Areas of interest have started overlapping. Any action of one is seen as affecting the interest of the other. Once the superpowers acquired physical and industrial might, in their run to achieve their foreign policy goals, the smaller powers have been made to feel more and more insecure. The lesser powers grow maximally concerned with the security of their essential structures. Their international interactions and policies are designed to safeguard their interests.

This environment variable becomes very potent in determining the foreign policy behaviour of small power states. They do not usually have a wide range of
means with which to implement their foreign policy objectives and, therefore, are vulnerable to external pressures. With no or little control over the overall systematic changes, policies are then invariably affected by the changes in overall power structure in the system. In a situation where the international system is marked by the presence of two mutually opposed dominant powers, a small power is compelled to ally with a potential protector to protect its essential structures threatened by a much larger power.

The range of interest of a superpower and a small power varies. The small power's range of interest is regional, concerned with the immediate environment. Due to its limited economic and military powers, the main concern of a small power is to secure its essential structures from the perceived danger emanating from its immediate environment. If this threat is overwhelming, the small power may be compelled to ally itself with a bigger power to balance the power of its immediate adversary or to add the physical capabilities of the great power to its side in order to deter its adversary.

From the perspective of the superpowers, the relationship with any small power is based upon its degree of utility in advancing the former's national interest. The stability of this bilateral relationship is achieved if there exists a similarity of perceptions, especially of the perception of the main adversary. These bilateral alliances, nevertheless are of uncertain nature because of an inbuilt inequality among the two. The two, with markedly different capabilities, inequality of purpose, obligation, commitment, benefit and risk, would function in accordance with
inequalities. The scope of interest of a superpower exceeds those of a smaller power. The weaker state worries about survival and its security tends to depend on the support of its stronger partner whereas the reverse never holds. Thus majority of options are with the superpower.

The United States and the Soviet Union in their roles as superpowers in the post-World War II power configuration were actively involved in respective search for political and economic security. Hence, majority of their externally projected actions were designed to counter the strategies of each other. The policies of the two superpowers vis-a-vis the smaller states were primarily shaped by their relationship with each other rather than with an assessment of what their relationship should be with the individual smaller states. Policy makers of both generally perceived at each political crisis within or between smaller nations in terms of how they might affect the long term strategic balance between both superpowers. Thus, they tended to concentrate most of their efforts to interact with each other’s major political and economic rivals. Regardless of the friendly or hostile nature of such interaction, decision makers in both the governments perceive that they cannot ignore the other and in fact their goals are best served by constant monitoring and evaluation of each other’s external behaviour. As a result, there is only a small fraction of their total time available, saved to interact with those nations which are considered to be peripheral to their interests.
SUPERPOWERS IN WEST ASIA:

West Asia can be regarded as a locale of disputed symmetry of interests which made it difficult for superpowers to agree upon norms or rules by means of which to regulate their competition. It is a difficult task for both superpowers to sort out and delimit their respective interests in this area. Unlike Europe, there is no clear geographical line dividing East and West in West Asia which could serve to separate each superpower's area of predominant interests. Thus they could never demarcate a reasonably stable, quasi-sphere of influence. On the contrary, US and Soviet interests in this region have always overlapped and intermingled geographically. Aggravating efforts to define and delimit their interests in the pronounced instability within the region made it difficult for either superpower to be content with the measure of influence it had managed to achieve for the time being with one or another West Asian country.

On the other hand, the volatility and geographically open-ended characteristics of this competition in West Asia serve, in turn, to exacerbate the already existing tendency for global, geopolitical consideration to magnify each superpower's conception of its purely regional interests. Both have displayed a tendency to assess their own interests in West Asia both from a global and a regional standpoint.

The circumstances under which the superpowers interact in West Asia exacerbate the 'basic security dilemma' which is deeply embedded in the nature of the international system. So, what one side does to enhance its security is often perceived
by the other side as a threat to its own security which requires it, in turn, to undertake additional actions to buttress its security that can have a similar effect on the adversary. Thus a vicious action-reaction cycle of high tension and distrust is set in motion. Neither side is disposed to take at face value the assurances of the other that it acts solely for defensive purposes or to ensure deterrence. Since an adversary's intentions, particularly the relationship of its current actions to its long term aims, are difficult to ascertain reliably, one is inclined to judge those intentions not by what the opponent says but rather on the basis of one's perception of the possible implications and long term consequences of its current actions. Given the ambiguity of an opponent's intentions, policy makers feel obliged to attach greater significance to the possibly threatening consequences of the adversary's behaviour. This is the source of the difficult superpower relations in West Asia.

In the post World War II period, the Western powers perceived the Middle East as one of world's most serious zones of conflict, with the potential of precipitating confrontation between the superpowers. Wars in the region took place so often 1948, 1956, 1967, 1969-70, 1973, 1982 (Arab-Israeli), Iran-Iraq (1980-88) - and border conflicts were a continuing phenomena. Due to this war-torn status of the area and the chances of regional turbulence erupting into a superpower clash, both superpowers have felt the need for some form of superpower crisis prevention or crisis management mechanism but none actually could be operative since the basic interests of both the sides were not mutually exclusive. One compatible interest was a desire to avoid a confrontation leading to nuclear war. Another common interest was the need of freedom of navigation through the Middle East waterways. While the US was keen
on navigation of the oil tankers, the Soviets were dependent on the Black Sea - Mediterranean - Suez Canal - Indian Ocean route for goods and material sent from the European part of the USSR to Siberia. The third area of interest was the free flow of oil from the region, more vital for the US than the erstwhile USSR.

The main overriding clashing interest over the above common interests was the superpowers' competition for influence. For almost two decades after the World War II, both superpowers did not have any major clash. Both supported Israel in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, in 1956 both opposed the tripartite Franco-British-Israeli attack on Egypt. It was in 1967 that the war showed signs of leading to superpower confrontation. The hotline was used on four different occasions to assure each other that both were not interested in the escalation of the conflict. The ceasefire agreement between Syria and Israel defused the crisis but it could not withhold the Arab-Israeli conflict from becoming a key element in Soviet-American relations.

Moscow's conception of US policy in the Middle East was rather simplistic, viewed primarily in ideological terms. Arab states were urged to end their internecine conflicts and present a united front to the imperialistic advance of the Americans and the linchpin of Western imperialism, Israel. Moscow supported the establishment of a Palestinian state not merely because Palestinians had every right to have a sovereign state of their own but it also hoped that the Palestinian state would become an ally of Soviet policy in the Arab world.
Analysis of the ups and downs of superpower policy in West Asia over the decades shows that neither could ever be in control of events in the turmoil-filled region. Each was reacting to events beyond its control and working against each other's interest. Both failed in making their 'clients' in the region tow the line dictated by their superpower 'ally'. The 'clients' showed very little obedience to their superpower patrons despite receiving vast amounts of arms and aid from them.

The superpowers got entangled in Syria at the beginning of the Cold War, due to their attempts to counter each other. "The US was primarily interested in Syria in terms of the extent of its relationship with Moscow, fearing that it could become a Soviet base for subversive activity in the region. The Kremlin, in tum, did not want Syria to become ensnared in the Western "containment" defence net and wanted to extend its influence to a country that was more amenable to Soviets to secure an indispensable role after itself equal to that of the other great powers in the Middle East."¹

**SYRIA AND THE UNITED STATES: A BRIEF OVERVIEW, 1945-1970:**

During the years after its independence, Syria's strategic location and continuing political turmoil held foreboding implications for broader American interests in West Asia. An unfriendly Syria, with Turkey in the north and Israel in the south, could jeopardize President Truman's doctrine of containment and also could disturb USA's special relationship with Israel. Syria could also disturb the flow of oil

since it lay astride the pipeline from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean. Syria had the Arab world's most active communist party and the Americans knew that it was vulnerable to Soviet influence. Historically, US interest in this region centered on four aspects: protection of Israeli interest; support to moderate Arab regimes who could be counted on as American allies; undisturbed access to oil; and the exclusion of Soviet influence. For American policy makers, the radical nationalism prevalent in Syria posed a threat to all four interests. "The Truman administration (1945-53) viewed Syria in terms of its strategic location in the heart of the Middle East, athwart oil pipelines and air routes, its possible role in a crisis in an area of ingress from Eastern Mediterranean."2

As early as 1943, the founders of the Ba'ath party protested against US support for Zionist settlement in Palestine. Most Syrians regarded schemes like CENTO as imperialistic plots to maintain Western dominance at the expense of Arab nationalism.

In their effort to create a pro-Western regime in Syria without overt military intervention, the Americans, through CIA, clandestinely encouraged a right wing military coup in March 1949. American policy makers hoped that the perfect way to create a pro-Western regime would be to avoid armed intervention which may lead to a superpowers showdown and encourage coups. CIA's covert military action continued in the following decade. This stimulated anti-Americanism and drove Syria closer to the Soviets. This covert American intervention in Syria in the early decades

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of the Cold War reversed a century of friendship which had begun with the American missionaries who had made the Levant their home since 1820. American educational institutions in Syria had contributed a lot and many Syrians, especially government officials, were educated in America. The Syrians regarded the Americans as their friends as they had encouraged the Arabs to fight against Ottoman domination. The King-Crane Commission had upheld Syrian independence. President Woodrow Wilson had included Arab self-determination in his celebrated Fourteen Points. President Truman had helped Britain thwart a French attempt to reclaim the pre-war protectorate and had insisted that France accept Syrian independence instead. The Syrians were pro-American to the extent that, in 1919, they had requested US to be their mandatory if they could not have independence.

The first breach occurred when Syrians protested against the American policy towards Palestine. When the UN General Assembly approved the Partition Plan on 29 November 1947, the American Embassy was stormed by 2000 odd Syrians. The US became the chief benefactor of Israel and Syrian attitude hardened. American support for Israel was detested by Syria.

Syria and Turkey have a long-standing dispute over Syria's northernmost province, Alexandretta. In early 1947, Syria brought its demand for the return of Alexandretta to the UN but Washington managed to table the matter. The brewing Syro-American friction was given a major boost by American policy towards Syria's two non-Arab neighbours, Israel and Turkey. Continued support for Israel and the US
efforts to get recognition for Israel by the Arab states produced strains in the relationship.

In 1950, Syria was accepted by the Americans as "a particularly sensitive danger spot". Dean Acheson noted in January 1951, after American failure to resolve the Palestinian refugee problem, that "The key to the situation is Syria".

In assisting General Husni al-Zaim (in March 1949) overthrow the discredited Shukri al-Quwatly regime, the US felt it was riding a wave of popular discontent in Syria toward establishing a regime that would bring stability to a country ripe with factionalism. It would bring power to a leader with whom Washington could work to improve the chances of achieving peace with Israel and fitting Syria nicely into the West’s schemes of preventing an increase of Soviet/communist influence in the region. But these American hopes came to naught. General Zaim was overthrown in five months and thus the American policy was undermined.

By mid-1951, the Syrian leftward drift was apparent and US, especially under Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles, tried to woo Syria by promises of aid, both monetary and military. But there were a number of obstacles which prevented US from gaining a foothold in Syria through the vehicle of military aid: (a) The French

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4 Memorandum by Dean Acheson, January 9, 1951, Box 66, Dean Acheson Papers, Truman Library.

blocked the growth of American influence in Syria and the British too did not want to be replaced by the Americans. (b) A tripartite declaration was signed in 1950 in which the US, UK and France agreed to limit arms' sales and transfer in the Middle East so as to prevent an arms race between Israel and the Arab states. (c) The Israeli lobby in the Congress lobbied successfully against the transfer of American arms to a hostile state on its borders. (d) Added to all these was the Syrian refusal to tie-up with a country which supported Israel.

However, as the Ba'ath Party grew in strength, Soviet influence in Syria continued to grow. Another factor which caused increased tension between the two states was American pressure for a Middle East collective security system through the Baghdad Pact. Syria repudiated these efforts and vehement Syrian opposition to the American blessed Baghdad Pact put Syria in the opposing camp along with Egypt in calling for Arab non-alignment.

Syria increasingly identified itself with Nasserism and its hostility towards Israel continued unabated. From 1945 to 1958, Syro-American relations steadily deteriorated. The Syrian-American crisis was officially flagged off on 12 August 1957 when the Syrian government declared that it had unearthed an American plot to overthrow the regime. On 13 August 1957, the American government declared the Syrian Ambassador and the Second Secretary persona-non-grata.

This covert coup was apparently the brainchild of the American Second Secretary in Damascus, Howard Stone. Reportedly, the aim was to bring back
Colonel Adib al-Shishakli to power after deposing Sarraj. The plot met an ignominious end.

This crisis led to a considerable increase in Soviet influence in Syria at the expense of the US. Ba'athists and communists carried on a steady campaign against the West. Hatred for America was intensified due to the oft-repeated clandestine quick fixes that America resorted to in Syria. Coups were encouraged by America since they seemed to combine most of the advantages of armed interventions with few of the disadvantages. Ironically, CIA activities in Syria came very close to triggering off precisely the sort of military involvement they were designed to avoid.

For decades, the bitter legacies of the failed policies of Truman and Eisenhower in Syria haunted their successors. When Syria seceded from the UAR in 1961, U.S. policy makers saw a brief opening but the correctionist movement by the Ba'ath in March 1963 spelt an end to this brief rapprochement.

US efforts to harness Syria to anti-Soviet alliances in the 1950s, the CIA intrigues against nationalist governments in Syria, interventions with Britain against Arab nationalist forces in Lebanon and Jordan and efforts in the name of the Eisenhower Doctrine to quarantine Syrian radicalism led to the growth of mutual animosity.

In the war of 1967, US support for Israel prompted Damascus to sever diplomatic relations with Washington and thus the estrangement was complete.
Syrians saw how in 1967 US Ambassador, Arthur Goldberg, the then Security Council President, deliberately delayed a meeting of the Council until Israel could - in violation of an earlier UN ceasefire - complete its conquest of Golan. They also observed that it was massive US arms shipments that helped Israel to reverse Syrian advances. Syria regarded the US as the head of the "world imperialist camp". US ties with Israel were seen as organic, not accidental. Israel was seen not only as a U.S. client but as a surrogate acting in US interests; for Israel, the U.S. represents a vital lifeline and strategic depth without which it could not survive.

Syro-American relations were thus poised when Hafiz al-Assad took over the helm of power.

SYRO-AMERICAN RELATIONS UNDER ASSAD

When President Assad came to power, he realised that a small country's national interest can be best served by not antagonizing any of the two superpowers but by adopting a policy that would ensure maximum freedom of action and manoeuvrability between them. Although the Arab-Israeli conflict was regional, Hafiz al-Assad was aware that it moved in a broader global content and recognised the necessity of mobilising all available resources within the regional environment and outside it. His early efforts to improve relations with the United States were hampered by Syria's military, economic and political dependency on the Soviet Union.

\(^6\) See the Speech by Noureddin Atasi to the UN General Assembly, June 20, 1967.
To American policy-makers, Assad seemed to be a "pragmatist" and his regime a "stabilizing factor in the region" and found the regime "generally moderate externally."

By the early 1970s, the discord in Syro-American relations had become apparent. The discord in relations between the US and Syria in the Cold War years was primarily the result of the respective relations of the US with Israel and of Syria with the Soviet Union. For Syria, Zionism was the major regional threat while for the US it was Soviet expansionism. During the Cold War most of the foreign relations of the United States were shaped by its competition with the Soviet Union and its relations with Syria, which it perceived to be a Soviet client-state, were no exception.

In addition to the characterization of Syria as a Soviet client, the US perceived Syria as stridently Marxist and as firmly opposed to any peace with Israel. Syria regarded the above as mis-perceptions and as a negative assessment. The Syrians contend that Syria never was a Soviet ally as there was no formal alliance, only a treaty of friendship. Moreover, it was due to American actions that Syria had little choice but to accept this treaty to balance the overwhelming support of the US for Israel. Nor is Syria zealously Marxist. Moreover, Syrian policies give evidence of a pragmatic realist approach.

The early 1970s witnessed certain important changes in the West Asian status quo. The rise of Arab military and economic power at the time of the 1973 war and
the consequent U.S. need to placate the Arab world was understood by Syrian
decision makers as introducing a potential divergence between U.S. and Israeli
interests and providing new Arab leverage over the United States. They saw an
opportunity to bring US to consider Arab interests in order to protect its own and to
pressurise Israel to withdraw from the lands taken in 1967.

In June 1974, ties with the United States (which had been broken in 1967)
were reviewed. On March 6, 1974, Henry Kissinger announced before the Senate
Foreign Affairs Committee to approve $100 million in annual aid for Assad's regime.
Kissinger's request was approved with some modification.

After 1973, Syria accepted Kissinger's mediation efforts and re-established
long inactive diplomatic connections with Washington. Unlike Sadat, Assad was
astute enough to realise that the US would put pressure on Israel only if, in the
absence of a peace settlement, its own interests were under threat of renewed war and
an interruption of access to oil. Moreover, Assad was deeply suspicious of the US
policy in West Asia and his views on a solution to the Arab Israeli conflict differed
from the American view. He suspected that the U.S. aim was to substitute a partial
settlement for a comprehensive one, divide the Arabs and keep them militarily inferior
to Israel.

Aftermath of 1973 War

In the early seventies, a formal US-Israeli link was forged largely due to the
efforts of Dr. Henry Kissinger, the American Secretary of State. He had successfully
convinced the American policy makers that Israel could be a US strategic asset in the global struggle against Soviet Union. Israel's interest in holding on to Arab land and in gaining ascendancy over the Arabs was presented as an American interest to exclude Soviet influence from the Middle East. Thus Kissinger juxtaposed America's global concerns and Israel's local ambitions. This growing closeness was reflected in large credits and arms deliveries. By 1973, US was financing 42 per cent of Israel's defence budget.  

Kissinger topped off his good deeds for Israel by holding up a Soviet ceasefire proposal for seventy-two hours, "to help the Israeli offensive in Syria". This act of Kissinger proved to the Syrians that the US would go to any extent to protect and promote Israel, their regional representative. Kissinger could surpass the Israelis in his determination to see that Israel should end the war without any territorial loss and preferably with territorial gains. It was again Kissinger who successfully weaned Anwar Sadat away from Assad and into secret overtures with America. Sadat's double dealing with Assad dealt a blow to the Arabs' military pressure on Israel and caused the abandonment of their common strategy.  

On 22 October 1973, Resolution 338 was adopted by the UN Security Council. This ceasefire resolution was accepted by Israel and Egypt but Syria did not do so initially. Halting the fighting where the armies found themselves left Israel

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holding new bargaining counters in both Syria and Egypt. The word "withdrawal", so central in Arab demands, was found nowhere in the resolution and the word "Palestine" did not appear anywhere. Assad, finally, did accept Resolution 338, but spelt out his understanding of the resolution as total Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories, and the safeguard of Palestinian rights.

Kissinger was designing the grand Egypt-Israel peace accord and realised that Syria would be a major obstacle in the path of his plans. Kissinger saw Syria as the most militant of Israel's neighbours, a close ally of Moscow and the only substantial hurdle to his grandiose plans for the region. The war of 1973 proved to Kissinger that his previous policy had become obsolete - Israeli military might was not enough to maintain the peace and a "no war - no peace" situation. A stable West Asia in which Israel and American interests would be protected, needed at least a partial peace. And for this partial peace, he chose Egypt. To protect Israeli-Egyptian progress from possible Syrian obstruction, Kissinger decided to tackle Syria and the first Assad-Kissinger meeting took place in Assad's office in Damascus on 15 December 1973.

For Assad, negotiations with Kissinger opened up to him a whole new world of international diplomacy and was the first taste of the game which he has played successfully ever since. Kissinger deflected President Assad's queries about why Palestinian rights were not on the agenda of the proposed international peace conference and whether the US was in favour of a land for peace settlement. The discussion which transpired at their first meeting prompted Assad to stay away from
the Geneva meeting and Kissinger achieved what he wanted - a lone Egypt being drawn into the Israeli-American embrace.

Kissinger continued his shuttle diplomacy in the region, trying to sell the idea that the United States was the only power who could make Israel withdraw and that he, Kissinger, was the architect of *detente*, the only person who could bring about a solution to the Arab-Israeli problem. He told Mohammad Heikal of *Al-Ahram* newspaper: "The Soviet Union can give you arms but the United States can give you a fair solution by which your lands will be returned to you." His post-war strategy was to portray the US as the only reliable mediator between the Arabs and the Israelis.

After the Israel-Egypt disengagement agreement, Kissinger turned his attention to Syria again. He knew that without a Syrian disengagement agreement, Sadat would be isolated in the Arab world and would stall the relationship with Israel. Kissinger needed something on the Golan front to let the Egypt-Israel relationship to grow. Syria had to be included in the disengagement process to allow the establishment of US credibility as a mediator. This was necessary in order to bring about the end of the oil embargo.

On his part, Assad may have believed that the disengagement process would lead, gradually, to the liberation of the whole of Golan. The Syrian leadership seems to have been divided over how to respond to Kissinger's diplomacy and more so over the concept of "step-by-step" approach. The hardliners vetoed any kind of partial

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settlements. They felt that since the power balance was tilting towards Arabs, Syria could press for a comprehensive settlement on its own terms. They were also apprehensive that a peace obtained under U.S. patronage would mean a defeat of the Arab revolution. Moreover, they rejected the concept of direct talks with the Israelis.

A second group favoured disengagement and the exploration of the "step-by-step" approach in order to get something to show for the war. They stressed that the outcome of the 1973 war was favourable for Syria and hence the Syrian bargaining leverage was at a maximum. They also were against the prospect of depending on Syria's wartime Arab allies to help force a general settlement. They also were convinced that the US would never permit a substantial shift in the balance of power against Israel. Assad agreed to negotiate mainly because "shuttle diplomacy" did not require face-to-face negotiations with the Israelis. The U.S. assurances that disengagement was only a prelude to subsequent and greater Israeli withdrawal were believed.

Assad bargained tenaciously with every card at his disposal and Kissinger, in order to show the Arabs that reliance on the U.S. paid, pressured Israel to make concessions comparable to those made to Egypt. Nevertheless, at the end, Assad had to settle for a partial disengagement, recovering only the sliver of land lost in 1973 and a small part of that lost in 1967. Kissinger's Syrian shuttle, from 29 April to 29 May 1974, catapulted Assad into a blaze of international publicity. He emerged as a champion of Syria's national interest and as a vital actor in Arab affairs. The disengagement agreement was signed by military representatives of Syria and Israel in
Geneva on 31 May 1974. Though the bargaining chips of the month-long bargaining were not vital, it was a matter of pushing zones by a mile here and there - but Assad gained a lot. He earned respect due to his firm stand, of fighting all the way and not crumbling under false flattery like Sadat did. Most importantly, he did not allow this new friendship with the USA to adversely affect Syro-Soviet relations. For Kissinger, the Syria-Israel disengagement was a very desired "radical anchors" for his peace parleys between Israel and Egypt.

Gradually, Syrian policy hardened against step-by-step diplomacy and instead veered towards an international conference in which a United Arab delegation would face the Israelis and extract a total withdrawal.

Assad, by early 1975, realised that the US was not interested in a comprehensive settlement and that American pledges to implement Resolution 242 were worthless. Kissinger's real intention, of drawing Egypt out of the Arab fold and splitting the Arab opposition to Israel, became obvious.

On 4 September 1975 Sinai II was signed in Geneva between Israel and Egypt but, actually, this was a trilateral agreement with the US as the third party, a precedent for the Camp David Accords which were signed three years later. The 'secret' agreements concluded between the US and Israel contained a clause that only 'cosmetic' changes would be contemplated on Golan. Kissinger even made President Ford of the USA write a letter saying that, in any Golan talks, the US would take into
account Israel's position that it should not return to the 1967 borders. The package of Israeli-US agreements succeeded in putting Israel virtually in control of the West Asian policy of the U.S. Kissinger had done for Israel what Israel could never do for itself.

Had the US wanted a settlement after the 1973 war, it was uniquely well-placed to achieve one. Israel was dependent on the US and the Arabs had put their trust in Kissinger and America. The Soviets and the Europeans were pushed to the fringes and America could have pushed through a settlement but it did not. Kissinger did not pressurize Israel to head for a comprehensive peace but helped Israel do what it wanted. Kissinger later admitted: "When I ask Rabin to make concessions he says he can't because Israel is weak; so I give him more arms and he says he doesn't need to make concessions because Israel is strong."11

SYRIA-AMERICAN RELATIONS VIS-A-VIS LEBANON (1976)

After the debacles of 1975, Assad took stock of the situation and must have realised that if Syria did not fight back, it would turn into just another weak Arab State on Israel's borders. Syria, therefore, embarked on its lone mission of becoming a substantial regional power and the only remaining Arab opponent (of any stature) of Israel.


11 Sheeshan, Edward, "How Kissinger Did It: Step by Step in the Middle East." Foreign Policy, no. 22 (Spring 1976), p.88.
The first priority was survival. Kissinger had outsmarted him. Sadat had betrayed him, Iraq was hostile, Jordan was useless and Saudi Arabia after King Faisal was uncertain. Syria stood alone, exposed, surrounded by Jordan, Lebanon and Palestinians, vulnerable elements directly in the line of Israeli fire. Syria needed power, strategic depth, and dependable allies.

The solution for Syria was to re-popularise the traditional concept of "Greater Syria" i.e. a United Arab Levant with Damascus as its focal point. Hence, the interest in Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians. Beneath this ideological overtones lay a military reality - the danger of Israel attacking these exposed flanks and rendering Syria vulnerable.

Assad was pre-empted by the outbreak of the civil war in Lebanon in spring 1975. The war spread and led to a security problem for Syria. Assad made repeated efforts to stop the fighting, the partition of Lebanon and retain optimal control over various sub-state and state actors in Syria's immediate environment.

The main threat posed by the anti-status quo forces in Lebanon was Syria's potential loss of control of events there. The breakdown of the status quo in Lebanon threatened to bring anarchy. If rebel forces would come to power, they could pursue policies prejudicial to Syrian interests. Moreover, catalytic behaviour by the PLO could drag Israel and Syria into a direct military confrontation at a time when Israel enjoyed a clear "strategic superiority".
A Lebanon controlled by the PLO or even by Iranian-backed Lebanese Shi'is could have grave consequences for Syria. The best thing Syria could do was to see that the Lebanese political system remained intact and controllable. Thus, Syria sought to end the civil war in order to preserve the status quo and joined the war on the side of the Christian militia against the PLO and other allied factions.

Before he took Syrian forces to Lebanon, Assad was convinced that events in Lebanon were being manipulated by external hands. The war was brewed to distract Arab opposition to the Israel-Egypt peace agreements, as a plot to finish off the Palestinian Resistance by pulling it into a war and that it was a Zionist aim to partition Lebanon. He suspected that the Christians in Lebanon were being incited by Israel and the US to fight the Palestinians. In fact, an American official of the National Security Agency alleged that the Athens station of CIA had been used to activate the Kata'ib and kindle the war. Assad was convinced that to thwart the American-Israeli activities in Lebanon, the fighting had to be stopped.

"The Lebanese crisis was Kissinger's last swan song. The last occasion on which he exercised his manipulative skills in the Middle East before President Carter's election removed him from office". The victories of the leftist forces suddenly jolted him into taking interest in Lebanon. The Soviet Union was behind the winning side

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12 Winslow Peck writing in Anti, an Athens magazine, 17 April 1976, Quoted in Arab Report and Record (1976), p. 256.

13 Seale, n. 10, p. 278.
and a new war had chances of erupting, between Syria and Israel, undermining his achievements and the Israel-Egypt peace.

Initially, the American stand was to stop Syria from intervening and the American Ambassador in Syria delivered an ultimatum, "do not intervene, or Israel will"\(^4\) and that the US might not be able to hold Israel back if Syria steps into the Lebanese imbroglio. American effort was to scare off Syria from intervening in Lebanon.

The American policy suddenly took a U turn due to Kissinger's change in policy. He decided it would be far better if Assad is encouraged to intervene in Lebanon against the Palestinians, and to convince Syria that if it does not intervene, Israel will. This would accrue numerous benefits - Palestinians would be humbled by Syrians, the leftist forces would be crushed, Moscow would be thwarted and Assad would stand discredited in Arab eyes for committing the unforgivable crime of fighting against the Palestinians. Moreover, the United States forced the establishment of an independent, radical regime in Lebanon in the aftermath of the civil war. Raimun Ibdah, an important Christian leader, declared in Beirut that in his trip to Washington, he had heard that Kissinger believed that peace would not come to the Middle East until Syria had taken administrative control of Lebanon.

Syria was assured that the US and Israel would not intervene in case of Syrian intervention in Lebanon on the side of the Christian militia. This agreement is

sometimes called the "RED-LINE" agreement\textsuperscript{15} - an unwritten, unsigned, and unavowed agreement whereby Israel agreed to allow Syrian entry uncontested into Lebanon \textit{albeit} with restrictions on number of brigades, limitation of air and naval deployment and non-deployment of SAM missiles.

Assad had long pondered over the repercussions of Syrian military intervention in Lebanon. The dangers of letting events drift in Lebanon would have had ominous impact on Syrian security. Once he had the green signal from Washington and assurance of non-intervention from Israel, he sent the army into Lebanon.

Assad's war against the Palestinians and in defence of the Christians sparked off a wave of criticism and unpopularity - the lion of Arabism was slaughtering Arabism's sacred cow. Israel watched the suppression of the Palestinians with satisfaction and Kissinger's bid paid off. The Soviets made known their displeasure and the Arab states criticised Syria and the latter stood isolated. Assad was accused of coalescing with Americans and of playing minority politics. Nobody cared to understand the reasons behind this act of Syria.

THE CARTER YEARS

When Jimmy Carter came to occupy the White House, he launched a revolutionary foreign policy programme. In his Middle East policies, he made human

\textsuperscript{15} Ze'ev Schiff, "Dealing with Syria", \textit{Foreign Policy}, no.55, Summer 1984.
rights a central issue and declared that the Palestinians have been wronged, morally as well as politically. Carter was supported in this by his Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, and his National Security Advisor, Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski. They were critical of Kissinger's attitude of seeing the world in terms of geopolitical competition with the Soviet Union. Peace in the Middle East was promoted to the top of Carter's foreign policy priorities.

Carter stopped giving an unconditional support to Israel and Israel grew alarmed at Carter's oft-repeated plans of "real peace" in the Middle East. To Israel, Carter seemed to be dislodging all the rules of US-Israeli relationship: Israel was not consulted before Carter took any Middle East initiatives; he publicised all disagreements with Jerusalem; and seemed to take back the favoured status of Israel in American arms deliveries. Much to the consternation of Israel, Carter made friendly overtures towards Syria, a turn from Kissinger's policy of letting Assad remain on the wings. Assad refused to go to the White House to meet Carter and the latter, understanding that Syria had to be a major player in any comprehensive peace in the areas, agreed to meet Assad in Geneva.

On May 9, 1977, Assad and Carter met in Geneva for a seven- hour meeting. Assad's refusal to agree to give up even an inch of Arab land and the question of Palestinian homeland were issues on which there could not be a consensus and nothing substantive came out of the Carter-Assad meeting. Israeli refusal to negotiate with Palestinians till Israel was recognised as a State by the latter, and the Palestinian
refusal to do so, and the pressure of the Jewish lobby on Carter, gradually spelt an end
to Carter's good intentions in the Middle East.

The Camp David Accords were, for Syria, Carter's last betrayal and put an end
to all those expectations Assad had from the new administration of Carter. Instead of
rectifying Kissinger's work, Carter had fulfilled the former's grandiose plans. Assad,
who had faith in Carter's pledge of seeking a comprehensive solution, viewed the
Camp David accords as yet another example of the Americans reneging on their
promises and dividing the Arabs to suit Israel.

US INVOLVEMENT IN DOMESTIC DISSENSION:

While Assad was busy trying to cope with the setbacks in Syrian foreign
policy, the domestic situation worsened. Terrorist attacks on Alawites, hit and run
terrorism, explosions, assassinations, etc. became a routine affair. The worst kind of
domestic crisis was brought upon by the Muslim fundamentalists who tried to stage
large-scale urban uprisings. The regime was forced to resort to brutal suppression of
these uprisings and culminated in the Hama Uprising of 2-3 February 1982 and the
three week-long wiping out operation by the regime. The war Assad fought against
Islamists convinced him that he was battling not just domestic dissent but with a large
conspiracy aided and abetted by external forces, by Iraq, Lebanon, Israel and the
United States.
In March 1980, he publicly accused the CIA of encouraging 'sabotage and subversion' in Syria so as to bring the entire Arab world under joint US-Israeli domination.\textsuperscript{16}

In February 1982, it was the State Department in Washington and the Muslim Brothers in West Germany who broke the news of the Hama uprising to the world, (a week after the uprising began) and this was regarded by Syria as an attempt to encourage the rebels. The US ambassador in Damascus, Robert Paganelli, was summoned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was told of Syria's displeasure.\textsuperscript{17}

An incriminating evidence proving American involvement came to light when US equipment was discovered with the guerrillas, especially sophisticated communications equipment of a certain kind, which, it was believed, could not have been sold, even to a third party, without US government's permission. Syrian intelligence believed that an American manufacturer had sold it to the guerrillas with the permission of the American government.\textsuperscript{18}

By the dawn of the eighties, Assad harboured resentment for the United States. The reasons for this were many: the US success in the weaning away of Egypt from the Arab fold; the help US was believed to have given to the Muslim brotherhood; the American responsibility in making Israel strategically strong by giving arms and

\textsuperscript{17} Seale, n. 10, p.335.  
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. p.336.
money by signing the agreement on strategic cooperation with Israel; the US encouragement to Israel to make separate arrangements with individual Arab states for undermining Arab security and thereby ignoring the profound sentiment of a common Arab destiny.

Assad was now defiant and openly positioned himself in the anti-American Camp. For instance, during the hostage crisis of November, 1979, when revolutionary students in Teheran took over the American embassy, Assad supported Iran. Again, when Soviet troops intervened in Afghanistan, Assad was one of the few leaders outside the Soviet bloc who did not condemn the action. By the time President Ronald Reagan came to power, America stopped regarding Syria as a potential participant in any peace process. Some within the Reagan government regarded Syria as a Soviet surrogate whose interest could be disregarded and whose punishment represented a victory over Moscow.

SYRIA-AMERICAN RELATION VIS-A-VIS IRAN

The onset of the Iran-Iraq war saw the unthinkable happening in the Arab world. Syria pitched in support of Iran and against Iraq, a brother Ba'athi State - the reasons behind this have already been studied in the previous chapter.

Syro-American relationship was shaken by the former's stand during the first Gulf War. Syria's friendship with Iran had become yet another source of tension with the United States.
US-Iran relationship was going through troubled times. Once allies in the reign of the Pahlavi Shah, they were now enemies. The partnership they had formed in the early 1970s to safeguard their mutual interests in the Gulf had dissolved in bitterness. Iran, once considered a pillar of U.S. power in the Middle East, had become a dangerous dilemma. The US, once the ultimate guarantor of Iran's independence against a covetous and expansionist USSR, had been denounced and cast away as a satanic and imperialist threat to the Islamic Revolution.

In 1992, Syria's ambassador to the United States, 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. I don't feel that Syrian-Iranian relations can damage Syrian-American relations, because, the US itself tries to send many messages to the Iranian leadership to normalise their relations".19

Syria and US vis-a-vis Lebanon, 1982

The entire gamut of power relationship changed in the region after Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982. The balance of power tilted towards Syria, helping it to end its isolation and take a grip over the Middle Eastern diplomacy. Israel's role was diminished and American diplomacy was stuck in the Lebanese quagmire while the Soviets regained influence in the region. The US could have put pressure on Israel to avoid an invasion. Begin and Sharon had given the Americans warning about the

invasion and the Israelis felt that Secretary of State Alexander Haig approved of the impending invasion.

Israel's main aim in the invasion was to secure its northern borders, destroy the PLO, and help the Lebanese Phalangists to power so that it could make Lebanon an Israeli ally.

When the invasion took place, America tried to use it as a strategic opportunity to destroy Soviet influence in the region, get Syria and the PLO out of Lebanon and impose a peace settlement favourable to America and Israel in Lebanon.

None of the above grandiose plans materialized. The long-drawn out conflict harmed Israel more than Israel had ever dreamt.

America had supported Israel's moves without understanding the implications. Its involvement in Lebanon in 1982 was a gross miscalculation. On September 1, 1982, President Ronald Reagan laid down the parameters of America's Middle East policy which included a comprehensive peace plan favouring Palestinian self-government in conjunction with Jordan. The peace plan also demanded the evacuation of all foreign powers from Lebanon. But miscalculations by the Americans put this plan on a backburner and the entire emphasis of US policy was soon placed on Lebanon. Assad categorically rejected this peace plan.
After nine months of shuttles by America's Middle East negotiator, Ambassador Philip Habib, George Shultz took as America's Secretary of State over on May 17, 1983. He avoided trips to Damascus on his shuttles and tried to present the agreement as a *fait accompli* to Syria. A Lebanese-Israeli withdrawal agreement was brought about, and Washington seemed satisfied but this agreement was not fated to last.

The US took over as a guardian of the Amin Gemayil government while keeping Syria out of the negotiations. "Let's leave the Syrians on the outside looking in", Reagan told Israeli Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir.\(^\text{20}\)

Syria had not been included in the negotiations. Assad was determined to overthrow the Gemayil government and force a nullification of the Israeli-Lebanese-US withdrawal agreement. This agreement had given Israel special rights in southern Lebanon and the agreement bordered on a peace treaty because of a "normalization of relations". These were unacceptable to Syria and also to other Arab states. To Syria, it seemed that the May 17 Agreement rewarded Israel for its invasion. The Reagan administration harboured the illusion that Israeli military threats and Saudi financial pressures would force Syria out of Lebanon.

Assad refused to even negotiate on a withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon and denounced the treaty as a Zionist-American hegemonistic plan, worse than the Camp David Accords. Renewed fighting was stimulated and supported by

Syria. In late 1983, US aircraft and naval guns struck against the Syrian-backed militias. Assad also tried to bring the PLO under Syrian control. Syria solidified its leadership over anti-Phalangist forces. US Marines, 241 of them, sent in as "peace keeping forces" lost their lives in October 1983 in a bombing.

In the US some had argued for greater American-Israeli cooperation in order to balance the Moscow-Damascus tie-up. America rushed in headlong but, half-way through, got bogged down in Lebanon. Americans were unclear about what comprised the US interests in Lebanon. The US with limited forces in Lebanon, and in the face of congressional and popular dissidence about further American involvement, was in no position to challenge Syrian predominance in Lebanon. By February 1984, the Lebanese army units had collapsed under the pressure from Syrian-supported militias and within days, the Reagan administration withdrew its marines. This withdrawal was a defeat for the Americans and for their "peace plan". The May 17 Israeli-Lebanese accords were abrogated.

America reacted bitterly, their diplomacy was badly scorched and the American press credited Assad's statecraft as the reason behind the failure of the American policy in Lebanon.

The defeat of the accord in Lebanon could not make Shultz change his Middle Eastern policy. On the contrary, he took the debacle as a personal defeat and plunged into a closer relationship with Israel. This headlong rush pulled America into the intricacies of terrorism, counter-terrorism, hostage crisis and Irangate. By condoning
Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon and pitching in with Israel in the post-accord period, the US had convinced Assad that US had a disregard for Syrian interests and had tried to drive him to the edge of national extinction. Assad seemed convinced that "the US does not have an independent policy in the Middle East; it implements the policy that is decided by Israel".21

THE TERRORISM ISSUE:

A wave of terrorism swept over the region after 1982. The Reagan administration, after their debacle in Lebanon, began identifying Syria as a prime victim of its anti-terrorist tirade.

In late April 1984, Peter Jennings of ABC asked Assad in a television interview whether he considered terrorism as a legitimate tool of war. Assad replied:

We are against terrorism. But what is terrorism? Terrorism is one country invading another, occupying its land and expelling its people. If you mean by terrorism acts committed by gangs of robbers and murderers... we are against it. But the acts of people against the occupiers of their land have not throughout history been known as acts of terrorism. We support the national resistance of all peoples...

The reign of terror and counter terror had been triggered off in the region even before the state of Israel was carried out. So much so that many Middle Eastern states were using terrorism as an instrument of their foreign policy. Syria fell into this mode of waging a war. Reports of Syria's involvement in terrorism intensified too when it attempted to abort the Israeli-Lebanese May 1983 accord and scare Lebanon and Jordan away from such accords. Abu-Nidal, the legendary terrorist, is said to have worked with Syria, especially against Jordan. Gradually, Assad seemed to have lost control over Abu Nidal, who had, anyway, numerous other patrons. Abu Nidal and his group began using Syrian facilities like camps, lodgings, airports etc. in attacks with which Syria had no connection, such as the El Al counter bombing at Rome and Vienna in December 1985 and hijack of the Pan-Am airliner on the ground at Karachi airport in September 1986.

Along with the independent acts of Abu Nidal, the overspill of terrorism in Lebanon served to be damaging to Assad. Post-invasion Lebanon was anarchic and ruled by chaos and this became a fertile breeding ground of radical Shi'ite and Palestinian factions which indulged in acts of terrorism and were beyond the pale of Syrian control. Initially, to counter Israeli action, Syria had helped the militant Shi'i and other Lebanese radicals but very soon Assad had no control over these separate Lebanese militant groups which launched a rampant terror campaign (assassination of Bashir Jumayil, blowing up of US embassy, killing of the marines etc.). Nevertheless, Syria stood accused of aiding and abetting terrorism. Assad could not stop these acts
though he unequivocally condemned hostage takers and hijackers as damaging to the Arab cause.\textsuperscript{22}

On 29 June 1985, Assad secured the release of American hostages of the TWA airliner, but USA failed to convey their thanks in a befitting manner, convincing Assad that while the US wanted him to tame the terrorists, especially in Lebanon, it was indifferent to Syria's security needs.

The labelling of Syria as a terrorist state began with the alleged discovery of a Syrian connection in the attempt to bomb an EL AL plane by a Jordanian operative from London in April 1986 - the so-called "Hindawi Affair". Britain broke off diplomatic relations with Syria on 24 October 1986. The US and Canada followed by recalling their ambassadors and limited measures were taken by the US to impose sanctions on Syria while consultations with other European countries followed. However, the US officials had to take balanced steps since they wanted Syrian help in securing the release of American hostages in Lebanon and thus they displeased the British by their cautious stand.

The Syrians denied involvement and called the EL AL incident an American-Zionist plot. The plot was never actually solved. Certain quarters even called Hindawi, the Jordanian operative, an \textit{agent provocateur} whose mission was to entrap the Syrian intelligence services so as to label Syria a terrorist State.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{22} Seale, p.468.

\textsuperscript{23} Seale, p.480.
Vice President George Bush attacked Syria openly but White House spokesman Larry Speakes noted that 'Syria continued to be helpful in the release of hostages."24

Syrian connection in the Rome airport terrorist attack in December 1985 was hinted at but no concluding statements were made.

Gradually, America had become obsessed with the issue of terrorism, especially during President Reagan's second term. American policy makers persuaded their public opinion that Israel's enemies were also America's.

Syria itself came under terrorist attacks which were variously blamed on Iraq, Israel, Muslim Brotherhood and the CIA. Car bombs, bombings on trucks and trains took scores of Syrian lives.

It was the unveiling of the Iran-Contra affair which helped Syria off the dock of being a terrorist state. The news of covert US arms deals with Iran broke in early November 1986, a mere 10 days after Hindawi was sentenced in Britain. The Iran-Contra affair totally undermined America's counter terrorist pretensions. It also exposed the in-built contradictions in Israel's two-track policy of denouncing Syria due to its alleged terrorist record while covertly arming Iran in spite of its terrorist records.

It seemed to Assad the height of Western, specially American, double standard to put Syria on the dock over affairs like the Hindawi case, subvert his political position in Lebanon and put Jordan in Israeli arms, while secretly arming Iran and doing deals over hostages in blatant breach of its proclaimed counter terrorist policy.

For its part, Syria appeared to be anxious to be seen to dissociate itself from terrorist groups and to use its influence in Lebanon to free Western hostages. In June 1987, it was reported that the offices of Abu Nidal's Fatah Revolutionary Council, near Damascus, had been closed and its members expelled by the Syrian government and that Abu Nidal had moved to Libya. This paved the way for the return of the American Ambassador to Damascus.

The West was focussing on isolating and pressurizing Iran. At this point of time Syria became pivotal to Western interests and the stand towards Syria was considerably softened. The European Community, except Britain, lifted its ban on ministerial contacts with Syria in July 1987 and financial aid was resumed.

Syria remains on the US administration's list of countries suspected of supporting terrorism and still has the dubious reputation among the Western countries of being an abuser of human and political rights.

Till 1990, the US policy was governed by the urge to undermine Syria's legitimate regional interests and to reduce Syrian influence. America's policy was
marked by double standards, evident in a comparison of its behaviour towards Israel and Syria. For the same pattern of behaviour, Israel would be rewarded and Syria punished by the US. For example, the Americans labelled Syria "hardline" when it opposed the UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, and later when Syria came around to insisting on the full implementation of the same resolutions, the Americans wasted no time in calling this attitude "hardline"!

America's partiality to Israel continues to be an obstacle to an amicable relationship with Syria. As the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Adnan Umran, pointed out, the relationship faces problems because America is not sovereign and independent in the Middle East. Its policy making is not free from Israeli duress. As long as the Americans continue to be influenced by Israel, the Syria-American relation will continue to suffer.

When President George Bush came to power, efforts were made to improve relations with Syria. The US Ambassador, Edward Djerejian, contributed considerably in restoring some trust between Damascus and Washington. Subsequently, the US changed its policy in Lebanon and supported the Syrian-sponsored Taif Accord which aimed at ending the Lebanese Civil War. America also opposed Michel Aoun's anti-Syria policy.

Syria and the US, however, did not come to an agreement over the details of a peace process. The US continued its support to Israel and rejected an international conference as impractical. It concentrated on Israel-Palestinian negotiations, leaving
Syria aside. Syria watched with grim satisfaction when the America-Israel-PLO dialogues failed in December 1988 after Arafat refused to condemn a terrorist attack on Israel.

With the demise of the USSR as a Super Power, Syria recognised the fact that the US would emerge as a sole Super Power in the post-Cold War world and therefore tried to improve relations. Damascus hoped that now the US would look at the Arab-Israeli conflict in terms divorced from its struggle for supremacy with the Soviet Union. It hoped that with the end of the East-West rivalry, Israel's stature in American eyes would be diminished.

SYRIA AND THE SOVIET UNION

In his book, *The Soviet Union And Syria*, Efraim Karsh rightly concludes the nature of the relationship between a great power and a small state by stating that analysis of international, especially great-power/small-state relationship, often falls within one of the following two broad categories: the patron-client relationship and the 'tail wags the dog' syndrome (the power of the weak). The first form of analysis implies that relationship between actors of unequal power and status favour, altogether, the patron, whose bargaining position is by definition much more than that of the client. Ranging from a more or less symbolic partnership to a situation of unilateral exploitation, patron-client relations are based on reciprocity in the exchange of material goods or protection for services, loyalty and deference to the patron.
The small state can still get help if it needs, but it has to give something in return. In other words, it has to keep in mind the interest of the patron while taking any decision in international issues, which is a sort of limitation on its freedom or even on its sovereignty. This was the price which many Third World countries paid during the Cold War. This kind of policy is called pleasement or agreement of the stronger power. In the ideal form of patron-client relations, the client state voluntarily sets its own limits on action and makes decisions in support of the great power, hoping by such acts either to get immediate positive rewards from the great power or to accumulate goodwill and credit for the future.\textsuperscript{25}

The 'tail wags the dog' paradigm, on the other hand, starts from the assumption that the structural traits of the contemporary international system, particularly the inter-bloc polarization and the consequent superpower competition for allies, together with the advent of nuclear weaponry on the international arena, have significantly improved the bargaining power of small state actors \textit{vis-a-vis} the superpowers.\textsuperscript{26}

The elements or the components that forbid the superpowers' exploitation of their enormous military machines for other objectives or designs \textit{ipso facto} (thereby) aggrandize or enlarge the small states' capability or might and ability to use their own power for refusal and denial against the superpowers and their allies. When the


eagle's claws are clipped, the dove can save its life. The smaller states, feeling stronger in their defence against threats from the superpowers, are often able and willing to pursue goals beyond mere survival and security. Contrariwise, the superpowers, encumbered by their nuclear power, must concentrate as never before on the requirements of security and survival.\(^{27}\)

Though the above-mentioned opposing paradigms are the standard in which the superpower relations with small states are applied, Syria's relations with the superpowers do not fall in place with these theories.

Soviet Union's relations with the developing world were usually seen to be dominated by three traits: Soviet efforts to institutionalize the relationship; client's effort to obtain maximum assistance at a minimum cost; and an overriding Soviet tendency to defer to the client where the latter's core interests were concerned. As a result the client ended up with greater influence over Soviet behavior than vice versa.

There are four dominant interpretations of Soviet-Syrian relationship. The first propounds that terms of the Soviet-Syrian relations were typical of patron-client relationships. It was simply stated that "the Soviets provide Syria with assistance necessary for it to be effective in regional policy and in exchange the Soviets obtaining a presence in Syria as well as Syrian support for Soviet actions in areas outside Syria's interest."\(^{28}\) Contrary to this view is the belief that Syria was merely a

\(^{27}\) Handel, n.25, pp. 132-5.

Soviet proxy, "the Cuba of Middle East." A third interpretation states that the Soviet concern with Syria had led the former to let the Syrians call the shots in the West Asian environment. Another important view regarding the Soviet-Syrian relation, is portrayed in terms of a mutually beneficial strategic interdependence between two allies: a relationship favouring each partner in accordance with the vicissitudes in regional and global affairs.

For the Soviet Union the West Asian region was not just another Third World area but it was the most volatile part of Asia immediately bordering Russia and as such was a vital component of the Russian defence perimeter. For this very reason the Soviet Union could not remain indifferent to the situation in that region. The Russian Foreign Ministry in April 1955, in response to the formation of the Baghdad Pact, stated: "... the USSR is situated very close to these countries, consequently, the 'establishment of foreign military bases on the territory of the countries of the Near East and Middle East has a direct bearing on the security of the USSR."

Geopolitical factors elucidate the basic difference between Soviet interest in the Middle East and that of any great power. American interest in the region is vital no doubt, but purely circumstantial. Soviet interest was of a structural nature. Whereas Western interest in the area is confined to the global level, the USSR viewed the Middle East in predominantly regional terms. This is not to deny the relevance of

29 Karsh, n.26, p.96.
global consideration in the making of Soviet foreign policy towards the Middle East, particularly in the post-war system with its intensifying superpower competition for assets in the Third World. Notwithstanding, Russian foreign policy towards the Middle East has revealed far greater consistency and far less dependence on the fluctuations of international events than American.\footnote{Karsh, n.26, p.2.}

As far as the Arab world in general and Syria in particular are concerned, there was a distinct lack of Soviet interest in the Arab world until early 1950s, despite the fact that the Arab world has undeniable geostrategic and economic advantages. But, the initial and the main reason for the Soviet interest emerged from the Soviet desire to undermine the Baghdad Pact which the Soviets regarded as a major security threat. Not only did the Pact transform what had been an effective buffer zone in the pre-war period into an important link in the worldwide chain of Western containment strategy but it also meant the extension of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) military power to the USSR's backyard, thus turning it into a potential theatre of war.\footnote{Y. Primakov, \textit{Anatomy of the Middle East Conflict}, (Moscow: Nanka, 1979), p.145.}

Therefore, and in order to contain and to stem the West's mounting military power and to contain Baghdad Pact, the Soviets began to look for ways and means by adopting direct and indirect approach. This policy of the Soviets attracted the Arab states who opposed the Pact and Western involvement in their region. In 1957, the Soviet-Syrian relation took a turn when pro-Soviet groups came to the fore in Syria's
domestic scene. A Syria-Turkey dispute was brewing in the fall of 1957 and, on this pretext, Soviet arms poured into Syria. This trend was quickly arrested by the formation of the United Arab Republic in 1958.

Nasser opted for closer ties with the Soviet Union and hence Soviet influence existed in Syria only as an appendix of the Soviet relations with Nasser. The United Arab Republic (UAR) was driven in the direction of the USSR by mainly defensive considerations, following Israeli attacks along with Western help and support against Arab States, on the one hand, and Iraqi and Turkish overt threats, accompanied by military shows of force aimed at deflecting Syrian rejection to the Baghdad Pact, on the other.

By the end of the 1950s it was apparent that the Soviets had clearly indicated commitment to defend Syria against any threat for instance, in March 1955, it announced its readiness to extend to Syria "aid in any form whatsoever for the purpose of safeguarding Syria's independence and sovereignty." This announcement was in response to reported Turkish and Iraqi troop concentrations on the Syrian North-Eastern borders. The result was the first Soviet-Syrian arms deal in the autumn of 1955 and the Soviet-Syrian Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation of 28 October 1957.

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In the ensuing period, the Arab-Israeli dispute became the most crucial issue underlying this relationship. In November 1967, the Soviet Union was instrumental in the passing of Resolution 242 (which recognises Israel's right to exist) by the UN Security Council and it regarded it as the base on which Arab-Israeli peace could be built. But Syria rejected this resolution outright. Though displeased, the Soviets did not force Syria to change its fundamental position.

There was also an ideological basis of this relationship. Syria was and remains the most intransigent among the confrontation states with Israel. It has stuck to its rejectionist attitude and has refused to bow down to West-sponsored "peace plans". This traditional hostility towards the West was shared by the Soviets. The struggle against colonialism and imperialism -identified with the West and Israel- was written into the Syrian Constitution of March 1973. More than Arab socialism or militant Ba'athist ideology, it was Syrian opposition to colonialism and imperialism that brought it closer to the Soviets.

ASSAD'S APPROACH TO THE SOVIET UNION

Early in 1970, when the memories of al-Nakabah (1967 War) were still fresh, Assad came to power and made it one of his immediate goals to reassure the USSR of Syria's future course. Along with including Communists in the new government, the Regional Command of the Ba'ath Party released a pamphlet announcing its continued adherence to the Muntalaqat (starting point or guidelines) set by 'the Party's congresses and theories' and reiterating its intention to "improve relations with the
Socialist bloc, particularly with the friendly USSR." Assad realised that Syria was nearly totally dependent on the Soviet Union for the sustenance of its military machinery. The air force, which had tripled in size since the war, boasted 175 late-model MIG-21 fighters and SU-7 fighter-bombers and eighty-five MIG-17 fighters. Deliveries to the ground forces in three years period included 290 tanks, over 100 armored personnel carriers, 400 field guns and mobile rocket launchers, and an estimated forty SA-2 SAM missiles. Transfers to the navy included two Soviet-supplied minesweepers, six Komar-class missile boats, and at least a dozen motor torpedo boats. An agreement on improvement of Syrian operational efficiency was reached in 1970.

Another military aid agreement was signed with Moscow in February 1971. Yet another important move to consolidate Soviet-Syrian relations was made when President Assad paid his first visit to the Soviet Union as the head of state on 13 November 1971. Despite the surfacing of certain differences, mainly Syria's rejection of Resolution 242 as a basis for an Arab-Israeli settlement, Assad's visit completely dispelled any remaining hopes in the West of a reversal in Assad's foreign policy orientation. Instead, it underlined the two states' keen interest in continuing their

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relationship and started an era of close Soviet-Syrian cooperation which was to last until the mid-70s, or to be more precise until the outbreak of the 1973 war. 37

In fact during the three years before the 1973 War Syria became a very close ally of the Socialist bloc in general and of the Soviet Union in particular. Bilateral exchanges of delegations grew significantly; the spring and the summer of 1971 also witnessed the flow of Soviet arms to Damascus. In February 1972 an agreement on Soviet economic and technical aid to Syria was reached which was followed in May 1972 by an arms deal signed during a visit to Damascus by the Soviet Minister of Defence, Andrei Grechko. Soviet-Syrian military ties were significantly upgraded later in the year following the signing of two arms deals in July 1972 and December 1972. 38

Assad was not just an ally of Soviet Union but he was also the closest one from the region after the Soviet-Sadat relations fell apart, following Sadat's intention to look for an alternative for military aid. Egypt-Soviet relations worsened after the expulsion of about 15,000 Soviet military personnel from Egypt in July 1972 which was undoubtedly the major turning point in Soviet-Syrian relations. This event enhanced Syria's significance in Soviet eyes. The 1972 the Sadat move reinforced


existing trends which had started after Assad's visit to Moscow in 1971. This division of Soviet policy between Damascus and Cairo was generously reciprocated by Damascus. Not only did Assad withhold from utilizing the deterioration in Moscow-Cairo relations in order to extract benefits from the USSR, but he (Assad) also worked to mend the rift between the USSR and Egypt. On the way home from Moscow, Assad stopped in Cairo where he questioned the motives behind Sadat's decision. In the following months, Assad was the link between Moscow and Cairo in order to smooth over their differences.

Assad, nevertheless, attempted to conduct an independent foreign policy, preferring not to be considered part of the Soviet bloc. An example of this trend was when he sent a high-ranking delegation to China in search of political and economic aid. The war of 1973 proved that despite the increasing influence of the Soviets, they were never able to make Syria heed Soviet advice. The Soviets opposed the 1973 war being afraid that it might escalate into a superpower confrontation. After initially trying to halt the war, the Soviets reconciled to airlifting huge quantities of arms to the Arabs.

The 1973 war brought about a Syria-Soviet clash when a joint Soviet-American ceasefire proposal was approved on 22 October 1973 by a special session of the United Nations Security Council as Resolution 338. It called upon the belligerents to terminate military hostilities within twelve hours and to start negotiations "under appropriate auspices" immediately thereafter for the implementation of Resolution 242 and the establishment of a just and durable peace in the region. Syria did not
welcome resolution 338 because Syria's complete exclusion from US-Soviet negotiations on the ceasefire agreement was regarded by Assad as a personal and national humiliation. Assad scathingly criticized the USSR in a speech to the nation. Consequently, Assad ignored the ceasefire resolution. It took two more days of fighting and another Security Council Resolution 339, to convince Assad to halt fire and accept Resolutions 338 and 339. But, to be fair, Assad's rejection of 338 was not only because Syria was excluded from the negotiations but also because Assad knew that the Arab forces were in a better position than the Israelis and if he had accepted 338, Israel was going to reject the other provision of the resolution, that is, the settlement on the basis of 242 and he was right in his prediction or calculation.

In fact Assad was not satisfied with the Soviet leaders' political move who could not convince the Americans in arranging a peace settlement or to apply pressure on Israel to moderate its position. The failure of the Soviet political move during the June 1974 Soviet-American Summit disappointed Assad. The USSR's failure to live up to Assad's expectation was therefore bound to incur a measure of Syrian wrath. "The Soviet-American accord comes at the expense of the weak and vanquished people, even if the whole world breathes the fragrance of accord, the fact that our people have the right to their land and dignity cannot be changed or compromised". The loss of faith in Moscow's ability to promote the Arab cause peacefully was further illustrated by Assad's rejection of a Soviet request for restraint, forwarded to him by a

member of the Politburo, Andrei Kirilenko, who was on a short visit to Damascus in
July 1973.\footnote{M.Ma'oz, \textit{Syria under Assad} (Jerusalem: The Hebrew
University, 1975), p.25.}

While Moscow sought to rally the Arab world into an "anti-imperialist" front
against the West, Syria regarded Moscow mainly as a supplier of arms and diplomatic
assistance. So, both Syria and the Soviet Union were in need of each other. This fact
was realised by both leaders. Nevertheless, two factors drove a wedge into Syrian-
Soviet relations. Syria's refusal to attend the Soviet co-sponsored Geneva Peace
Conference in December 1973, and the successful shuttle diplomacy of Henry
Kissinger which led both to a separation of forces agreement on the Golan Heights
between Israel and Syria and the re-establishment of Syrian-American diplomatic
relations chilled Soviet-Syrian ties. In fact, Assad indicated on several occasions,
though without distancing himself from the USSR, his interest in fostering the newly
established Syrian-American cooperation.\footnote{Assad's interview with \textit{al-Ahram},
(Cairo), 5 July 1994.} There was evidence of a little
improvement in Syrian-American relations, for instance, the warm reception for
President Nixon during his visit to Damascus on 15 June 1974. The visit produced a
number of concrete results, including the restoration of diplomatic ties and an
American promise of economic aid to Damascus.\footnote{See George Saddiqui's
(Syrian Minister of Information) Interview to \textit{Svenska Dabladet}, (Stockholm), 9 August
1974, also \textit{Damascus Domestic Service}, 16 June 1974.} At this particular period Syria
witnessed a sort of economic "openness" to Western Europe which was a worrying
development from Russian point of view.
The Syrian decision on 13 March 1974 to lift restrictions on the movement of private capital in and out of Syria as well as to permit the private sector to sign loan agreements with foreign investors, together with statement made by Syrian leaders about the need for a greater measure of economic deals and interaction with the Western countries, made the USSR more concerned over Syria's future course. But the Syrian-American 'honeymoon' ended quickly, much to the relief of Moscow. It was Syria who in early summer of 1974 realised that it did not figure high on the American list of priorities. Either because of its eagerness to exploit the Egyptian opening to the hilt or because of the obstacles involved in bringing about another agreement on the Golan Heights, the US policy makers made up their minds to leave Syria aside, at least for some time and to divert and concentrate on achieving an Egyptian-Israeli agreement, to be followed, if possible, by a Jordanian-Israeli one.

Interestingly enough, it was in these circumstances along with the differences between Egypt and Syria that a convergence of Soviet-Syrian interest took place. The Soviets were anxious to cement the tentative rapprochement with Syria. By and large the Soviet-Syrian cooperation grew during the autumn of 1974 as Syria increasingly identified itself with the Socialist bloc in general and with Moscow in particular and it demanded reactivating the Geneva Conference. As a result, a joint communique

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47 See Syrian Information Minister, Ahmad Iskander Ahmad's, interview with the Bulgarian News Agency (BTA), 11 October 1974, also al-Safir (Beirut), 12 October 1974.
was issued following Gromyko's visit to Syria in February 1975 which demanded immediate resumption of Geneva talks by February or early March 1975. In fact, it was clearly indicated by Brezhnev's speech in Kishinev on 11 October 1974 in which he classified Syria first, before Cairo and Baghdad, on the list of Arab countries maintaining 'friendly cooperation' with Moscow. The chief editor of Izvestia, cited Soviet-Syrian collaboration as a model for other countries.

The year 1976 saw Assad's productive diplomatic dealings at its best. He was successful in maintaining political and economic relations with both USA and USSR. His diplomacy culminated in the joint communique of October 1977 by both the superpowers regarding an overall Middle East settlement.

The Israeli-Egyptian rapprochement was yet another development which drove Syria closer to the USSR. Assad perceived Sadat's act as a betrayal of the Arab cause and a setback to Arab nationalism. Therefore, Egypt's isolation from the Arab family was a must in Assad's view, yet Assad realised that the removal of Egypt from the Arab-Israeli conflict would upset the regional balance of power in favour of Israel and will leave Syria alone in the frontline of the Arab struggle. Sadat's move of signing the Camp David Accords in September 1978 and the peace treaty with Israel in March 1979 took Egypt, the most powerful Arab State, out of the Arab ranks. Consequently, Damascus denounced the Camp David agreement, thereby taking a position coinciding with that of Moscow which regarded the Camp David as a major

48 Tass, 3 February 1975, also see al-Thaura, (Damascus), 4 February 1975.

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blow against the "anti-Imperialist/Zionist" Arab bloc. Moscow was encouraged by Arab unity in opposing Camp David and especially by the rapprochement between Damascus and Baghdad which made possible the formation of a large anti-Sadat bloc in the Arab World. However, this anti-Sadat bloc was to be short-lived. The renewal of the Syrian-Iraqi confrontation after the accession of Saddam to power in 1979, Jordan's decision to ally itself with Iraq in the renewed confrontation between Baghdad and Damascus, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979, the Iraqi-Iran war of September 1980, and the Lebanese crisis split the Arab world.

THE TREATY OF FRIENDSHIP AND CO-OPERATION:

It was Moscow which, till the late 1970s, had tried to extract a bilateral treaty from Syria. Syria had resisted from doing it despite intensification of Soviet pressure in 1972 after it had signed a treaty with Egypt. Even Sinai II did not change Assad's mind. Syria did not want to compromise its sovereignty and independence and sully its position and image in the Arab world.

Late 1978 and things changed. A reversal of positions took place. It looked as if Syria was not merely after a standard friendship and cooperation treaty but it also sought to tie the USSR to a more binding pact, particularly concerning defence. The reasons for this were many. Egypt was effectively neutralized, Iraq was alienated, Jordan was supporting the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria against the regime, and Syria was bogged in the Lebanese swamp. To top it all was the Israeli threat. Under these
circumstances, Assad came to the conclusion that a treaty with the Soviet Union would be the best insurance policy against all the brewing problems.

The real breakthrough in Soviet-Syrian procurement relations, was reached in October 1979 when the two parties concluded the largest arms deal until then. Apart from writing off $500 million of Syria's military and economic debts, and signing generous economic and technological agreement, this started a new qualitative stage in Syria's military build-up. The Syrian armed forces absorbed approximately 1,400 tanks, 200 combat aircraft, 2,000 armoured vehicles and 1,700 artillery pieces. Indeed, the implementation of Damascus's decision to strengthen its ties with Moscow to a 'higher qualitative level' was quick and determined. Some ten visits were exchanged between Damascus and Moscow from April to October 1980. In mid-May Abdul Halim Khaddam indicated that discussions on upgrading bilateral relations were already under way, and in August the 13th National Congress of the Ba'ath Party gave formal sanction to the intention to develop further the Syrian-Soviet ties.

On 8 October 1980 the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Moscow and Damascus was signed which actually constituted an uneasy compromise and was the outcome of a balance of mutual weakness. Reluctant as it was to sign a treaty at that time Moscow could not afford to turn down its major Middle Eastern

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50 Middle East Military Balance (SIPRI).
ally. Syria, on its part, unable to harness an unequivocal Soviet commitment to its national security in the form of a defence pact, had to content itself with a "standard" Third World Friendship and Cooperation Treaty.

The treaty comprised fifteen articles which laid down the framework for enhanced cooperation between the two countries in technical, military, economic and cultural spheres. They stipulated common action against aggression, called for disarmament, and for peaceful resolution of disputes.

Many analysts call this treaty an uneasy compromise. A reluctant Soviet Union could not afford to refuse its staunch Arab friend. Syria needed the security umbrella that the Soviets could provide. The Soviets tried to highlight the international and not the bi-lateral ramifications of the treaty. Whereas Syria expected Soviet support in its foreign policy ventures, the latter tried to use the treaty as a mechanism for tension defusion and crisis management.

In other words, the Syrian-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was only an unequivocal political adherence of Syria to the Soviet bloc which it had been reluctant to declare before 1980 and no more. The Treaty of 1980 did not demand total coordination of all policies in the Middle Eastern conflict, but its signing was a

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52 It should be emphasized that since he took power in 1969-70 Assad abstained from signing a treaty of friendship with the USSR similar to those contracted by the Soviets with Cairo and Baghdad, despite the economic assistance he continued to receive from Moscow. He did not want to be labelled as a communist and wished to conduct an independent foreign policy, preferring not to be considered part of the Soviet bloc.
milestone in the Syrian attitude to the USSR. The answer to the major question posed by the treaty - did it assure a more efficient Soviet support for Syria during a crisis - was negative. Massive Soviet aid in 1970-1973, without a formal treaty, bears this out. What, then, were the factors which influenced the Syrian-Soviet relations? Domestic problems, (the opposition from Muslim Brotherhood 1979-83) and Syria's isolation in the Arab world - these were two main factors - promoting Syria to become more interested in strengthening its relations with the USSR. And here we could see the difference in Assad's approach from 1970 till early 80s. However, Assad's policy was dictated more by a fear of isolation in the Arab world in the face of an Israeli threat than by domestic problems.

IRAN-IRAQ WAR AND THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION

When the Iran-Iraq war erupted in the region, the U.S.S.R and Syria found themselves supporting opposite sides. At the outbreak of the war in September 1980, the Kremlin considered Iraq as the aggressor and extended diplomatic and technical aid to Iran. However, towards the end of 1982, Soviet-Iranian relations deteriorated leading to Soviet support to Baghdad. Though Moscow had not yet voiced an unequivocal condemnation of Iran, the Soviets published a severe denouncement of Iranian treatment of imprisoned members of the communist Tudeh Party, calling for international condemnation of such acts. Damascus, in contrast, consistently supported Iran in the conflict. Syria also closed the Iraqi pipeline passing its territory in order to pressurize Iraq. Assad clearly blamed Saddam for the war by calling it "a

Pravda, 15 November 1984.
wrong war, at the wrong time against a wrong enemy". Saddam's act, according to Syria, "accomplished nothing but harmed the cause of the Arabs and helped the Zionist and the imperialist by this war against Iran... who declared its support to our cause."^54

Another example of a delicate framework of interest was their policy towards the Palestinian question. In fact, despite Assad's support of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Kremlin disapproved of the Syrian involvement in Lebanon in 1976, when the Palestinian guerrillas were quelled by the Syrian army. Signs of this controversy were evident when the Palestinian National Council (PNC) met in Algeria in February 1983. Though the PLO expressed its support for a few points of the "Brezhnev Plan" for a solution in Middle East (16 September 1982) in the council's final resolution, the Syrian-supported Ahmad Jibril's (Palestinian) Organization rejected the resolution, and Syria itself refused to accept any resolution which even hinted at a political settlement.\(^55\)

In the intra-PLO struggle of 1983, when Syria backed the rebels who opposed al-fatah, it disconcerted the Soviets. The Soviet leaders urged Assad to mend his relations with Arafat. The revolt against Arafat, allegedly engineered by Syria, was viewed with grave concern in Moscow. The Soviet leaders tried to maintain good relations with both Assad and Arafat and, at the same time, worked for their

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reconciliation. On the diplomatic level, the Soviets tried to avoid being seen as siding with any one party. Nevertheless, the Soviet ambassador in Damascus made apparent their displeasure at the infighting in the PLO. In a message to Assad, Andropov wrote "Safeguarding the unity of the PLO is a basic and inalienable policy of the Soviet Union. A continuation of fighting threatens both Syrian and Palestinian interests".

Soviet leaders were in agreement with Arafat's position regarding a future Palestinian state limited to West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and hence they did not want a PLO dominated by Syria.

LEBANESE CRISIS AND SYRIAN-RUSSIAN RELATIONS:

One of the major crises which had influenced, shaped and re-shaped Damascus-Moscow relations was the Syrian involvement in Lebanon. Syrian intervention in Lebanon in 1976 proved to Moscow that its influence on Syria was very limited. When Syria took a decision to intervene, Soviet Premier Kosygin went to Damascus to dissuade Assad from sending Syrian troops to Lebanon. It was ironical that two Soviet clients fought each other in Lebanon. The Soviet press denounced the Syrian action. On 15 July, Syrian Foreign Minister went to Moscow for talks but the views were so divergent that the meeting could not even produce a joint communique. This was followed by a letter from Brezhnev which insisted that the Syrian leadership should take steps to end its military operations against the Palestinian resistance. When none of these worked, and the lack of Soviet hold over Syria became apparent, the former suspended deliveries of military equipment and
spare parts and delayed the signing of new contracts. Assad retaliated by reducing the number of Soviet military personnel in Syria, stopped sending its own military personnel to USSR for training and asked the Soviets to remove its submarines and support craft from the Tartus.

Initially, the Soviets thought that given the Lebanese situation, the only factor that could prevent the disintegration of Lebanon was Syrian intervention. But this intervention should be limited and decisive. But the campaign proved to be long and indecisive. Much to the horror of the Soviets, its two principal allies got embroiled in a bloody war and the Soviets now feared the two-pronged danger of "internationalization" of the Lebanese crisis and the dissipation of Palestinian and leftist power.

Soviet reprimands did not really work. Offended by what was perceived as unjust criticism, Assad totally ignored this demand for restraint and intensified the Syrian intervention in Lebanon. Nevertheless, Assad avoided a rift with Moscow and restrained from overt and open criticism of the Soviet stand. This combination of relentlessness and leniency, of determination and pragmatism, had a moderating influence on Soviet behaviour. Moreover, the defeat of the leftist and Palestinian forces and the Arab recognition of the Syrian action in Lebanon proved to the Soviets that *Pax Syriana* might be a lesser evil. Therefore, the Soviets put a stop to the harsh criticism of Syrian actions and gradually started to recognise the legitimacy of Syria's regional role. Strained relationship between these two led to a period of *rapprochement* between Washington and Damascus. Prompted by this, Moscow
signed an agreement in January 1978 to increase supplies of military hardware to Syria including 12 MIG 27s.

Moscow begun to feel that the relationship needed to be redefined and it began to press Damascus for a formal agreement. The result was the treaty of 1980.

Within a couple of years from the signing of the Treaty to the death of Brezhnev in November 1982, the newly attained agreement was subjected to repeated tests. In the year between the missile crisis of April-June 1981 and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, there was a clear strain in the Syrian-Soviet relations. As Tel-Aviv and the USA began to talk about "strategic cooperation" Syria re-doubled its efforts to obtain more aid from Moscow, mainly military equipment, so as to have strategic balance with Israel. For its part, however, the USSR, perhaps remembering Syria's previous efforts to embroil Moscow in its adventures, appeared reluctant to meet Syrian requests. Thus a Syrian military delegation led by Mustafa Tlass (the Syrian Defence Minister) which visited Moscow in September 1981 reportedly did not get all it wanted. Even after the annexation of Golan Heights on 13 December 1981 (an event which led the U.S. to suspend the security agreement concluded with Israel two weeks earlier), Moscow did not move to step up its assistance to Damascus, although Moscow denounced the annexation.

When Syria demanded more help and support, following the annexation of Golan, it did not have a great deal of success. Gromyko pointedly avoided any specific commitment to Damascus and reiterated the Soviet commitment to its three-point peace plan, which included Israel's right to exist, withdrawal according to 242, and a comprehensive peace treaty acceptable to all parties concerned. The war in Lebanon was of particular worry to Moscow, both because the Shi'is as the poorest element in the Lebanese population, were a prime recruiting ground for the Lebanese Communist Party and the other leftist Lebanese militia, AMAL, was now also fighting against leftist and communist forces. The major problem for Moscow, however, was the gradual rapprochement between Egypt and Morocco, Saudi Arabia, UAE etc. Induced in part by the Israeli withdrawal from the last part of the Sinai on 25 April 1982, this rapprochement was accelerated by Iran's success in its war with Iraq when Tehran took the offensive and threatened Iraqi territory in late spring. The Iranian advance frightened the Gulf Arab States and they turned both to the USA and Egypt for assistance. Soon after the outbreak of the war, Iraq had become a recipient of Egyptian military equipment which as a result improved their bilateral relationship. Egypt finally urged Syria and Qadafi to request the Soviets to take action to contain the situation on the one hand and to reverse such rapprochement between Iraq, Egypt and the Gulf States, Morocco and Jordan. More importantly Syria wanted a strong

58 D. Butler, "In the Same Trench", The Middle East, June 1982 p.6, also see by the same author "Shiites in Beirut Clashes", The Middle East, February 1982, p.14.
59 Refer to Taha Y. Ranadan's (First Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq) comments Baghdad Radio, 1 June 1982 (FBIS, ME 2 June 1982, p.2.
military backing from Moscow during the Lebanese war, and after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Yet Moscow took no substantive actions, thus it demonstrated once again that the Soviet-Syrian treaty of October 1980 did not cover Syrian activities in Lebanon. This led to much criticism of Moscow for its lack of assistance. Qaddafi declared that Arab friendship with the socialist bloc was almost "ready to go up in flames, the way Beirut is going up in flames". Yet Syria held aloof from the cascade of public criticism against Moscow.

By the time the 1982 intervention in Lebanon took place, Soviets were resigned to the fact that they would have to accord legitimacy to the Syrian role, and Syrian action was accepted as necessary and Syrian troops were acknowledged as "peace-keeping forces". In 1984, Andropov extended political and military support for Syria's relentless campaign against Israeli and American actions.

But despite the lack of direct involvement of the USSR in Lebanon, the Syrian-Soviet treaty (1980) served as the basis for rebuffing the aggressive policy pursued by the imperialists and Zionists. By the time of Andropov's death on 10 February 1983, Syria had generously repaid the Soviets. First, it had succeeded in dealing a mortal blow to the Reagan Plan in the spring of 1983, secondly, through direct and indirect pressure on the US Marines in Beirut, it had managed to attain the much-coveted Soviet goal of driving US out of Lebanon. On 7 February 1984, Reagan announced his intention to withdraw the Marines from Beirut to US ships off

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the Lebanese coast, which he did. More significantly, the relentless Syrian campaign against the American-sponsored Lebanese-Israeli agreement led to the collapse of that arrangement on 5 March 1984. In an attempt to save his shaky regime, President Amin Jumayil unilaterally abrogated the 17 May agreement with Israel. And despite the fact that Damascus and Moscow found themselves in opposing camps in the Iran-Iraq war, it did not damage their cooperation. Although it injected a measure of antagonism into the relationship, Syria's closeness to Tehran provided a useful channel of communication between Moscow and Tehran. This channel required a special significance in 1983. During that year Damascus was reported to have mediated (unsuccessfully) between Moscow and Tehran.

By 1980, the Soviets were convinced that political settlements were the sole medium to resolve the crises in the Middle East. The result was the Brezhnev Peace Plan of September 1982 and its revised version, the Chernenko Plan of July 1984. Both the plans had six points and basically emphasized that the sovereignty of all states in the Middle East, including Israel, must be secured and that 1967 borders be considered as permanent boundaries.

When Konstantin Chernenko came to power, he wanted to widen Moscow's Middle Eastern horizon beyond the pro-Soviet 'radical' bloc. He was helped in his move by the return of Israeli Labour Party to power in autumn 1984. That party had declared readiness to negotiate peace settlement with Jordan. Hence the Soviet

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61 See for example al-Yamama (Saudi Arabia) 30 March 1983 also see R.O. Freeman "Moscow, Damascus and the Lebanese Crisis of 1982-84", Middle East Review, Vol 17, No. 1 (Fall 1984) p.35.
courtship of Jordan illustrate both by the Jordanian Chief of Staff's visit to Moscow in August to discuss a Soviet-Jordanian arms deal and by the Soviet Peace Plan of 29 July 1984, which supported a confederation of the Hashemite Kingdom and the envisaged Palestinian state on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. Soviets also tried to make inroads into the "conservative" Arab camp, leading to the resumption of full diplomatic relations with Egypt in July 1984. Equally irritating for the Syrians were Andrei Gromyko's meeting with Arafat in Berlin on 7 October 1984, the meeting of the Soviet and Israeli Foreign Ministers in New York during the UN General Assembly in September, 1984, and the visit of the Iraqi Foreign Minister, Tariq Aziz, to Moscow in October 1984. Assad not only disapproved of Chernenko's policy but he also began to doubt the USSR's readiness for military help, which had been established following the 1982 Lebanon war. Assad feared that the USSR would cut its supplies, especially after what the Soviet media expressed "that Syria now has the defensive capability needed to protect its national independence and defend its political line."

Although Damascus avoided clear criticism of the Soviet policy it soon gave the Soviets some subtle, but pointed, hints that their support should not be taken for granted. For instance, Farouq al-Shara, the Syrian Foreign Minister, indicated in many interviews, Syria's support for an American mediation effort under the auspices of the UN to end the Israeli occupation of Lebanon. In fact it was at this time when

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63 Radio Moscow in Arabic, 28 April 1984.
64 Radio Monte Carlo, 6 October 1984, also see al-Hawadith (London), 12 October 1984, pp. 27-9.
Syria increased its official visits to Western countries. Syria publicized its intention to buy French and, perhaps after Western arms. Whether or not Moscow took seriously Syria's threat to diversify its weapon sources, the fast and unpredictable tide of the events in the region was soon to bring the USSR and Syria closer. Thus, right from 1984 onwards, the USSR resumed its support for Syria in its feud with the PLO leadership, deploiring in strong terms the Arafat-Hussein agreement of 11 February 1985 as leading to the 'destruction of the reputation of and respect for the PLO, and also damaging its role as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

The Soviets urged Arafat and his followers to mend the rift with Syria.

ASSAD AND GORBACHEV

Konstantin Chernenko wanted and attempted to remove the strains in Soviet-Syrian relations and he succeeded in doing so. And after his death the Syrians expected that the same policy will be pursued by the new Soviet Secretary-General,

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65 Mustafa Tlass' interview with Liberation (Paris), 30 November 1984, p.25.

66 On 22-29 November 1984 the PNC convened in Amman for its 17th session and, though it rejected King Hussein's call for Middle Eastern Peace based on Resolution 242, it left the door open for future contacts between Arafat and Hussein. Soon after, on 11 February 1985, the two leaders reached an agreement on joint Jordanian-Palestinian steps to be taken towards a Middle East settlement. The PNC's Amman session and the 11 February agreement, were received in Moscow with bitter disappointment and severe apprehensions. Having courted the conservative Arab State, for several months, the Chernenko regime felt that its Middle East campaign was running out of steam and that the USSR was yet again losing the political initiative to the US. These fears were compounded by Arafat's moves, which revived old Soviet worries about FLO shift towards the Reagan plan.

67 Efraim n.26, p.85.
Mikhail Gorbachev. But they were quick to realize that the forceful and resolute backing of their brinkmanship tactics during Andropov's brief period of power was the exception rather than the rule as far as Soviet-Syrian relations were concerned. Just like previous leaders, Gorbachev preached caution and restraint, emphasizing the political option as the means of resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. The new Russian leaders also sought to prevent the US from monopolizing the re-emerging political process in the Arab-Israeli sphere. Gorbachev courted the conservative Arab states by establishing diplomatic ties with Oman and the UAE in 1985, and even rescheduling Egypt's military debt and signing new economic treaties with Egypt in 1987. All these moves obviously were not welcomed by the Syrians, and perhaps more alarming from the Syrian point of view, laid great emphasis on the normalization of realities with Tel Aviv.

In fact the scope and intensity of the Soviet-Israeli interaction was notably widened and enhanced after Gorbachev assumed office. In July 1985 the Soviet and Israeli ambassadors to France held a secret meeting in Paris in which they reportedly discussed restoration of bilateral relations and the possibility of a Syrian-Israeli agreement on the Golan Heights. Such meetings between the Soviet and Israeli diplomats continued, e.g. in August 1986, foreign ministry officials from the two countries met in Helsinki, and the Helsinki meeting was followed by bilateral contacts at a relatively high level. (These included, inter alia, meetings between the states'

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68 ibid., p.89.

foreign ministers during discussions at the UN's General Assembly in September 1986-1987) and in July 1987 a Soviet Consulate was set up in Tel Aviv. In all these dealings with Israel, Moscow apparently used its relationship with Damascus as a trump card, implying that it had both willingness and the capability to exercise influence over Syria. 70

In fact throughout the 80s Assad faced many challenges from different quarters, e.g. domestic problems and facing a concerted diplomatic onslaught by US, UK, as well as the risk of military confrontation with Israel. Yet Gorbachev did not live up to the Syrian expectation, rather Gorbachev made clear to Assad both his reluctance to support Syria's goal of strategic parity with Israel and his dissatisfaction with the continuing trend in Syrian-Palestinian and Syrian-Iraqi ties. This policy of Moscow was clearly put forward to Assad during his first meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev in June 1985, when Assad failed to obtain a Soviet agreement to support Damascus's military needs. This Soviet policy was evident during the second missile crisis and El-Al bombing crisis. The USSR found itself in difficult, rather awkward, position of having to choose between its desire to appear as the staunch supporter of the Arab cause and its fear of escalation, between its anxiety to deny the West any gains and its reluctance to risk a superpower confrontation. The outcome was the tried combination of vocal endorsement of the Syrian stand on the one hand and avoidance of clear and unequivocal commitment to Syria on the other. 71

70 Karsh, no.26, p.86.
71 ibid., p.89.
Despite the official statements of both countries the Syrian-Russian relationship by 1990 was clearly cold and Assad realised that the Soviets were no more in a position to offer any concrete help. Yet Assad tried to keep relations with Moscow in a good form because, after all, the USSR was a superpower and had a veto power. But at the same time Assad was looking for an alternative to improve Syrian position in the region and this aim was facilitated following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, when things really took a new turn and direction. Theoretically, USSR and Syria agreed on the concept of an international conference (under UN auspices) to solve the Arab-Israeli dispute.

Syria was deeply affected by what perestroika and glasnost brought about in the Soviet Union and in the world. Syria had got used to Moscow being its principal ally. The weakening of the Soviet bastion revealed the limits of Soviet backing of Syria. So Gorbachev made it clear that Soviets opposed Syria's central strategic doctrine of attaining strategic parity with Israel. Gorbachev told Assad in Moscow in April 1987 that "the reliance on military force in settling the Arab-Israeli conflict has completely lost its credibility."  

Another issue which caused consternation in Syria in the Gorbachev era was regarding the emigration of Soviet Jews to Israel. Under Gorbachev emigration restrictions were eased. As a result some 200,000 Soviet Jews arrived in Israel in 1990. This issue was a setback for Syria - its chief patron allowing its Jews to migrate freely to Israel and giving Israel demographic means to alter the cultural and political

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72 Karsh, n.26, p.92.
landscape of the Occupied Territories. Though Moscow declared that settling of Soviet Jews in Occupied Territories was a violation of International Law and the United Nations, it made it clear that Moscow would not terminate Jewish emigration since it was permitted under Soviet legislation which gives every citizen the right to enter and leave the country.

With the collapse of the Socialist Bloc, the importance of Syria in the eyes of the Soviets and their East European allies definitely waned. The break-up of the Eastern bloc, the end of the Cold War, the negotiations regarding arms reduction, the re-unification of Germany, the rise of nationalism in the Baltics and other erstwhile Soviet republics, and other related developments reduced the importance of maintaining Syria as a close ally for the Russians. The change in Russian policy in West Asia too reduced Syria's room for manoeuvre.

As an Arab proverb goes "Mas'eb Qoun A'nd Quum Fowa'do (The tragedy of some people might be a source of profit and happiness to others). This was applicable in Syria's case. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait paved the way for Assad to improve relations with the West, mainly the US, and improve his position in Lebanon and put Syria in a new place after long years of isolation. Yet despite this improvement, Assad did not antagonize or even ignore Moscow, rather he emphasised on the vital role that the Russian Federation could play in the region, especially in the peace process!