CHAPTER III

Syria and the Arab States
Politics is a game of power. Every state tends to seek power and this power search invariably involves the conflict of interest of states. In the international context, a state gains power, more often than not, at the cost of another state. A state can be called powerful in relation to another. A state needs power to promote its national interests and the main aim of a state's foreign policy is to work for the fulfilment of its national interest. This aim is the determining factor in a state's relations with another.

Basically, it is power struggle which determines a state's behavior. Morgenthau has defined power as the ability to control the minds and actions of others.¹ Dahl says that power is "the ability to shift the probability of outcomes. In other words, if a state has power over another state to the extent that the former can get the latter to do something which the latter would not otherwise do".² Schwarzenberger asserted that power is "the mean between influence and force" and may be defined as "capacity to impose one's will on others by reliance on effective sanctions in case of non-compliance".³ The above observations indicate that power refers to one's ability to influence the behavior of another, hence, power and influence are similar phenomena, though this is not unanimously accepted.

A state strives to attain more and more power and this attainment of power becomes the objective of a state. It is the determining factor of its relations with other states. Power, or the wish to gain more power, usually is the main propellant of a state's foreign policy. A powerful state not only succeeds in its foreign policy but can also influence the foreign policy of weaker states.

If we apply this assessment to intra-Arab politics and to the factors which determine the relations between Arab states, we find that this analysis falls into place. The Arabs profess to belong to one nation and, in keeping with this idea, all of them have the formation of one Arab nation as the main foreign policy goal. The final aim of each Arab state in relation to another is to influence or to acquire the power to influence other Arab states. Influence here means dominance or leadership to lead the rest into a union. This tendency has existed in intra-Arab politics since the beginning of this century.

Therefore, intra-Arab politics is shaped by struggle for influence and leadership which is manifested in various spheres such as ideological differences, questions of legitimacy, perceptions of external threats, etc. All Arab states have striven for leadership. Individual Arab leaders have tried to portray themselves as Arab leaders and not just as leaders of one Arab state. Many regimes have based their legitimacy on their professed dedication to the Arab cause. Syria has been no exception. In fact, it regards itself as the "centre of Arabism" and it has striven for Arab leadership over the years.
After its birth as a modern state in the forties, Syria felt utterly wronged and the result was a "persistent revisionist irredentism". It devoted its efforts to erase the division of the historic Syria (Bilad al-Sham) into the present day states of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine. This feeling still shapes the policies of Syrian decision-makers. The people and the leaders of Syria have never been able to accept the legitimacy of the regional state system left behind by imperialism, and have dreamed of the reconstruction of Historic Syria as part of a large Arab nation. Syria still regards its identity as an Arab before its Syrian identity. It considers itself as the "beating heart of Arabism". It regards all the Arab states as constituting one nation with an overriding national interest that should govern their policies, and which faces identical external threats. But these aims have been confined to their policy papers, since in the modern state-systems it is not realistic to place esoteric elements above pragmatic considerations.

Whenever it has been alleged that Syria has given priority to a narrower raison d'être, Syrian policy-makers have justified it with the claim "what is good for Syria is good for the Arab nation." As a frontline state resisting Israeli aggressive and expansionist policies, and as a party to all major political developments in the Arab world, Syria occupies a key strategic position in the region. Syria is portrayed as committed to a radical policy orientation pursuing a firm and uncompromising attitude towards Israel and as a firm champion of the Palestinians. This Syrian posture has helped the leaders to be in a position to influence the course of political developments in the region. In fact, Syria has emerged as the major power-broker in the Arab world.
When President Assad came to power, Syrian foreign policy took a pragmatic and realistic turn. After securing himself at home, he conducted an energetic foreign policy to reinforce his position, leadership and domestic achievements. His first priority was to implement a pragmatic diplomacy of intra-Arab coordination to bring Syria out of its state of isolation and to increase its prestige in the region. Assad succeeded in doing this and Syria's *rapprochement* with the conservative Arab states was the result and then relations with Egypt improved. Syria participated in the 1973 war and got back a slice of the Golan Heights after the disengagement negotiations. Internationally, Assad earned recognition from the Super Powers that it constituted a key to war and peace in the region. Assad was able to forge a more decisive regional role through the utilization of opportunities for influencing events in Lebanon, Jordan and over the Palestinian groups. The build-up of armed forces in Syria gave Assad a decisive say in regional affairs.

In a nutshell, Assad's foreign policy making and implementing earned Syria a lot of accolades. Following is an account of Assad's policy towards the Arab states.

The first 20 years of foreign policy of independent Syria were markedly different from that of the following two decades. While in the first period Syria was the object of other states' policies, in the later period it recovered, became assertive and launched a policy based on the goals it set. The main preoccupation with pan-Arabism was replaced by a conventional aim of facing the Israeli challenge and recovering the lost Arab, not just Syrian, lands. President Assad was in favour of a
sophisticated strategy on military preparedness, alliances and balance of power to achieve this. Syria, nevertheless, did not relinquish the pan-Arab ideal. "Syrians still do not perceive the regional environment as a classical state system of distinctive national entities; the Arab states are still thought to make up a nation with an overriding national interest that ought to govern their foreign policy."

Syria's relations with other Arab states have not been constant. They have been dictated by circumstances in prevailing situations. Thus the relationship has been a mixture of alliances and rivalry. The pull of a common nationhood, the presence of a common enemy, and the obvious benefits of cooperation and coordination have often brought Syria closer to other Arab states. But Syrian policy has been often contested by other Arab states. Egypt, Iraq and Saudi Arabia have often disagreed with the Syrian view of a regulated foreign policy.

Under Assad the politico-diplomatic capacities were honed to a higher pitch of sophistication. His Arab diplomacy aimed at the forging of an effective all-Arab coalition against Israel that could combine a credible war option with the threat of an oil weapon. Assad, thus, tried to do away with all ideological quarrels of his predecessors and favoured a diplomacy of intra-Arab consultation and coordination.

In line with this, Syria's relations with Jordan were improved since a boycott of the latter was not perceived as functional to Syrian goals. Syria-Lebanon relations

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took a new turn when relations with the Maronites were improved. Anwar Sadat of Egypt was preparing for a military offensive against Israel and his strategy included Arab coordination for which Syria was vital. Syria found this initiative in line with its own plans and so participated actively to overcome rivalries and enmities in the Arab world. Thus bilateral relations with all Arab states, regardless of ideological differences, were improved and Syria participated in the various summit meetings and tried to commit the resources of the Arab world to a combined stand against Israel.

The end result of this new Arab coordination was the 1973 War, the consequences of which are too well known to be recapitulated here. It would suffice to say that the Arabs put up a good show as a result of their political, military and economic coordination. Syria emerged as an accepted power in the region.

The central role Syria assumed in West Asian politics was obvious by the end of the seventies. Though not a rejectionist state anymore, it still led the anti-Israel coalition. Resolution 242 was accepted conditionally and it was made clear that no settlement that does not ensure the return of all Arab territories would be acceptable to Syria. Many events drew attention to the growing regional power of Syria. It started playing a principal role in Lebanon. Iraq too bettered relations with Syria, especially in the face of the Egypt-Israel rapprochement, (but the events of 1979 changed this). Jordan proved loyal to Syria many a time and Syria was acknowledged as leader of the anti-Egypt bloc after Sadat launched his peace initiative.
In the 1973-1977 period, Syria emerged as one of the most dynamic countries in the region. External procrastinations about the instability of Assad's government came to nought. On the contrary, Syria moved from strength to strength and increased its say in Palestinian and Lebanese affairs. Having a say in the Arab affairs enhanced Syria's bargaining position vis-a-vis Israel.

The following pages will give a very brief outline of Syria's relation with Arab states in the period 1970 to 1990.

SYRIA AND EGYPT

The dissolution of the UAR in 1961 led to a period of "revolutionary rivalry" between Syria and Egypt. Assad's effort was to spell an end to this and strike an alliance in the early seventies. A mere ten days after he seized power, he flew to Egypt to meet Anwar al-Sadat and joined the proposed federation of Egypt, Libya and Sudan. Both Syria and Egypt of that time shared an incentive for military action against Israel to retrieve Arab lands taken by the latter. This alliance became the cornerstone of Assad's foreign policy. The reasons for this were many. To launch a military assault on Israel, the Egyptian force was a dire necessity; a military link with Egypt would restore the main Arab military counterpoise to Israel. Secondly, alliance with Egypt also helped to sate the strong pro-Egyptian trend in internal political opinion. A third reason put forward by some which is said to have prompted the joining with the Federation was the hope of financial aid from Libya.
Thus Egypt was Syria's first choice as a war partner. This two-front strategy was the bedrock of the secret preparations for the 1973 war. Assad and Sadat shared the affinity of coming to power almost at the same time and both led the two premier Arab states of the time. "Assad's confidence was not just in Sadat but in Egypt itself, which with its size and strength was evidently the senior partner in the relationship". The federal summits which were supposed to further the proposed federation provided both leaders opportunities to hold secret meetings about the planned offensive on Israel. A broad strategy was agreed upon which mainly dwelt on amassing of weapons and training of the armies. The pattern of these years was of close coordination. It was during this time that Syria announced the acceptance of Resolution 242 on the condition that Israel withdraw totally from Occupied Territories, and that the final solution should be acceptable to the Palestinians. This drew Syria even closer to Egypt which had endorsed the resolution earlier.

Another important outcome of the new trend of alliance was the formation of the tacit trilateral alliance among Syria, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, which rapidly became the new power bloc in the Arab state system. This alliance was the product of the pragmatic trend in Arab politics noticeable after the defeat of 1967. Ideological issues were pushed to the background and stress was laid on active cooperation among all Arab states. This new coordination led to the success of the 1973 war. The trilateral alliance emerged as the key grouping within the Arab world. The three countries had no formal agreement but there was a clear understanding among them.

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that they comprised a leadership bloc based on an "equitable imbalance" of assets. Egypt was the most powerful militarily, Saudi Arabia was by far the wealthiest and Syria, having been the fount of Arab Awakening, held a certain degree of political influence in both countries.

What President Assad did not see was the reality beneath the facade. The fundamental divergence in the Egyptian aims and Syrian intentions was not discerned by him. The objectives for going to war were not coinciding. Assad was preparing for war because he believed that there could be no satisfactory negotiation with Israel until the Arabs would militarily take back their land occupied by Israel. He believed that peace had to be a product of war, and not a substitute for it. Sadat had a different motive; his covert peace-making diplomacy had faltered and he hoped that a shock, i.e. war, would revive it. Thus, while Assad wanted the return of land, Sadat wanted the return of peace talks with a better bargaining leverage.

Cracks in the alliance started showing even before the war. For instance, during the Syria-Egypt summit at Burj al-Arab in April 1973, the former declared its dissatisfaction with the latter's war preparations, and the war was postponed to the autumn of 1973.

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6 Fouad Ajami, "Stress in the Arab Triangle" Foreign Policy, No.29, Winter 1977-78, p.91.
7 Seale, n.5, p.195.
The 1973 war was a military undertaking of the Arabs which was a considerable success, but politically it was just short of a catastrophe. It set them on a course of disintegration and rendered them vulnerable. The first day of war saw the storming of Israeli defences. As the American historian Trevor Dupey writes, "it was one of the most memorable water crossing in the annals of warfare". But this cause for Arab elation soon dissipated when Syria found that Egypt did not advance from the canal as expected but sat tight on its defensive positions. The Syrian army found itself fighting alone in its front.

Sadat is believed to have halted fighting since his aim was only to give the immobile peace process a jolt and not to embark upon long-scale reconquest. The Syrian leadership in Damascus waited for an Egyptian move and then it dawned upon them that they were fighting alone and their main ally would not advance anymore. On the contrary, it was later found out that even before the elapse of 24 hours of hostilities, Sadat had sent a "back channel" message to Kissinger stating his peace terms and adding "we do not intend to deepen the engagement or widen the conflict". Kissinger passed this message to Israel. It was only under renewed Syrian pressure that Sadat launched an attack on Sinai on 14 October.

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Assad was completely unaware of Sadat's covert diplomacy during the war. It was after the war that he came to know of this.\textsuperscript{11} He realised that the threat from his ally was almost as acute as that from his enemy. It was due to Sadat's double-dealing and strategy that Israel was able to concentrate most of its forces on the Syrian front. Sadat also tried for a cease-fire without Syrian agreement. In the post-war negotiations, he constantly disregarded Syria and the common Arab interest and opted for agreement which left Syria out. No combination of Syrian threats or pleas for sticking to the original goals could deter Sadat from following his separate path to peace with Israel.

The signing of Sinai Accords I and II completed the Syria-Egypt estrangement. These were accords between Egypt and Israel which established a precedent for the Camp David Accords. When these agreements were signed, Syria lost all hopes of a just and comprehensive settlement with Israel. Syria led the rest of the Arab states in their denouncing of the Egyptian betrayal.

Egypt contributed one more factor to the worsening relations by vehemently criticizing the Syrian role in Lebanon. Sadat's criticism was motivated. He aimed at preventing the Lebanese crisis from escalating into a wider Arab-Israeli conflict, thus maintaining his peace with Israel and keeping Syria away from establishing a dominant position in Lebanon and with regard to the PLO. Sadat's actions were interpreted as an effort to oppose any kind of unity of the Fertile Crescent. He did not

\textsuperscript{11} Interview with Assad, Damascus, May 1935 (Quoted in Seale, n.5).
seem inclined to become militarily involved but he tried to contain Syrian intervention by applying political pressure from within the Arab system.

The signing of the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt was the last straw for Syria. When Sadat announced his intention to go to Jerusalem to talk peace with the Israelis, a new front of Syria-Egypt confrontation was opened. Assad tried all ways to dissuade Sadat from his intentions but failed. The last great duel between the two took place in Damascus on the night of 16-17 November 1977. Both leaders tried for the last time to convince each other that he should drop his position. This meeting left them more at loggerheads than ever before and revealed that each was intent on pursuing his own path. Sadat's aim was a last ditch effort to get Assad's approval for his negotiations with Israel and, if this was not possible, to win his silence. He failed in both and this was to be the last meeting between the two leaders for some years. It is said that Sadat had tried his best to convert Assad to his way of thinking. He is said to have exclaimed: "Let us go to Jerusalem together, or if you cannot come please keep silence. Do not condemn me. If I fail, I will admit that I was wrong and tell my people to give you the leadership."12

Assad refused to go along with Sadat in his hurry to end the war, to disengage and to go to Jerusalem, because he felt that such a hurry would spoil all chances of a solution favourable to the Arabs. Assad told the Syrian media: "I am extremely sad that I could not convince Sadat of the gravity of the visit and of its far-reaching consequences for our Arab cause. Peace is our aim in Syria, as it is in Egypt and in

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12 Interview with Assad, Damascus 11.8.84. (Cited in Seale, n.5).
the whole Arab world. But a successful strategy cannot be pursued through unsuccessful tactics".\textsuperscript{13} Thus, the facts of divergent national trajectories drew the two countries apart. Assad was obsessed by the geo-political equation, and he knew that the loss of Egypt would weaken the Arab challenge to Israel.

The Geneva Meet enlarged this estrangement. Assad is said to have put a condition that if the question of Palestinian right and of Israeli withdrawal is kept on the agenda, he would attend the meet, but Sadat spoiled any chance of a comprehensive meet by going alone. This act of Sadat sparked off a verbal war launched by the Syrian media. The Syrian newspapers drew parallels of Sadat with the Nazi collaborators, Quishing and Petain and his visit was described as treachery and capitulation.\textsuperscript{14}

The Camp David Accords marked the final breach. These were condemned vociferously. The then foreign minister of Syria called it "Sadat's last strip-tease".\textsuperscript{15} Syria led the Arab states in breaching diplomatic relations with Egypt.

The strategic balance in the region stood transformed by this accord. Israel was clearly the gainer whilst the Arab bloc stood divided. For Assad the impact of this estrangement with Egypt was profound. After coming to power he had actively

\textsuperscript{13} Tishreen (Damascus) 19 November 1977. See also Arab Reports and Records (1977), pp.923-938.

\textsuperscript{14} Al-Ba'ath and Tishreen Records, November 1977, Damascus.

\textsuperscript{15} Arab Reports and Records, 1978, p.620.
coordinated with Egypt to get back the Arab lands. His effort to hold Sadat back was a failure. The alliance which was the backbone of the Arab strength was broken.

The ostracism of Egypt could not last forever in the Arab world. In 1983, Yasser Arafat, after his expulsion from Tripoli by the Syrians, went to Hosni Mubarak. In September 1984, Jordan re-established diplomatic ties with Egypt. The Iran-Iraq war saw the latter buying huge quantities of arms from Egypt. While Iraqi men were at the battlefront, a million and a half Egyptians worked in Iraq to keep the economy going. In November 1987, the Arab League Summit in Amman passed a resolution allowing Arab states to restore full diplomatic ties with Egypt. In February 1985, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and the Yemen Arab Republic formed the Arab Cooperation Council. Lebanon resumed diplomatic relations with Egypt in June 1989.

The Syrian-Egyptian diplomatic relations which were broken off in April 1979 were restored in December 1989. From the Syrian perspective, there were many reasons to mend fences. The diminishing value of the Soviet alliance prompted Damascus to look elsewhere for support and cooperation. Moreover, Egypt had worked its way back to the Arab fold. The other factor, as one may say, was the implied acceptance of Egypt's peace with Israel. In Syrian calculation reconciliation with Egypt would facilitate Syria's rapprochement with the United States which eventually it hoped would lead to a peace with Israel on Syrian terms.
Nothing substantial came out of this renewed alliance except a treaty in May 1990, which dealt with economic, cultural, scientific, artistic, social and energy cooperation between both the states.

It was Saddam Hussein who gave the chance for this renewed alliance to flourish. When Kuwait was invaded and occupied by Iraq, Syria and Egypt formed the main Arab axis arrayed against Iraq. Both were actively wooed by the West to side with the latter and accordingly it was these two Arab countries who led the Arab part of the coalition. Both could win the confidence of the Gulf states, and accordingly found a place in the post-war security arrangements of the region.

SYRIA-IRAQ RELATIONS

It is important to analyse Syria's relations with Iraq because despite the commonalities that exist between the two, a long estrangement can also be seen. This analysis shows that both have played a significant role in intra-Arab politics; both adhere to the Ba'athist-pan-Arabist socialist ideology; both have striven over the years to project themselves as the role model for Arab revolutionary countries; and, lastly, all these factors have not been able to bring them together. They have been at odds with each other for years.

A few major causes responsible for this can be discerned as under: A long standing dispute has been over the distribution of the water of the Euphrates.\textsuperscript{16} Syrian

\textsuperscript{16} For details see Zohurul Bari, "Syrian-Iraqi Dispute", International Studies, 16 February 1977, pp 234-244.
decisions in the past to limit/control the flow of Euphrates water to Iraq has always rankled the latter. Syria has periodically blockaded this water. In 1974, Syria decided to limit the flow of water that passed through the Tabaqa dam and this led to a cooling of relations. Both need the waters of the Euphrates for irrigation and agricultural development and may be to derive political benefits by diverting this water to certain area or groups. But this water is not enough to cater to their respective plans. Moreover, a third state stakes a claim over the same water - Turkey. In the recent past Turkey has built a series of dams over the Euphrates, thus making the issue of distribution of the water more complex. By possessing the capacity to limit the flow of water, Syria exercises a certain pressure over Iraq regarding the division of the same.

A second discordant variable has been the Iraqi dependence on the transit oil routes across Syrian territory to the eastern Mediterranean terminals. The disagreements over oil royalties form an appendage to this issue. Syria is in a position to block this pipeline and has done so in the past, for instance, in 1982. This can also be used as a bargaining chip to demand higher oil royalties by Syria.17

In the early 1970s, the alleged manipulation of Iraq's Shi'ites by the Syrian Alawite ruling elite was another source of tension. Iraq also accused Syria of aiding the Kurds. For instance, in the early seventies Jalal Talabani, the left-wing Kurd

leader, is alleged to have been helped by Syria to renew the Kurdish insurrection.\textsuperscript{18} Such accusations have been a part of their relations over the years.

In both the countries the ruling cliques operate in Ba'athist parameters and other parties are pushed out of the political arena. While the Ba'ath claims to be a single unified party covering and uniting the entire Arab world, it is actually split vertically into two. The Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, and President Hafez al-Assad of Syria lead the rival factions. Thus there exists a competition for Ba'ath leadership. The struggle for leadership is extended to include the whole of the Arab world as the arena of influence.

It is often said that the cause which overrides all others is the personal animosity that exists between the two leaders. Either has sought to overtake the other in the race for pre-dominance in the \textit{al-Hilal al-Khaseeb} (The Fertile Crescent).

Thus we see that a historical Damascus-Baghdad rivalry, competition for Ba'ath and Arab leadership, sympathy for co-religionists, geo-political aspects, and personality clashes have rendered this relationship full of complex problems. Apart from propaganda, both sides have employed additional measures against each other. Iraq has assisted in the past various opposition groups operating against Assad's regime, and the Syrian regime is alleged to have done the same.

At the same time we cannot deny the fact that this relationship has not always been hostile. A number of times, a *rapprochement* seemed evident between the two, for instance, during the time when the rest of the Arab states arrayed themselves against the Camp David Accords, but none were fated to last.

The Iraq-Syria estrangement preceded Assad's coming to power. In February 1966 Michel Aflaq and his supporters were brought down by the Military Committee in Damascus and one ultimate result was the fleeing of Aflaq to Iraq. In 1968 when his supporters in Iraq seized power, many Syrian exiles found haven there. "From then on, the two capitals traded plots, accusations and rival claims to party legitimacy".19 When Assad came to power the relationship was brought to certain amicable terms and the result was the valuable aid Iraq lent Syria in the 1973 war.

This fragile fabric was torn by Kissinger's diplomacy. Iraq could not resist the temptation of deriding Syria due to the disengagement treaty it entered into with Israel. "Iraq's leaders taunted Assad with defeatism over his Golan agreement with Israel, using against him the very accusations he was himself levelling at Sadat: was he not also betraying the Arab cause by courting Kissinger, accepting Resolution 242 and contemplating a peaceful settlement?"20 Iraq could afford to sound critical because it was a long way from the front line and had lost no land to Israel.

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19 Seale, n.5, p.262.
20 Ibid.
Syria counter-attacked by calling the Shatt al-Arab Iraq-Iran agreement of 1975 as "a collusion with imperialism, a surrender of Arab land and a betrayal of the revolution in Arabistan" (the Arab name for Khuzistan). This slanging match soon expanded to include the belittling of Iraqi help in the 1973 war as too little and too late.

Iraq opposed Syrian involvement in the Lebanon and Assad's maneuvering in the Arab system. The rival branch of the Ba'ath in Iraq was particularly sensitive to the balance of power situation in the Fertile Crescent, which had tilted in Assad's favour after his active involvement in Lebanon. Iraq grew vehement in its criticism when Syria opted to back the Maronites and subsequently Iraq supported the PLO-Muslim alliance in the Lebanon. Furthermore, Iraq encouraged all kinds of opposition to Assad's policy in the Lebanon.

Following Sadat's peace accord with Israel, Assad became aware of two danger: that Syria was vulnerable to physical destruction by Israel if it stood alone: and marginalization of Syria would take place and even his downfall may come about if Sadat succeeded in drawing the rest of the Arab states to his camp. Therefore, Assad had to take care of two aspects: to militarily protect Syria and to isolate Egypt. Among the Arab states, Iraq was obviously the only possible military counterweight to Israel. In keeping with this view, Assad appealed to Iraq on 20 November 1977 -

\[^{21}\text{For details refer to Colin Legum and Naim Shaked, Arab Relations in the Middle East: The Road to Realignment (New York, Holmes and Meier, 1979), pp.14-15.}\]
the same day Sadat was speaking in the Israeli Knesset - to bury the hatchet and "face our pan-Arab responsibilities".22

Iraq also had realized that the Camp David Accords threatened it with isolation. Due to this perceived common danger, both joined hands. Talks began and the entente was sealed when Assad went on a three-day visit to Baghdad in October 1978. A "Charter of Joint National Action" was signed which was called a step to bring "an important qualitative change in the relations". Assad put the cause of Arabs as the first priority. He declared, "I prefer to be a private soldier in a united Arab world than a general in a secessionist state. My brothers, I have no personal ambition to satisfy; it is the same to me if the capital is Basra, Mosul or Homs."23

This new rapprochement led to a number of developments: the Saudis were deterred from following the lead of Sadat; Egypt was suspended from the Arab League; the League's HQ was shifted out of Cairo; all economic aid, technical help, loans and oil exports to Egypt were called off.

The new alliance seemed to be heading for better days when talks for a federation were mooted, with Ahmad Hasan-Bakr as the head, Assad as his deputy and Saddam as number three. This scheme was not liked by Saddam (who knew it

22 Damascus Radio, 1 February 77. See also Tishreen 2 February 77.

23 Interview with Saber Falhat, Damascus, 11 May 1985 (Cited in Seale, n.5, p.413).
would spell danger for his ambitions) and also by Saudi Arabia and Jordan. In July 1979, 12 days after he took over power, Saddam announced the uncovering of a plot against him by few of his colleagues, in coordination with "a foreign hand" which he alleged was Syria. Syria denied all accusations. This brought all talks of a federation to a grinding halt.

The Syria-Iraq animosity came to a head when Ayatollah Khomeini took over power in Iran. While Assad saw Iran as a valuable ally to be used against Israel, Saddam regarded Khomeini as a danger to Iraq. A Shi'i state in the neighbourhood was perceived as a threat to the regime which comprised of Sunnis in a Shi'i-dominated Iraq. Assad was looking for means to contain the Israeli threat while Saddam looked at Iran as his prime enemy.

Assad was aghast when Iraq launched the war against Iran in September 1980. He called it a "wrong war against the wrong enemy at the wrong time. To fight Iran was folly; it would exhaust the Arabs, fragment their ranks and divert them from the ongoing battle for Palestine." Throughout the war Assad maintained the position

26 For details of the allegations and counter allegations with regard to this plot see Seale, n.5, p.354-55.
that instead of making an enemy of Iran, the Arabs should take it into their camp and
together tackle Israel.

Strategic compulsions forced Assad to take an unprecedented step and support Iran in the war. He realized that in case of an Iraqi victory Syria would be stuck between a hostile Israel and an equally hostile Iraq. Subsequently, Syria found itself involved in the war on the side of Iran in minor matters like intelligence sharing, arms supply, propaganda etc. The Iraqi oil pipeline to Mediterranean which ran through Syrian territory was cut off. Thus, Syria seemed to render some truth to the truism "enemy's enemy is my friend".

The old media war commenced again. In 1980 the Syrian embassy in Baghdad was stormed by Iraqi troops and in October Baghdad severed diplomatic relations with Damascus. In 1982 Syria closed the border with Iraq and blocked the Iraqi pipeline. The more vociferous the Iraqi criticism, the further Syria grew from Iraq and closer to Iran.

No improvement took place in the state of affairs in the following years. In the years that followed, maybe as a revenge for Syrian support to Iran, Iraq backed the militia of Michel Aoun in Lebanon against Syria. By early 1990, other Arab states like Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Libya made efforts to end the Syria-Iraq estrangement. But it proved impossible to bridge the rift. Saddam Hussain declared the impossibility of any reconciliation with Syria until the latter tendered an apology to all Iraqis and Arabs for its "position and acts that have harmed the nation" and
expressed his grouses against Syrian "backing of Iran during the war, blocking the transfer of Iraqi oil through Syrian land,... and diverting the waters of the Euphrates". He also demanded "the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon". President Assad answered in milder terms that "the rift with Iraq was wide and much time and effort is needed to bridge this rift". A *rapproachment* was "not achievable because the two states had conflicting opinion over a vast range of issues while the points of agreement were almost non-existent." This was followed by the May 1990 refusal of Syria to attend the Arab Summit in Baghdad. When Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990, the old wounds reopened again. From the very beginning Assad tried to make Saddam see sense in a quick withdrawal. After calling in vain for an Arab solution, Syria chose to join the multinational coalition against Iraq. The reasons for this step were numerous - Syria needed to end the Lebanese imbroglio in its favour; it was anxious to establish cordial relations with the US, specially due to economic reasons; it was keen to have the Gulf states on its side; and, more importantly, Syria could not approve of the invasion of one Arab state by another.

Syria assured on its joining the coalition that it would not take up guns against Iraq but that the troops would only be there for the protection of the Holy Places. Just prior to the breakout of the war, Assad sent his last appeal to Saddam through an open letter broadcast over the radio on 12 January 1991. He appealed to Iraq to withdraw and that if need arose after withdrawal, "Syria would fight in the same trench with

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29 FBIS, May 8, 1990, p.27.
Iraq. Saddam spurned this appeal in a harshly worded letter (again broadcast) over the radio.\textsuperscript{30}

Thus, the war which broke out could not be stalled or stopped by Syrian effort. The events in the war and the joining of Syria in the rival camp soured Iraq even more. As yet no improvement has taken place in Syria-Iraq relations.

\textbf{SYRIA AND LEBANON}

In his book, \textit{Labnan wa Suriya}, Jozef Abu-Khalil writes that the misunderstandings between the two countries are as old as the two countries. The events which created Lebanon can be cited as the prime reasons for the mercurial relationship both share. Without going into details about the factors which led to the creation of Lebanon, it would suffice to say that it was created by the French, the Mandatory power, in keeping with the eternal principle of imperialism, \textit{divide et impera}. The French could accomplish this with active help from the Maronites. The French had portrayed themselves as the protectors of the Maronites since the Middle Ages.

An account exists which tells of a letter from Louis IX which described the Maronites as "a part of the French nation, for its love for France resembles the love which Frenchmen bear one another". He assured them protection for all times.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{30} See Appendix (1).

\textsuperscript{31} Quoted in E.S. Stevens, \textit{Cedars, Saints and Sinners in Syria} (Undated), p.251.
When the nationalist movement started, the Maronites sided with the French and did not prefer to join the historical Syria. 1920 saw the birth of Lebanon, a piece carved out of Syria. Thus a state with artificial borders was created at the behest of the Maronites. What they did not realize was the perils of remaining a minority forever in this state.

Syria till date perceives Lebanon as its part which had been cut away by the imperialist powers and it regards the Lebanese and Syrian people as one and the same. The division of Syria was resented and never accepted by Syrians. Moreover, a lot of problems cropped up due to this partition: it set up artificial boundaries; it separated interior Syria from the ports of Tripoli, Beirut and Sidon; it separated families who were settled on both sides of the line; and it disturbed the movement of goods and people. The worst outcome was that it created the conditions of acute political long-term instability. The demand for reunification was loud and vociferous and Syria watched developments in Lebanon closely since the time of independence.

Lebanon's survival as a nation was endangered by the delicate sectarian balance that existed. The Maronites, though in minority, formed the elite class. The Sunni and Druze constituents contested the Maronite power time and again. The National Pact could not suffice to hold the fort in the state and the frequent civil strifes tore apart the flimsy fabric. The sectarian balance could not lead to an integrated national model. The myth of Maronite preponderance in the context of an actual Muslim majority was proving false. A class conflict started between an affluent middle class and an impoverished populace. Sectarian rivalry assumed violent forms.
Distinct forms of political ideology emerged: Kiyanism of the Maronites; the predominant Muslim population favoured union with Syria; a radical school was led by the Druze leader, Kamal Jumblatt. Another vital phenomenon at work was the demographic upheaval caused by the influx of Palestinians. Different strains of ideology from outside, like Nasserism, socialism, communism and Palestinian nationalism permeated the Lebanese society and all these factors at work brought the country to the brink of disaster.

Before going into the intricacies of Syria-Lebanese relations, one must first discern the real motives behind Syrian involvement in Lebanon. The festering internal situation in Lebanon, with the combination of Arab and regional nationalists, Muslim, Christian, Druze, Palestinian and foreign interference, became the focal point of inter-Arab tensions. Syria could not stay divorced from such developments.

First, the feeling of historic closeness, even inseparability of Syria and Lebanon, still permeates the psyche of many Syrians. Thus Syria, being the senior, larger and older "partner", has always been interested in events in Lebanon. Secondly, Lebanon is vital to Syria from the security point of view. The mountains of southern Lebanon are regarded by Syria as a natural defensive frontier which could be used to impede an Israeli march to Syria. President Assad has reiterated time and again that "it is difficult to draw a line between Lebanon's security in its broadest sense and Syrian security". In case of a weak and divided Lebanon, Israel would run

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it over in a day and Syria would be left facing the enemy face to face in almost all the fronts.

President Assad formulated a broad policy on Lebanon which can be outlined thus. His basic attitude to the civil war was that there should not be a military solution to it. He made it clear that a military solution (*al-hasm al-askari*) would not be supported by Syria and, accordingly, Syrian military intervention in Lebanon was in order to foil the military victory of any of the warring sides of Lebanon. In fact, Syria has in the past militarily intervened to prevent a military outcome in Lebanon. Syrian influence in Lebanon could be uprooted in case of a decisive military victory by any faction. Moreover, a leftist military triumph would leave the totally embittered Maronites who just might fly to the waiting arms of Israel. The end result of such a development would have a catastrophic effect on the pan-Arab defence system fostered by Assad. A Maronite-Israeli nexus would balkanize the Arab world and might lead to the further partition of the land.

The major Syrian trepidation was that the sectarian strife in Lebanon would inevitably spill across the border. This would be disastrous for it will upset the multisectarian base on which the power structure rested. Due to the considerable opposition that the regime faced from pre-dominantly Sunni groups, this danger had to be kept at bay.

In case of a Maronite defeat, a radical state in Lebanon could sponsor *Fedayeen* activities and there would be an increase in guerrilla attacks on Israel. This
would give Israel the excuse to skirt all pressures for a peace settlement, militarily uproot the Fedayeen presence and bases from Lebanon, fulfill its eternal desire to seize the area, etc. An Israeli intervention, whether as an answer to Maronite SOS or against the radical forces, would drag Syria into a war, unprepared and on terms favourable to Israel. Syria's vulnerable western flank, its "underbelly", would be threatened. This military/security threat perception was, without doubt, the prime ingredient in Syrian policy towards Lebanon.

Damascus did not desire a radical Lebanon. It rather preferred conditions in which it could play the role of an intermediary or a balancer between the two warring factions and thus exercise a hegemonic say. Influence in Lebanon would improve the Syrian position vis-a-vis the rival Arab powers. It could thus be able to resist those who were pressurizing for compromising with Israel and also the extreme rejectionist group led by Iraq, who would try to block any kind of settlement.

Another vital factor which was responsible for the Syrian policy in Lebanon was the considerable Palestinian presence on Lebanese soil. This aspect was multifaceted. Fedayeen attacks on Israel exposed Lebanese territory to Israeli retaliation and Syria could well meet the same fate. Thus, Palestinian activities could drag Syria into a war. Secondly, Syria also did not prefer that this section of the Fedayeen should fall out of its influence and fall into the clutches of another Arab state. Thirdly, the prospect of the Palestinians getting embroiled in the domestic situation was equally unappetizing since this would divert their attention from the greater fight for regaining their state. Fourthly, occasionally, the Palestinian leadership defied
Syria and invited animosity and this made the Syrians feel the need for greater control over the Palestinian movement. Fifthly, Israel would use the sectarian conflict in Lebanon to vindicate their refusal to democratize its system and accept the Palestinians back into a secular state. They could claim that since Lebanon could not survive, how could a secular state compromising Jews, Muslims and Christians survive?

A factor which was the basis of the Syrian policy was its conviction of the innately expansionist designs of Israel. The latter would take advantage of a partitioned Lebanon and move into the southern part, occupying land upto the Litani River. Syria regards the Litani, the Jordan river and the Golan Heights as the main areas Israel covets, since it would give the latter natural borders with its hostile eastern neighbours. The Israelis could engage Syrian forces on the Golan front and then strike at Damascus through the exposed Bekaa Valley.

Lastly, Syria regards itself as the repository of Arab nationalism. As the birthplace and the guardian of Arabism, it cannot allow the balkanization of Lebanon, a place which produced famous nationalists. Assad can be counted among the fast dwindling breed of Arab leaders who champion the cause of Arab Nationalism. The partition of Lebanon would be an enormous setback to his concept of Arab unity.

This ideological trend was augmented by the ideology of the ruling Ba'ath party, a vehemently nationalist party which is pan-Arabist. The Ba'ath is one of the three pillars on which the rule of President Assad is based. It enjoys the ear of the
President and exerts considerable influence on the country's policies. The party has backed Assad's Lebanese policy to the hilt and considers it in keeping with the goals of the party of furthering Arab unity and preventing sectarian violence, and balkanisation of any country of the Arab world.

Thus we see that there were multifaceted factors at work which motivated an active Syrian involvement in Lebanon.

The 1976 Intervention:

The stage was set for Syrian military involvement in 1976 by the ongoing civil war in Lebanon. When 1975 approached its end and the civil war intensified, Syrian threat perception of partition of Lebanon and Israeli intervention mounted. Syria threw caution to winds and overtly declared that "Lebanon can stay united or it will have to return to Syria". Initially, the Syrian involvement was minimal as it tried to serve as a mediator. But with the escalation of the civil war, the result was massive physical damage, partition of the state between armed gangs, and the rendering of the central authority ineffective. Assad perceived the threat this situation posed to Syrian security. As he himself said at that time "the security of the countries was indivisible". By January 1976 he had decided to assume a more prominent role. The Syrian dilemma has been described by Patrick Seale thus: "A number of developments in Lebanon caused Assad extreme alarm. As the violence grew he

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33 Hinnebusch n.4, p.5.

34 See President Assad's Interview with Salim al-Lawji of al-Hawadith, 22 June 1988, Beirut, BBC/SWB, ME/4941.
envisaged two possible outcomes, both equally horrendous: either the Maronites would set up a separate state, which would bring Israel in as its protector, or the radical with Palestinian backing would beat the Maronites, which would bring Israel in as a punisher. If Syria intervened, it faced defeat; if it remained on the sidelines, Lebanon would fall to the enemy.  

President Assad presented a peace plan which provided for a redistribution of power in favour of Muslims. The Maronites were to accept the Palestinian presence in return for latter's disengagement from Lebanese politics. Syria thus tried to be fair to both the sides. Though the Maronites accepted this plan, the Leftist Muslim - PLO alliance rejected it. They wanted a radical change, a more substantial redistribution of power based on secularization. The Druze leader, Kamal Jumblatt, also refused to agree to the Syrian plan, and championed a "total and irreversible" war on the Maronites. Syria suspected Jumblatt of trying to establish influence at least on the "leftist" half of Lebanon, i.e. the south, the Shouf, Sidon and West Beirut" where he saw himself running a sort of Mediterranean Cuba, which he imagined Soviet support would make invulnerable. Arafat too refused to fall in line with the Syrian plan because he felt that a Leftist Lebanon, where he would have considerable sway, would be a perfect haven for his homeless people, and it could also be used as a springboard for the movement. Thus he decided to continue the fight against the Maronites.

35 Seale n.5, p.276.

36 Interview with Khalid al-Fahum, Damascus, 7 September 1984 in Seale n.5, p.281.
All efforts of Syria to mediate and stem the fighting failed and the tide of the war turned in the favour of the Leftist-Muslim-PLO alliance. When the Maronites were thrown on the defensive, the Lebanese President, Sulaiman Franjiyah, issued an official invitation to Syria to intervene militarily. On 1 June 1976, Assad sent an army to Lebanon, the Syrian third Armoured Division, backed by elite commandos.

This was the first major show of Syrian military strength after the war of 1973. The Syrian forces succeeded in breaking the siege on Christian settlements, taking over control of strategically important towns and rapidly driving back the leftist and PLO forces. Nevertheless, the military march was low-keyed and advances were interspersed with calls to the alliance to give up their arms and withdraw from the Christian areas. Syrian forces pushed the Palestinian forces to their southern bases. Israel, who was watching all these, reacted when Syrian forces approached Nabatiyyah. Through the USA it made known its preference to have the Palestinians on Israeli's northern border, but not the Syrian forces. Accordingly, the Syrian forces stopped short of Nabatiyyah and did not cross the "red line"

Thus started the U-turn of events. Syria had become the ally of right-wing Christians, abandoning its former allies, the PLO and the left. Questions were abound about Assad's change of tactics. Why had he waged proxy wars against the Maronites on the side of the PLO-Leftist alliance if he had to protect the former? Why had he not foreseen the dangers of a Maronite defeat? Why did he waste money and arms on the PLO-Leftist Alliance, stocking them up before taking them on?
Widespread criticism erupted all over the Arab world of the Syrian intervention. Sadat broke off relations with Syria and accused Assad of genocide.\(^{37}\) Iraq moved troops to the north-eastern border of Syria and Saddam called Assad a megalomaniac whose mad ambitions had immersed him in a blood-bath of his own making.\(^{38}\) Jumblatt accused Assad's regime as a fascist military regime and combined with the PLO to call for an all-out war against Syrian forces. With the assassination of Jumblatt on 16 March 1977 the most critical voice from Lebanon disappeared.

Some of the oil states who had previously funded the Syrian boom in 1973 cut off their aid. Eminent personalities like Salah al-Din Bitar, (co-founder of the *Ba'ath*) questioned the Syrian partnership with an isolationist Christian group, a course so foreign to its traditions. He pinned the causes to the "lonely, undemocratic regime in Damascus".\(^{39}\) This was not the only unfair criticism levelled at Assad. He was accused of playing minority politics, an Alawite siding with another minority group, the Maronites. He was also accused of conniving with the US to crush the Palestinian movement. People who were bent on criticism refused to see that the motivation for the Syrian action in Lebanon lay in geo-strategic reasons, by the need to hold off an Israeli intervention, and not by narrow sectarian sentiments or hegemonic tendencies.

In a public speech on 26 July 1976, Assad explained his policy and he blamed the PLO-Leftist alliance of expanding their demands for a "decisive military action which, Assad pointed out, would lead to Israeli intervention and "to the creation of a

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\(^{38}\) Ibid.

\(^{39}\) *Le Monde*, 21 September 1976, also see Seale n.5, p.236.
dangerous and oppressed Christian minority with a state of its own, more dangerous
and hostile than Israel".  

Assad's arguments seemed to bear fruit when in the peace-making Riyadh
summit of October the Lebanese President, Elias Sarkis, praised the Syrian role in his
country and blamed the Palestinians and the Lebanese Left for the recent massacres at
Tal al-Za'ater. Assad again gained a victory of sorts when Syrian presence in Lebanon
was legitimized and Syrian troops were recognized as the major contingent in the
proposed Arab Deterrent Force of 30,000 troops placed under the Lebanese President
and chiefly funded by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Another factor which helped Syria
to vindicate itself was the pro-Syrian, Arabist policy of President Sarkis. Syria's show
in Lebanon went a long way in convincing the Americans that it is a significant and
responsible power in the region.

This Syria-Maronite friendship was not fated to last long. Incompatibility
between Syrian and rightist aims soon became apparent. President Sarkis proved to
be too weak to control the unfolding events and power slipped in to the hands of
Christian militia leaders. There were a number of reasons for this new rupture. Syria
had miscalculated that it could win the Maronite trust by fighting on their side and
that it could convince the latter to accept a lesser role in Lebanese politics. On the
contrary, the Maronites demanded more power and refused to fall in line with the
Syrian plan of integrating Lebanon into the Arab world. They demanded a traditional
Maronite dominance, or equity on the lines of a mini-state closely linked to the West.

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Syria wanted to set up a centrist government, disarm the militias, and a non-sectarian army, but the Maronites refused to cede any of their powers. They refused to fall in with such plans and even resisted the Syrian peace-keeping forces in Christian area. They did not agree with the Syrian stand on the Palestinian presence and the status of southern Lebanon. While Syria wanted to discipline the Fedayeen, the Maronites wanted them uprooted.

Syria mooted the Shtrah agreement which provided for a reasonable curtailment of Palestinian activities but the rightists refused it and demanded expulsion of the Fedayeen. Moreover, due to the Syrian effort to forge a combined opposition to the Egypt-Israel rapprochement, its ties had improved with the Palestinians. This was not appreciated by the Maronites who were drifting away from President Sarkis and were forming an extreme rightist group under Bashir Gemayel. Soon, this new faction was involved in intermittent fighting with the Syrian forces. The former even asked Israel for help. The election of Bashir Gemayel as President worsened the situation.

The Israeli invasion of March 1978 had already led to the control of southern Lebanon by Major Sa'd Haddad, an Israeli-backed military leader. Syrian forces were engaged on battles in this front since 1978. In 1981, this conflict intensified when the rightist militia tried to build a road towards Zahlah in the Bekaa valley. Syrian forces were pitted against the rightists who were then supported by the Israeli air-force. Syria moved anti-aircraft missiles into eastern Lebanon and stuck to this position. Finally, the US prevailed upon the Israelis to restrain and a crisis was thus averted.
On 6 June 1882, Israel launched the second invasion of Lebanon. The objectives were to destroy the Palestinian military infrastructure in the south, to defeat the Syrian forces and force their partial or total withdrawal from Lebanese politics, and after achieving these, to facilitate the reconstruction of the Lebanese state and political system under the hegemony of its Maronite allies. Israel named this invasion *Operation Peace for Galilee*.

Like in 1978, Syria did not jump into the battle immediately but under assault its troops fought back and inflicted losses on the Israelis in the main tank engagements. Israel had carefully planned and timed the invasion. They timed it to coincide with the termination of the presidential term of President Sarkis. Moreover, the aim of the invasion was to initiate an Israel-Lebanon treaty on the Israel-Egypt model and this required the total expulsion of the Palestinians and the Syrians from Lebanon. The Israeli invading forces succeeded in driving the *Fedayeen* out of southern Lebanon, laying siege to Beirut and pushing back the Syrians. Under the shelter of Israeli guns, Bashir Gemayel was elected President, but he was soon assassinated and replaced by his brother, Amin. A ceasefire was accepted but Syria had, till then, suffered considerable setbacks.

The Americans sponsored face-to-face talks of Israel and Lebanon with the aim of withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon. Negotiations led to the 17 May 1993 agreement which provided for the termination of the state of war between Lebanon and Israel and setting up of bilateral diplomatic and economic relations. It
was tantamount to a peace treaty without being called one. It was a triumph for the Israelis and, if actually implemented, it would turn Lebanon into an Israeli satellite.

Syria totally rejected this agreement and called for its abrogation. It demanded full Israeli withdrawal in compliance with Security Council Resolution 508 and 509. The common opposition to the agreement drove the Lebanese leftist forces back to the Syrian camp since their vital interests coalesced again. Syria's Lebanese allies held a council of war at Zghorta. The Sunnis, the Druzes, the Lebanese Communist Party, the SSNP, the Lebanese Ba'ath party, with Syrian encouragement, formed the National Salvation Front, which vowed to fight the agreement, end the Maronite hegemony, confront the Israeli occupation and "rebuild a new Lebanon". Civil war started anew and the first spark was the Druze-Phalangist strife over Shuf. This time it was truly a "civil war" with multinational involvement: Israel, Syria, the US, France were all contributing their bit to the imbroglio. Despite American backing, the Phalange-Israeli troops were driven back. The Syrian troops and their allies achieved unprecedented success and, finally, even the Americans deserted the rightist coalition, (it had lost 241 marines in October 1983), and the Reagan Administration withdrew. With his Western protectors gone, Amin Gemayel fell under Assad's mercy since the Lebanese rightist forces were completely routed. On 28 February, Gemayel ate the humble pie, travelled to Damascus and announced the abrogation of the May 1983 agreement and even agreed to a new round of peace talks to be held among the warring factions in Geneva under Syrian sponsorship.

This was a major triumph for Syria. It demonstrated to all who were interested that Syria could scuttle agreements and partial peace plans in the Arab East which ignored its interests. Syria checkmated Israeli's search for expanded clientage and enhanced its prestige in the Arab world for successfully defying the maneuverings of Israel and the US. Arab governments were now wary that any kind of capitulationist agreements would be opposed and foiled by Syria. Syria made up for the reverses it had suffered in 1982.

After March 1984, Syria became the main power broker in Lebanon. Israeli ties with its Lebanese right wing allies were almost severed and it was driven out of Lebanon. The rightists also acquiesced to the Syrian role. A right wing Christian leader, Kamil Chamoun, stated: "Syria is our first neighbour with whom we aspire to forge close cooperation. This cooperation is imperative and I believe that it will bring a final end to the civil strife in Lebanon."\[^{42}\]

In the post-1984 period Syria's policy in Lebanon revolved around four main issues: pacification of the warring factions and normalization of life; legitimization and consolidation of its position in Lebanon; continuing conflict with Israel; and relentless tussle with the Palestinians.

Syria had a number of problems inherent in its position in Lebanon. Itamar Rabinovich, the Israeli expert on Syrian affairs, underlined the following difficulties. Its victory in 1984 encumbered Syria with the responsibilities of a hegemony but

\[^{42}\text{Worcester Telegram, 19 May 1985.}\]
without providing the necessary resources. Syria had to show a measure of public order and progress towards a settlement. The Geneva talks of 1983, the Lausanne meet of 1984, and the Damascus accord of December 1985 could not succeed. Syria was expected to put back the fractured nation on its tracks without engaging its troops. Finally, involvement in Lebanon was proving to be a financial burden. For all these reasons the task in Lebanon became doubly difficult for Syria.\(^{43}\)

Assad tried to make his strategy succeed through influence over local forces and actors. Here one must dwell on his relations with the Amal and the Hizbollah. Imam Musa al-Sadr was looking for a patron for his just-born organization, Harakat al-Mahrumin (Amal) in the early seventies. Al-Sadr was the Imam who had issued the recognition of the Alawis as Twelver Shi'ites.\(^{44}\) Amal's base of operation was Lebanon and Syria armed it with the help of Saiqah. Amal soon became a tool of Syria in Lebanon. It supported the Syrian action of 1976; it helped the Syrian crackdown on the Palestinians in Lebanon. Though it suffered several reverses, with the Syrian ascendancy in Lebanon, the star of Amal shone brighter on the Lebanese horizon and became a vehicle for Syria in Lebanon. Amal also served as a weapon against Iraqi influence in Lebanon. Thus, Amal has remained a major ally of Syria in Lebanon.


\(^{44}\) Assad Abu-Khalil "Syria and the Shi'ites; Al-Assad's policy in Lebanon", Third World Quarterly, 12(2) April 1990, p.15.
Syria has not enjoyed such a fluid relation with the *Hizbollah*, (Party of God) since it had to take into account Syria-Iran relations while dealing with the party. In 1982, in the Syrian effort to send the multinational forces packing, the *Hizbollah* had helped a lot. They also contributed to the conditions which forced the abrogation of the May 1983 agreement. Despite its close cooperation with the organization, Syria has tried to maintain a distance, due to the latter's extreme policies.

In the mid-1980s, events unfolding in Lebanon proved to be beyond the control of President Gemayel and the civil strife intensified. In the face of impossibility to hold elections, Amin Gemayel appointed General Michel Aoun as the head of an interim military government on 22 September 1988. His appointment was opposed by a pro-Syrian, "West Beirut" cabinet headed by Salim al-Hoss. The first step taken by Aoun was to unite the Maronites against Syria and its Lebanese allies. In March 1989, he even launched war against the latter in a spurt of bravado, plunging his country into chaos again. Lebanon was torn into two, Beirut was split into the Eastern and the Western sections, and two prime ministers, one Christian and one Muslim, battled with their militias.

Soon the civil strife assumed such horrendous dimensions that it drew the attention to the need of external mediation. The result was the *Taif Accord* which was signed on 30 September 1989. This accord underlined the Arab character of Lebanon and stressed that it is a country for all its people, irrespective of their religion or sect. It emphasized that Syria-Lebanon relations should be improved since the factors
which link both outnumber their differences. One main characteristic of the accord was that it was pro-Syrian and anti-Aoun.

This accord did not usher in peace. Rene Mouwwad, the President elected after the accord, was assassinated by means of a car bomb on 22 November 1989. Suspicions were directed at Aoun who had opposed the Taif Accord. He was the one who would have benefitted the most from a constitutional paralysis caused by this assassination. But the Syrian reaction was swift. The parliament met in Shturah and Ilyas Hrawi was elected President and the cabinet was to be headed by Salim al-Hoss. Aoun refused to accept Hrawi as President and, holed up in his enclave, continued his fight. He refused to settle for anything less than a total Syrian withdrawal. He was the recipient of considerable Iraqi help.

While events in Lebanon stood deadlocked, the region was rocked by a new tremour. Iraqi invaded Kuwait on 2 August 1990 and occupied it. The Arab world was aghast. It was unprecedented that an Arab state invaded a brother Arab state. Appeals to Saddam to withdraw proved ineffectual. The Arab states were divided into pro and anti-Saddam groups. Syria, due to many reasons, opted to join the multinational coalition against Iraq and thus earned American gratitude. The state which the US had till recently labelled "terrorist" was now in its own camp! It is sometimes surmised by some that the American gratefulness to Syria was expressed by giving it a free hand in the events that were unfolding in Lebanon.
In October 1990, Hrawi officially asked for Syrian help in flushing out Aoun by tightening the economic blockade. On 11 October, Syrian troops moved to Baadba, launched aerial attack and directed heavy artillery fire at Aoun's stronghold. Aoun wasted no time in abandoning and fled to the French embassy and asked for asylum. Syrian forces immediately dismantled the Green Line which separated east and west Beirut, removed checkpoints and cleared the Damascus-Beirut highway.

Despite the numerous reverses suffered by Syria in Lebanon since 1958, the ultimate result was a stupendous success. In the early 1990s, it almost looked that the Lebanese regime stood erect solely due to Syrian propping. Syria-Lebanon relations were further cemented by the "Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination" signed on 22 May 1991.

President Assad's policy towards Lebanon is based on feelings and convictions described by him as "what is between Syria and Lebanon is much greater than any document we signed in the past or will sign in the future. What is between us was made by God; we have not made it. History asserts that we are one people, like we were in the past; we will remain so, whether we are one state or two independent states”.

SYRIA-JORDAN EQUATION:

These two countries have had an unusually tense and fluctuating bilateral relationship. There is a specific element in this relationship which is unique and

45 Al-Safeer, Declaration by Assad to one of the journalists on the day of signing.
which sets it apart from other sets of bilateral relations in the region. The very nature of either state sets them apart. Jordan is a monarchy, the main interest of the regime is to preserve the ruling elite and the state as it is. Syria, from its infancy, has experimented with all kinds of democratic ventures. Due to its historical past, it feels that it should enjoy regional supremacy. Accordingly, it has striven to build up a good defence apparatus. This aspect rankles Jordan who regard it as a threat to its survival as a separate entity. On its part Syria has always been suspicious of the extent of Hashemite ambitions.

Tension between these two Arab states is also due to the exigencies of the concept of Greater Syria, ideological differences, and conflict over who can have greater influence over the Palestinians. King Abdullah's efforts for setting up his Greater Syria were disliked by Syrians. And the expansion of the Syrian military power was feared by the Jordanians.

Ideologically, they have often found themselves in opposing camps. Jordan was firmly embedded in the opposing camp when radical, socialist, and anti-Western wave swept the Arab world. Jordan was a monarchy whose major concern was to keep exotic ideas of revolutionary socialism out of its borders; it was dependent on the West for assistance; and it had adopted a cautious policy towards Israel.

The disagreement over the treatment of Palestinian Fedayeen was another cause of contention between the two. For instance, after the Black September
episode, the Jadid regime had declared war on Jordan. This issue remained a thorn in
the side of both for a long time.

In spite of Syrian efforts to maintain cordial ties with Jordan, the relationship
has always been tense and uneasy. When Assad came to power he moved to restore
relations with Jordan by closing down the mainly anti-Jordanian radio, *Saut al-
Thaurah al-Filistinia* (the Voice of Palestinian Revolution) and by purging and
controlling *al-Saiqa*, which Salah Jadid had tried to exploit for his aims.

Assad had already earned a place in the good books of King Hussain when he
had refused the orders of the Jadid regime to launch an air assault on Jordan as a
punishment for the King's onslaught on the *Fedayeen*. When he refused this order,
Jadid tried to dismiss him and in the resulting tussle, the *coup* took place which
brought Assad to power. It was thus natural that a friendlier era of relations was in the
offing. When King Hussein moved against the Palestinians again, Syria severed
diplomatic ties in July 1971.

It was perceived that Jordan was an important part of the pan-Arab defence
model of Assad. It was useful as part of the eastern front and because it was realized
that no benefits could be derived by doing away with the monarchy, which anyway
was hardly possible. Assad calculated that the Jordanian army was a more important
asset in a war than the commandos. Therefore, diplomatic ties were resumed in 1973.
King Hussein's calculation was that if he had Syria on his side, it would be easier to deal with the Palestinian commandos. Therefore, Jordanian policy placed substantial importance on the maintenance of high-level diplomatic relation with the Syrian leaders.

Jordan also served as Syria's "window to the West". Military strategy was evolved tying the defence of the Irbid Heights (a corridor to Syria that would outflank the Golan defences) to overall Syrian military preparations. The Rabat Summit stripped Jordan of all claims to represent the West Bank and the Palestinians. Jordan accepted this and with the goodwill and support of Syria it returned to widespread Arab good graces.

At a summit meeting in Cairo just before the 1973 war, Assad and Sadat welcomed Jordan back into the Arab fold. King Hussein found himself facing a dilemma: if he actively took part in the war, the end of the war would render Jordan vulnerable to Israeli retaliation; and he also knew that if he did not join, the Arabs would accuse him of treachery. On the other hand, Syria was also in a dilemma: Jordan was needed to fill the gap in its defences but King Hussein's surreptitious contacts with Israel were detested.

Jordan's contribution to the Syrian military operations in the 1973 war, though limited to sending two armoured brigades to the Golan front, had a positive effect on bilateral relations. In 1974, economic, political and cultural ties were upgraded. The two countries agreed to coordinate on some aspects of their internal politics, a joint
military manoeuvre was conducted and bilateral visits became fairly frequent.\footnote{Walid W. Kazziha, \textit{The Palestinians in the Arab Dilemma} (London: Croom Helm, 1977), p.52.} On 8 December 1976, in accordance with the spirit of Arab unity, the two countries announced their intention to form an union, but in reality little came out of these plans. Both the countries realised the need to stand together to combat the slipping of Egypt from the Arab front.

In the Lebanese crisis Jordan was perhaps the only Arab state which supported Syria. Jordan also favoured a moderately reformed \textit{status quo} in the Lebanon and did not share the rivalistic stance of Egypt or Iraq. King Hussein backed Syria because a Muslim-PLO domination in the Lebanon might isolate Jordan in its immediate regional situation and preclude the possibility of a \textit{rapprochement} between Amman and the PLO. On the other hand, Assad regarded the alliance with Jordan as a stepping stone to a broader hoped-for federation of Syria, Jordan and the West Bank, which will be led by Syria.

In the period following the Egyptian abandonment of Syria, Jordan joined Syria in opposing the peace initiative. While putting its weight behind Syria, Jordan was careful to try to prevent a Syria-Iraq \textit{rapprochement} since such a development would mean a total Ba'athist domination of the Fertile Crescent, which would inevitably eclipse the Jordanian political influence in the region.\footnote{Alan R. Taylor, \textit{The Arab Balance of Power} (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982), p.86.} This relationship
worsened in 1977 when King Hussein refused to join the Syrian-led Steadfastness and Confrontation Front formed in December 1977.

After the first Gulf War broke out, Syria-Jordan relations grew strained. The Iraqi-Jordanian rapprochement was not liked by Damascus. King Hussein openly supported Iraq and helped in the latter's war efforts. In 1980, Syria accused Jordan of supporting the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria who were trying to overthrow the Assad regime, and amassed 30,000 troops along the Jordanian border. This situation was controlled through Saudi mediation, only to be derailed soon after by Jordan's new policy towards Israel. In the early eighties, Jordan began contemplating negotiations with Israel. The threat of losing Jordan to Israel was ominous, since it would upset the balance of power. King Hussein was determined to remain an independent player and while trying to keep Syria at bay it fell under the American pressure to talk peace with Israel. Moreover, King Hussein wanted a formula for a Jordanian-Palestinian solution while Assad was trying for a wider solution.

Assad fell ill in 1984 and King Hussein promptly took a few steps. He invited Arafat to Amman. The Palestinian supremo had just been expelled from Syria after being declared persona non grata. Diplomatic relations with Egypt were restored. Syria did not approve of both these steps.

Jordan fell in with the Reagan Plan and on 11 February 1985, it signed an agreement with the PLO for a joint approach to peace. The PLO agreed to take part in talks "within a joint delegation of Jordanian-Palestinian representatives" and to form a
"Confederation of Jordan and Palestine". Syria criticized the accord in strongest terms and vowed to block it. The Syrian cabinet decided to "make the foiling of this accord its official policy".

Another development watched closely by Syria was what Jordan was doing in Washington. In Syrian perception, Jordan was trying to acquire arms and political backing from the US, it was edging closer to the Jewish lobby and was portraying Syria as an enemy and Israel as a friendly neighbour with the hope that with Israel, Palestinian radicalism could be contained. Unable to stomach this volte face, the Jordanian ambassador to the US, Ibrahim Izzeddin, returned to Jordan. All these caused the undeclared war between Syria and Jordan in 1983-85.

A number of steps were taken by Syria to deter Jordan. A "Jordanian National Movement" was launched to dethrone Hussein and set up a "democratic and nationalistic" government in Jordan. Abu Nidal and Abu Musa set up a joint command to make war on Jordan. All these, and more, caused King Hussein to beat a hasty retreat and he sought to improve relations with Syria. Assad put forward two conditions - that King Hussein should denounce the accord and accept that Jordan was in league with the Muslim Brotherhood. Subsequently, a truce was called.

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48 For details see International Herald Tribune, 25 February 1985.
49 Ibid.
50 Seale, n.5, p.464.
52 Ba'ath Party Report, August 1985, (Damascus).
extended a *mea culpa* regarding the involvement with the Muslim Brotherhood, and a joint communique was issued rejecting direct negotiations with Israel. King Hussein went to Damascus in December 1985 and renounced his accord with Arafat. President Assad visited Amman in May 1986, thus sealing the *rapprochement*.

After bringing back the relationship to an even keel, King Hussein tried to bring about reconciliation between Iraq and Syria. The Arab Summit in Amman in 1987 was a victory for him since he persuaded Syria to attend the summit and the latter even voted for the resolution condemning Iran for occupying Iraqi territory.

Thus we see that Syria's relationship with Jordan has undergone an acute level of fluctuation. The reasons for this were many. In both the states, the power realities of the political system and the attitude of the key constituencies are important determinants of the domestic and foreign policy mix at any given time. Both Assad and King Hussein have been at the helm of power for a long time, and they have survived against all odds. Both have been engaged in endemic strains with their domestic components. To survive, both had to keep the domestic elements satisfied, by adhering to issues of domestic, Arab and Islamic nature. Thus they have legitimized their long spanned rule. In retrospect, we can say that they both have succeeded to a great extent in pursuit of their goals. Both the countries tried to maintain a *correct* diplomatic relationship but in 1990, after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, both found themselves on opposing camps. King Hussein extended a tacit support to Iraq and the foremost worry in his mind may have been a very powerful Syria in case of an Iraqi collapse.
SYRIA AND THE GULF STATES

Syria's relations with the Gulf states have fluctuated over the years from fair to good. The Sheikhdoms pay due heed to Syria as a leader in the Arab world. Syria has come to rely heavily on their financial assistance, given to it as a confrontation state. In order to rescue Syria from political isolation due to the ultra radicalism of his predecessors, Assad edged closer to the Gulf states after he took over power. Ideological differences were pushed backstage and active cooperation was encouraged.

Among the Gulf states, primacy was accorded to Saudi Arabia which eventually played a far more important role in Syrian foreign policy than it is actually recognized. Syria's role as a radical, revolutionary and progressive state had soured its relations with Saudi Arabia for a long time. The Saudis never trusted the Syrians and were relieved to have a monarchic, moderate Jordan as a buffer in between. Syria's policy towards the Gulf states changed after the coming of President Assad to power. "The sharpest turn in policy was in Syria's relation with the American surrogate, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Assad closed down Radio Damascus's voice of the Arabian Peninsula, "which under Jadid had encouraged liberation movements in Saudi Arabia and throughout the Arabian Peninsula."

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Syrian policy towards the Gulf, specially Saudi Arabia, was formulated on three premises. The first consideration was the considerable financial aid that could be secured from the Saudis. Secondly, the Saudis had a lot of influence over the region, specially in the Gulf. And, thirdly, the Saudis exerted a substantial amount of religious influence.

Saudi aid was necessary to help Syria acquire the arms it desired. It was useful in defraying the expenses of costly military operations like the Lebanese one. "The ability of the Syrian government to pursue a guns (arms procurement) and butter (development) programme was a function of Saudi subvention". 54

Another issue of lesser importance is the Saudi regional leadership. It was useful to win Saudi concurrence in certain specified issues because such support would affect the policies of other Arab states, usually of the Gulf states. The role of Saudis as a religious leader of the Islamic world has special meaning in Syria. For instance there has been considerable Sunni opposition to the ruling elite (Alawis) in Syria by quarters like the Muslim Brotherhood who are closely tied to Saudi Arabia. It has been realized that the Saudis can use Islam to mobilize subversive movements against the regime. This factor is a clear evidence of how domestic matters determine aspects of foreign policy.

Assad reversed Jadid's policy on Aramco's trans-Syrian oil pipeline and allowed the repairs to be made under the old agreement. He removed trade restrictions between Syria and Saudi Arabia upheld under the Jadid regime and allowed Saudi Arabian overflights of Syrian territory. President Assad supported Faisal ibn Saud project for the creation of a federation of Gulf states which Jadid had opposed as an imperialistic design of western powers.

In the early seventies, Assad took a number of steps to improve relations with the Gulf states which resulted in the participation of the Gulf states in the 1973 war. In garnering opposition to the Egyptian peace initiative, he successfully convinced them to join the anti-Egypt camp. In the mid-seventies, Syria was caught between the hostility of Cairo and Baghdad and made efforts to maintain a good working relationship with the Gulf states. Syria found a friend in King Faisal of Saudi Arabia who went to Damascus in March 1975. Faisal took the lead in pouring money into Syria's war-ravaged economy; in supporting Syria in its opposition to the Sinai Agreement; he refused to fall in line with Kissinger's diplomacy after a little amount of initial hesitation. But his assassination spelt an end to this phase.

In the Lebanese crisis, Saudi Arabia backed Syria though rumblings were heard only when the latter sided with the Maronites. While in this case support continued, the Gulf states were aghast when Syria declared its support for Iran in the Iran-Iraq war. These Sheikhdoms were extremely wary of the ideas of the Islamic Revolution seeping into their borders, and so they were banking on Iraq to check the Iranian ideological march. They pumped money to help the Iraqi war effort and
condemned the Syrian support to Iran. The Syrian media, in turn, blamed the Gulf states of being the main backers of a wrong war launched by Iraq.\(^{55}\) Thus, a near cold war ensued between the two.

The next breach occurred when Assad denounced Prince Fahd's Eight-Point Peace Plan which was presented at the Fez Summit. Assad criticized it since it called for an implicit recognition of Israel. Moreover, he favoured a total solution and not any kind of partial and bilateral temporary solution. This criticism of the Fahd Plan exacerbated the existing tensions over the Iraq-Iran war, but total breach of diplomatic relations was avoided.

Saudi Arabia was not keen to break off relations with Syria despite its socialistic and pro-Soviet leanings. As Prince Talal ibn-Saud had once commented, "Saudi Arabia cannot ignore Syria. It is the heart of the Arab world".\(^{56}\) The Saudis were in favour of maintaining a consistent relationship with Syria at this stage because after all the latter was a frontline Arab state in a state of war with Israel. Secondly, by alienating Syria, the Saudis did not want to push it more closer to the Soviets. Thirdly, being a moderate Arab state, they could not afford to create circumstances which would force Syria to become more radical.

This bilateral relationship was, thus, never allowed to cross the boundaries of unrescuable disagreements, i.e. no break was allowed. The hostilities eased by the


\(^{56}\) Newsweek, 4 July 1983.
end of the eighties. In 1990, when Saddam invaded and occupied Kuwait, Syria was one of those who were loud in their appeals to Iraq to withdraw. Finally, when it joined the coalition against Iraq, Syria stood vindicated. It protected the Gulf states from their erstwhile protector, Iraq. Syria could have adopted a smug stand, a "I told you so" attitude, since it had always warned the Gulf states against helping Iraq. But, it opted to demand the return of Kuwaiti sovereignty and help in the liberation of Kuwait.

When the war ended, the Gulf states were not hesitant to show their gratitude and, accordingly, Syria was initially given a symbolic place in the post-war security arrangements in the region, as evidenced in the Damascus Declaration.