CHAPTER III

U.S. - WEST ASIA
The United States (US) has a greater degree of influence in the Middle East because of the region's lack of reliability and consistent alliance systems or any internationally recognized leaders. (The Reagan Administration reached some important conclusions during his first term). As Arab states have developed their separate identities, Pan-Arabian has become a less tenable ideology. The willingness of Egypt to sign the Camp David accords, of Lebanese Maronite Christians to ally with Israel, or of Syria and Algeria to support Iran against Arab-Iraq. Despite Islamic fundamentalism's inability to seize power anywhere outside of Iran, the movement has proved a source of divisiveness - through the Iran-Iraq war, terrorism and heightened communal tensions rather than one of unity.1

Egypt cannot play a leadership role in the region while it continues to be penalized for the Camp David accords. Iraq is tied up with an expensive war effort; Syria's obvious ambitions have brought it isolation; Saudi Arabia's economic leverage has steadily declined as its petroleum price and production have fallen. In this situation of "every state" for itself, Washington's role is very important.

The Iraq-Iran War

The ongoing Iraq-Iran war (eight years) was burst into

the open on September 22, 1980, after it had been brewing ever since the overthrow of the Shah of Iran. (Saddam Hussein (Iraq), and Ayatollah Khomeini (Iran) against each other, had been an additional factor of destabilisation in the already unstable region of the Middle East).

The reasons were close geographical proximity of this war. The conflict, whose roots go back to the earlier centuries, was transformed by war. For twenty years, since the Algiers agreement of 1975 signed between the governments of Iraq-Iran was an apparently successful attempt to end the conflict. Ayatollah Khomeini's return to Iran at the head of an Islamic Revolution destroyed the Algiers accord.

The prospects of a long-term conflict in the Gulf was the significance of an Iraqi oil pipeline through Turkey to the Mediterranean to replace the pipeline which crosses Syrian territory to Tripoli in Lebanon. The flow of Iraqi oil through the Syrian pipeline had been interrupted several times since late 1960s and most recently in 1982 when Syria shut the pipeline down as a strategic move designed to help its ally, Iran in its war effort. At the height of the war, when its own ports and Baghdad's airport were not secure, Iraq was supplied through the Jordanian port of Aqaba and Amman's airport became a temporary substitute for Baghdad's Jordan's territory provided strategic depth in the confrontation with

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Iraq.

The Arab response in the war did not support unitedly to Iraq. Syria and Libya criticised Iraq for diverting Arab attention away from the confrontation with Israel by waging a war against Iran. The Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, apart from describing "the war as recklessness of a blood-thirty boy like Saddam Hussein" also criticised Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates for collaborating with Iraq". The other Arab states, especially those in Gulf (Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Oman, UAE, Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait) generally supported Iraq, with Jordan lending political, diplomatic, military and material support while Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE gave Iraq financial grant and aid.

Syria and its new ally, Libya became the first Arab country to proclaim open support for Iran. In a message to King Khalid of Saudi Arabia, Colonel Qadhafi said that "Islamic duty behoves us to align ourselves with the Muslim of Iran, instead of fighting them on behalf of the United States", Libya and Syria were supplying Iran with airlifted supplies of Soviet origin military equipment (i.e. anti-aircraft anti-tank missiles and rocket-propelled grenades). On 11 October, Iraq broke off diplomatic relations with Syria and Libya for supporting Iran, a change that Syria denied, calling

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4 Ibid.
on the Arab League to investigate. At the same time Syria also stepped up its propaganda war against Baghdad. Saudi Arabia’s relations with Libya also worsened, especially after Qadhafi’s Id-al-Ada speech on October.

Because of this growing polarisation in the Arab world, the Arab League proposed an Arab Summit conference on November 25, 1980 in Amman. A pre-Summit conference of Arab foreign ministers was held talks, Syria began to mass troops on its border with Jordan over the question of supporting Iraq in the war and holding of the Summit. Syria was accused of trying to assume the leadership of the Arab world and diverting the Palestinian and Arab cause from confronting Israel. Jordan had called this Summit to help heal the Inter-Arab division on the Gulf war. Finally, Syria boycotted the Summit, and was promptly joined by South Yemen and later by the Steadfastness Front (grouping Libya, Algeria and PLO, besides Syria and South Yemen. The Front was formed in 1978 to promote hardline opposition to a peace settlement with Israel).

In view of the perceived threat from Iran, Iraq settled its scores with Iran and it would result in reducing the Iranian threat. Significantly some diplomatic activity also preceded. The activity included were:

i) In August 1980 a security agreement was signed between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, ii) in March 1980 Iraq made efforts with Kuwait especially with regard to the territorial dispute involving the Islands of Bubiyan and Warbah, iii) again in
August 1980, the North Yemen with Iraq to develop Arab solidarity and joint Arab efforts and face threats on the Arab future, iv) on September 16, the UAE with Iraq, the issue of three islands which belonged to the UAE border problem between Iraq and Iran and the situation in the Gulf.5

The Jordan was the first Arab state to support Iraq openly in the war, within two weeks after it broke out. The part of Aqaba was opened for Iraq to receive armament and military supplies, especially from the Soviet Union, to be followed by allowing Iraqi military aircraft use of the Magraq airbase, 65 km north of Amman. Jordan also broke relations with Iran. The support of Bahrain, Kuwait, Amman, Qatar and the UAE for Iraq was marked caution. Because of their small armed forces and more to avoid any direct attack from Iran these states refrained from providing any military support. Kuwait alone among these small Gulf states exhibited some political and material support. Kuwait also supplied it refined oil products and even processed food, it granted Iraq transit facilities to closure of Iraq's Basrah port.6 The war remained indecisive but showed no signs of spreading or endangering the Persian Gulf oil exports.

The US remained neutral from the beginning of the outbreak of the hostilities. The US supported the independence

5 See Karsh, Efraim, n.2, pp.234-235.

and territorial integrity of both Iraq-Iran, as well as that of other states in the region. In keeping with our policy worldwide. 7 "We oppose the seizure of territory by force. We urge an immediate end to hostilities and a negotiated effort for a peaceful solution to the conflict on the basis of each state's respect for the territorial integrity of its neighbours and each state's freedom from external coercion". 8 In keeping with the policy we have joined with other members of the UN Security Council in July 1980 to end the conflict. The US supported the security of friendly states in the region which felt threatened by the conflict. 9

The AWACS Controversy and Arms for Saudi Arabia

The Reagan Administration, which assumed office in 1981 was immediately faced with another Saudi request for arms, especially equipment to upgrade its F-15. In addition to sixty-two, F-15 fighter bombers, initially promised by the Carter Administration. "In the context of concern about instability in the Arabian Gulf, threats to western access to oil, and increased Soviet influence in the region, the


9 "Statement issued by the White House, July 14, 1982", in US, Department of State, American Foreign Policy: Current Documents, Ibid., p.785.

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Administration announced on March 6, 1981 that the U.S. was prepared to sell Saudi Arabia all of equipments that it requested except for bomb racks.\textsuperscript{10}

In April 1981, the Administration announced that it would sell Saudi Arabia five AWACS of its own, delivery to be scheduled for 1985. Pending delivery, the four American-manned AWACS sent by Carter would remain. The provision of the F-15 equipment and the AWACS became an important policy objective for the Reagan Administration, which recognize the utility of having a positive relationship with a pivotal Arab state of such importance in OPEC, significant in geostrategic location and fervor against communism.\textsuperscript{11}

The AWACS had a fundamentally political rather than military significance. They were intended to provide the Saudi's with concrete evidence of America's friendship, to give an incentive for Riyadh to contain its pro-western economic policies; and to encourage the Saudi to support Secretary of State Alexander Haig's plan to forge a 'strategic consensus' against Soviet penetration in the region. The plans in no way altered the military balance between the Arabs and Israel. Ronald Reagan would never have permitted such a shift, since both he and Haig were committed to the absolute military superiority of Israel. Haig, a former top aide to Henry Kissinger, strongly advocated the thesis that Israel was an


\textsuperscript{11}  \textit{New York Times}, 16 April 1981.
indispensable strategic asset to the U.S. in containing the Soviet Union.

The Egyptian-Iraqi relations warmed in the context of the war, with Egypt supplying Iraq substantial amount of military equipment - some $1.5 billion worth in an agreement concluded in April 1982 alone. In return Iraq eased its boycott against Egypt, upgraded its diplomatic representation in Cairo and boosted economic ties between the two countries.\textsuperscript{12}

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, like the Iranian revolution, was a significant event in terms of the linkages between great powers relations and the Middle East regional context. The invasion, which was prompted by the loss of power of a pro-Soviet regime in Kabul as a result of popular opposition to its extensive social reform measures. The Carter Doctrine, committing the United States to protect the security of Arabian Gulf of oil producing states if they were externally threatened.\textsuperscript{13}

By the time Reagan became the President, detente was frozen and the new administration rapidly rekindled the cold war. Regional problems were again viewed exclusively in the context of great power politics, and the world was divided into the forces of good and the forces of evil, with every regional conflict reduced to a simplistic view of American-

\textsuperscript{12} DAWN (Karachi) 10 May 1981.

Soviet competition. It was Kissinger's view of the world, except that the perception of the Soviet Union was no longer one of a traditional great power pursuing its interests in the context of power politics, it was a reversion to the earlier perception of George F. Kennan, of a Soviet Union as a world revolutionary state.

In the Middle East the priorities for the Reagan Administration were decreasing Soviet influence and safeguarding the freedom of access to the area's oil. The Reagan-Haig team expanded the Carter Doctrine and gave great stress to the development of the Rapid Deployment Force. The major thrust of Haig's regional strategy was the attempt to create an anti-Soviet security screen termed a "strategic consensus" extending from Pakistan to Egypt and including such disparate nations as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Israel. This was like John Foster Dulles' Middle East policy.

The new strategy included an increased programme of military assistance to a number of Middle Eastern countries, including Saudi Arabia, other Gulf states, Egypt and Jordan.

In 1986 Saudi planned to upgrade their air defense system by acquiring aircraft and other military equipment in the US were thwarted by Congress. Finally, in a bold move to free herself from excessive dependence on America, Saudi Arabia signed on January 8, 1988, a major arms agreement with Britain providing for supply of combat aircraft, helicopters, nine-
sweepers, and the construction of airbases. The total cost of the arms package was initially estimated at $34 billion to $36 billion by some American sources but was stated to be as high as $68 billion by the Saudi Deputy Minister of Information. In explaining the Kingdom's decision, a Saudi official declared:

"We would prefer to buy weapons from the US. American technology is generally superior. But we are not going to pay billions of dollars to be insulted."

The Strategic Cooperation Agreement

After the tension and irritations caused by the attack on Iraq's nuclear reactor and the AWACS dispute, the Administration responded by including with Israel, on November 30, 1981, the strategic cooperation agreement. The main points could be summarised as follows:

- The US and Israel to form a committee to arrange for joint military exercises and provide for the use of Israeli ports by the Sixth (Mediterranean) Fleet of the US navy.

- The US to resume the delivery to Israel of American cluster bombs (temporarily suspended).

- Israel to build, with partial US financial assistance, the Lavi fighter aircraft, which it was free to market abroad. (This provision was rescinded a few years later).

Israel and the US to conclude a trade agreement that would allow duty-free and tax-free imports and exports for both countries giving Israel a preferential treatment in comparison with other US trading partners. 17

Local conflicts - whether in Asia, Africa, Latin America or the Middle East - were perceived by the Reagan Administration as manifestations of the global Soviet threat. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the fall of the Shah of Iran were seen to heighten the risks for the west in the vital Persian Gulf. Moscow's arms supplies to Syria and Libya and access to Syrian ports were cited as proof of the vulnerability of the eastern Mediterranean to Soviet penetration. Therefore, the Secretary of State Alexander Haig made that threat the primary focus of his first trip to the Middle East in April 1981. 18

But Haig misdiagnosed the regional concern in the early 1980s. The Arab regions along the Persian Gulf did not see Moscow as a direct threat. They were disturbed by the military imbalance in the Arab-Israeli equation caused by Egypt's withdrawal from the Arab front. Heightened tension on the Israeli-Syrian lines in Lebanon and the Israeli air strike against the Iraqi nuclear plant in June 1981 led Jordan and


Saudi Arabia to seek weapons to ward off a potential Israeli attack. Riyadh purchased American airborne warning and control system (AWACS) as a defence against Israel, not the Soviet Union; the Saudis did not share a "consensus of concern" with Tel Aviv.

International terrorism also became the major foreign policy concern of Haig, "announced that international terrorism will take the place of human rights" as the focus of the US policy. The US Administration took pains to prove Soviet complicity in international terrorism.\(^\text{19}\) In fact, the State Department "proved Soviet financial aid and training for some elements of the PLO as evidence of Soviet sponsored terrorism. As a candidate Reagan had repeated by described the PLO as a terrorist organisation".\(^\text{20}\) Now this description was expanded to refer to its role in a Soviet-dominated international terror network. The US officials also sometimes called the PLO a Soviet puppet, a designation that indicated that the PLO was not the valid representative of the Palestinian people. And Reagan added the conditions of renunciation of terrorism on the PLO.

Israel launched its first bombing raid of the new year on 29 January 1981 against Palestinians in Lebanon and cited President Reagan's dictum that "terrorism" should be dealt with swiftly and unequivocally. It had all the blessings of

\(^{19}\) New York Times, 29 January 1981.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 30 January 1981.
the new Administration.  

The Arab regime’s hesitancy to embrace Haig’s approach, in turn, reinforced the Administration’s proclivity to view Israel as the linchpin of American strategy in the region.  

Ariel Sharon, who became Israel’s Defence Minister in mid-1981, welcomed the role of policeman in the Middle East and encouraged the signing of a memorandum of understanding on 31 November 1981 that linked Israel, for the first time, to Washington’s anti-Soviet posture. A former Carter aide noted that "the relationship took a giant step forward during the Reagan Administration which saw Israel not as a post Holocaust American moral obligations but, for the first time, as a strategic asset in the regional struggle against the Soviet Union for primacy in the Middle East".

Reagan had assumed that establishing firm American-Israeli strategic relations would encourage Israel to take further steps towards peace. The Administration reaffirmed its support for the Camp David process, but focused on finalising the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai rather than on reinvigorating the autonomy talks. Egyptians-Israeli

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22 Juliana Peck, n.18, p.20.

negotiations concerning the West Bank and Gaza Strip had been ended abruptly by Anwar Sadat in mid-1980 when the Israeli government declared all of Jerusalem its external capital. The Reagan Administration appealed to tilt towards Israel’s interpretation of autonomy, particularly when Reagan stated that Israeli settlements in the occupied territories were not illegal. Moreover, the US officials tended to see Palestinians as individuals and refugees whose difficulties would be resolved by gaining civic rights in the context of a federation of the West Bank with Jordan.

Even after Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin decided in August 1981 to resume autonomy talks, Washington showed little concern to reach a swift conclusion. Haig delayed until January 1982 to travel to the region to promote autonomy negotiations, apparently jolted into action by the possibility that Egypt would lose interest once it regained Sinai on 25 April. But that effort faded and Haig waited a month after Israel withdrew from Sinai to talk about accelerating the autonomy effort as a step towards resolving the Palestine problem.

Meanwhile, Washington continued to insist Hussein to negotiate on behalf of the Palestinians. The PNC of February 1983 rejected the idea but approved the establishment of a confederation between Jordan and an independent Palestine state. The King could not persuade the Palestinian leaders to enter into talks under his auspices and Washington or self-
determination. Thus, there was a diplomatic stalemate on the Palestinian front and the credibility of moderate Palestinians was damaged.

Rather than analysing the basic causes of Washington's diplomatic failure in Lebanon and the polarization in the region, Reagan's speech in October 1983 signalled rejection of the search for a comprehensive peace and the return to a one-dimensional approach. On 29 November 1983 Reagan and the new Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir signed a strategic cooperation accord that went well beyond the agreement reached in late 1981. Three joint groups were set up: political-military, economic development and in 1986, security assistance planning. By 1987 more than twenty-four military technical agreements were made. Moreover, Israel was designated a major non-NATO ally, which codified its de facto status and opened up greater possibilities for Israel to sell military equipment to the US. In addition to high level strategic coordination in the eastern Mediterranean and Middle East, Israel covertly assisted the Reagan Administration's policies elsewhere. Israel played a central role in the arms-for-hostages drama exposed in the Iran-Contra affair. Moreover, Israel was involved in providing arms directly to the Contra rebels after May 1983. The Department of Defence paid $ 10 million for arms and ammunition in the form of

24 Ibid.
weapons that Israel had captured from the PLO in 1982.25 When the Boland Amendment banned American aid to the Contras in mid 1984, the Administration continued to pay for Israel to arm them in return for which Washington agreed to be flexible and supportive towards Israel’s military and economic requirements. Such arms deals continued throughout 1986, despite the strains caused by the "pollard spy case", which revealed that a US government employee had provided vital information on Arab military sites to Israel’s intelligence service.

Thus the Reagan Administration followed the policy of Kissinger with renewed vigour. It formalized the status of Israel as a strategic ally of the US. The PLO was sought to be delegitimised. In its place, Jordan was propped up as the representative of the Palestinians.

Politically, however, it represented a major move of American involvement on Israel’s side, and since there was no corresponding pact signed with any Arab state, the US could no longer claim to act as an impartial mediator or arbiter in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The strategic cooperation agreement aroused much resentment in the Middle East. It was formally reconfirmed at the time of Reagan’s second peace initiative, on April 21, 1988.

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Israeli Invasion of Lebanon

Since 24 July 1981, Israel had attacked many times the joint force positions and civilian targets in Lebanon, in clear violation of the cease-fire. However, the Palestinians had generally observed their side of the cease-fire. But in June 1982, Palestinians artillery units in southern Lebanon started shelling targets inside northern Israel for the first time in over ten months in reprisal against Israeli air attack on 4 June.

On 6 June 1982, Israeli army launched a major invasion of Lebanon which the Israeli government named "operation peace for Galilee". Israel's defense minister General Ariel Sharon, had initiated the invasion (with Premier Begin's and Likud Party's concurrence) with two strategic objectives. (i) To destroy the existing military formations of the Palestine, and (ii) to establish a Maronite ruled state in Lebanon that would form an alliance with Israel and Cede to it Lebanon's territory south of the Litan River Likud's longer-range plans envisaged inducing the Palestinian militants to over-throw King Hussein's monarchy in Jordan and replace it with their own political structure.\(^\text{26}\)

Israeli invasion did not exactly surprise the Reagan Administration though Haig gave "green light" for the invasion. The White House claimed that it had understood that Israeli forces would only move 40 kilometers (25 miles) into

Lebanon to secure their northern border and thus ensure "peace for Galilee", but that the Israeli had never indicated that they would drive all the way to Beirut. The invasion left 15,000 Lebanese and Palestinians dead; 600 Israeli troops were killed in the same period.

George Shultz took advantage of the somewhat improved situation in Lebanon to convince a reluctant Ronald Reagan to become involved in wider diplomatic efforts in the region by announcing "on September 1, 1982 a plan for the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Rejecting Israeli annexation of the occupied territories as well as the idea of an independent Palestinian state, the Reagan plan called for an association of the West Bank, Gaza, and Jordan. The plan met with a mixed reception - negative from Israel, less from the Arabs who responded almost immediately with their own plan based on an Arab League summit meeting held at Fez, Morocco. The assassination of President Gemayel just two weeks after the plan was announced, and in reappraisal. The systematic murder of hundreds of Palestinians in refugee camps of "Sabra and Shatila". The outskirts of Beirut, the Reagan peace initiative, was buried".27

On August 18, 1982 with the help of American mediation, an agreement was reached between the Lebanese and the PLC on a cease-fire and the evacuation of the PLO from Lebanon.

Israel accepted the plan. The Palestinians fighters were to be dispersed in various Arab countries, as far as South Yemen. (They transferred the PLO headquarters to Tunisia). The evacuation began on 21 August. To ensure smooth implementation of the agreement, a multinational peace force consisting of U.S., French and Italian troops was dispatched to Lebanon. It contained an American contingent of 800 marines took up positions in the port district to Beirut.

The American component of a multinational force was to be present in Lebanon for thirty days but, owing to a rather prompt evacuation of the PLO, it was withdrawn after seventeen days.

By the time a new trend appeared in American policy to end hostilities, both President and Haig began to refer to the Lebanese events as a "new opportunity" for peace. Many Lebanese misfortunes stemmed from interference of foreign elements in its politics. Two reservations regarding this concept, first, a controversial invasion of one country by another opportunity for peace, second, the conception of concurrent evacuation of all foreign forces from Lebanon that had brought these forces into Lebanon. There was difference between the presence of Syrian troops and the Israeli forces. Syria was an Arab country, as was Lebanon and its presence.

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there was sanctioned by the Arab League. 29

The war generated substantial controversy in the US-Israel relationship. A persuasive case can be made that the US, aware of Israel's concerns about the situation, made no significant effort to discourage Israeli action. Zeev Schiff, one of Israel's foremost military commentators has summed up the situation in these terms:

Although the Americans sounded circumlocutory warnings for public consumption, the American nay was so feeble that the Israelis regarded it merely as a diplomatic maneuver designed to exonerate the US should the military operation go sour. Based on trustworthy intelligence, Israel was confident that the US would welcome a military operation in Lebanon if it struck at the base of Moscow's allies - the Palestine (PLO) and Syria - without resorting to dangerous extremes. 30

The Administration's initial response to the war was that the United States did not collude with Israel and did not welcome the Habib, nor did it condemn it. Ambassador Habib was responsible for securing the termination of hostilities between Israel and the PLO. He also brought about the lifting of the Siege of Beirut, arranged cease-fire, and negotiations and the withdrawal of the PLO from Beirut. Yasser Arafat agreed, as early as 3 July.

As a result of the negotiations, US mediator Philip Habib


30 Zeev Schiff, "The Green Light" Foreign Policy, no.50 (Spring 1983, 73-95), p.33 ff.
presented a written guarantee. It was contained in a document which had been agreed to by the PLO and the governments of Lebanon and the US, and was subsequently published by the State Department. This document provided for the ground-rules for the PLO fighters' evacuation from Beirut, and for the deployment of the multi-national force under whose auspices this evacuation would take place; the US France and Italy were all to contribute units to this force. The document also stated:

Law-abiding Palestinians non combatants left behind in Beirut, including the families of those who have departed, will be subject to Lebanese laws and regulations. The Governments of Lebanon and the US will provide appropriate guarantees of safety in the following ways.

The Lebanese government will provide its guarantees on the basis of having secured assurances from armed groups which it has been in touch.

The US will provide its guarantees on the basis of assurances received from the Government of Israel and from the leadership of certain Lebanese groups with which it has been in touch.31

On the basis of these guarantees, the first contingent of PLO fighters set sail from Beirut on 21 August 1982, bound for Cyprus on 30 August Arafat embarked on a ship to Athens. The PLO began to have for Tunisia, Syria, Sudan, Algeria, North Yemen, South Yemen, Jordan and Iraq on the same day, and the evacuations was completed by September. Subsequently U.S.

31 Juliana S. Peck, no.18, p.70.
troops withdrew from Lebanon (on 11 September), as did the Italians and French soon thereafter.

On October 23, 1983, a truck loaded with 2,500 pounds of TNT drove into the U.S. marine head-quarters in Beirut causing a massive explosion. 265 Marines were killed. The suicidal driver was probably an Iranian - backed Shiited Moslem. In justifying Americans presence President Reagan stated that "the US had vital interest in Lebanon and that American troops were there to prevent the Middle East from becoming incorporated into the Soviet block". 32 The vitality aspect of the American presence in Lebanon seems to have evaporated: If a collapse of order were to occur in Lebanon Reagan explained, it would be a reason for the marines to leave. 33 By February 1984 the marines were evacuated from Lebanon soon after-ward, on March 5, Gemayel's Lebanese governments, out of considerations for Syrian and domestic Moslem sensitivities, cancelled its May 17, 1983, agreement with Israel. And as before, Israel continued to control its "security Zone" in Southern Lebanon.

**Syrian Missile Crisis and the USA**

The emplacement of missiles in Lebanon by Syria in April 1981, in apparent violation of tacit agreements worked out in the mid 1970s, when Syrian forces had been sent into Lebanon

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33 George Lenczowski, n.29, 224.
in connection with the civil war.

The movement of missiles into Lebanon was a result of clashes between Syrian forces and the Phalangists near the city of Zahlah. An artillery battle in early April 1981 was followed by Syrian air strikes against Phalangist positions. Israel came to the aid of Phalangists by attacking Syrians positions and shooting down to Syrian helicopters on April 28. The next day Syrian moved SAM-3 and SAM-6 (Surface-to-air) missiles into the Lebanese Bekka Valley. This move of the Syrian Government drew the U.S. government into a more direct involvement in Lebanon's tumultuous affairs than it had at any time since Americans marines had landed there in 1958.14

According to Menachem Begin, "the Israelis had originally planned to destroy the SAM batteries at once, with air strikes, but bad weather had delayed them. While the Israelis waited for the aware of the political dangers of a direct Israeli-Syrian confrontation in Lebanon".15

The US sought to end the confrontation in the region to diffuse the crisis and prevent conflict. The immediate concern was to avert an Israeli strike at the missiles. On April 29 State Department spokesman Dean Fischer said that the United


States had not given a "green light" - an apparent effort to clarify an impression given earlier by National Security Adviser Richard Allen that "hot pursuit reaching the source of terrorism is justified".\textsuperscript{36}

Philip Habib, the US special envoy to the Middle East, made a series of visits to Jerusalem and Damascus during May. An attempt to work out a compromise formula to persuade Saudi Arabia to encourage the Syrians to modify their position. Instead, Saudi Arabia opened a round of inter-Arab negotiations aimed at reaching agreement on the main points of a comprehensive Lebanese settlement, which would then make it easier to solve the crisis caused by the missiles. The settlement envisaged was to be based on the conclusions of the Beiteddine conference of 1978 with provisions for the future relations between the Lebanese factions, between Syria and Lebanon, and between the Palestinians and the Lebanese government. Meanwhile, inter-Arab relations, which had deteriorated since the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war, improved and at a meeting of Arab Ministers of Foreign Affairs, in Tunis on 23 May, Syria received the almost unanimous backing of the Arab world.\textsuperscript{37} The direct US involvement in Lebanon thus initiated was to play a major role in developments over the following two years and thereby also

\textsuperscript{36} Reagan Imprint, n.34, p.97.

in the affairs of the PLO, for which Lebanon constituted a major military base until August 1982.

The PLO declared its opposition to the Habib mission. A statement issued on 8 May by the PLO news agency, Wafa said that,

"Because of the US support for Israel, the US can be neither arbiter nor mediator, for it is one of the foremost parties involved in the missile crisis. Nevertheless, the State Department disclosed that it had contacted UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim to convey to all parties to the conflict (that is including PLO)... the need for moderation and restraint". 38

Indirect contact thereafter continued between the two sides, dealing mainly with the situation in Lebanon, and conducted both through the UN channel and through Saudi, and later on also through Egyptian mediator.

On 10 July, an Israel air raid against South Lebanon left one dead and six wounded; the joint forces retaliated by shelling a north Israeli settlement wounding 14. The casualty toll in Lebanon from Israel; responses them soared steeply. On 17 July, the Israeli air force bombed areas controlled by the Joint Forces in West Beirut itself. 39

The news from Beirut brought Habib (who had been discussing the Syrian SAM's in Saudi Arabia) hurrying back to Levant. On 19 July he met Begin in Jerusalem to ask about Israeli conditions for a cease-fire in Lebanon; then he met

38  Helena Cobban, n.35, p.110.
39  Ibid., p.111.
briefly with Lebanese officials in Beirut before returning to Saudi Arabia, this time reportedly to seek the Saudi help in obtaining PLO commitment to a cease-fire in Lebanon. The Beirut raid thus served to spur Reagan into broadening Habib's mandate from one centering on the question of the Syrian missiles in the Bekka to one encompassing the whole wide security issue in Lebanon, in which the increasingly direct Israeli-Palestinian confrontation. There was a major factor. But the US mediator still remained unable to undertake any direct contacts with the PLO, instead, he stepped up his existing UN and Saudi channels.

The same day that Habib returned to Levant, the PLO Executive Committee (EC) held a meeting in Beirut, following which the PLO's Voice of Palestine (VOP) radio station reported, "the PLO Executive Committee considers the US to be the first responsible party for Begin's crimes against our people and the fraternal Lebanese people. However, on 21 July the UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim sent a message to Arafat asking for PLO agreement to an immediate cease-fire in Lebanon. That same day too Reagan was reported as sending a "very firm" message to Premier Begin making the same request.40

By 24 July, Habib's efforts appeared to have been successful in containing the threatened explosion in Lebanon. Speaking in Jerusalem, Habib announced, "I have today

40 Ibid.
reported to President Reagan that as of 1330 local time (1130 GMT) 24 July 1981, all hostile military actions between Lebanese and Israeli territories in either direction will cease". Premier Begin thereupon confirmed that "the Government of Israel endorses the statement just made by Mr. Philip Habib". Five minutes later, the VOP was broadcasting the revolution reaffirms the position conveyed to the UN Secretary-General in the wake of his call for a cease-fire, which is to abide by it as well. Despite the cover of a UN role which was draped over these negotiations, it nevertheless remained clear that the July 1981 cease-fire represented another watershed for the Palestinians. It was the PLO’s most explicit acceptance of a direct US mediating role and conversely, for the US, it was its most explicit recognition to date of the necessity of involving the PLO in issues of Middle Eastern war and peace.

At first there was some fear that the PLO’s acceptance of the cease-fire might not be unanimous. On 25 July, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command a statement saying that it did not consider itself bound by the cease-fire, and over the next few days, the PFLP-GC units continued to shell areas controlled by Saad Haddad’s pro-Israeli militia in South Lebanon. Two days later, Arafat met Jibril, in the presence of Lebanese leftist Muhsin Ibrahim.

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41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
The VOP subsequently described the mood of their meeting as very frank but during it the cease fire decision issued by the Lebanese-Palestinian joint command was reaffirmed Jibril's infractions of the cease-fire and ceased by 29 July.\textsuperscript{43}

Once these initial teething troubles had been dealt with and despite the varying interpretations placed upon the cease-fire by the PLO and the Israelis with the former claiming it covered nothing outside Southern Lebanon, and the latter claiming it covered any action taken against Israeli targets anywhere in the world - it proved effective for further ten months in preventing another all-out Israeli Palestinian confrontation in Lebanon.

United States Aid to Israel–Jordan (Middle East)

Soon after President Ronald Reagan was sworn in for his second consecutive term of office, in the continuity of his administration's policy towards the Middle East, the Israel continued to be a strategic ally whose security was one of the prime concerns of the US was made obvious when Reagan agreed on 30 January 1985 to increase the US military aid to Israel by $400 million to $1800 million for the 1986 fiscal year.\textsuperscript{44} While requesting foreign assistance for 1986, George Shultz said in a statement before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on 9 February:

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{44} *Middle East and North Africa, 1993*, p.45.
Our foreign assistance request for fiscal year (FY) 1986 comes...at a time when his Administration and Congress are bringing our budget deficits down...

(However) our request for military assistance - that it, direct foreign military sales (FMS) credits and grant military assistance programme (MAP) - is $860 million more than was appropriated in 1986. Most of this increase, $525 million, is accounted for by higher levels for Israel ($1.8 billion as opposed to $1.4 billion in 1985) and Egypt.43

On 30 January 1985, the Administration bowed to pressure from the pro-Israeli lobby and delivered what appeared to be a deliberate snub to Saudi Arabia, its most important Arab ally. Less than two weeks before King Fahd of Saudi Arabia was to pay a state visit to Washington, it was announced that the sale of 40 F-15 fighter bombers to Saudi Arabia had been postponed pending a review of US arms sale to the Middle East.46 Instances like this resulted in America's closest allies feeling betrayed and humiliated. The Deputy Minister for Information Affairs of the Saudi Arabia, Dr. Fouad A. al-Farsy, made the following remarks:

American presents herself as an honest broker between Israel and the Arab world (more correctly, between Israel and the moderate Arab countries). But America takes as her basic premises that when the chips are down, Israel's interests must take precedence. When an Arab country asks to buy weapons... even a country like Saudi Arabia, which has shown itself to be tireless in seeking diplomatic solutions to the problems of the

region... America is quite likely to say no, because AIPAC fears the weapons could one day be used against Israel. The refusal of your (American) congress to supply arms to one of its best customers is puzzling to say that least... of course, in terms of arms supplies, America can do as she pleases. But she cannot pretend to be politically impartial. She cannot expect the Arab world to accept her as an "honest broker" when she is so clearly swayed by Israel's interest.

And what are the consequences of America's partiality towards Israel? They are entirely predictable. The first and most immediate result is that America's Arab friends are forced to look elsewhere for arms - and for a less biased view of the Middle East and its problems. 47

During the eight years of the Reagan Administration, US-Israeli partnership was extensively dependent and strengthened in a variety of situations, it was apparent. The US repeatedly vetoed Security Council Resolution critical of Israel. On 8 January 1988, a resolution condemning an Israeli attack on Lebanon was vetoed by the US. On 24 March, it abstained on a resolution condemning the assassination of PLO official Khalil al-Wazir. 48 Only once in eight years did the Reagan Administration support a resolution of the UN critical of Israel. On 5 January 1988, the US voted in support of Resolution 607, which urged Israel to comply with the International Red Cross's Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, concerning the treatment of civilians in war-times and to


abandon its plans to deport nine Palestinian activists from the occupied territories. Israel, however, ultimately deported them.

The US Administration announced in mid June 1985 that Jordan would receive additional aid worth $250,000,000 over the next three years, in recognition of the Jordanian government’s contribution to the search for a "diplomatic solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict". Approximately $160,000,000 would be allocated to support Jordan's community import programme. Prior to the announcement, existing US aid to Jordan for 1985 amounted to $112,000,000.

In September 1985 President Reagan revived a plan to sell US arms $1900 million to Jordan. In October 1985, the Senate voted by 97 votes to one to delay the sale until 1 March, unless Jordan agreed to enter direct peace talks with Israel.\(^{49}\) On 12 November the House of Representatives adopted a similar resolution and President Reagan signed the measure into law on 25 November.\(^{50}\) This only went to show the extent to which the Reagan Administration could go to prop up Jordan, secure in the knowledge that it would effectively bar the PLO from entering into peace process. A rapprochement that started developing from October between Syria and Jordan forced the hands of King Hussein in not toeing the American

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\(^{50}\) "Arms Sale to Jordan", *Department of State Bulletin*, vol.86, no.2107, Feb 1986, p.89.
line. After discussions between Administration officials and Senate leaders at the end of January 1986, President Reagan on 3 February announced the indefinite suspension of the sale. The decision was taken after more than 80 senators 270 members of the House of Representatives had indicated that they would oppose the sale.

When Peres visited Washington, he said on 17 October that he was ready to hold talks with Jordanian officials without preconditions, and that he would be willing to make "territorial compromises" in the search for peace. In a speech to the UN General Assembly on 21 October, he said that Israel was willing to end the State of war with Jordan and to negotiate with a Jordanian-Palestinian delegation within the framework of an international forum under the auspices of the UN Security Council. Because of the developing rapprochement between it and Syria, Jordan rejected such "partial and unilateral" peace settlements.

Murphy was reported in late October to have held secret talks with King Hussein in an effort to find common ground between Israel and Jordan on the question of the proposed international peace conference. But thanks to the rapprochement nothing came out of it. And by this time the Senate had voted to block all proposed arms sale. Reagan Administration, previously stressing on direct negotiations, now became somewhat amenable to international peace conference after Peres hinted at it in his speech at the General
Assembly. The Reagan Administration seemed to be saying that Israel knew it best. And for Israel’s security, it received $2,600 million in financial and military aid from the US during 1985. The two countries cooperated in development work on submarines and on Israel’s Lavi fighter aircraft. This aircraft was launched on 21 July 1986. A free-trade agreement, providing for the removal of all tariffs within 10 years, was signed on 23 April 1985, during a visit to Washington by Ariel Sharon, the Israeli Trade and Industry Minister. Before this, the US "never concluded an agreement of this kind".51

In order to look evenhanded and to thwart increasing Soviet influence in the Middle East, the Reagan Administration, in January 1986, undertook to invite the PLO to the international peace conference provided it publicly accepted Resolution 242 and 339 as the basis for negotiations.52 The US proposal was that non-PLO Palestinians take part in the preparatory stages of any conference, to be replaced by PLO delegates as and when the organization had accepted the UN Resolutions. This proposal was inevitably rejected by Arafat during his talks with King Hussein.

A year of coordination between Jordan and the Palestine ended in February 1986 after the breakdown of talks between

Arafat and King Hussein. In a speech on 19 February, the King announced the abrogation of the Jordanian-Palestinian accord on 11 February 1985. The principal sticking point between the two sides during the talks was Palestine’s refusal to endorse Resolution 242 without a simultaneous acknowledgement of the right of the Palestinians to self-determination. King Hussein pressurized, cajoled and persuaded Arafat to accept Resolution 242 and 338 (as was intended by the US) and Arafat persistently refused to do so unless Palestinian’s right to self-determination was recognized. After the collapse of the accord, King Hussein tried to create a Palestinian constituency independent of Arafat. This was to the expansion of the Jordanian House of Representatives from 60 to 142 seats was approved by the House on 27 March 1986, and by the Jordanian Senate at the end of April. Of these seats, 71 could be for East Bank constituencies and 60 for those on the West Bank (a 1984 Jordanian constitutional amendment had provided for parliamentary representation of the West Bank Palestinians), with the remaining 11 to be elected by West Bank Palestinians currently living in refugee camps in the East bank. The activities of the Palestine members in the country were henceforth to be restricted to an even greater extent than before, and a number of officers of Fatah, loyal to Arafat, were expelled. Arafat was ordered to close his main Palestine (PLO) offices in Jordan by 1 April. And, with Israeli for the West bank and Gaza Strip was introduced in
August 1986. Thus at this point of time the interests of Israel, US and Jordan coincided. Jordan became a partner in US-Israeli ties. By December 1987 the United States provided $185 million in assistance for the initiative of King Hussein. 53

With the assumption of premiership by Itzhak Shamir on 20 October 1986, the convening of an international peace conference became a distant reality. While introducing the new government to the Knesset, he stressed that no international forum can serve as a substitute for direct negotiations, while Peres, now his deputy, and Foreign Minister, vainly said that he could not abandon the idea of an international conference. However, he somewhat modified his position when he said the following February 11, 1985 agreement that an international conference should be convened in 1987 leading to direct negotiations.