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Syria and Israel in the Middle East: an Anatomy of the Conflict

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Syria and Israel in the Middle East: an Anatomy of the Conflict

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Summary

My research focuses on two case studies, namely, Syria and Israel in their strategic security interactions. The main questions I shall attempt to answer in this study are: what are the sources of the perpetual Syrian-Israeli enmity, and what are the perspectives for peace between these two states?

In attempting to answer these questions, this study shall be laid out as follows:

In the first Chapter of my study, I shall start by tracing the principal characteristics in past trends of Syrian and Israeli security policies. I shall demonstrate that both Syria and Israel have applied various strategies in managing their conflict, ranging from independent arms-based policies to reliance on major power patrons, to alliances with other regional powers. It will become clear that the two states altered their policies as regional and global political circumstances changed and as the relative decreasing effectiveness of existing policies became evident. This Chapter should be looked at, therefore, as an essential but brief survey of the Syrian-Israeli conflict. For most of the chapter, I shall cover the period between 1967-1995. I selected the year 1967 as the starting point for my examination because it was the year in which the Israeli-Syrian conflict has officially started with the occupation of the Golan Heights by Israel.

In the second Chapter, I shall examine the different confines of the conflict. These will include (a) the territorial dimension of the Syrian-Israeli conflict, (b) the military capabilities and strength of each state and the on-going arms race between the two countries, and finally, (c) the Israeli and Syrian standpoint of each other; what I shall be calling "the ideological imperative" of the conflict.

In the third Chapter of this thesis, I shall present the two main perspectives on ways to resolve the Syrian-Israeli conflict; being the Syrian and Israeli ones. Therefore, in the first part, I shall discuss the Syrian stand in the peace negotiations and its perception of peace. In the second part, I shall discuss the Israeli stand and its own definition of peaceful relations with Syria. In the last part, I shall present why, in my opinion, the peace negotiations have failed in achieving peace.

The conclusion of the thesis shall introduce an important but less known position arguing that the U.S. has failed in its attempts to achieve peace in the region, and, therefore, the only solution to the problem is that a new superpower should intervene. The purpose of this conclusion is to demonstrate that a greater involvement of the EU in the Middle East will help achieve peace in the region. My conclusion will reflect upon past experience and future trends.

Sommaire

L'objectif premier de cette recherche est de traiter des relations et des interactions stratégiques et militaires entre la Syrie et l'Israël. Nous nous interrogeons notamment sur les causes du conflit israélo-syrien depuis 1967 et sur les différentes perspectives de la paix mises en œuvre entre les deux états.

Notre démarche consiste dans un premier chapitre à présenter les principales caractéristiques des politiques de sécurité de la Syrie et de l'Israël. Ces deux pays ont appliqué un certains nombre de stratégies tant militaires que non militaires avec l'aide et le recours à des alliances avec les puissances régionales et mondiales. Ces stratégies ont cependant montré leurs défaillances dans le temps, ou au fur et à mesure que le contexte régional et international changeait. Ce premier chapitre se veut être un résumé du conflit israélo-syrien et une présentation des principaux acteurs qui l'ont initié. Nous limiterons l'analyse des années 1967 à 1995, c'est-à-dire entre le début de l'occupation du Golan par Israël et la fin des négociations entre l'Israël et la Syrie.

Dans un second chapitre nous examinons les différentes dimensions du conflit israélo-syrien. Cela comprend (a) la dimension territoriale du conflit, (b) les capacités et force militaires des deux états et la perpétuelle course aux armements entre eux, et finalement, (c) la dimension idéologique du conflit.

Dans un troisième chapitre nous verrons les principales positions et visions qu'ont les deux pays dans l'instauration de la paix entre eux. Nous présenterons également les raisons pour lesquelles les négociations de paix ont échoué entre la Syrie et l'Israël.

La conclusion du mémoire introduira une perspective importante mais moins connue sur la résolution du conflit. Cette perspective argumente que les Etats-Unis ont échoué dans l'établissement de la paix dans la région et déduit que la seule solution pour le problème serait l'intervention d'une nouvelle puissance mondiale. Le but de cette conclusion est de démontrer qu'une intervention plus importante de l'Union Européenne dans le Moyen Orient aidera à établir la paix dans la région. Ma conclusion reflétera l'expérience du passé et les tendances du futur.

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Introduction

The end of the Cold War and its consequence on the global security system requires us to re-examine the international policies of the Middle East for one main reason: The Middle East is a region that has been long torn by conflicts but which, in the early 1990s, has moved away from being an intractable or difficult region to witnessing the opportunities of peacefully resolving its most enduring and viable disputes. [1] To be sure, the Palestinian Intifada in the late 1980s and the US-led Gulf War in 1991 have led the way for a possible shift towards a peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Some have gone so far as to suggest that we may be at the dawn of a new era and at the dawn of a "New Middle East".[2] However, after the Madrid peace conference in 1991 and the Oslo peace accords in 1993, followed by seven years of negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, and intermittent negotiations between the Israelis and the Syrians, we have witnessed a major setback in the region demonstrated by a second Palestinian Intifada and the election of the right wing candidate, Ariel Sharon, to power in Israel.

These events, it is believed, leave us with a true image of the state of regional security in the Middle East because they demonstrate that the fundamental enmities of the region that appeared to be on their way to resolution are, indeed, as dangerous and as precarious as they were more than fifty years ago.

This shift in international politics and the latest setback in the Middle East beg upon us to conduct yet another examination of the relations between the warring parties. However, an exhaustive examination of the interaction between all parties falls outside the scope of this study. Therefore, we shall limit ourselves to focusing on two of these parties; namely, Syria and Israel.

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[1] Zeev Ma'oz, "Editor's Introduction", *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 20, No.1, 1997, p. v.
[2] *Ibid.*

These two states were chosen because it has been stated that "no Arab-Israeli war is possible without Egypt, and no Arab-Israeli peace is possible without Syria".[3] In other words, if the Middle East peace process is to be 'comprehensive', 'stable', and 'durable', a political settlement between the two states is needed. This is especially true, because in many respects, after the signing of the Camp David Accords in 1978 between the Egyptians and the Israelis, the Arab-Israeli conflict has practically become a 'Syrian-Israeli confrontation'.[4] In fact, during the 1980s and early 1990s, Syria and Israel became the major actors in the Middle East conflict for two main reasons: they are the principal rivals with respect to the Golan Heights on the one hand, and the main rivals over influence in Lebanon and the Palestinian people on the other. "Indeed, Israel and Syria each control large sections of the Palestinian people and both are thus able greatly to affect the settlement of the Palestinian problem –the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict-as well as of the current peace process".[5] But, more importantly, Syria and Israel are also main rivals over the unstated issue of who will prevail not only in the Middle East, but also in the whole Levant. Therefore, it is safe to argue that if Syria and Israel do not reach a peace agreement, the entire region will continue being driven by turmoil. This, not only keeps the region in an enduring conflict, but also affects today's major world powers, such as the United States and the European Union, by putting them in a constant *political* and *economic* unrest, thus, negatively affecting the whole world economy.

Here, the main questions I shall attempt to answer are: What are the sources of the Syrian-Israeli enmity? How workable and just would peace negotiations be if they do not

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[3] Moshe Ma'oz, *Syria and Israel: From War to Peacemaking*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), see preface. Moshe Ma'oz is Israel's main Syriologist.
[4] Moshe Ma'oz, "Syria, Israel and the Peace Process", in Barry Rubin (eds.), *From War to Peace: Arab-Israeli Relations*, (New York University Press, 1994), p. 157.

reflect a realistic perception of the causes of the conflict, and what are the perspectives for peace between the two states? In other words what are the positions of Damascus and Tel Aviv in the peace process, notably concerning the Golan Heights and a peace settlement? In addition, I shall ask if negotiations could solve the problem and how?

In attempting to answer these questions, I seek to demonstrate that, despite all the animosity between the two states and the failure of the peace process under American tutelage, peace is reachable only if the peace negotiations and solutions succeed in according comparable dignity to both countries. Thus, this study shall be designed as follows: In the first chapter of this thesis, I shall start out by tracing the principal characteristics of past Syrian and Israeli strategic interactions and security policies. I shall demonstrate that both Syria and Israel have applied various strategies in managing their conflict, ranging from independent arms-based policies to reliance on major power patrons, to alliances with other regional powers. It will become clear that the two states altered their policies as regional and global political circumstances changed and as the relative effectiveness of existing policies became evident. This chapter should be looked at as an essential historical background to be able to set the scene for the conflict. For most of the chapter, I shall cover the period between 1967 and 1995. I selected the year 1967 as the start point for my examination because, on the one hand, it was the year in which the Israeli-Syrian conflict officially started, with the Six-Day War and the occupation of the Golan Heights by Israel. On the other hand, it was the year in which the superpowers of the Cold War started taking a more active interest in the Middle East. However, we will still very briefly refer to the period between 1948 and 1967, since it is difficult to ignore the events that took place in that period, which had their effects on the

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[5] *Ibid.*, p.157.

post-1967 era. The argument throughout the chapter is that Syrian-Israeli strategies have only added to the animosity of the conflict and the feeling of insecurity of both peoples, instead of achieving security.

In the second chapter, I shall answer the question: what are the sources of the Syrian-Israeli enmity, by examining different dimensions of the conflict. The first dimension is the territorial one. This dimension comprises three main factors. The first factor is the geographic proximity between the two states and the occupied Golan Heights. As might be expected, Israel's lack of depth has exerted a powerful influence on the formation of its strategic doctrine. Israeli strategists adopted a preemptive offensive strategy rather than a defensive one, because the combination of densely populated areas and no territorial depth made it imperative that Israel fights all wars outside its borders. For Syria, this geographic proximity constitutes a problem solely in the case of the Israeli occupation of Lebanon and its presence in the Beka' valley, which places the Israeli army only 30 miles west of Damascus. As for the Golan, the core problem lies in the Israeli occupation and its effective annexation in 1981. The second factor is the demographic element. The fact that Israel has 25% of its population of Arab origin puts constraints on the maximum size of its armed forces that it can mobilize. The case is set to worsen for Israel. According to the World Bank (2000) estimate, by the year 2025, the population of Syria will number 30 million compared to Israel's 8 million. The third and final factor of the territorial dimension is the water problem. The shortage of fresh water supplies suffered by the two countries accentuates the feeling of mistrust between them. Lake Tiberias, which Israel now controls, will have to be shared if Israel returns the Golan Heights to Syria.

In the second section of the chapter, I shall examine the military capabilities and strength of each state. This section provides a quantitative study that helps examine the military dimension of the conflict for both Syria and Israel. This study will reveal some systematic patterns in the security policies of both Syria and Israel. As one would expect, their military expenditures rise in response to increases in their adversaries' military expenditures, therefore institutionalizing a sequence in which a prolonged arms race is followed by bursts of intense tensions and sometimes war. I shall demonstrate in this section that the Arab-Israeli conflict has shifted to become a Syrian-Israeli conflict and that the military capability is yet another cause of the wars for it produces a situation based upon the so-called security dilemma. The logic of the security dilemma is that, even though both Syria and Israel seem to be ready to establish peaceful relations, they are not assured of whether the other will follow a similar policy. Because of this uncertainty about the future intentions of the opponent, the two countries are constantly attempting to protect themselves by building up their armaments. This is interpreted as an aggressive policy, and thus as a danger for the other's territorial integrity in return. The reaction is then to increase defense capacities on the part of the neighboring nation; a reaction which then influences the defense policies of the first nation. The consequence is an arms race leading to more mistrust and fear and adding to aggravation between the two nations.

Finally, in the last section of this chapter, I shall study the Israeli and Syrian standpoint vis-à-vis each other; what I shall be calling the "ideological imperative" of the conflict. This dimension not only helps explain the increasing hostility between both countries and leads to constant failures in the peace process, but has also been the origin

of the start of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The function of this section is to explore the ways Arabism, the movement of Greater Syria, and Zionism are determining ideological components in Syrian and Israeli foreign policy. It will become clear that studying the ideological imperative of the conflict is very pertinent in promoting a better understanding of the full dimensions of the conflict. In addition, this section holds special importance as this dimension has not been fully examined –unlike the other confines of the conflict.

Throughout the chapter, I attempt to demonstrate that the military, territorial and ideological sources of the conflict have institutionalized a cycle of animosity between the two peoples, I argue, nullifying the possibility of peace if these sources are not acknowledged and neutralized during negotiations.

In the third chapter of the thesis, I shall present the different Israeli and Syrian perspectives on ways to resolve the dispute through an examination of the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations between 1991 and 1996. It should be noted that, many observers view the conflict between Israel and Syria as being embodied in the occupation of the Golan Heights by Israel. The problem of the Golan Heights, it is argued, means dealing with the a) the geographic proximity, b) the occupied land and c) the water issue, thus dealing with the feeling of insecurity of both states and their ideological imperatives; the very source of their hostility. According to this view[6], Israel's stand on resolving its conflict with Syria can be divided in two principal views: the right wing view adopts the position of rejecting any possibility of Israel's withdrawal from the Golan and expects the Syrians to abandon their demands of returning the Golan. The left wing agrees to a partial withdrawal from the Golan while keeping the Heights as a de-militarized zone with early

warning stations, pushing the Syrian forces back to the outskirts of Damascus. At the same time, the Israeli army would remain on the lip of the Golan fence or just below it in the Jordan Valley. Furthermore, two more demands are made: that Syria severs most of its relation with Iran, and that the size of the Syrian army be limited by a treaty. It is clear that this position is greatly influenced by the feeling of insecurity Israel has, as we would have previously discussed.

The Syrian position is based on the implementation of the "Peace for Land" formula stipulated in the UN Resolutions.[7] This principle includes: the full withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Golan Heights; the demilitarization of the entire zone with a demilitarized zone of the same depth on either side of the dividing line; the sharing of water resources from Lake Tiberias; and the implementation of UN Security Council resolution numbers 242 and 338. And even though demilitarization is accepted, the Syrians contend that they have peaceful borders with their neighbors, and in the case of signing a peace treaty with Israel, the Israelis have no right in asking for "early warning posts" in the Golan. This position is also greatly influenced by the feeling of insecurity Syria has as shown earlier. Thus, during the peace negotiations, several points were clear: Syria stated terms that are well known: a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, coupled with some, as yet unspecified, form of international monitoring process to supervise it and provide both sides with peace of mind. In return, it has offered a peace of the "full and comprehensive" variety.

Israel, on the other hand, is less equivocal. Bearing in mind the various constraints facing any Israeli government with regard to negotiating a settlement - not

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[6] See Samuel J. Roberts, *Party and Policy in Israel*, (London: Westview Press, Inc., 1990).
[7] See Helena Cobban, *The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, 1999).

least that of having to face the electorate with whatever deal it reaches - Israel is unwilling to make such a clear-cut commitment and is uneasy, for unknown reasons, about the prospects of foreign, even American, forces monitoring the situation in the Golan after it withdraws. I attempt to argue in this chapter that the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations, under American tutelage, have failed because: on the one hand, they were the continuation of war by other means rather than a decision to banish violence entirely from their relationship, and on the other, because the American side never acted as a broker, or as an enforcer, but as an Israeli patron and facilitator.

The conclusion introduces my perspective on resolving the Syrian-Israeli conflict. In this final part, I argue that the U.S. has failed in its attempts to achieve peace in the region, and therefore, in order to solve the Syrian-Israeli conflict in its many dimensions, a new superpower should intervene in order to impose a certain balance and a sense of security on both sides. The purpose of the section is to demonstrate that a bigger involvement of the European Union in the Middle East as a counter-balance to the U.S. will help achieve more stability in the region and therefore allow a greater chance of peace. My conclusion will reflect upon past experience and future trends. It will briefly sum up the main points of the thesis arguing that, under the current circumstances, even though a large-scale conventional war is unlikely between Syria and Israel, the possibilities for peace between the two States are almost nonexistent.

Chapter One:

A troubled Relationship: A Survey of the Syrian-Israeli Conflict

This chapter attempts to briefly examine Syrian-Israeli security policies from the Cold War era until the present. This chapter should be looked at as a brief survey of the Syrian and Israeli strategies that allows us to set the scene for the conflict. For this, and in order to show the growth and change in the course of Syrian and Israeli security, I will be presenting both the Israeli and the Syrian positions in time epochs. Ultimately, the main argument the chapter defends is that the strategies both Syria and Israel had adopted vis-à-vis each other were not only costly and risky, but also failed to achieve the physical and psychological security both states sought.

A- <u>Evolution of Syrian Security Policies</u>

After the Syrians fought their war of independence from French occupation, the country plunged into a frenzy of military coups that prevented it from having a stable government, and thus an independent security policy. The leaders at that time focused their attention on building the country and strengthening their position in power. However, even Syrian foreign policy has been characterized mainly by an enduring anti-western and anti-Zionist policy translated into a great animosity towards the creation of Israel[8] for two main reasons: First, in the wake of the 1917 Arab revolt, Syrians expected the creation of an independent Arab state in Bilad al-Sham (historic Syria). Instead, Bilad al-Sham was divided by the colonizing western powers at that time into four mini-states: Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine.[9]

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[8] Raymond Hinnebusch, "Revisionist Dreams, Realist Strategies", in B. Korany & Ali E. Dessouki (eds.), *The Foreign Policies of Arab States*, (London: Westview Press, Inc., 1984), p. 283.
[9] See A.L. Tibawi, *A Modern History of Syria*, (London: Macmillan, 1969), chapter 8-11.

Secondly, Syrians' belief that without western colonization, the state of Israel would have never been established in the land of Palestine. It was only in 1958 that Syria united with Egypt to form the United Arab Republic. In that period, the Syrians surrendered their security policy to the Egyptians under Jamal Abdel Nasser. That union broke up after only three years and a Ba'thist government took power in Damascus. The Syrians began once again to pursue their own security policies, which comprised avoiding any military confrontation with external powers and building to legitimize Syrian independence.[10] In 1966, however, a coup d'Etat was staged by a group of neo-Bat'thists who transformed Syria's security policy to become a more aggressive and radical one. The Ba'thists viewed historical Palestine as part of the Arab world and considered Israel to be an alien entity planted in the region by colonial powers to control and weaken the Arab world. Therefore, they sought and succeeded in signing a defense pact with Egypt in 1966 in order to try to contain Israel and defeat it eventually.[11] Their strategy was based on a war of the people in which Israeli military superiority would be neutralized by numerically superior Arab masses and armies. Therefore, Syria, under the Ba'th party, started to train Palestinian guerillas and attempted to export to the rest of the Arab world the idea that the Arab masses can actually topple the western-financed Arab regimes and free their land to achieve unity.[12] However, the Six-Day War launched by Israel in 1967 shattered their dreams.

The 1967 war resulted in the loss of the Golan Heights on one hand, and the rest of historical Palestine on the other. The Syrian defeat generated intense new security

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[10] Gerald Sorokin, "Patrons, Clients and Allies in the Arab-Israeli Conflict", *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1, p. 59.
[11] *Ibid.*
[12] Raymond Hinnebusch, "Revisionist Dreams, Realist Strategies", p. 304.

fears. The Syrian defense minister at that time, Hafez al-Assad, realized the military inequality between Syria and Israel, and was determined to rectify it. One point that should be noted, however, is that while Egypt and Israel were engaged in a war of attrition, Syria and Israel did not clash directly. The Six-Day War revealed a serious weakness in Syrian military strength, and added another difficulty for Syrian military planners, while making the Syrian people feel more insecure than ever. The loss of the Golan Heights meant that the Syrians lost their high-ground strategic advantage over the Israeli army, and that Israeli forces were posted at a very uncomfortable distance from the Syrian capital.

In November 1970, Hafez al-Assad rose to power in a military coup d'Etat which marked another phase in Syria's political and military state. He succeeded in building a relatively stable regime, and became an important actor in the Arab political arena.

Assad was a Ba'thist who considered the threat from Israel unambiguous, and in Moshe Ma'oz's words, after he came to power, "Assad's major priority was quickly and systematically to build a strong army and prepare it for a war against Israel. He believed that this would enable him to negotiate with Israel from a position of military strength." However, Assad believed that training and arming the Palestinian guerillas was too costly to Syria. He maintained that if Syria was to achieve its security goals, it should focus on building its army and allying itself with Egypt and the rich Gulf countries. Also, he believed that the Syrians needed to forget about exporting their ideological revolution to the rest of the Arab world since the main struggle was now with Israel and not with the

other Arab regimes.[13] Therefore, Assad's policy towards Israel, as shaped over the years, has comprised two basic components:

> On the one hand, there was an extremist and dogmatic attitude, manifest in the refusal to recognize Israel's right to exist and in the desire to vanquish it militarily. On the other hand, there was a pragmatic approach, made manifest in a series of understandings with Israel that eventually even included readiness to enter into negotiations for a settlement with it (...).[14]

To translate his policy into action, Assad started to modernize the Syrian army, and forged a client-patron relationship with the Soviet Union. In 1972-1973, Syria acquired a large amount of arms from the Soviet Union, and the number of Soviet military advisors in Syria increased.[15] However, Syria never wanted to sign a formal treaty with the Soviet Union in order to retain some political flexibility, especially to retain its ties with the Arab states upon whose financial aid Syria relied – mainly Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states.

In October 1973, Syria and Egypt started a sudden offensive against Israel simultaneously on the Syrian and Egyptian fronts. A limited military success was achieved at the outset, but then the divergence of Egyptian and Syrian interests in the war gave the advantage to the Israelis especially when the Egyptians decided to halt their offensive which enabled Israel to divert its military core from the Egyptian front to the Syrian one. Added to this was the American airlift of supplies to Israel. The result of the war was the inability of Syria to achieve a military advantage vis-à-vis Israel, its failure to recapture the occupied Golan Heights, and the intensification of security fears on the part of the Syrian people.

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[13] *Ibid.*

[14] Efraim Inbar, *Regional Security Regimes*, (New York: State University Press, 1995), p. 153.

[15] Gerald Sorokin, "Patrons, Clients and Allies in the Arab-Israeli Conflict", p. 61.

The realities of this war gave more sustenance to the pragmatic approach, and Assad often expressed the hope of retrieving the Golan Heights through negotiations, even at the price of a settlement with Israel. However, Assad probably envisaged a non-belligerency agreement rather than a full peace treaty with Israel. Despite the aberration of Egyptian and Syrian goals during the war, Syria kept a close alliance with Egypt and carried through its strategic patron-client relationship with the Soviet Union. A hard abd sudden change in policy was forced upon Syria once again in 1978 when Egypt, under Sadat, signed the Camp David peace treaty with Israel. This meant that Syria could no longer rely on Egypt for military support if it wanted to continue its anti-American and anti-Zionist policies. Thus, through the period between the Yom Kippur War and the signing of the Camp David agreement, Syria's increase in real GDP by two-thirds was diverted by the Syrian government to increase military expenditure.[16] After Camp David, specifically in 1980, Syria signed a friendship treaty with the Soviet Union in an attempt to achieve strategic parity with Israel unilaterally, without any Arab backing.

The next stage in the growth and change of the Syrian course of security was between the years of 1978 and 1990. The main episodes in this phase were Syrian and Israeli involvement in the Lebanon war, and the Syrian poise in the Iraq-Iran war. This stage witnessed the continuation of Syria's attempts to increase its own arms and achieve military parity with Israel. To reach this goal, Syria signed a friendship treaty with the Soviet Union in 1980 as already mentioned. In addition to this, the Syrians decided to overcome their loss of the Golan Heights through asserting their power in neighboring Lebanon. However, this move did not go unchallenged by the Israelis and both Syria and Israel fought a costly war in the early 1980s on Lebanese territory. The outcome of this

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[16] Gerald Sorokin, "Patrons, Clients and Allies in the Arab-Israeli Conflict", p. 62.

war was in Syria's favor, but its aftermath was the occupation of a strip of land in South Lebanon by the Israelis under the pretext of protecting its northern border, causing more hostility between the two peoples.

To further its own security, Syria went into an alliance with Iran in its war with Iraq in the early 1980s. Although this alliance against Iraq was conceived as a blatant contradiction to the idea of Arab unity that the Syrian Ba'th regime had forcefully defended, however, few would argue against the benefits Syria acquired by way of this alliance.

Israel's failure to pacify and conquer Lebanon has allowed Syria and Iran to consolidate their alliance and enhance Syrian power and influence inside Lebanon, especially with the Lebanese Shiite and their resistance party, Hizbollah. Furthermore, this alliance gave Syria more power and prestige in the Arab world since it proved that it can follow its own policy defying Arab Sheikhdoms and the United States.

The signing of the friendship treaty with the Soviet Union bore its fruits for Syria, even if only for a while. Syria's military spending rose and it acquired sophisticated weaponry for its arsenal. The presence of a sympathetic Russian defense minister, Dimitri F. Ustinov, further facilitated the procurement of arms and meant additional military aid between 1976 and 1984. However, the change in leadership in the Soviet Union in 1985, and its eventual collapse, rendered Syria without a superpower patron, which added to the Syrian feeling of insecurity.[17] This was especially so in that Syria's military spending

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[17] *Ibid*, p. 62.

followed this pattern: Syria was spending only one-third as much on arms in 1988[18] compared to 1983; Israel, on the other hand, was spending about two-thirds as much.[19]

During the 1990s, Syria's views regarding its own security had undergone a dramatic change. This period witnessed the unimpressive collapse of the Soviet Union and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Hence, during the Gulf War, Assad aligned himself with the United States even if it meant siding with the West against an Arab state.

> It is true that Syrian relations with Iraq were strained since the beginning of the Iraq-Iran war, but Syria's notorious hostility toward the Iraqi Ba'th was still a long way from siding with the West against Iraq, in such blatant contradiction to the idea of Arab unity … that the Syrian Ba'th regime had been at pains to cultivate.[20]

But, after the Gulf War, when Syria realized that the United States was the only superpower, it also realized that the destruction of Iraq's military power meant the absence of a strategic depth in the event of a confrontation with Israel.[21] Therefore, when the Gulf War ended, and when the United States launched a peace process designed to end the Arab-Israeli conflict, for the first time the Syrian leaders agreed to participate in the American-sponsored process. This entailed eight rounds of visits to Damascus by American Secretary of State James Baker between March and July 1991. However, Syria's approval to participate demonstrated the real change in Syria's postwar security perception.

Nevertheless, it must be stressed that the money Syria received in 1991 from Saudi Arabia was first and foremost used, according to the Jaffee Center, for military

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[18] Even before the collapse of the USSR, the arrival of Gorbatchev to power in 1985 had drastically affected the Syrian-Russian partnership since Gorbatchev made it clear the USSR no longer wanted to back Syria against Israel.

[19] Efraim Inbar, *Regional Security Regimes*, p. 63.

[20] *Ibid*, p. 161.

[21] *Ibid*, p. 162.

requirements and not in order to ease the economic situation.[22] This stresses the centrality of the conflict to Syrian thinking. From this, some argue that Syria's tactics have changed, but not its principle, since the postwar climate made it impolitic to appear as the side against the negotiations;[23] others maintain that the Syrian decision of July 14, 1991 to attend Madrid was a very positive and genuine answer to American initiative and responded to the Syrians' need for stability and security.

However, the Palestinians and Israelis shocked the world when they announced that they signed a peace treaty in Oslo in September 1993. The Jordanian followed suit and signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994. These new realities forced the Syrian leadership to raise their stakes in their security confrontation with Israel and augmented their support to the Lebanese resistance movement, Hizbollah, during the 1990s. They did so even as they risked a full-fledged confrontation with Israel as was the case in 1996 when Israel launched operation "Grapes of Wrath". Still, this high-risk policy paid off in May 2000 when Israel withdrew its forces unconditionally from the strip it occupied in South Lebanon, and the Syrians gained the strategic advantage of pulling one Arab country, namely Lebanon, to take its side in the confrontation with Israel. Until now, the Syrians are waging a low-intensity war of attrition against Israel in the Chabaa Farms in South Lebanon; the thing that leaves the door open for possible renewed hostilities with Israel.

Still, it seems that the path to a peace agreement between Israel and Syria is still long and strewn with obstacles. One needs not only to observe the latest events in the region to discover how fragile any peace agreement can be, but also how the costly

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[22] Report of a JCSS study group, *War in the Gulf*, (The Jerusalem Post Press, 1994), p. 267.
[23] *Ibid.*

strategies adopted by the Syrian government have failed in achieving the promised security of its people.

B- <u>Evolution of Israeli Security Policies</u>

The nearly obligatory observation commencing any writing on the subject of Israeli security policy is the amount of material available to cover this theme. The creation of a state for the Jews in 1948, after being persecuted in Europe in WWII, and the fascination of right wing Christians in fulfilling the prophecy of the Bible regarding the return of the 'Messiah', made the security of Israel front-page material.

Israel was created in 1948 on what was British-mandated Palestine. The first problem that faced the Israeli security planners was the fact that on the eve of the 1947 UN plan to partition Palestine, Arabs still were a large majority, with Jews amounting to only one-third of the population – 608,225 Jews to 1,237,332 Arabs.[24] This demographic problem manifested itself in that fact that the number of conscripts in the Israeli army was limited compared to the opposing Arab armies, in addition to the problems associated with handling a large number of unpredictable Arab citizens within its borders.[25] In confronting this issue, Israeli policy depended on encouraging Jewish immigration to Israel to counterbalance the number of Arabs living in it, and on acquiring sufficient capabilities through both a domestic military program and ties to outside powers.

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[24] United Nations, Subcommittee Report to the Special Committee on Palestine, A/AC 14/32 in Paul Findley, *Deliberate Deceptions – Facing the Facts About the US-Israeli Relationship* (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1993), p. 6.
[25] This problem still persists for the Israeli planners and will be discussed in more detail when we get to the stage of discussing the dimensions of the conflict in the second chapter of this thesis.

The regional powers at that time were the United Kingdom and France, and Israel and France were cooperating in what Crosbie calls a "tacit alliance".[26] This cooperation culminated in a trilateral assault against Egypt in 1956 carried out by the United Kingdom, France and Israel. American pressure to end the assault, and the final capitulation of England and France to this pressure, made the Israelis realize that they needed to shift their allegiance to the arriving new superpower – the United States.

Therefore, by the mid sixties, Israel became much closer to the United States than to France for several reasons: First, the superpowers (the United States and the Soviet Union) started taking a more active interest in the Middle East, and secondly: the US became a major arms supplier to the world. This shift in alliance bore its fruits for Israel since that time until the present. First, it has made it easy and inexpensive for Israel to acquire political and diplomatic support in almost all of Israel's actions. Secondly, it allowed Israel to gain unlimited access to modern weaponry and economic aid from the United States, which allowed it to raise its GDP domestically, thus satisfying the needs of a variety of domestic political and non-political actors.

On the domestic level, Israel has relied, since its creation in 1948, on two main elements for its national security: its military capacity on the one hand, and a number of other elements that complemented its military supremacy. These elements comprised:[27] 1) the need to mobilize, in case of war, all of Israel's resources, including its industry and entire population. 2) The dire necessity to lead in the region in the quality of its weapons, air defense, training of the army, and advanced military technology in order to protect

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[26] See Sylvia K. Crosbie, *A Tacit Alliance: France and Israel from Suez to Six-Day War*, (Princeton UP, 1984).

[27] See Avraham Tamir, "The Use of Military Force: an Israeli Analysis", in Judith Kipper and Harold Saunders, *The Middle East in Global Perspective*, (Oxford, Westview Press, 1991), pp. 225-226.

itself without the help of outside powers if needed. 3) The idea that the state of Israel should not return any occupied territory that grants it strategic depth; therefore, Israel should not give up the Golan Heights, nor allow any hostile structure in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.[28] 4) Israel must prevent any threat from forming, and this could include preventing Iraq from acquiring nuclear capabilities or simply preventing Syria from deploying its forces in Lebanon. 5) Finally, the necessity to maintain the existence of demilitarized zones on Israel's borders that allow Israel the strategic depth it needs and early warning arrangements. Therefore, as a result of these elements, until the late 1980s, to employ offensive armed forces in order to "repel, and even perhaps pre-empt, cross-border invasions by land, sea or air" was always a possibility for Israel. Especially since both the Syrian and the Egyptian forces until 1977, had access to advanced weaponry and could, in the Israeli strategists' mind, therefore initiate a surprise attack on Israel.[29] Understanding this offensive strategy is crucial to grasping Israel's decision to launch an offensive strike against the Arab armies surrounding it in 1967. Israel selected to move the site of the war from its own territory to Cairo, Damascus and Amman.

After capturing what remained of historical Palestine, in 1967, along with the Golan Heights and the Sinai desert, Israel maintained its offensive strategy along its eastern and southern borders with Syria and Egypt respectively. It is argued though that Israeli strategy since 1967 has been at the level of 'grand strategy', a 'defensive one'; it is only at the operational level that it has been an offensive one. What this means is that Israeli strategists would launch a pre-emptive attack across the border such as in 1967,

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[28] However, this principle is self-defeating because if Israel declares the Golan Heights as Israeli land, then it needs to occupy more land from its neighbors in order to gain the "strategic depth" it claims that it needs for its security. Clearly, this leads to an absurd circle of never-ending occupation.
[29] Stuart A. Cohen, "Changing Emphases in Israel's Military Commitments", in *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (September 1992), p. 331.

only if they perceived an immediate threat.[30] However, the stealth attack that was initiated by Syria and Egypt in October 1973 forced a change in the security planning for Israel. During the first three days of the Yom Kippur War, the mobile counterattack on the Bar-Lev line with Egypt failed to halt the Egyptian army, while the static defense on the Syrian side was more effective.[31] Nonetheless, this has not changed Israeli strategy; it kept on being an offensive one at least at the operational level, as we will see during the Lebanon war.

Notwithstanding, following that war, Israel came to the realization that no army could win all the wars, and that there can never be a final battle or deliver one final blow to the enemy.[32] Therefore, although the Arabs failed, the political earthquake caused by the war led to a frenzy of diplomatic activity by the United States. That is why, when President Sadat of Egypt proposed a peace deal with Israel in 1978, the Israelis, with help from the United States and from President Carter in particular, were happy to give up the Sinai peninsula in return for neutralizing the biggest Arab nation and signing the Camp David peace accords. After the signature of Camp David in 1979, even though Israeli military commitments were reduced massively, Israel feared Assad's intents to acquire the necessary armaments to achieve strategic parity with Israel. Therefore, the Israeli military moved entirely to the Syrian front in order to defend the Golan Heights from a Syrian offensive.[33]

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[30] *Ibid*, p. 342.

[31] Ya'cov Bar-Siman-Tov, "The Bar-Lev Line Revisited," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1998, pp. 149-177.

[32] Michael Handel, "The Evolution of Israeli Strategy: the Psychology of Insecurity and the Quest for Absolute Security", in Murray Bernstein, *The Making of Strategy*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.275.

[33] Stuart A. Cohen, "Changing Emphases in Israel's Military Commitments", p. 334.

Even though, since 1978, the Israeli army moved from 'perimeter requirements',[34] towards more 'intra-frontier' and 'remote requirements'[35], 'perimeter requirements' have remained crucial vis-à-vis Syria and are obvious through the retention of significant armored force levels.

In the 1970s, the Likud emerged as a powerful political party in Israel, and it sweeping victory in the 1977 elections brought Menachem Begin to power instead of David Ben Gurion. The rise of messianic nationalism over secular Zionism in Israel had a huge impact on the state's definition of its national security. The Likud believed that "the right of the Jewish people to Eretz Israel[36] is eternal and indispensable."[37] This belief, coupled with a strong view that Israel confronts an undifferentiated, revisionist, and hostile Arab world, gave more stamina to the security planners to use extensive force when dealing with Israel's political and military problems.

This policy materialized in the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. To accomplish its goal, Israel fielded 90,000 troops, 12,000 troop and supply trucks, 1300 tanks, 1300 armored personnel carriers, 634 warplanes, and a number of warships. What all this power finally achieved was the evacuation of an estimated 8,300 PLO[38] fighters from Beirut.[39] Not only did Israel want to rid South Lebanon of PLO fighters, it also wanted to rid all of Lebanon of any Palestinian military presence, defeat the Syrian army, and

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[34] *Ibid,* p. 331. Perimeter requirements are the most fundamental of all military obligations. They "denote obligations to employ armed forces, offensively and defensively, in the immediate vicinity of either the state's frontiers or a military front held by its troops".

[35] *Ibid.* Intra-frontier requirements denote rather civil defense measures. Remote requirements denote "commitments to resort to military force...in locations not directly contiguous with the nation's borders and the front along which its troops are currently stationed".

[36] In Hebrew, 'Eretz Israel' means Greater Israel, implying Jewish rule over all of Palestine as well as Jordan. Some even go as far as claiming it to be all the land encompassed between the Nile and the Euphrate rivers.

[37] Elfi Pallis, "The Likud Party: A Primer," *Journal of Palestine Studies,* (Winter 1992), p. 42.

[38] PLO is the Palestinian Liberation Organization. It was created in 1964, and is considered an umbrella organization comprising most of the Palestinian political and military factions.

[39] Claudia A. Wright, "The Israeli War Machine", *Journal of Palestine Studies,* (Winter 1983), p. 39.

appoint a Christian government that would ally itself with Israel.[40] However, Israel not only failed to do that, it also cost the Israeli people thousands of deaths, caused a great feeling of insecurity and promoted an important economic crisis.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Israeli military planners recognized the advantages of a more defensively oriented conventional military doctrine, so long as Israel guarded the land it occupied in the 1967 war.

Many believe that Israel's security policy changed as the power alternated between the Labor party and the Likud party. After the Gulf war in 1991, and the winning of power by Labor's Yitzhac Rabin in June 1992, a breakthrough in Israeli security policy took place when the Israeli leadership was convinced to pursue negotiations wit the PLO. This resulted in the signing of the Oslo peace accords in September 1993 between the Palestinians and the Israelis, which in turn provided a basis for signing yet another peace treaty with the Jordanians in 1994.

However, the peace treaty began to lose momentum under the terrorist blow of Israeli extremists when they assassinated Prime Minister Rabin in November 1995. The future of the peace process became uncertain when the Likud leader Benjamin Netenyahu was elected as Prime Minister. Indeed, under Netenyahu, the peace process appeared to be disintegrating: the Syrian-Israeli border was intense and on the brink of heating up dangerously and Southern Lebanon continued to be the site of clashes between the Israeli forces and Hizbollah.[41] The Israeli government also announced that it would not abandon

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[40] Kristen E. Schulze, *Israel's Covert Diplomacy in Lebanon*, translated by Antoine Basil, (Beirut: Printing Press, 1998), p. 132.
[41] Ben D. Mor, "The Middle East Peace Process and Regional Security," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1997, p. 184.

any of the occupied territories, including the Syrian Golan Heights,[42] therefore, leading the region once again to tension and instability.

When Barak of the Labor party was elected in 1999, the accelerating pace of diplomatic breakthroughs and collapse of barriers created the impression that the peace process could become once again the answer. However, once progress was blocked, the strategies employed by the involved actors increasingly assumed patterns consistent with a structure of coercion and a rather offensive oriented military doctrine. The result of this reciprocal strategy was made manifest in the September 2000 second Intifada and the use of violence to deter the Palestinians. Today, at this writing, (March 2003), the Middle East seems to be settling once again into the all-too-familiar patterns of conflict.

We conclude therefore that the Syrian and Israeli strategies have only helped in igniting the animosity between the two states instead of achieving security for their peoples. On the one hand, Syria has, since its independence, faced a large gap between its security goals and its military capabilities. This, we believe, is due to the fact that the U.S.S.R provided Syria, only for a short period, with the means to seriously challenge its adversary. The Syrian regime, also, could never rely on a fragmented Arab world to ensure its foreign policy goals. Finally, even under the pragmatic Hafez al-Assad, Syria never accepted the reality of the status-quo; that is the establishment of Israel in the region. In contrast, despite having succeeded in acquiring military capabilities and strategic strength, Israel's foreign policies have never allowed it to feel entirely safe within its own borders mainly because they are not yet defined by the Israelis, and to face the fact that its Arab neighbors, including Syria, are there to stay. Therefore, this chapter

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[42] Menachem Begin -even after retirement, still a figure of great authority within the Likud and the population in general- exercised his residual influence saying that Israel should not change the Golan Law which officially annexed the Golan Heights to Israel.

concludes that the Syrian-Israeli strategies vis-à-vis each other were costly and unsuccessful in achieving the two states' goals of security. This is due, I believe, to the sources of the conflict, as we will see in the next chapter.

Chapter Two:

Israel and Syria: Anatomy of the Conflict

Before embarking on the subject matter of this chapter, it is important to restate the plan set up to explore its context. As previously stated, this study seeks to focus upon the different dimensions of the Syrian-Israeli conflict. Therefore, in the first section of this chapter, I shall present the territorial dimension of the conflict. This territorial dimension comprises three main factors: the demographic proximity and the Golan problem, the demographic imperative, and finally the water problem. These factors are considered to be crucial for understanding the Syrian-Israeli conflict for two reasons: first, they have constantly contributed to an increasing hostility and feeling of insecurity in both Syria and Israel; secondly, they have led to constant failures in the Syrian-Israeli peace process during the 1990s.

In the second section of this chapter, I shall investigate the military dimension of the conflict. This section allows us to explore the military capabilities of the two states and the negative effect of the ensuing arms race on the struggle. Finally, the last section of the chapter discusses the ideological imperative where I explore the ways in which the movements of Greater Syria, Arabism and Zionism affect Syrian-Israeli security policies and lead to more mistrust and unrest between the two peoples.

This chapter's main argument is that the territorial, military and ideological sources of the conflict have institutionalized a cycle that has increased the animosity between the two people over the years. This cycle has made, we argue, the possibility of security and peace null if these sources are not acknowledged and tackled at their roots. In other words, to break the cycle of animosity between the Israelis and the Syrians, the peace

process should start by agreeing first on a n end result that neutralizes the sources of the conflict before embarking on any peace negotiations; the purpose of the negotiations would therefore deal only with what road to take in order to achieve the agreed upon goals. Accordingly, I attempt to answer two main questions: what are the sources of the Syria-Israeli enmity, and, can a peace agreement work and last if it does not reflect a realistic perception of the sources of the conflict? Answering these two questions allow us to determine what the real problem is, especially in that there is still a serious difference among the Israelis and the Syrians about the nature of the conflict. In fact, until the Syrians, Israelis and the peace broker involved all agree on a common understanding of the exact mix of elements in the problem, solutions will be difficult to reach. After all, "progress towards peace depends on breaking down the barriers to negotiation and reconciliation – the other walls. If we ignore the politics of breaking down these barriers, the mediator and negotiator may never have a chance."[43]

A- The Territorial Impact on the Conflict

1-Geographic Proximity and the Golan Problem: (see maps in annex)

Being one of the crucial factors of the territorial dimension, the geographic proximity is a determinant factor when considering any state's national security. Historical Palestine has a unique location at the center of the Asian-African axis. This location has always been considered as the reason it has witnessed many wars and made

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[43] Moonis Ahmar, "The Concept of a Peace Process", in Moonis Ahmar (ed.), *The Arab-Israeli Peace Process*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 20.

it vulnerable to attacks throughout history by major powers.[44] Today, Israel's location in the midst of a hostile Arab-Muslim world makes it "a classic case of a state whose strategy has bben dominated by territorial imperatives."[45]

Therefore, the geographic proximity factor holds more importance to the Israeli side than to the Syrian one. Since 1948, Israel's bordering countries were considered as threats that Israel had to deter constantly, either diplomatically, or by the use of its military power. Israeli strategists increasingly had to take into account countering al Arab countries, also including those who do not border Israel, such as Saudi Arabia, Libya and Sudan.[46] Military strategists in Israel have always based their foreign and defense policies on a worst case scenario, which meant a total Arab alliance against Israel if war is waged.[47] Furthermore, beginning in the early 1980s, Israel started to pay special attention to the Syrian-Iranian alliance. Iranian support of the Shi'ite Hizbollah movement in Lebanon and its increasing military strength made it more likely that, in the case of war breaking out between Syria and Israel, Iran would intervene to help Syria. According to Michael Handel "this does not precisely define that regional balance of power as much as it demonstrates the type of psychological pressure felt by Israel."[48]

This pressure is based upon the fact that Israel lacks strategic depth in comparison to its enemies. Ben Gurion wrote in 1955:

> From our point of view there can never be a final battle. We can never assume we can deliver one final blow to the enemy that will be the last battle, after which there will never be the need for another clash ort that the danger of war will be eliminated. The situation of our neighbors is the opposite. They can

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[44] Michael Handel, "The Evolution of Israeli Strategy: The Psychology of Insecurity and the Quest for Absolute Security" in Murray Bernstein, *The Making of Strategy*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 535.

[45] *Ibid.*

[46] *Ibid*, p.537.

[47] *Ibid.*

[48] *Ibid.*

assume that a final battle will be the last one, that they may be able to deliver such a blow to Israel that the Arab-Israeli problem will be liquidated.[49]

These geographic realities play an evident role in accentuating the Arab-Israeli conflict, particularly the Syrian-Israeli conflict. They forced Israeli planners to make sure that they fight their wars outside their borders. That is why in 1967, Israel waged an offensive war that moved the battle scene from Tel Aviv to Cairo, Amman and Damascus.[50] Indeed, it was only during the late 1980s and early 1990s that Israel adopted a more "defensively oriented conventional military doctrine".[51] Israeli strategists felt much more secure for two reasons: first, they had signed a peace treaty in 1978 with Egypt, which neutralized Egypt as a confrontational state. Added to that, the Sinai desert is considered by the Israelis as a wide secure area that allows Israel geographic strategic depth. Secondly, during the Six-Day War, they had occupied the Syrian Golan Heights, which provided Israel with a strategic buffer zone. That is why, some argue that, if Israel withdraws from the Golan Heights as part of a peace agreement, Israel's reliance on much more preemptive/offensive doctrine will be revived.[52]

This brings us to another problem that inflames the Syrian-Israeli conflict: The Golan Heights, because, added to the geographic proximity, the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights is another territorial cause for the persistence of the conflict. Events, as we will see, clearly show that the Israeli side always wanted to gain control of the Golan Heights for strategic reasons. Indeed, many Israeli leaders and military advisors expressed their regret that Israel did not occupy the Golan Heights in 1948. However, in

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[49] *Ibid.*

[50] *Ibid*, p. 540.

[51] *Ibid.*

[52] *Ibid.* However, it is important to note that the arrival of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to power in 2000 has indeed revived the Israeli offensive-oriented military towards Syria. This became more obvious when Sharon was re-elected as Prime Minister in 2002 (see Chapter 1) although the Golan has not been returned to Syria.

the early 1960s, Israel started taking serious steps toward fulfilling this goal. Israel had insisted on cultivating the South of the Demilitarized Zone on Syrian territory, claiming that sovereignty over it was not yet determined.[53] The aim was either to force the Syrian military to either take action, which would conveniently lead Israel to escalate the situation, or to tacitly admit Israeli rights over the Demilitarized Zone inside the Golan Heights.[54] In 1966, the Israelis started edging more and more beyond their borders with their bulldozers in order to cultivate the land. But each time Israeli bulldozers encroached over the border, the Syrian military responded with light fire. This resulted in an almost everyday exchange of fire and an Israeli resort to air strikes. As a conclusion to these cumulative skirmishes, on the 7th of April 1967, Israel further escalated the encounter by launching a major attack on Syrian border villages using tanks, artillery and warplanes. [55]At the same time, an Israeli military official declared that Israel would occupy Damascus and overthrow the government if it had to.[56]

The attack Israel launched had a devastating result on Syria, as it caused the Syrians to lose six of their Mig warplanes. The Syrian leaders responded by publicizing on the 14th of May 1967, the Israeli declaration and threatened to invoke their defense agreement with Egypt if Israel attacked again.[57] The logic behind the Syrian escalation was that if Syria backed down at this time, it risked losing a considerable part of its prestige and would publicly admit that Israel could fly freely over Syrian territory

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[53] Avner Yaniv, 'Syria and Israel: the Politics of Escalation', in Moshe Ma'oz and Avner Yaniv, *Syria under Assad,* (Croom Helm, London and Sydney, 1986) pp. 162-163.

[54] *Ibid*, p. 163.

[55] Laura Drake, "the Golan Heights", *The Middle East International*, 11September 1992, p. 24.

[56] *Ibid.*

[57] *Ibid.*

without being punished.[58] Unfortunately, the UNEF forces refused to intervene, even though Nasser of Egypt was announced to U Thant and other diplomats that the Arabs did not want to go to war. It was against this background that Egypt closed the Suez Canal and the Straits of Tiran, which Israel considered to be an act of aggression claiming that the Straits were international waters, not Egyptian waters.[59] Israel answered back on 5 June 1967 by starting the third Arab Israeli War.[60] Henceforth, the Six-Day War culminated in the occupation of the Syrian Golan Heights and its subsequent annexation in 1981. According to Ayner Yaniv:

> ...the Six-Day War appears to have been virtually inevitable. For if Israel escalated because she was more concerned to sustain the credibility of her deterrence than to control the escalation, and if Syria acted concurrently in a similar fashion, everything which happened between the summer of 1966 and the summer of 1967 was little more than a countdown towards a full-scale collision.[61]

On the Syrian side, and since the Six-Day War, Syria has repeatedly affirmed its adherence to UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338[62] and its support for the exchange of land for peace as a part of a comprehensive settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Furthermore, Syria has regularly pointed to the fact that the annexation of the Golan is considered by the UN Security Council to be null and void and without international legal effect.

Today, just as the geographic proximity constitutes a problem to the Israeli military planners and more importantly to the Israeli people, the Golan problem adds to

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[58] Avner Yaniv, 'Syria and Israel: the Politics of Escalation', in Moshe Ma'oz and Avner Yaniv, *Syria under Assad*, p. 167.

[59] Laura Drake, "the Golan Heights", p. 24.

[60] It is argued though that if Yigal Allon (the Likud candidate) did not press Premier Eshkol to launch a bold attack on Southern Syria in order to occupy the Golan Heights and therefore reduce Syria in both 'size and stature', the occupation would not have occurred. Prime Minister Eshkol was susceptible to such pressures because of his poor performance during the pre-1967 War Crisis. See Avner Yaniv, 'Syria and Israel: the Politics of Escalation', in Moshe Ma'oz and Avner Yaniv, *Syria under Assad*, p. 170.

[61] *Ibid*, p. 167.

[62] James A.Bill and Carl Leiden, *Politics in the Middle East*, (Toronto: Little Brown Company, 1990), pp. 343-344.

the Syrian feeling of insecurity in general and contributes enormously to the constant failure of the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations. Not recognizing and dealing with the significance of the geographic proximity for the Israelis on the one hand, and the importance of the Golan Heights to the Syrians on the other hand, inevitably renders the peace efforts fruitless. This, among other things, can explain the failure of the 1990s peace negotiations between Israel and Syria. The solution might lay in making it very costly to the side that would rather live in the present situation than to solve the problem, and then by identifying a solution to the problem before embarking on any negotiations, as I will argue in the third chapter.

2- The Demographic Imperative:

As with geographic proximity, demography is considered another substantial cause that perpetuates the Israeli-Syrian conflict, but with special relevance to the Israeli side. Not only does Israel exist amongst the Arab world; it also governs millions of Arabs through its occupation of Arab lands and within its borders. This demographic 'problem' became all the more important; especially after the Six-Day War of 1967 when Israel occupied large Arab areas and, unlike 1948, could not "transfer" the Arab indigenous people. Indeed many Israelis realize that the demographic imperative will be a threat when it will eventually lead to an economic integration and political amalgamation between the Israelis and the Palestinians, therefore 'de-Judaizing' the country.[63] It is important to note that the size of the population as an indicator of military

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[63] Samuel J. Roberts, *Party and Policy in Israel*, (London: Westview Press, 1990), pp. 46-47.

strength has become since the mid-20th century, decreasingly important when considering recent conflicts, because of the new technological developments that have replaced the actual soldier. Notwithstanding, 'in low-intensity warfare and daily coexistence', as in the Arab-Israeli case, 'the demographic trends cannot be ignored'; [64] especially that the Israelis live in a region that has been culturally homogeneous for more than 2000 years. To demonstrate this point, in the year 2020, not only will the Israeli labor market be flooded with Arab workers coming from the occupied territories, but also, 37 of the 120 Knesset members elected would come from the Arab community. Added to that, the population of Syria will number around 20 million; more than double that of Israel's 8 million. [65]

Therefore, even though Israeli hardliners have constantly dismissed the importance of the demographic problem, maintaining that "it could be dealt with via increased Jewish immigration, the provision of Jordanian citizenship to the Arab inhabitants of the territories or…the encouragement of Palestinian emigration"[66], however, the demographic imperative intensifies the Syrian-Israeli conflict as it increases the Israeli feeling of insecurity. According to Edward Said, it is in the Israeli people's interest that their leaders sign a peace agreement with their Arab neighbors because: on the one hand, the Palestinians in Israel and Palestinian occupied territories will outnumber the Israelis in a little more than 10 years. On the other hand, because the Israelis, indeed, live in a region that is inhabited by 280 million Arabs, he states that the Israelis are no safer and more secure than they were 53 years ago and they will inevitably

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[64] Michael Handel, "The Evolution of Israeli Strategy: The Psychology of Insecurity and the Quest for Absolute Security", pp. 544-545.

[65] *Ha'aretz*, August 23, 2001

[66] Samuel J. Roberts, *Party and Policy in Israel*, (London: Westview Press, 1990), p. 46.

feel less secure in the future if peace is not achieved in the region.[67] Added to that, because of their large population, Arabs tend to accept more easily the loss of their young population in the case of war. While on the other hand, Israel cannot rely on 25% of its population, as they are second citizen Arabs.[68] This reality imposes a great limit on the size of the Israeli armed forces that Israel can mobilize in time of crisis. According to Michael Handel, it is the demographic constraint that restricts the number of pilots in the Israeli army and not the actual number of airplanes available.[69] The demographic imperative therefore plays a crucial role in determining the size of Israeli military forces, which explains the compulsory service of women in non-combat duties such as intelligence work and radar handling.[70] In addition to that, since 1967, to remedy the problem of the size of the armed forces, military planners have increasingly relied on "advanced technological solutions and state-of-the-art weaponry"[71]; as we will see later on, even the economy has been massively reoriented toward military requirements and advancements. Accordingly, we conclude that the demographic imperative adds to the Israeli feeling of insecurity and is hence a main factor contributing to the continuous Syrian-Israeli struggle. It poses a great problem for the achievement of peace in the region.

Nonetheless, I believe that the demographic problem can be considered a psychological barrier rather than a physical one. The real issue is hence whether the

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[67] Edward Said, "The Only Solution to the Conflict is a Palestinian-Israeli Federation", *Al-Hayatt newspaper*, (25/06/2001).
[68] Michael Handel, "The Evolution of Israeli Strategy: The Psychology of Insecurity and the Quest for Absolute Security", p. 545.
[69] *Ibid.*
[70] *Ibid.*
[71] *Ibid*, p. 546.

peace broker can succeed in removing this barrier by acting as a political sovereign that guarantees the agreed upon settlement; the only real security for the region.

3- The Water Problem:

Another contributing factor enormously intensifying Syrian-Israeli animosity is the scarcity of the water resources. Some even go so far as to say that it is not only a contributing factor, but also a basic source of the conflict in the Syrian-Israeli case.

The epicenter of this conflict lies in a region adjoining the Syrian-Jordanian-Israeli shared borders in what is known as the occupied Golan Heights. In that region, the River Jordan is fed by its Yarmuk tributary and at some point, forms a lake called Tiberias. What is important to know is that Lake Tiberias is considered a major fresh water supply for the three neighboring countries; therefore the three countries have, in some way or another, attempted to assert control over it. Even before the 1967 Six-Day War, water caused a major problem between the Israelis and the Arabs. A brief historical account of events that took place in the early 1960s will serve to demonstrate this point:

In 1961, when Arab users were facing a decline in the water level of the Dead Sea, Syria, supported by the Arab League, decided to divert the upper Jordan waters for its national water supply. However, by doing so, Syrian leaders prevented it from reaching the Israelis and impeded Israel's water projects.[72] From their side, the Israelis were forced by the United Nations cease-fire commission to remove any obstacles on the Northwest shores in Lake Tiberias that prevented water from reaching the Syrian side. In 1964, when the Israelis finally completed their project of a National Water Carrier, the

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[72] Helga Haftendorn, "Water and International Conflict", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 1, p. 60.

Arab League, in order to assure an adequate amount of water to Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, attempted to divert two tributaries of the River Jordan: the Banias and the Hasbani. But as soon as the diversion work began by Syria, Israel answered back by limited, but disruptive military strikes and bombing, which succeeded in canceling the Arab League's attempts.[73] The Jordan diversion project was halted.

Nonetheless, in 1967, in an almost similar manner, one of the major causes of the Six-Day War between Syria, Egypt, and Israel was the Israeli diversion of the River Jordan, which Syria wanted to stop by building a dam on the Yarmuk River on the Syrian border. The building of the dam, the Israelis argued, would be a major cause of the War.[74] Israel was faced by a clear choice; to either launch a massive blow that would certainly lead to war, or, start a limited operation that would deter Syria without escalating to war. The Israeli choice was, as has been explained earlier, to escalate. Helga Haftendorn states that as a result of the Six-Day War, "the entire scenario of the region changed", because, with the occupation of the Golan Heights, the Israelis now not only "controlled the entire Jordan waters" but also "had unlimited access to the Land's underwater reservoirs".[75]

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Syrians have indicated that they would be prepared to negotiate a mutually advantageous sharing and supervision of water resources, but only if Israel withdrew from the Heights back to the line of the 4th of June 1967, which until this writing, Israel refused to do.[76] The reason the 1967 line is essential to Syria is because Syria needs to regain access to the northeastern shore of Lake

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[73] *Ibid*, p. 61.

[74] *Ibid.*

[75] *Ibid.*

[76] Hisham Dajani, "What Price the Golan", *The Middle East International*, 3 December 1993, p. 18.

Tiberias, notably now that Damascus, Aleppo and several other Syrian cities are short on water several nights a week since the early 1990s- and sometimes the Syrian government has to cut back on the supply of electricity to Damascus.[77] The Israelis, on the other hand, are equally determined that they must retain full sovereignty over the Lake and control its shoreline.[78]

To exacerbate the water dilemma, Israel attempted to put more pressure on Syria to agree to a peace accord using its special relations with Turkey. For Israel to force Syria into accepting a peace treaty on its own terms, it had agreed with Turkey to deny Syria access to the water of the Euphrates.[79] Some observers believe that Turkey's water projects on the Euphrates could reduce the river flow by half, causing a major water crisis in Syria if no compromise is reached between Syria and Turkey, and hence between Syria and Israel.[80]Thus, the Golan is an intricate and complicated issue due to the fact that the Golan is quite rich in water resources and for Israel to lose it means for Israel to lose what makes up today around 40 per cent of the total amount of water used in Israel today. Furthermore, according to a number of sources,[81] a technical survey of sub-surface water in the Golan has shown the existence of large resources, estimated at twice the amount of surface water from Lake Tiberias.[82] Therefore, it seems that real Israeli and Syrian long-term preoccupation is more the control of the surface and underground water resources of

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[77] See Amikam Nachmani, "the Politics of Water in the Middle East: the Current Situation", in Efraim Inbar (ed.), *Regional Security Regimes,* p. 233.

[78] Hisham Dajani, "What Price the Golan", at 18.

[79] It is important to note that the Turkish-Israeli relation has reached an astounding level in the 1990s. It has included military, economic and civilian cooperation especially under the Netenyahu government in Israel. See Amikam Nachami, "The Remarkable Turkish-Israeli Tie", *The Middle East Quarterly,* June 1998, Vol. V, No. 2.

[80] Hugh Pope, "The Looming Crisis over the Tigris-Euphrates Waters", *The Middle East International,* 9 June 1995.

[81] Hisham Dajani, "What Price the Golan", p. 19.

[82] *Ibid,* p. 18.

the Golan than security and economic issues. Thus, the solution lies in recognizing that the problem of the Golan is not only one of borders but also of water. The Syrian side has often indicated that, if Israel withdrew from the Golan, the water resources would still be supervised and shared with the Israelis through a 'mutually advantageous' settlement.[83]

There exists an economic approach on how to deal with the water problem. In fact, many observers argue that "water does not have to be such an intractable problem, and negotiations need not to be a zero-sum game. Thinking about water values and water markets, rather than just water quantities, can lead to an arrangement in which both sides benefit".[84] This economic approach to the problem argues that[85]: water ownership is not synonymous with water usage; a joint management of water resources is more efficient; arrangements not to sell or buy water would not be allowed, and prices would be appropriate. "Such a system would reap great rewards economically and, most importantly, serve as a symbol of the stability and prosperity that only peace can deliver."[86]

The real issue in this case would be for the peace broker to convince both sides that such a solution is better than continuing the present situation.

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[83] Godfrey Jansen, "Air of make-believe", *Middle East International*, 14th April 1995, p. 5.
[84] Franklin M. Fisher, "Water and Peace in the Middle East", *Middle East International*, 17 November, 1995, p. 17.
[85] *Ibid*, pp. 17-18.

B- <u>Syrian and Israeli Military Capabilities:</u>

Clearly, the main element in the quest for absolute security is the military one. The Arab-Israeli conflict has become, according to many observers such as Moshe Ma'oz, a Syrian-Israeli conflict.[87] The arms race between Syria and Israel demonstrates this point. However, in this section, the argument is that, while military power is supposed to achieve security in the Syrian-Israeli case, the military buildup that led to an arms race reinforces the feeling of insecurity in both states. This section of the chapter serves to explore the military capabilities of each state and their adverse effect on the stability of both of them.

1- <u>Israeli Military Capabilities:</u>

In its quest for security against Syria and more broadly the Arab world, Israel had to become a 'garrison state'.[88] Therefore, since 1967, and even more since 1973, Israel reoriented its economy to a great extent to respond to the state's military requirements, becoming a great power in military, and correspondingly, political terms. However, in order to achieve the desired level of self-sufficiency, Israel, poor in mineral, oil, or water resources, needed throughout its existence economic support and financial aid "in order to prepare for war while still building a relatively advanced industrial base".[89] This

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[86] *Ibid.*
[87] Moshe Ma'oz, "Syria, Israel and the Peace Process", p. 157.
[88] See Joel Beinin, "Israel: the Political Economy of a Garrison State", in Hisham Sharabi (ed.), *The Next Arab Decade* (Boulder Colorado: Westview Press, 1998).
[89] Michael Handel, "The Evolution of Israeli Strategy: The Psychology of Insecurity and the Quest for Absolute Security", p. 547.

economic support came from four main sources: France, the U.S., Jewish international organizations worldwide, and the German compensations for WWII crimes committed against the Jews.[90] It allowed it to raise its GDP domestically, thus satisfying the needs of a variety of domestic political and non-political actors on one hand, while enabling it to build a strong economy on the other. For example, between 1949 and 1991, the U.S. government had provided Israel with $53 billion in aid and special benefits,[91] allowing Israel to spend in 1964, around 10% of its GNP on defense; 22% in 1971-1972; 26% in 1978 and around 30% in early 1980s.[92] This is important, as it shows the centrality of the military in the Israeli planners' thinking. Therefore, it is safe to argue that without U.S. support, Israel would not have been able to achieve a GNP per capita similar to those of the advanced world, while spending so much on its military. After all, and despite the high level of U.S. aid, Israeli economists argue that the 1980s economic crisis originated in the high increase of military expenditures during and after the 1967 and 1973 wars.[93] It is important to point to the fact that since 1973, Israel had successfully pressed the U.S. for higher levels of aid in order to achieve a high level of self-sufficiency in weapons production.[94] As a result of this spending, by the late 1980s, military production had become the leading sector of the Israeli economy.[95] Joel Beinin states that "some 25 percent of the labor force is employed either directly or indirectly by the military, and half of all industrial workers are involved in military-related production", making Israel

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[90] *Ibid.*
[91] Paul Findley, *Deliberate Deceptions*, p. 111.
[92] See Joel Beinin, "Israel: the Political Economy of a Garrison State", p. 244.
[93] *Ibid*, p. 243.
[94] *Ibid*, p. 244.
[95] *Ibid.*

Military Industries one of the two largest industrial enterprises in Israel.[96] Therefore, as long as it continues receiving significant technological and economic aid, Israel will remain able to develop a strong weapons industry that absorbs enormous amounts of energy and resources to ensure its security. However, this has adverse consequences on the Israeli economy on one hand, and the Syrian feeling of security on the other.

This is important to us because the reorientation of the economy towards military requirements served to meet, to a great extent, the arms race with Syria. According to Gerald Sorokin, from 1963 to 1993, Israel military expenditures rise each time Syria increases its military expenditures, therefore reacting positively to increases in the Syrian threat (see figures 1 & 2 in annex). He writes that each million dollar increase in Syrian and Egyptian military expenditures yields an increase of around $200,000 in Israel's expenditures, all else held constant.[97] Furthermore, even after the signature at Camp David with Egypt, Israeli military imports rose sharply in the early 1980s as a response to the Syrian increase.[98]

This arms race, or military buildup, had continued during and after peace negotiations with Syria, which made the Syrians feel that the Israeli leaders did not want peace; what the Syrians see from their side of the border is that, for example in 1993 alone, Israel purchased the F-16, F-18 and planned to buy the offensive F-15 aircraft. Also, while it was developing its Arrow Anti-missile, Israel succeeded that year in sending a military satellite into space.[99] In fact, that year, President Bill Clinton formed

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[96] *Ibid*, p. 245. For further information, see U.S. Assistance to the State of Israel: Report by the Comptroller General of the United States Prepared by the U.S. General Accounting Office (June 24, 1983).
[97] Gerald Sorokin, "Patrons, Clients, and Allies in the Arab-Israeli Conflict", p. 57.
[98] *Ibid*.
[99] Alkhaleej Newspaper (UAE), *The 1996 Strategic Report of the Middle East*, (January 1997), p. 6. See also *Haaretz*, (June 18, 1993).

an American-Israeli committee for the purpose of transferring the most sophisticated technologies from the U.S. to Israel in order to demonstrate his full commitment to maintaining Israel's qualitative superiority.[100] Furthermore, Israeli leaders decided that year to militarily reinforce all settlements, including those of the Golan Heights; even though they were negotiating a withdrawal from the Heights with Syria.[101]

In 1996 (see Table 1), Israel's ground forces personnel reached 521,000, including regulars and reserves. Israel owned 1210 high quality tanks – mainly Merkaval, MK 2, and MK 3 – and added to that 3895 medium and low quality tanks including upgraded Centurions and upgraded M-60A3. In 1996, Israel's air force, being prepared for modern battlefield conditions, included 640 combat planes and 285 helicopters. The combat aircraft consisted mainly of the F-151, F-15 Eagle and F-16A/B/C and D. They also included multi-role RF-4E Phantoms and A-4 Skyhawk. The attack helicopters were comprised of 42 AH-64 Apache and AH-1G/1S Cobras. Its air defense forces included 4 heavy SAM batteries and 50 light SAM launchers. Israel's air-to-air missiles included the Aim-9 Sidewinder and Phytons 3 and 4, and its air-to-ground missiles comprised the Hellfire and AGM-65 Maverick. Israel's navy comprised 3 GAL submarines and 22 combat vessels.[102] The nuclear arsenal, on the other hand, was composed of two nuclear research reactors containing undisclosed number of nuclear warheads, chemical weapons, surface-to-surface missiles, as well as a delivery system capable of causing severe damage to most of Arab capitals in a very short time.

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[100] *Ibid.*

[101] *Ibid*, p. 7.

[102] See Shlomo Brom and Yiftah Shapir (eds.), *The Middle East Military Balance 1996-1997*, (London: The MIT Press), pp. 213-233.

Table 1: Armed Forces

Year: 1996	Country: Israel	Country: Syria
Ground Forces		
Tanks	3,870	4,800
Artillery	1,292	2,500
APCs/AFVs	8,010	4,980
SSM Launchers	12	62
Air Force		
Combat Aircraft	640	515
Transport Aircraft	83	23
Helicopters	285	285
Air Defense Forces		
Heavy SAM Batteries	4	108
Light SAM Launchers	50	55
Navy		
Submarines	3	3
Combat Vessels	22	32
Patrol Crafts	36	16

Source: *The Middle East Military Balance, 1996-2000* (London: The MIT Press, 2000), p. 223, pp. 348-349.

There is no question that this arms race and military build up between Syria (as we will see in the next section) and Israel has two main adverse consequences: not only is it imposing severe social and economic costs on both countries - and to a lesser extent on the entire region in general - but it also greatly enhances the Syrian and Israeli feeling of insecurity and mistrust. Furthermore, the Israeli military buildup foregoes any possibility of altering Arab perceptions of the intentions of the State of Israel; however, to the Israelis, this might be an inevitable price to pay if they are to feel secure.

2- Syrian Military Capabilities:

The Syrian quest for security is also first of all military (see Table 2). But just as in the Israeli case, the Syrian military build up is paradoxically a main cause of the incessant struggle between the two states. One main indicator demonstrating the Syrian military quest for security is its arms race with Israel. According to Gerald Sorokin, from 1963 to 1993, a million-dollar increase in Israeli military expenditures is associated with a $340,000 increase in Syrian military spending [103] (see figures 1 & 2 in annex).

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[103] Gerald Sorokin,"Patrons, Clients, And Allies in the Arab-Israeli conflict," p. 56.

Table 2: Ratio of Syrian (n) to Israeli Forces (1.00), 1982 and 1989

	1982n	1989n
Armed forces		
Regulars	1.85	3.00
Reserves	1.35	0.90
Total	1.50	1.55
Armored and		
Mechanized Divisions	0.55	0.75
Tanks	0.80	1.00
Artillery and Mortars	2.30	2.30
High-quality		
Combat Aircraft	0.50	0.50
SAM Batteries	4.00	5.00
SSM Launchers	2.30	2.00
Missile Boats	0.80	0.90

Source: *The Middle East in Global Perspectives*, (Oxford: Westview Press, 1991), p. 193.

Actually, in order to achieve strategic parity with Israel and to respond to increases in Israeli military power, Syria has devoted upwards of 65% of its yearly budget toward the military. What the Israelis see is that, in fact, added to the two billion dollar grant from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait for Syria's participation in the Gulf War,

since 1991, this high military budget allowed Syria to buy: 150 SCUD-C missiles from North Korea; 600 T-72 tanks from Russia and the former Soviet bloc states; 48 MIG-29's from Russia; and the formation of two new active armored divisions.[104] But since 1988, even though it spent around $3.6 billion dollars in an attempt to construct six nuclear reactors, Syria still stands far behind Israel in its quest for nuclear weapons.[105] This for two reasons: on the one hand, it was clear that Syria did not succeed in getting the arms deliveries and military aid needed to modernize its military. On the other hand, much of the military aid Syria received ended up in the hands of its corrupt senior military and political officials. In fact, the lowest point in Syrian Arms deliveries occurred in 1994, totaling only 41 million dollars, compared to 2.6 billion dollars in 1987.[106]

Nonetheless, the Syrian armed forces have still expanded enormously since the Lebanon war (See Table 1 above). The 80 percent increase in the regular armed forces was combined with an increase from 6 to 9 in the number of armored and mechanized divisions, plus the number of the main battle tanks increased by around 35 percent to equal 4200 tanks. Syria also bought 77 new tactical ballistic missile launchers and 50 new surface-to-air batteries. Since 1984, there was also an increase in its combat aircraft, from 440 to about 650, and an increase of 150 percent in its helicopters, from 40 to 100.[107] It has also bought 200 SCUD-B Missiles and 60 SCUD Cs from North Korea in 1992, plus 62 SS-1 and SS-21 launchers. In 1996, its air force was composed of 515 combat aircraft and 285 helicopters, 108 heavy SAM batteries, 70 medium SAM batteries

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[104] Major Shawn Pine, "Israel's Chimera & Assad's Peace Strategy", [Online] [Cited September 1997]. Available HTTP: http://www.treeman.org/m_online/sep9//pinel.html.
[105] *Ibid.*
[106] *Ibid.*
[107] Ahmed Khalidi and Hussein Agha, "The Syrian Doctrine of Strategic Parity", in Judith Kipper and Harold Saunders (eds.), *The Middle East in Global Perspective*, (Oxford: Westview Press, 1991), p. 192.

and 55 light SAM launchers. Added to that are 155 interceptors: MIG-25, MIG-29 and MIG 23. Syria had surface-to-air missiles including 624 heavy missile launchers and 108 heavy missile batteries. Its navy included 32 combat vessels and 3 submarines.[108]

Over and over that, since the arms race was shifting from force quantity to force quality, new weapons system were added to the Syrian armed forces since 1982. these included: SS-21 tactical ballistic missiles that reach the 120 kilometers and Sepal shore-to-shore missiles that reach 300 kilometers; T-80, T-72, and T-74 main battle tanks; MIG-29 counter-air fighters, which have recently entered service in the Syrian air-force, as well as BM-27 220-millimeter multiple rocket launchers, "which represent a significant addition to the Syrian mobile artillery forces."[109] However, the real issue for Syria in its quest for security still remains whether it could find equal or greater financial resources and means of obtaining high-technology weapons that can compete with those of Israel, as all qualitative improvements in its weaponry must be compared not only to improvements in Israeli weaponry, but also to those it acquires from the U.S.. Although Syrian regular forces outnumber Israeli regulars 3 to 1, Syria lags far behind Israel in its technical and technological capabilities in general, but especially when it comes to its aerial operations. Furthermore, Israel still leads by far in its training, command and operational techniques (See Table 1 above).

Recognizing the impossibility of fulfilling this gap, and to compensate for the loss of the Soviet Union as its patron, as well as its lagging far behind Israel in its military strength, and to further assure its security, Syria has entered into a de facto regional alliance with Iran. This alliance seems at first to be quite enigmatic as the Syrian secular

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[108] See Shlomo Brom and Yiftah Shapir (eds.), *The Middle East Military Balance 1996-1997*, pp. 345-357.
[109] Ahmed Khalidi and Hussein Agha, "The Syrian Doctrine of Strategic Parity", p. 192.

pan-Arab vision of an Arab nation is incompatible, if not totally in contradiction with, the Iranian dream of a unified Islamist world.[110] Nevertheless, this alliance has served the purpose of allowing Syria to consolidate its power and influence in the region, but most importantly in Lebanon, which has worked against U.S., French, and Israeli interests in the region. [111] Syria's defiance of these powers, by following a consistent favorable policy towards Iran, gave it more power and prestige in the region, at least in the eyes of the Arab peoples.

Furthermore, by backing Iran in its support of the Shi'ite community -that lives mainly in South Lebanon adjacent to Israel- in becoming economically, socially and politically stronger, Syria succeeded in deterring the Israeli military on the Syrian-Lebanese border.[112]   After all, it is the Shi'ite community and their resistance party, Hizbollah, which, in 2000, liberated the Israeli-occupied South Lebanon.   Therefore, while the Irano-Syrian alliance is considered by the Israelis to pose a problem to their security, it offers Syria the possibility of increasing its own security within its borders and inside Lebanon.

Unfortunately the military imperative places Syria and Israel in a cycle where, the more they spend on their arms buildup to prevent the other from achieving a relative advantage, the less secure they feel. To more thoroughly demonstrate this point: Realism argues that individual well being is not the key interest of states; instead it finds that survival is their core interest. Hence, it is safe to argue that the fundamental goal of states in any relationship is to prevent others from achieving advances in their *relative*

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[110] See Yair Hirshfield, "The Odd Couple", in Moshe Ma'oz and Avner Yaniv (eds), *Syria under Assad*, (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 106-124.
[111] Major Shawn Pine, "Israel's Chimera & Assad's Peace Strategy", [Online] [Cited September 1997] Available HTTP: http://www.treeman.org/m_online/sep9//pinel.html.
[112] *Ibid.*

capabilities. however, according to the security dilemma, an increase in one state's security decreases the security of others. To put this into perspective, an increase in Israel's arms and forces leads Syria to feel it lacks reasonable security and encourages it to engage in an arms race with Israel. Except, by increasing its military strength preparing to receive an attack, Syria forces Israel to spend more to increase its own security, hence decreasing Syria's security. Therefore, the Syrian-Israeli arms race is believed to prevent the other from achieving greater security leverage, and this only leads to a closed cycle in which the psychology of insecurity ushers more security measures, which by definition, convey more feeling of insecurity. For this reason, both Syria and Israel seem to be basically ready to establish peaceful relations; however, they are not able to calculate whether the other will follow a similar policy, making the security dilemma a major cause of the ongoing Syrian-Israeli conflict. The military imperative, we believe, can be dealt with once the Golan problem and the geographic problem have been solved and a peace treaty is signed, the military power of the two states becomes less important. Again, the real issue is whether the peace broker can succeed in creating an atmosphere where the psychological barrier can be overcome. This can be achieved if the peace broker acts as a fair guarantor for peace and stability for all people in the region.

C- <u>The Role of Ideology in the Conflict:</u>

In September 1993, Moshe Ma'oz predicted that in return for a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, Syria would agree to full diplomatic relations.[113]Unfortunately, the elections of May 1996 led to a complete shift in the Israeli position, causing both countries to move away from the possibilities of peace once more to the threat of war. The new right-wing government headed by the Prime Minister Benjamin Netenyahu decided to harden the Israeli position, which halted all peace negotiations on both the Syrian and Palestinian tracts. While the Syrian and Israeli governments still declared that they had made a 'strategic decision of peace', both Syria and Israel started exchanging blame for the failure of the negotiations.

The main question that I would like to answer in this part is: how does the ideological imperative help in explaining the escalation of the Syrian-Israeli conflict? The function of this section is to explore the ideological component as a determining factor in Syrian and Israeli interactions.

1- <u>Israeli ideology and its role in the conflict:</u>

The main ideological movement that helped create the state of Israel was Zionism. Zionism is an ideology that had its origins in the 19th century, even though it is safe to argue that its background comes from the biblical period. It became a clear historical and political phenomenon in the early 20th century when Theodor Herzel, the founder of modern Zionism as a political movement, proposed a Jewish state in Palestine

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[112] *Ibid.*
[113] *Ibid.*

(or less preferably Argentine), as a solution to centuries of European anti-Semitism. Thus, the link between Zionism and Israeli policy is apparent and has its roots far before the creation of the state of Israel. When studying the different Israeli governments, we realize that there are 3 main Zionist guidelines that the subsequent Israeli right and left wing governments have followed throughout the fifty-four years since the creation of the State of Israel. B.Reich and G. Kieval explain that these three guidelines are: [114]

1- 'Territorial expansion'. When Ben Gurion declared the establishment of a Jewish State in 1947, Begin declared:

> The state of Israel was established. But we shall remember that the homeland had not yet been liberated... We shall carry the vision of full liberation and full redemption.

2- 'The Use of Force'. Compatibly with its territorial expansion policy, throughout its history, Israel relied on an 'activist' foreign policy that used coercion, force and war to solve its military problems and to assure its security. For example, during the first thirty years of Israel's history, the old right believed that only a total war would allow Israel to finally liberate its 'occupied homeland'.[115] They have since maintained that only a decisive military blow or a continuation of the conflict with the Arabs would eventually deter the Arabs and bring them to acquiesce to Israel's dominance. The new right, accordingly, considers the 1990s peace process with the Arabs to be futile, if not entirely useless.

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[114] See Bernard Reich and Gershon Kieval, *Israeli National Security Policy*, (London: Greenwood Press, 1998), pp. 62-65.
[115] *Ibid*, p. 63.

3- 'Nationalism'. Generally, nationalism meant for Israelis a return of the 'Kingdom of Israel' worthy of its name with all its mythical power and grandeur.[116] On a smaller scale, it meant keeping all the land Israel occupies as part of the Land of Israel.

Both Israel's two main political coalitions —the Labor Alignment and the Likud Alignment- have been constrained by these three guidelines when carrying out their foreign policy. Israeli leaders believed that a vulnerable community requires the existence of substantial ideological cohesion if it is to survive. Even though each leader has had somewhat different stands on how to deal with the conflict on the ground, they remain essentially faithful to the guidelines stated.[117]

As an example, *territorial expansion* is, from a Likud point of view, a right[118] that guarantees the vision of Greater Israel, which means the dire necessity to annex neighboring Arab land. The old right ideology that was based upon Jabotinski's dictum believed that "The Jordan has two banks: the one is ours, and so is the other."[119] Jabotinski's[120] ideology (revisionism), which was one of the most extremist in Israel, was mainly based on the idea that the Jewish nation has a 'mission' of its own. This mission's goal is to re-establish 'the Kingdom of Israel' worthy of is name.[121] Jabotinski rejected the partitioning of Palestine into one Jewish State and one Arab State. But since he knew that the Arabs would not relinquish any part of their land without fighting, he believed that the armed conflict between the Arabs and the Jews was existentially

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[116] *Ibid.*

[117] The moderate Israeli peace camp will be discussed in chapter 3.

[118] Bernard Reich and Gershon Kieval, *Israeli National Security Policy*, p. 65.

[119] Samuel J. Roberts, *Party and Policy in Israel*, p. 22.

[120] Vladimir Jabotinski (1880-1940), one of the fathers of the Zionist movement, founded in 1923 the World Union of Zionist-Revisionists, and soon afterwards he formed a secret army called the 'Nationalist Army Organization', also known as 'Irgun'.

[121] See Bernard Reich (ed.), *An Historical Encyclopedia of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (London: Greenwood Press, 1995).

inevitable and preached that international relations in general epitomize a never-ending "struggle for blood and soil".[122] Jabotinski morally justified this struggle on the account that the survival of the Jewish people depended on the conquest of entire historical Palestine. As his thinking was becoming more and more ethnocentric, Jabotinski inspired many of the Israeli leaders such as Yitzhak Shamir, Menachem Begin, Benjamin Netenyahu and Ariel Sharon, who often implemented their leader's ideas. Therefore, it is safe to argue that today's Likud, which is a composite of various parties, "is an outgrowth of revisionist Zionism. During its decades on the political sidelines, its leaders redefined their liberal economic outlooks and the theoretical basis for their support of the notion of a "Greater Israel"...."[123] As a matter of fact, some argue that when Menachem Begin arrived to power in 1977, he indeed radicalized Jabotinski's ideology (neo-revisionism) by refusing to recognize the mere existence of Palestinian nationalism, and by repeatedly asserting that a "return of Israel to the 1948 lines would mean a return to Auschwitz borders".[124] This clearly means that Israel should not give up the territories it conquered in the 1967 war as it posed a fatal danger to its entire existence. In fact, in 1978, as soon as Begin signed the peace agreement with Egypt at Camp David, "he immediately returned to his annexation stance, approved an accelerated settlement effort, and refused to allow any but the most limited autonomy to the local inhabitants."[125]

In 1982, Oded Yenon, a former employee of Israel's foreign Ministry under Ariel Sharon, declared that Israel's strategy should focus on breaking the Arab states into many

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[122] Bernard Reich and Gershon Kieval, *Israeli National Security Policy*, p. 56.
[123] Naomi Chazan, "The Domestic Foundation of Israeli Foreign Policy", in Judith Kipper and Harold Saunders (eds.), *The Middle East in Global Perspective*, (Oxford: Westview Press, 1991), p. 82.
[124] Bernard Reich and Gershon Kieval, *Israeli National Security Policy*, p. 59. Auschwitz was a Nazi concentration camp where many Jews perished in WWII.
[125] See Bernard Reich and Gershon Kieval, *Israeli National Security Policy*, p. 65.

ethnic mini-states: four in Syria, three in Egypt, two in Iraq, etc...[126], which has been consistently stated by many Israeli right-wing politicians. The idea behind it is clearly that ethnic mini-states are much more easily neutralized and captured than the actual relatively vast, active confrontational states.

Therefore, it is clear that the Likud, in general, operates within a framework that views *force* as the mechanism of preference in the Middle East in both the short and long term, in the belief that Israel would eventually liberate the rest of the Land of Israel. From their perspective, Israel as a power confronts a largely undifferentiated, revisionist, and hostile Arab world whose ultimate goal is to destroy it. Conformably, in 1996, Benjamin Netenyahu declared that he found the Oslo accords to be 'particularly amusing'. He argued that an Israeli withdrawal from the territories captured in 1967 would anyway not stop the Arab peoples in general and the Syrians more particularly from perceiving Israel as an alien aggressor. [127] Therefore, Netenyahu defended the Israeli right-wing views concerning the challenges Israel faces by concluding that Israel's sole power is its military might.[128] He stated that:

> ...the basic hostility to Israel is still widespread. Therefore, our ability to reach peace with our neighbours [sic] exists first and foremost due to our deterrent power, following the estimate in wide circles in the Arab world that Israel possesses great power. Once this estimate breaks down, all the political progress we have achieved to date will break down as well.[129]

As for the Golan Heights, Netenyahu maintained that an agreement with Syria would inevitably be fragile for three main reasons: first, Syrian military power is constantly increasing; secondly, the Syrian alliance with Iran, and thirdly; Syrian sponsoring of what

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[126] *Ibid*, p. 71.
[127] Major Shawn Pine, "Israel's Security and the Peace Process", [Online] [Cited September 1997]. Available at: http://www.treeman.org/m_online/sep9//pinel.html
[128] *Ibid*
[129] See Bernard Reich and Gershon Kieval, *Israeli National Security Policy*, p. 71.

he calls 'terrorism'.[130] Furthermore, critical importance is attached to what is called 'strategic-Height Problem'-which is the ability to stop the descent of Syrian Tanks that Israel would face if it withdrew from the Golan Heights.[131] Thus in late 1996 in an interview with Ha'aretz, Netenyahu suggested that "…when we enter this negotiation, we will enter it with a demand identical to that of the Syrians. If they demand all of the Golan Heights, so will we."[132]

From a labor point of view, however, the power politics approach of the Likud is remodeled to fit into a more conciliatory program. For example, according to the classic labor approach, *military force* is to be used only when diplomatic efforts have failed to achieve an Israeli plan. This approach is embodied in the Hebrew phrase 'ein breira': "war is to be waged only when there is no other choice, when all other means have been exhausted".[133] As a result of this approach, Labor, and the left in general, believe that some *territorial concessions* are a price to pay in exchange for a peace agreement.

Nonetheless, the Labor party and its supporters agree to the use of *force* when it comes to establishing settlements in Palestinian occupied territories, security zones in Lebanon and the Golan Heights, therefore supporting *territorial expansion*. And even though the Left Alignment is divided basically into two camps - the moderate or 'doves' and the 'hawks', in other words the hardliners of the Party - it remains faithful to the 3 principles on which the State of Israel has been established and secured.[134] To illustrate this point, in 1956 the governing Labor party Mapai, under Ben-Gurion, successfully seized Sharm-al-Shaikh, an Egyptian town, and opened the Straits of Tiran to Israeli

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[130] Major Shawn Pine, "Israel's Security and the Peace Process", [Online] [Cited September 1997].
[131] Ben D. Mor, "the Middle East Peace Process and Region Security", p. 188
[132] Bernard Reich and Gershon Kieval, *Israeli National Security Policy*, p. 71
[133] *Ibid*, p. 39
[134] *Ibid*

shipping hoping that military moves and the use of force ensured the necessary ground for an eventual peace with the Arabs.[135] The Labor hypothesis is that a strong Israel would compel the Arabs to opt for peace. Later on, on the issue of the Golan Heights and territorial annexation, part of the Labor agreed to only a partial withdrawal from the territory, while the majority strongly supported the demands of the settlers to remain in the Heights.

Therefore, it is safe to conclude that even though the Left and the Likud have somewhat taken different stands on many issues concerning Israel and its Arab neighbors, nevertheless, they have been constrained by the three main guidelines that we have mentioned earlier, namely territorial expansion, the use of force, and finally nationalism when carrying on their foreign policy and assuring their security. Unfortunately, a strong military combined with an ideological belief that supports it could help preserve Israeli security; however, it also insures an intensified Arab anxiety and an increased feeling of insecurity, which, as we have seen earlier, stimulates Arab animosity and countermeasures.

2- Syrian ideology and its role in the conflict:

The examination of the beliefs of the Israeli right and more importantly the Zionist leader, Vladimir Jabotinski, helps better understand the political movements that have emerged in Syria and the Arab world. However, it is important to note that even though, not all Israelis believe in Jabotinski's ideas, the Syrian people tend to think that most of

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[135] Samuel J. Roberts, *Party and Policy in Israel*, pp. 19-20.

the Israeli people have allegiance to Jabotinski's revisionism and the right wing in general.

Accordingly, what mostly alarms Syria and the other Arab states in general is the fact that, by prompting the dream of grandeur and national power, neo-revisionism endorses the ideas of "Jewish superiority" and Jewish domination over others.[136] What I seven more worrying to the Arab people is the fact that Israeli leaders like Yitzhac Shamir, Ariel Sharon, Benjamin Netenyahu and others, have deep personal and ideological conviction in this set of ideas.

Thus the Syrian struggle with the Zionist entity is also first of all ideological. Added to this is the fact that Syria has traditionally, and since the late 19th century, viewed Zionist ideas as racist and the Zionist dream of Israel as a sort of European colonial occupation. Syrian thinkers rejected the idea of Israel from a nationalistic standpoint based upon two secular ideological movements that originated at the beginning of the twentieth century from Syria and Lebanon: these are Arabism and the movement of Greater Syria.

Arabism, under its Arab Christian leader Michel Aflaq, asserts that Israel, as a foreign and expansionist entity, wants to stretch from the Nile to the Euphrates, presents by definition danger to not only the Arab land, rights, or will, but to their entire existence as a people. Michel Aflaq, and other leaders of the Arab movement such as Akram Hourani and Ali al-Arsuzi, therefore warned in their writings about the establishment of Israel and its false claims of its desires for peace. On this ground, Arabism as a movement that aspires for the re-unification of the Arab world considers Israel to be an illegitimate entity that is not only alien to the region, but also established in Palestine at

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[136] Bernard Reich and Gershon Kieval, *Israeli National Security Policy*, p. 60.

the expense of the Palestinian Arab people.[137] It is thus a sort of European colonialism imposed by western powers to break a culturally-homogeneous area that expanded from Anatolia to Egypt and was known in the 19th century as Arab Asia. To demonstrate this point, Patrick Seale writes:

> From North to South there were no linguistic, natural, or racial boundaries...By 1922 this vast area had been carved up by Britain and France into no less than eight administrative units...To free and reunify these territories became the main objective of Arab nationalism.[138]

The movement of Greater Syria on the other hand, calls for a re-unification of what was called till 1923 Greater Syria, including present-day Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, the Palestinian territories and Iraq.[139] The movement stresses the fact that the colonial presence in the region drew arbitrarily borders to create, in the 1920s, new political entities, formed it is argued, to strategically divide and exploit the region. In order to discern this point, it is important to note that even the actual Syria was supposed to be partitioned into 5 mini-states by the French colonial powers. These were deemed to be: The State of Aleppo and the State of Damascus would form what we would have called Syria, the Alawi State, the State of Jabal el Druze, and finally the Alexandratta State in the North. Therefore, the movement of Greater Syria opposes the existence of the Zionist entity on the ground that historical Palestine is but the South of Syria historically and that this reality has been changed by the creation of, what colonialists have called, 'nation-states'.[140] Thus, the movement and its followers in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan view Israel as an obstacle to the fulfillment of their ambition of regaining

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[137] *Ibid*, p. 64.

[138] Patrick Seale, *Assad of Syria*, (London: Tauris and Co Limited Publishers, 1988), p. 5.

[139] See Issa al-Yazji, *Adoua' 'ala Fikr Sa'ada*, (Beirut: Bissane, 1997). See also Antun Sa'ada, *The Principles of the Syrian National Party*, (Beirut Press, 1938).

[140] For further information, see Antun Sa'ada, *Nishou' al-Oumam (The Birth of Nations)*, (Beirut: Dar Sa'ada, 1999).

Greater Syria's historical, rightful and natural boundaries, which, as stated earlier, include Israel, Syria, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Jordan and Iraq. Furthermore, the movement of Greater Syria is, by definition, irreconcilable ideologically with the Zionist entity as the latter has expanding ambitions that overlap those of Syria's, demonstrated, it is argued, by the actual Israeli effort to maintain its control over the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights. To better illustrate this point, Syrian thinkers and others argue that Begin's peace with Egypt and his war with Lebanon "were intimately and directly linked with the central goal of annexation", the goal of creating Greater Israel, which is intended by Zionists to overlap historical Greater Syria. In fact the ambition to create Greater Israel can only make the Syrians and the Arabs in general - whether they believe in Arabism and the Greater Syria movement or not - define their conflict with Israel in existential terms.

The importance of the ideological factor is, therefore, that it has the specificity of being (just like the military imperative) part of the main factors causing the feeling of insecurity, while also being an active element used by the Israeli and Syrian governments in their quest for security. In other words, ideology itself is used to reassure the two peoples when they feel the least secure within their borders, while at the same time igniting their animosity and mistrust towards one another.

Finally, this chapter has attempted to present the exact mix of elements behind the Syrian-Israeli conflict and to demonstrate the territorial, military, and ideological reasons behind the perpetuation of the conflict, and why it remains -after 54 years of the establishment of Israel - as intense as ever. It is argued that these causes have

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[140] For further information, see Antun Sa'ada, *Nishou' al-'Oumam* (The Birth of Nations), (Beirut: Dar Sa'ada, 1999).

institutionalized a cycle that has increased the enmity between the two peoples, over the years, making the possibility of peace nonexistent unless: 1- these causes are recognized; 2- and most importantly, an end-result or a solution has been identified by a just peace broker to neutralize the sources of the conflict. This conclusion leads us to new important questions that we shall attempt to answer in the next chapter: what are the possible solutions to the Syrian-Israeli problem? What are the Syrian and Israeli perceptions and solutions to the problem? Could negotiations solve the problem? Answering these questions can help understand the real factors behind the failure of the Syrian-Israeli peace process and the prospects for a durable settlement.

Chapter Three: Perspectives for Peace and Peace Negotiations.

In this chapter shall attempt to answer these main questions: What are the positions of both Damascus and Tel Aviv with regard to the peace process; notably, their position vis-à-vis the Golan Heights, and what are the prospects for a durable settlement of the Arab/Syrian-Israeli conflict? Also, what is 'peace' for both sides, is it an end to the state of belligerency in a peace treaty, or is it normalization of relations on the economic and diplomatic levels?

At the outset, it should be clear that the Israeli and Syrian contentions have changed over the years apropos the peace process. For this reason, I have seen it best if we discuss both the Israeli and the Syrian positions in time epochs. The first phase shall trace the period between the 1967 Six-Day War and the Second Gulf War in 1991.[141] The second phase shall cover the period between 1991 and 1996.[142] In addition to this, and for the purpose of furthering the assertion of this thesis, a special section will be introduced investigating the propositions of the peace camp in Israel, and, for lack of material, the propositions of 'moderate' elements in the Syrian government.

This chapter shall attempt to demonstrate that the peace negotiations of the early 1990s failed because they were "the continuation of war by other means and not as a means of banishing violence from their [Syria's and Israel's] relationship". They hence failed because they never solved once and for all the reasons behind the state of war, which are territorial (the Golan Heights), military and most importantly, ideological causes. But this is also because the U.S., being Israel's patron, was never a just and

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[141] The year 1991 has been chosen because it was the year when the United States launched its war against Iraq and promised a more active role in bringing to an end the Arab-Israeli conflict.

legitimate broker between the two states. Therefore, the failure of the peace process, we believe, does not mean that peace is unreachable, but that the process has been founded on different beliefs.

A- <u>The Israeli part in the Peace Negotiations:</u>

1- <u>From 1967 to the end of the Gulf War:</u>

On the eve of signing the armistice agreements with both Egypt and Syria in 1967, Israel accepted, on November 22nd, 1967, UN resolution 242 that called for *inter alia,* "withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict" and "termination of all claims or state of belligerency, [and respect the] territorial integrity and political independence of every state in the area and [the] right [of the people] to live in peace with secure and recognized boundaries, free from threats or acts of force."[143]

However, many argue that the Israeli leaders interpreted this resolution as meaning that the Israeli forces are to be withdrawn from the "territories occupied in this conflict" to 'new', to-be-agreed-upon, borders in return for terminating the state of belligerency and respecting the "territorial integrity and political independence of every state in the area and their right to live in peace...".[144] This view held true for the Syrian case more than the Egyptian case, for Israel returned all the occupied land to Egypt after

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[142] Our analysis shall stop at the year 1996 because Syrian-Israeli negotiations have since been suspended until the day of this writing.

[143] See Moshe Ma'oz, "Syria, Israel and the Peace Process," in B. Rubin and J. Ginat (eds.), *From War to Peace,* (New York: NY University Press, 1994), p. 158. See also Bernard Reich (eds), *Arab-Israeli conflict and Conciliation: A Documentary History,* (London: Greenwood Press, 1995), pp. 101-102.

[144] Moshe Ma'oz, *Syria and Israel: From War to Peacemaking,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) p. 112.

signing the Camp David Peace Accords in 1979. However, since this thesis does not deal with the Israeli-Egyptian conflict, we shall limit ourselves to exploring the truth of this claim from the Syrian perspective.

The first sign came in 1968 when Israel actually abolished the above resolution. To be sure, Israel declared in 1969 that it would not give up the Syrian Golan Heights. Ya'Alon[145] wrote arguing that "our firm hold [in] *sic* the Golan Heights and the Mount Hermon shoulder is very vital not only in order to defend… the Hula Valley from Syrian fire … (but also) [o]ur control over the Golan Heights *derives from Israel's overall strategy, since this means defending the chief water resources.*"[146] (*Italics are mine).*

In reality, however, several Israeli governments, and even the Likud ones, were prepared to partially withdraw from the Golan Heights in return for a full peace and normalization of relations with Syria. For example, in 1977, following his advent to power, Prime Minister Menachem Begin declared that Israel would remain in the Golan Heights but that it would be ready to withdraw its forces to a 'new' line that would become its permanent boundary with Syria.[147] However, during the 1980s the Israeli Right further hardened its position and upon Begin's request, the Knesset[148] passed the "Golan Law"[149] on the 14th of December 1981, which, in effect, meant the annexation of the Golan to Israel since it extended the application of Israeli law and administration to that jurisdiction.[150]

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[145] Allon is considered by many as one of Israel's chief strategic thinkers.

[146] Moshe Ma'oz, *Syria and Israel: From War to Peacemaking*, p. 112.

[147] *Ibid*, p. 192.

[148] The Knesset is the Israeli Parliament.

[149] See Bernard Reich (ed.), *Arab-Israeli conflict and Conciliation*, p. 174.

[150] Moshe Ma'oz, "Syria, Israel and the Peace Process," in B. Rubin and J. Ginat, *From War to Peace*, p. 158.

The case was not different on the Labor side of the government. Few members of the Labor Party demanded that Israel should withdraw from the Golan Heights, and the Labor Knesset members voted for the 1981 Golan Law. The Israeli Labor Party, moreover, interpreted the 242 UN resolution to mean only a partial Israeli withdrawal from the Golan within the framework of a full and viable peace. The Labor Party insisted that Israeli settlements and military control in the Golan should continue even if there were peace with Syria.[151] Furthermore, several senior members of the Party have been categorically opposed to any compromise in that region.[152]

Therefore, intransigence from the Labor and Likud governments not to give up the Golan was equally strong. Many Jewish settlements were established on the Golan under the Labor governments' period of office up until 1977. Several more settlements were added after the Likud's ascendancy in 1977, and, in late 1981, a new Golan development project envisaged building a few more regional centers and adding several thousand new settlers in the Golan. This prompted a very strong reaction from Syria, and it made an appeal to the UN Security Council to have Israel abrogate the Golan Law. Not only did Israel ignore Syrian appeals, but it invaded Lebanon in 1982, thus pushing Syria to increase its military build-up as part of its attempts to reach a military balance with Israel in that period.

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[151] Moshe Ma'oz, *Syria and Israel: From War to Peacemaking*, p. 223.
[152] To give one example is Benjamin Ben-Elia'zer. He is the current leader of the Labor Party and he occupies the task of defense minister under the government of right-wing Likud leader Ariel Sharon.

2- From 1991 to 1996 and the Peace Process:

As we have already mentioned, both Israel and Syria never kept a constant pace in their foreign policies and allowed themselves room to stay as flexible as circumstances needed. The two states altered their policies as regional and global political circumstances changed and as the relative effectiveness of existing policies became evident.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, and America's war in the Gulf, a new vision for the Middle East was in the making by the only remaining superpower. US officials, headed by Mr. Bush himself, declared that the United States was serious in finding a just solution for the Middle East on all tracks, including the Syrian-Israeli track. For this reason, Israel found itself incapable of swimming against this American tide and had to enter into negotiations with the Arab states; notably, with Syria. At that time, a Labor government took control in Israel under Yitzhak Rabin as Prime Minister. Despite the mistrust and antagonism that existed towards the Syrian regime, however, Rabin said in late 1991 that Israel could talk to Syria; after all, Syria had kept the separation of forces agreement for 17 years, since May 1974. Later on, on the eve of the 1992 Israeli elections, he said that there would be room for territorial compromise and that he would be willing to return some of the land to Syria.[153]

Yet, events never actually took the shape that a lot of people in the region had hoped for. The suspicion between Israel and Syria was deeply rooted, and none of the two countries were willing to commit themselves to an agreement they were apprehensive the other party would not respect. For this reason, Israel's position was always intended to be ambiguous. In addition to this, Rabin had always considered the Golan an important

strategic asset and he was also attached to the settlements there, many of which were affiliated with the Labor Party. Therefore, he wished to see the Golan issue deferred as long as possible, and eventually to reach a 'territorial compromise' with Syria in return for full peace.

In 1992, in an address to a special meeting of the Knesset, Rabin said that Israel's intention was indeed to thoroughly exploit that chance. In an October interview with Ma'arif, an Israeli daily newspaper, one Israeli official said:

> In a personal conversation with Rabin before the formation of the coalition, he told me, " we will not return even a single centimeter of the Golan Heights … [and] settlement in the Golan Heights … will continue to be encouraged."[154]

Despite this intended ambiguity in the Israeli position, however, in 1994, when US Secretary of State Warren Christopher met Rabin in Jerusalem, he was asked to deliver to the Syrian side a peace package which reportedly consisted of the following elements:

1- Israel will withdraw *in* the Golan Heights in three stages over a period of five to eight years, parallel to three phases of peace and normalization with Syria,

2- In the first stage, Israel will withdraw from three Druze villages in the north-east adjacent to the cease-fire line with Syria, and in return Syria will establish diplomatic relations with Israel, and exchange ambassadors,

3- During the second stage, in these three Druze villages only, Israeli settlements will be evacuated and full normalization will be implemented between the two states,

4- In the third stage, Israel will resume its withdrawal.[155]

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[153] Moshe Ma'oz, *Syria and Israel: From War to Peacemaking*, p. 224.

[154] Israel Shahak, "Hostility and Cooperation," *Middle East International*, 6 November 1992.

[155] It should be made clear here that the Israelis never specified to which final line their withdrawal would reach.

5- Syria and Israel will implement a variety of security arrangements that include demilitarization and reduction of troop concentrations, mostly from the Syrian side, as well as creating early-warning stations and deploying an international force to supervise these security arrangements.[156]

Statements followed up these steps from Israeli officials adding more impetus to expediting the peace process with Syria. Most notably, Foreign Affairs minister Shimon Peres clearly stated that "[w]e have acknowledged Syrian sovereignty on the Golan Heights time after time."[157] He added that he believed that more than half of the members of the Knesset were prepared to make such a change.[158] Peres' statements, most probably coordinated with Rabin, clearly signified that Israel was ready to give up the Golan in return for an inclusive peace with Syria.

Nonetheless, and under very heavy pressure from the Labor's constituency, the Rabin government decided it was best not to officially commit itself to withdrawal from the Heights. In early September 1994, Rabin proposed a different, "very partial" Israeli pullback from four Druze villages in the Golan. This was supposed to be followed by a three-year "test period" during which there would be a full normalization in relations with Syria, including embassies. Subsequently, a substantial Israeli withdrawal in return for a comprehensive peace would be decided in a referendum.[159]

Furthermore, the Israeli government, in coordination with the American government, initiated several agreements with Jordan that culminated in July 1994 with the signing of a mutual non-belligerency agreement in Washington. These advances were conceived to

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[156] Moshe Ma'oz, *Syria and Israel: From War to Peacemaking*, p. 224.
[157] *Haaretz*, 31ˢᵗ May 1994.
[158] *Ibid.*
[159] *Haaretz*, 8ᵗʰ September 1994.

pressure Syria into accepting the Israeli proposals in the sense that Syria would be left out of the peace process and would lose its benefits if it kept pursuing its uncompromising line.

These measures, coming despite positive signs from Syria, were considered a regression from the previously declared official position, and especially so by the Syrians. However, this new position was, as we already mentioned, influenced by the growing rebuke in Israel to a full withdrawal from the Golan. This opposition to any compromise with the other side was capped by the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin at the hands of Israeli right-wing extremists.

Some signs of life in the peace process reappeared when Peres assumed his position as Prime Minister, considering that his seeming priority was reaching a settlement with Syria. But, the election of Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu in May 1996 as Prime Minister put the whole process on hold, as Netanyahu was unequivocal in his refusal to make concessions on the Golan. On September 9th 1996 at the White House, Netanyahu delivered two main "NOs" to President Clinton: Israel would not surrender the Golan Heights, nor was Israel ready to withdraw its troops from Mount Hermon. Netanyahu, in these avowals, followed by heart the Likud strategy which said that the only way to achieve peace for Israel was through a balance of power tilted towards Israel and not through "comprehensive peace".[160]

The real problem in the negotiations therefore lies in the fact that, while the Israelis were willing to withdraw *in* the Golan and at times *from* the Golan, they still wanted to keep all the security advantages they had acquired by occupying the Golan Heights. It is argued that:

The Israeli negotiator approached peace with the mentality of a precise technician who wanted all the guarantees in the world before taking any step forward. He wanted all the political and military advantages associated with occupying the land, yet at the same time, peace required that he should withdraw from the land.[161]

Therefore, instead of entering the negotiations with the goal of entirely banishing violence from their relationship with the Syrians, Israeli negotiators considered the peace process as another means to cling to their political and military advantages.

3- The Israeli Peace Camp:

The Arab-Israeli struggle is viewed by many as an existential struggle rather than a border one. For this reason, nearly all segments of the political spectrum in both Israel and the Arab world are deeply involved in this fight, with some interesting differences inside each individual country. The Israeli peace camp is considered by many as an important actor in the intricate balance of powers within Israeli society, especially in a system where public opinion holds such sway on the turn of events in the foreign policy arena. Ergo, we shall examine its dictum vis-à-vis the Israeli occupation of the Golan.

The overwhelming argument among Israeli peace supporters is the relative unimportance of the Heights to Israel. They argue that claims that Israel's advanced military lines would prevent Syria from waging war first are untenable. In 1973, for example, Israel was as close to Syrian border as it is now (at some points even closer); however, that did not stop Syria from launching an attack first.

Furthermore, they argue that Israel's strategic choice of always being geared to wage a preventive war against Syria is hampered. In 1973, Israel encountered the

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[160] It is useful to reread the Israeli strategy under the Likud discussed *supra* in chapter one of this thesis.

importance of international pressure on the aggressor state. Hence, Israel must allow a state that wants to recover its territory to appear clearly as an aggressor in the eyes of international opinion, and then be able to attack it first. Therefore, if the Golan Heights were returned to Syria in return for some sort of concessions, and if Israel perceives that those concessions are being violated, then, according to them, Israel would be able to assault Syria first.[162]

Finally, some argue that the presence of settlements on the Golan actually hinders the Israeli army from fighting well, since the first job of the army would be to evacuate the settlers there. To them, this means that the whole claim that Israel is holding the Golan to provide some strategic depth for the Galilee (the North of Israel) gives rise to an absurdity: if the Israelis move the Galilee to the Golan, then the problem of defending the Galilee becomes the problem of defending the Jewish population in the Golan.[163]

B- <u>The Syrian Part in the Peace Negotiations:</u>

1- <u>From 1967 to the end of the Gulf War:</u>

Unlike the Israeli position regarding Syria and the Golan, which in reality seemed to be unchanging, the Syrian position regarding Israel went through several phases of change since 1967. Immediately after the war, the official position was, as one might expect, hostile and uncompromising. Syria refused to acknowledge the right of Israel to

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[161] Walid Kazziha, "The Syrian-Israeli Peace Process", in Moonis Ahmar (ed.), *the Arab-Israeli Peace Process*, p. 209.
[162] Israel Shahak, "The Real Problem Between Israel and Syria," *The Middle East International*, 12 April 1996.
[163] *Haaretz*, June 30th 1995.

exist, and adopted policies aimed at hurting its enemy, like allowing Palestinian resistance to operate across its border.

The first change occurred in 1970 when Hafez Al-Assad rose to power via a bloodless military coup. Assad adopted a new attitude and accepted UN resolution 242 which called for the partition of historical Palestine into a Jewish state and a Palestinian state, at the same time focusing on the part calling on Israel to withdraw from all occupied Arab territories and guaranteeing Palestinian rights. However, as we mentioned earlier,[165] Assad never relinquished his military option and continued in his attempts to reach a military balance with Israel. This strategy stemmed from his belief that Israel's military strength should be countered with Arab strength, however, diplomacy and political maneuvering should also be used in an overall strategy toward Israel.[166]

For this reason, in early 1977, Syria sent messages to the Carter administration stating it was willing to enter into peace negotiations with Israel to reach a just and durable peace settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict. However, after the signature of the Camp David peace treaty between Egypt and Israel in 1979, Assad abandoned his diplomatic efforts and concentrated more on building up his military option vis-à-vis Israel.[167] He believed that neutralizing Egypt would give Israel more leverage in any peace negotiations unless the Arab side countered Israel's power.

The early 1980s were dominated by the involvement of both Syria and Israel in the Lebanon war and its aftermath. This period witnessed direct confrontations between

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[165] See Syrian strategy, supra chapter 1.
[166] See Moshe Ma'oz, "Syria, Israel and the peace process", *in* B. Rubin and J. Ginat (eds.), *From War to Peace*, p. 159.
[167] *Ibid*, p. 161.

the armies of the two countries, and Syria in this case considered it was defending its national security, making sure the Israeli forces never came too close to Damascus so as to pose a serious threat to it. Israel, on the other hand, always thought of Lebanon as the weakest link in the Arab chain, and believed that if Lebanon was made to sign a peace treaty with it, then Jordan, and eventually Syria, will have to do the same. During such kind of atmosphere, it was hard for anyone to imagine starting peace negotiations between the two parties.

Nonetheless, by the end of the 1980s, things had changed for both states: Israel dropped its claim to partition Lebanon and confined itself to occupying a border strip as a "buffer zone" in the south of Lebanon, and Syria lost its power patron when the Soviet Union collapsed and the Russian leadership changed its attitude toward Damascus. Added to this was the fact that Syria was going through an era of severe economic distress.[168] These evolving new conditions led the Syrians back to the phase of considering a peaceful settlement to the struggle with Israel. The Syrian leaders realized that Syria had no military option for an all-out war against Israel, especially that Syria could not rely on the backing of either Egypt or Iraq in case of war with Israel.[169]

Notwithstanding, Syria had a considerable military capability which it continued to develop. Many agree that this two-track strategy had been a constant keystone in the overall Syrian strategy in its struggle with Israel. This two-track strategy consisted of the simultaneous expansion of a military option and the use of diplomacy in order to regain the Golan Heights as well as other occupied Arab territories, and also to guarantee the

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[168] Many reasons are said to have contributed to the Syrian economic distress; the more important of which was the collapse of the Soviet Union thus the end of any financial assistance the Syrians were getting from the Soviets. Another reason is the rising military expenditures of the Syrians especially when they realized that they were without a power patron and had to acquire more defensive arms to guarantee their security.
[169] *Ibid*, pp. 163-164.

national rights of the Palestinian people. Yet, Syria did not seriously consider using the military option. The military option was actually meant to support Syria's decision to opt for a political settlement of the Middle East conflict. It stemmed from the belief that the strategic imbalance in Israel's favor precluded an honorable settlement, and Syria opposed negotiations until Israel committed itself to full withdrawal. This Syrian action was meant to obstruct attempts to bypass Syria in a regional settlement with Jordan and the Palestinians.

One final point can be made in this domain. Coupled with Assad's two-track strategy toward Israel, Assad concluded that reforming an Arab coalition was vital to preserve Arab interests. That is why, in 1988, after a decade of anti-Egyptian propaganda, Assad publicly stated that his country acknowledged the importance of Egypt in the Arab world and that the Syrian-Egyptian cooperation was essential to Arab interests. [170] In July 1990, he made his first official visit to Cairo in 13 years, and declared his country was ready to join the peace process, and to accept UN resolutions 242 and 338 that call for a formula of "Land for Peace" as a basis to resolve the conflict. Many observers agree that this important move was designed to create a united Syrian-Egyptian front to counter Israel's refusal to withdraw from the Golan. [171]

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[170] Moshe Ma'oz, "Syria, Israel and the Peace Process", *From War to Peace*, p. 164.
[171] *Ibid.*

2- From 1992 to 1996:

In mid 1991, Damascus adopted still a more flexible position regarding the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. President Assad kept sending messages directed particularly to the Bush administration reflecting Syria's readiness to find a peaceful solution to the conflict. The main proposition of these messages was the will to implement UN resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of "Land for Peace", which meant complete withdrawal from all Arab occupied territories in return for full peace.[172]

This approach gained more importance and more momentum after the Gulf War in 1991. At the end of that war, America emerged as the only worldwide superpower, and the Arab world suffered a severe blow after the defeat of Iraq. Syria had to come to terms with these facts, and started showing flexibility in order to end the conflict in the region. The first step of many was to ease the conditions made in order to enter negotiations with Israel. Previous to 1991, Syria had long insisted on, (1) a united Arab delegation; (2) UN sponsorship, which would make UN resolutions 242 and 338 the basis of any settlement and would put pressure on Israel; and (3) prior Israeli commitment to full withdrawal from the Golan. Instead, Syria accepted entering into unconditional bilateral negotiations with Israel. The best Syria could get was US assurances that the US considered UN resolution 242 as a basis for any settlement and that the Israeli annexation of the Golan to be illegitimate. [173]

The US administration under George Bush decided to play a more active role in the region in order to broker a peace deal between the warring parties. The US initiative

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[172] *Ibid*, p. 165.

[173] Raymond A. Hinnebusch, "Syria and the Transition to Peace", in Robert O. Freedman (ed.), *the Middle East and the Peace Process: the Impact of the Oslo Accords*, (Orlando: University Press of Florida, 1998), p. 143.

materialized in convening an international conference under an American-Russian joint chairmanship, and with representatives from the EU and the UN. The regional countries that participated were Syria, Lebanon, Israel and a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation.

Negotiations started within an atmosphere of hope and optimism. This was especially true for the Syrians because they thought that the Gulf War resituated Syria at the center of the Arab world and had weakened the PLO and Jordan, making them potentially dependent on Damascus. This created an impression for the Syrians that they had more leverage in pushing Israel to withdraw from the Golan if it wanted peace with its Arab neighbors.

However, those Syrian hopes were dashed as the PLO and Jordan reached separate agreements with Israel, and the Gulf Arab states moved toward normalization of relations with Israel even in the absence of a comprehensive peace. Thereby, the Syrian-Israeli negotiations now focused on the issue of the Golan and the Syrians insisted on full recovery of the Golan and the withdrawal of Israeli troops back to the 4th of June 1967 international borderline. In return, Israel would have peace with Syria including, *inter alia*, diplomatic exchange, economic cooperation and normalization of relations. Syria's minister of foreign affairs, Farooq Al-Shara', took another significant step when he announced in New York, for the first time, that Syria was prepared to sign a "total peace" with Israel in return for Israel's withdrawal from the occupied Arab lands. [174]

However, as we discussed earlier, the Israeli government, under the pressure of public opinion, proposed a "peace package" transmitted through Secretary Warren Christopher that was below the Syrian expectations, to say the least. Syria rejected this offer for many reasons, the most important of which was that the offer never mentioned

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[174] Moshe Maoz, *Syria and Israel: From War to Peacemaking*, p. 226.

Israel's commitment to fully withdraw from the Golan. Nevertheless, the Syrian leadership regarded this offer as a start and countered it with a "peace package" of its own. Warren Christopher was again the messenger of a Syrian peace proposal with the following main elements:

1- Israel should revoke the Golan Law of 1981 and recognize Syrian sovereignty in the Golan Heights,

2- Israel must withdraw from the entire Golan Heights within a period of maximum 2 years, followed by full peace with Syria,

3- Peace between Syria and Israel should be part of an overall peace between Israel and confrontation states[175],

4- Security arrangements should be symmetrical[176],

5- Syria will be ready, once Israel withdraws from the Golan, to discuss normalization of relations and diplomatic and economic relations.[177]

Subsequently, the Syrian government kept reiterating its position and demanded a total Israeli withdrawal to pre-1967 line, including the strategic area of Al-Hamma. Syria also demanded Israeli withdrawal to be completed in 2 years, after which relations between the two countries would be normalized. Following this withdrawal, security arrangements at the border would be determined symmetrically.

By that time, the Syrian government, as a proof of its seriousness, began preparing the Syrian public for peace. The Syrian media signaled that Syria was ready to discuss a

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[175] The confrontation states are Egypt, Jordan, the PLO, Syria and Lebanon. In reality, this demand meant linking the Syrian and Lebanese tracks for Egypt signed a deal already, the Palestinians also signed the Oslo accords in 1993 and Jordan was on its way to sign a separate peace agreement.

[176] It is believed that the Syrians were focusing on the demilitarized zones and early warning stations. They argued that demilitarized zones should be equal in length on both borders, and that early warning stations should be set up on both sides or should not exist at all.

[177] Moshe Ma'oz, *Syria and Israel: From War to Peacemaking*, p. 247.

phased Israeli withdrawal from the Golan, provided Israel committed itself to total withdrawal. The Damascus Radio declared on July 18th 1994 that "Syria is interested and ready to cooperate with any serious proposal that will lead to genuine peace in the region. But under no circumstances will Syria compromise on the issue of Arab territory or the rights of the Arab people."[178] In September of that year, Syria's foreign minister, Farooq Al-Shara', said in London that Syria was ready to offer Israel, for the first time, a "warm peace" including full diplomatic relations between the two states following, or in exchange for full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan. Two days later, Assad told the Syrian Parliament for the first time that he believed that Syria should honor the "objective requirement of peace"; namely, normal relations with Israel, and expressed his hope that this would be achieved in the near future.[179] Similarly, on October 7th 1994, Farooq Al-Shara' gave an unprecedented exclusive interview in Washington to Israeli television in which he stated that Syria was interested in real peace with Israel and as soon as possible. Finally, on October 27th 1994, Assad, in his second meeting with President Clinton in Damascus, repeated Syria's vision:

> I also affirmed to President Clinton the readiness of Syria to commit itself to the objective requirements of peace through the establishment of peaceful and normal relations with Israel in return for Israel's full withdrawal from the Golan to the line of June 4 1967 ... it will be a peace that prevails throughout the region and enables its people, Arabs and Israelis to live in security, stability and prosperity.[180]

However, how the negotiations would be concluded, and with what results, depended on whether the opponents viewed diplomacy as the continuation of war by other means, or whether they regarded diplomacy as a means of banishing violence from their

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[178] Gerald Butt, "Syria Hold Out", *Middle East International,* 22 July 1994.
[179] See *The New York Times,* 11 September 1994.
[180] Moshe Ma'oz, "Syria, Israel and the Peace Process", p. 251.

relationship.[181] Arguably, both parties considered negotiations as a means to continue hostilities. Negotiations broke off in mid 1995 over Israeli demand to build early warning stations in the Golan. Assad believed that this demand was an infringement on Syria's sovereignty and insisted that an aerial and satellite surveillance was adequate. In addition, the Syrian government felt that it had some leverage and refused to make any more moves it considered as concessions; after all, without Syria's endorsement no Arab-Israeli peace can be legitimate. Israel's integration into the region would stay limited without peace with Syria. Besides, "a Syria opposed to the peace process, in alliance with Iran and possibly Iraq, could conceivably destabilize the Middle East."[182]

On March 4th, 1996, Israel suspended its participation in the negotiations. This was a true disappointment to the Syrian people in general.[183] Syrian television announced a few days later that even though the talks have been suspended, the Syrian government was still ready and committed to achieve a just and comprehensive peace.[184] Later on, Netenyahu's election shocked all those who were deeply involved in the peace negotiations, but most importantly the Syrians, especially when Netenyahu declared on the 17th of June 1996 that "the government of Israel will conduct negotiations with Syria without preconditions." And that these negotiations would be based on the new formula of 'peace for peace', instead of 'land for peace'.[185] These formal statements coupled with a program that intended to strengthen Israel's demographic and administrative hold on the Golan brought the peace treaty to a complete standstill.

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[181] Ben D. Mor, "The Middle East Peace Process and Regional Security", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1, (March 1997), p. 187.
[182] Raymond A. Hinnebusch, "Syria and the Transition to Peace", p. 146.
[183] Helena Cobban, *The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks*, (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1999), pp. 151-153.
[184] *Ibid*, p. 153.
[185] *Ibid*, p. 169.

The Israelis followed these official statements by actions on the ground. Israeli forces began operation "Grapes of Wrath" in South Lebanon with an announced aim of removing the threat of Hizbollah. However, since Syrian forces are stationed in Lebanon, the Israelis were apparently trying to instigate a confrontation with the Syrians. Fighting did occur between the two sides, but Israel was forced to withdraw under heavy international pressure after it bombed a United Nations shelter in Qana, where hundreds of Lebanese civilians were slaughtered. This intense situation kept flaring regularly since that date, especially when Hizbollah guerillas would launch attacks on Israeli army posts in Southern Lebanon, and Israel would respond by bombing Syrian army posts near the Beka' valley. It should be noted, however, that in May 2000, the Israeli army withdrew unconditionally from the so-called security buffer zone in southern Lebanon ending 22 years of occupation. Many optimists saw this event as a potential step to bringing the two sides to the negotiating table again, but were proved to be wrong as attacks and counter-attacks remained frequent across the Israeli-Lebanese border.

The Syrian peace negotiations with Israel showed that Syria was willing to be flexible concerning diplomatic relations with Israel, termination of its boycotts against Israel, and the movement of people and goods across the borders. However, Syria was reluctant to commit itself to any bilateral economic ties, fearing Israeli economic hegemony, and it refused to withdraw its troops from the front line while the Israelis remained in the Golan. Syria argued that this would leave Damascus utterly defenseless, therefore affirming that the peace settlement did not at all banish violence from Syrian-Israeli relations.

3- The Moderate Syrian Camp:

There are a lot of groups within the Syrian society and Syrian government who refuse to sign peace with Israel, either on ideological grounds, or because of Syria's weakness compared to Israel. However, there are many elements within the same milieu that have a contrary belief. These elements believe that peace is important to the stability and growth in the region, and that justice is the only way to reach that stage. That is why they insist that Israel should return the Golan to Syria and all the occupied Arab territories to the Arabs, in return for full and warm peace with the Jewish state. This view is echoed by many sectors in the Syrian civil society. For example, in 1992, Professor Aziz Shukri, Dean of the Law Faculty at Damascus University, repeated this camp's vision in a lecture at the Washington Institute, and stated for the first time that Syria was willing to give Israel the kind of peace it was requiring. In Shukri's words:

> Not an inch of the Golan is for sale or lease ... [however] the state of war between Israel and Syria should be ended legally and completely and replaced with a state of peace. This should be peace in the widest sense imaginable, including mutual recognition, normalization of relations, diplomatic exchange, economic cooperation, social cooperation, etc ... [186]

Many would agree that any durable peace with Israel should be based upon justice and legitimacy. They see that an economic discontent coupled, with nationalism and religious extremism, would generate counter-peace activism. But, they argue, if peace has some legitimacy, then it could generate powerful mutual interests, which not only would allow to preserving the peace settlement, but also to improve people's economic situation and bring Arab and foreign investment into the region. Stability and security come about as people sense justice and freedom without the threat of war or occupation.

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[186] Moshe Ma'oz, *Syria and Israel, From War to Peacemaking*, p. 226.

C- <u>Failure of the Peace Process:</u>

There are six reasons, I believe to the failure of the peace process. First, the Israeli side was always the stronger one during the negotiations because of American backing, therefore hindering the possibility of a 'win-win' situation. After all, why would the Israeli side commit itself to a settlement when the present situation seems more advantageous to the Israeli people? Secondly, there is a tactic of 'wasting time' that the Israeli side has adopted in order to "maneuver between the different tracks of the peace process".[187] However, the Syrian government also adopted this strategy to make the Israeli side yield to their conditions. Respecting the time limit fir the implementation of an agreement encourages trust and adds credibility to the whole process. Thirdly, there is the belief that it is in Israel's interest to divide the Arab tracks instead of letting them complement each other. Fourthly, the fact that it is in the Syrian and Israeli governments' interest to continue living in the present situation, rather than reaching a settlement that risks not being validated by their constituencies. Fifthly, the third party acting as a facilitator rather than as a broker and as an enforcer who would make it costly to any side that does not want to reach a settlement. Finally, the American conducting of the negotiations with no real pre-conditions (the step-by-step approach) as opposed to a defined set of goals to be reached. This approach to the problem led the negotiations into ambiguity. For instance, during the peace talks, while Syria's main concern was to commit Israel to withdraw from the Golan, the Israeli team was "instructed not to discuss withdrawal but to focus on a definition of the nature of peace envisaged by the

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[187] Helena Cobban, *The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks*, p. 186.

Syrians".[188] This reveals that the real issue remains, between the Israeli side and the Syrian side, in their definition of 'peace'. The Syrians define 'peace' as; an end to war, balanced security arrangements and the finalizing of disputed frontiers. Peace therefore involves peaceful relations, but not necessarily friendly, warm relations. The Syrian line is "we have peace with many countries but close relations with only a few".[189] To the Syrians, 'full peace' is, in itself, a great concession to Israel because according to Security Council Resolution 242, on which th apeace process is supposed to be based, the Arabs should renounce belligerency in exchange for withdrawal from occupied land. However, to the Israelis, 'full peace' includes: "an end to the state war, security, arrangements involving early warning stations and monitoring procedures for the Israelis, demilitarized zones, a Syrian military pull-back from the Golan to well beyond Damascus, a reduction in the Syrian troop levels, open borders, trade, tourism, cooperative development of the resources of the Golan and an integration of infrastructures".[190] The difference in their definition of peace hinders all efforts to reach a broader vision of the conflict. Instead both parties are stuck in the details that are certainly important, but only once the broader image has been actually defined.

However, the failure of the peace process does not mean peace is unattainable in the Middle East, but rather that the process under American tutelage has been founded on a wrong, bias basis. The issue remains that continuing the present ambiguous situation for the two parties, especially Israel, is actually preferable to any negotiated settlement they can foresee. Furthermore, I believe that the United States was not a just broker, but

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[188] Walid Kazziha, "The Syrian-Israeli Peace Process", in Moonis Ahmar (ed.), *The Arab-Israeli Peace Process*, p. 203.
[189] Michael Jansen, "Differences on Full Peace", *Middle East International*, 5 January 1996, p. 8.
[190] *Ibid.*

rather a facilitator. In fact, we believe that the peace negotiations would have succeeded if on the one hand, the peace negotiations started by agreeing first on an end result. In other words, both the Israelis and the Syrians should agree on: whether the Golan Heights should return to Syria or not; whether the Palestinian refugees should return to a Palestinian state and whether Syria is finally ready to consider Israel the same as any other state in the region that needs to feel secure through reasonable measures and recognized within a defined and agreed upon boundaries. On the other hand, if the United States was more involved as a catalyst and mediator rather than a 'facilitator', then a different outcome may have been possible. For example, the United States could have decided at times to exercise more pressure on the Israeli side so that it was not fruitful for them to maintain the present situation, while identifying itself with the critical issues and which goals were to be reached. Therefore, I would argue that the step-by-step process, which was followed during the 1990s process, could not achieve meaningful results. Unfortunately, because end results were not defined at the start of negotiations, the peace talks dealt only partially with the sources of the conflict as discussed in chapter two. This conclusion brings us to the last chapter of this thesis; it argues that the only solution to the problem is a real involvement of a counter-balancing superpower such as the European Union in the Peace Process.

Conclusion: The Need for a Second Superpower in the Region

A- <u>The Need for a Second Superpower in the Region:</u>

In this thesis, I have traced a few aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict by examining the case of the Syrian-Israeli conflict. We have seen that this conflict has been raging on for more than 54 years. Before the end of the Cold War, the conflict had been influenced by superpower interests in the region, driving them to exert dominance on the players within it. The USA was Israel's patron, and the Soviet Union was Syria's. However, after the end of the Cold War, the Soviet Union collapsed leaving the United States as the unmistakable sole superpower. After that, the United States continued playing a decisive role in determining the future shape of the region. By virtue of its interests with the Arab countries - especially with the Gulf states - and its special relationship with Israel, the United States appeared to be able to play the role of a "decent" peace broker in the region between the Arabs and the Israelis.

Nonetheless, the continuance of the conflict and the growing pessimism of bringing it to an end push us to evaluate the success of these American efforts and question its neutrality as a facilitator of peace. The accusation that America's Middle East policy is formulated, not in Washington but in Tel Aviv, has long been made. While professing to be the "honest broker" between Israel and the Arabs, the United States effectively, since 1967, and especially under the presidency of Bill Clinton and the current presidency of George Bush Jr., has taken the side of Israel under its different governments and ignored the Israeli refusal to live up to its commitments under the Oslo Accords. The extremely low level of confidence among the people in the region that the United States can bring about peace can be cited as proof that the 'two-faced' policy America is pursuing in the Middle East has cost it some of its influence. This undermines any effort to convince both

parties to end the conflict. The real issue is: how can peace be achieved if it does not accord comparable dignity to both parties?

Furthermore, unfortunately for both the Israelis and the Arabs, the Likud party won the 2000 Israeli elections and Ariel Sharon, an army General directly responsible for the Sabra and Shatilla massacres in Lebanon and the Quds Intifada, was elected by the Israeli people to deal once and for all with the Palestinians. Hence, after a decade of negotiations, the Middle East Peace Process can be said to have failed drastically and the United States is considered by many observers to have failed in its attempts to achieve peace in the region. Consequently, there is great uncertainty as to where the road taken today by all parties will lead in the future. So the question remains, how can we launch once again the Arab-Israeli, and particularly, the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations?

New voices are joining the call for a more involved European role in the Middle East. The argument goes that a greater involvement of the European Union will help revive the peace process and achieve a durable peace in the region. Supporters of this European engagement see it as a counter force necessary to balance what is viewed as a biased American effort in order to achieve a just peace, which was the aim of the peace process in the first place. In accordance with this belief, I shall examine the needs for a more active European role and the provisions the European Union has to satisfy if it wants to regain what I shall be calling its "superpower status" in the Middle East. Needless to say, it is too early to propose a new political organization for the region, but it is important to at least try to speculate on some of the simple principles on which to base a more active role of the EU in the Middle East.

Although the EU has recognized the strategic significance of the Middle East for its different security needs, however, following the end of WWII, the European part has been limited in both scale and importance. Despite both the United States and Europe having a different historical, geographic and demographic background than the Middle East, however, Europe, both as individual states and as a union, can claim a longer, closer and more essential connection with the Middle East than can America. Nonetheless, while it has interests in the region that are more vital, immediate and strategic, America, as the more remote power from across the Atlantic, has become the main source of influence in the region.

Observers of the relations between Europe and the United States claim that Europe has been playing a secondary role to the U.S. around the world in a way that became evident after the end of WWII. There is no better illustration of their claim than the Middle Eastern example. Since the Six-Day War in 1967 and the British withdrawal from Aden[191] four years later, Americans and Europeans have maintained a policy regarding the Middle East where the United States was recognized as the leader of Western efforts on the two main regional projects: the Arab-Israeli peace process and the security of the Gulf. The European role was limited to supporting American efforts and financing their initiatives, and sometimes pursuing some individual interests in different parts of the region. In any case, where the EU stood against U.S. policy, it was usually in non-threatening matters. This led many to examine the reasons why Europe has been acquiescent in taking this secondary position in spite of Europe's geographic proximity, historical connection, and its economic and demographic links to the area.

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[191] Aden is a coastal city in southern Yemen.

The logic of this secondary status has been dictated by four key factors: (1) Cold War competition with the Soviets, (2) the legacy of European colonialism, (3) European weakness and divisions, and above all (4) the ability of the United States to project political, military and economic power into the region. This division of labor was most obvious in 1990-91, when Europeans joined the US-led coalition to attack Iraq and then just sat as observers at the Arab-Israeli peace conference in Madrid.

However, the apparent failure of the peace process under American tutelage is pushing observers, as well as parties in the region, to consider giving a larger role to the EU. They argue that the United States, being a patron to Israel, can neither propose nor impose a real peace formula, as it can only be an unjust one. The absence of fair leadership will drive the region into a state of insecurity, mistrust and fear, leading to unforeseeable consequences for the regional security. Therefore, in order to provide a sense of security, the European Union could take advantage of the fact that the American·influence and popularity is at a record low in the region - particularly on the Arab side - and take on tasks involved in promoting peace above and beyond the role it has played thus far.[192] These tasks should be proposing a counter-peace overture based upon a European vision taking into account its special relations with both the Israelis and the Arabs.

The Bertelsmann Foundation,[193] in one of its publications, sees that in order for regional security systems to be operable, the following rules should be seen as guidelines: they must be based on norms binding for *all* participants; participants need to be

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[192] See Zalmay Khalilzad, "Challenges in the Greater Middle East", in David Gombert and Stephen Larrabee (eds.), *America and Europe: A Partnership in a New Era*, (Cambridge UP, 1997) p. 21.

monitored to ensure they abide by the norms; there need to be institutions where participants can convene to resolve their differences peacefully; and finally there needs to be the potential to impose sanctions for behavior deviating from the norms.[194]

In accordance with these rules, the EU can and should help to bring about a security system for the Middle East that would ensure peace in the region. The first rule in building this security system is that the system functions only if its members adhere to specific norms. The norms most relevant to the Arab-Israeli conflict are the inviolability of international borders, the peaceful settlement of disputes, and accords on arms control and disarmament. The European Union's role in this context could be to offer the participants a forum where they can negotiate such kinds of agreements.[195] In addition, the E.U. should persuade the parties to implement declarations of intent in the form of biding treaties under international law.[196]

The second rule is the ability to monitor the participants' compliance with these norms. The stability of the security system would particularly depend on the E.U.'s ability to monitor compliance with its norms. Any successful attempt the parties might take to escape compliance might undermine the system's norms. This holds especially true under the current security system monitored by the United States. For example, Israel often disrespected, and continues flagrantly to do so, treaties binding international law. However, the US has been incapable of doing anything about it and sometimes, as Israel's patron, endorsed it. On the other hand, there were instances where international

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[193] See Werner Weidenfeld, Josef Janning and Sven Behrendt, *Transformation in the Middle East and North Africa: Challenges and Potentials for Europe and its Partners*, (Gutersloh: Bertelsmann Foundation Publishers, 1997), pp. 21-25.

[194] John Peterson, *Europe and America: Prospects for Partnership*, (London: Routledge, 1996) p. 49.

[195] The 1995 Barcelona Conference represented a material contribution to this end.

[196] See David Owen, "Atlantic Partnership or Rivalry?", in Henry Brandon (ed.), *In Search of a New World Order*, (The Brookings Institution, Washington D.C., 1992) p. 44.

monitoring proved to be more successful. For example, the deployment of international missions to monitor the Israeli-Egyptian peace accord and Israeli-Syrian cease-fire agreements have provided better results and confirmed the positive effect of international third parties. The E.U. can provide similar services to the Middle East, benefiting from its distinctly more objective position in the Arab-Israeli conflict. This is especially so at a time when the United States seems to be losing the standing of an international observer in the eyes of the Arab peoples and many of the Israelis.[197]

The third rule is the need to build institutions that facilitate the peaceful settlement of new conflicts. These institutions have to be a platform to formulate unbiased solutions and therefore need to be acceptable to all parties of the conflict; something the US failed in doing. The establishment of a conflict prevention center in Amman is certainly a step toward establishing such institutions, but is not yet an effective launch pad to settle the region's conflicts. Another suggestion would be to establish a court for arbitration which would supervise compliance with the system's norms, and determine and publicize any violation. The participants in the system should pledge to uphold and respect the court's rulings and aid in implementing them. The E.U.'s role under such circumstances would be to help establish such courts of arbitration, thus replacing the US on many issues.[198]

The fourth and final rule is to possess the power to impose sanctions against any deviation from the norms. Without any effective sanction mechanism any security system would lack effectiveness, and for any regional system to be able to safeguard international stability, the participants need to be presented with a credible threat of

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[197] See Zalmay Khalilzad, "Challenges in the Greater Middle East", in David Gombert and Stephen Larrabee, *America and Europe: A Partnership in a New Era*, p. 22.
[198] See Werner Weidenfeld, Josef Janning ad Sven Behrendt, *Transformation in the Middle East and North Africa: Challenges and Potentials for Europe and its Partners*, pp. 21-25.

punishment that can be enforced. However, past experiences made in connection with the second Gulf War and the failure to find an internal Arab solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict demonstrate that there are limits to any system of sanctions unless there is adequate political, economic or military potential available to do so. Until now, Europe lacked the adequate crisis reaction forces necessary to ensure compliance with the norms. However, it is clear that Europe's economic potential puts it in a good position to become the peacemaker in the region.[199] Within the framework of the EU Mediterranean initiative, each country is obligated not only to set up its economic relations bilaterally, but also on a basis of peaceful regional foreign policy. The EU thus embarked upon serious attempts to encourage peace and stability through its economic potential.[200]

Thus, Europe has a tool to contribute to the stabilization of regional security systems by way of economic punitive steps. The EU could thus make a contribution to penalizing the aggressive foreign policy measures of regional powers. The EU also agreed with its Mediterranean partner nations to found a large free trade area at a conference in Barcelona. The goal was to use the exchange of goods to eventually stabilize the whole region and lead it to peace. At the same time, it was hoped that the economic interdependencies that would develop could be used to penalize those who failed to comply with the regional system's norms with economic sanctions. It is, however, crucial that Europe does not fall into the same mistake as the United States of being biased if it wants to succeed in bringing about peace and stability to the region.

Furthermore, Europe decided at Maastricht to go ahead with political union, which meant a united foreign policy and security; which ultimately means a common European

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[199] *Ibid.*
[200] *Ibid.*

army. Thus, Europe would have its own security policy independent of the United States and means to implement it. Therefore, a militarily stronger Europe would become a powerful, but more impartial broker, in the Middle East, which in turn will enable it to reach what we termed its "superpower status". The EU therefore has many options to become not only an economic partner to the Middle East, but also a security partner. Europe can combine forces with the regional players to formulate security norms which are binding under international law, devise ways to monitor and supervise compliance with these norms, develop institutions that make it possible to settle disputes peacefully, and finally impose penalties and economic sanctions in the case of noncompliance.

Finally, supporters of a more active European role in the Middle East make their case by saying that in order to bring peace into the region, and to preserve Europe's long-term interests as well, the EU needs to create an alternative to the Middle East peace process. It even needs to replace it in case it keeps failing. As for now, the WEU[201] has a working relationship with NATO. However, many believe that the EU will press to have its separate European Defense Forces which will allow it to help bring peace to a region, where stability has been lost for more than half a century.

B- <u>Conclusion:</u>

The function of this thesis was to trace Syrian-Israeli relations from the 1967 War until early 1996, at which time Syrian-Israeli negotiations were suspended until the time of this writing. This thesis attempts to explain the main causes of their conflictual

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[201] WEU is the Western European Union, an organization created in 1948 for political consultations on military matters within the European Union countries.

relations and the strategic posture of both countries vis-à-vis each other on the one hand, and the Syrian versus Israeli perspectives of a peace settlement on the other.

In order to conclude this study, it is important first to sum up briefly Syrian-Israeli positions regarding the conflict just before and during the 1990s peace negotiations.

Until the late 1980s, the positions of Syria and Israel were very far apart and highly asymmetric with regard to the Golan Heights and the Palestinian problem. Damascus insisted on Israel's total withdrawal from all occupied territories, including the Golan, and the establishment of a Palestinian State in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza, and considered these to be preconditions for a 'just' and 'comprehensive peace'. Tel Aviv, in contrast, also called for peace but it refused to withdraw from the Golan and to recognize Palestinian rights to self-determination and statehood. By September 1992, following the Clinton victory in the U.S., and after six rounds of the Arab-Israeli peace talks, significant progress was achieved. Moreover, Israel acknowledged that UN Resolution 242 was applicable to the Golan Heights and gave priority to negotiations with Syria; and, Syria declared its readiness for 'total peace', and hence sought a peace agreement with Israel. But by the end of round eight, Syrian-Israeli negotiations were at a standstill once again, because there was still a wide gap between the Syrian definition of peace and the extent to which the Israelis were willing to withdraw from the Golan. In fact, whereas Tel Aviv was ready to withdraw *in* the Golan in return for peace, Syria insisted on a total withdrawal *from* the Heights. Furthermore, the following round of the Arab-Israeli peace talks in late August 1993 did not achieve a breakthrough between Israel and Syria mainly because an Israeli-PLO breakthrough took place earlier in Oslo on the 19th of August. Subsequently, both the Likud and Labor leaders continued

to affirm that Israel should not release the Golan Heights, even in exchange for a 'warm peace' with Syria. The rationale behind this stand was, it is argued, partly for Israel to avoid uprooting more than 20 Israeli settlements, and also because the Golan contains extensive water resources and is a crucial buffer security zone.

Syria's position though, was that only a total withdrawal would attain the symbolic and security-connected ends of the Golan. In 1995, the Israeli offer on the table was a modest pullback followed by Syria's implementation of full peace; if Israel were satisfied with the implementation of full peace, it would complete its withdrawal from the Heights. Assad, pointing to Israeli reluctance to fulfill the Oslo Accords, rejected any agreement that would leave the outcome to Israeli discretion. Furthermore, Israel wanted more than Syria was offering, concessing the demilitarization of the Golan. It demanded a Syrian military pullback virtually to Damascus and a major downsizing of the Syrian army. To Syria, these demands threatened Syrian security and sovereignty. Assad's counter-position was to call for symmetrical demilitarization on both sides of the border. The negotiations stalled and were broken off in mid-1995 over the Israeli demand to exchange early warning stations, which, Assad said, were an affront to Syria's sovereignty and insisted that an aerial and satellite surveillance was adequate.

Having summarized the peace negotiations, one can only conclude that the real problem remains in the definition of what 'full peace' means. As far as Damascus is concerned, "full peace" signifies an end to war, balanced security arrangements and the finalizing of disputed frontiers. Full peace, however, involves peaceful relations but not necessarily friendly warm relations. The Syrian viewpoint is "we have peace with many

countries but close relations with only a few".[202] To the Syrians, 'full peace' is, in itself, a great concession to Israel because, according to Security Council Resolution 242 on which the peace process is supposed to be based, the Arabs should renounce belligerency in exchange for withdrawal from occupied Land. However, Israelis who fear for their security have included many elements in their definition of 'full peace'. These included: "an end to the state of war, security arrangements involving early warning stations and monitoring procedures for the Israelis, demilitarized zones, a Syrian military pull-back from the Golan to well beyond Damascus, a reduction in the Syrian troop levels, open borders, trade, tourism, cooperative development of the resources of the Golan and an integration of infrastructures".[203]

After almost a decade of negotiations, it seems that the peace process under American tutelage can be interpreted, not as reflecting a fundamental change in how the Syrians and Israelis perceive their conflict, but as a shift in their strategy within the same structure of coercion and fear of the other. But peace cannot exist in a structure of coercion in which the outcome of the negotiations is determined by which of the negotiators holds more military might.

Need for a Second Superpower:

Unfortunately, the situation remains and is becoming increasingly dubious especially after the election of Ariel Sharon as Prime Minister in Israel, an army general directly responsible of the Sabra and Shatila massacres in Lebanon and the Quds Intifada. Ariel Sharon's unhidden ambition to broaden Israel's strategic influence beyond that of

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[202] Michael Jansen, "Differences on Full Peace", *Middle East International*, 5 January 1996, p. 8.
[203] *Ibid.*

the Middle Eastern states and the Red Sea has taken the security and political structures in the Middle East to a new dimension, thereby making this period a difficult challenge for the outside powers that are involved in the Middle East. As third parties, who have a vital interest in the establishment of stability and peace in the region, they are aware of the substantial limitations to the amount of influence that they can exert. Similar to the United States, the European Union is also caught up in this conflicting situation, and, although it has an indispensable interest in the Middle East, it has thus far had a very limited set of instruments that it deployed to restore some sort of stability in the region.

So, the question remains, what should be done? Washington remains the critical outside actor in the region. Europe's contribution is at most complementary and supportive. According to this thesis, the United States needs to change its approach to the Middle East and allow Europe to intervene more on the political front. For, under an extreme right-wing Israeli government and a two-year-old Intifada, it would be futile to carry on as if nothing had changed. Europe, especially after the second Camp David conference under Bill Clinton, should not be left out of diplomacy, while being the paymaster for the Palestinians. In fact, by being left out, Europe condemns itself to compensate each time for the destruction and losses that have been caused by the lack of peace and stability in the Middle East. Indeed, this thesis argues that by intervening more politically, the European union serves four main purposes: first, it assures its own security given its proximity to the region and vulnerability to the flows of the refugees. Secondly, it makes sure that its dependence on the region's energy supplies, which is much higher than that of the U.S., is satisfied. Thirdly, it stops condemning itself to constantly compensating for the losses and destruction caused by the ongoing occupation

of Palestinian land. Finally, Europe can impose political stability; achieve a sense of security in the region and even peace by presenting itself as a second superpower in the Middle East.

Therefore, even though American leaders argue that the European Union's participation only complicates diplomatic efforts if it's not closely coordinated with the United States (in other words if it does not agree totally with the U.S. diplomacy), Europeans should intervene more in the Middle East, given all they have at stake. In fact being a first financial contributor to the peace process, Europe should and could go further than it currently does by imposing punitive political and economic measures against those who do not respect the signed agreements. According to M. Gerald Collins, former Foreign Minister of Ireland, "Europe has the leverage for such a policy; only the political will is lacking in some European countries".[204] He added, "Europe should, out of mere interest in the establishment of a real peace in the Middle East, not stand by watching this process going nowhere".[205] It is crucial for the region of the Middle East that the European Union intervenes as a counter-balancing power that is impartial and therefore credible. The European Union, according to this thesis, is capable of responding to any violations of the peace process, and in turn, reward any consolidation of those agreements.

Past Experience and Future Trends:

Given the failure of Camp David II summit in July 2000 and the outburst of the Palestinian Intifadah, and the recent fall of the Iraqi Ba'th regime and the occupation of

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[204] Gerald Collins, *The Role of Europe in the Middle East Peace Process*, Available at: http://www.Medea.be/en/index252.htm.
[205] *Ibid.*

Iraq by the American/British armies, the question arises: What will be the future of the Middle East?

Today's low-intensity war between the Palestinians and the Israelis is counter-productive for both sides and unsettling to the entire region. On the one hand, it delays the possibility of Israel being accepted in the region for many years. On the other hand, it exposes the region to more unrest and violence.[206]

The fact is that the future of the Middle East seems gloomy at the present (March 2003). Less than two months ago, my conclusion would have been that the risk of a new conventional war between the regional powers, notably Syria and Israel, is almost non-existent considering Syrian economic and military weakness and the non-military involvement of the United States in the region. However, today, with the American invasion of Iraq, the fall of Saddam's regime and the American accusations to Syria of developing weapons of mass destruction, all these events render the possibility of a conventional and even unconventional war between Syria and Israel very probable for two main reasons:

1) An American attack on Syria would be perceived by the Arabs in general as an attack that serves only the Israeli interests, since it would be getting rid of the only remaining official opposition to Israel's attempts to control the region. 2) The Syrian people would consider an American attack on them as an existential threat and might very probably counter this invasion by attacking Israel, which they consider fully responsible for inciting the Americans. Indeed, the American invasion of Iraq, and a possible attack on Syria will only revive and intensify the animosity of the Arabs towards Israel and lead to new forms of unrest in the Middle East if the American administration does not realize

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[206] David Hirst, "Israel's Survival is far from assured", *The Guardian*, 27th January 2001

that getting rid of opposition through force is a short term solution to the Arab-Israeli problem.

Unlike many observers, I believe that the real question should not be who will 'weary' first, but how to stop both parties from wearying first. In order to do that, one condition is indispensable: for a peace treaty to be a real start it must be comprehensive and just. Even then the treaty is no guarantee for peace, unless helped by the political and economic will of an impartial superpower.

The peace process, if resumed, can be an opportunity to create solutions to the problems of the Middle East. According to Zeev Ma'oz, these solutions are "a matter of policy, not of predictions."[207]

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[207] Zeev Ma'oz, "Regional Security in the Middle East", *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (March 1997), p. 34.

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Annex

Figure 1: Military Expenditures of Israel, Syria, and Egypt (1963-1993).

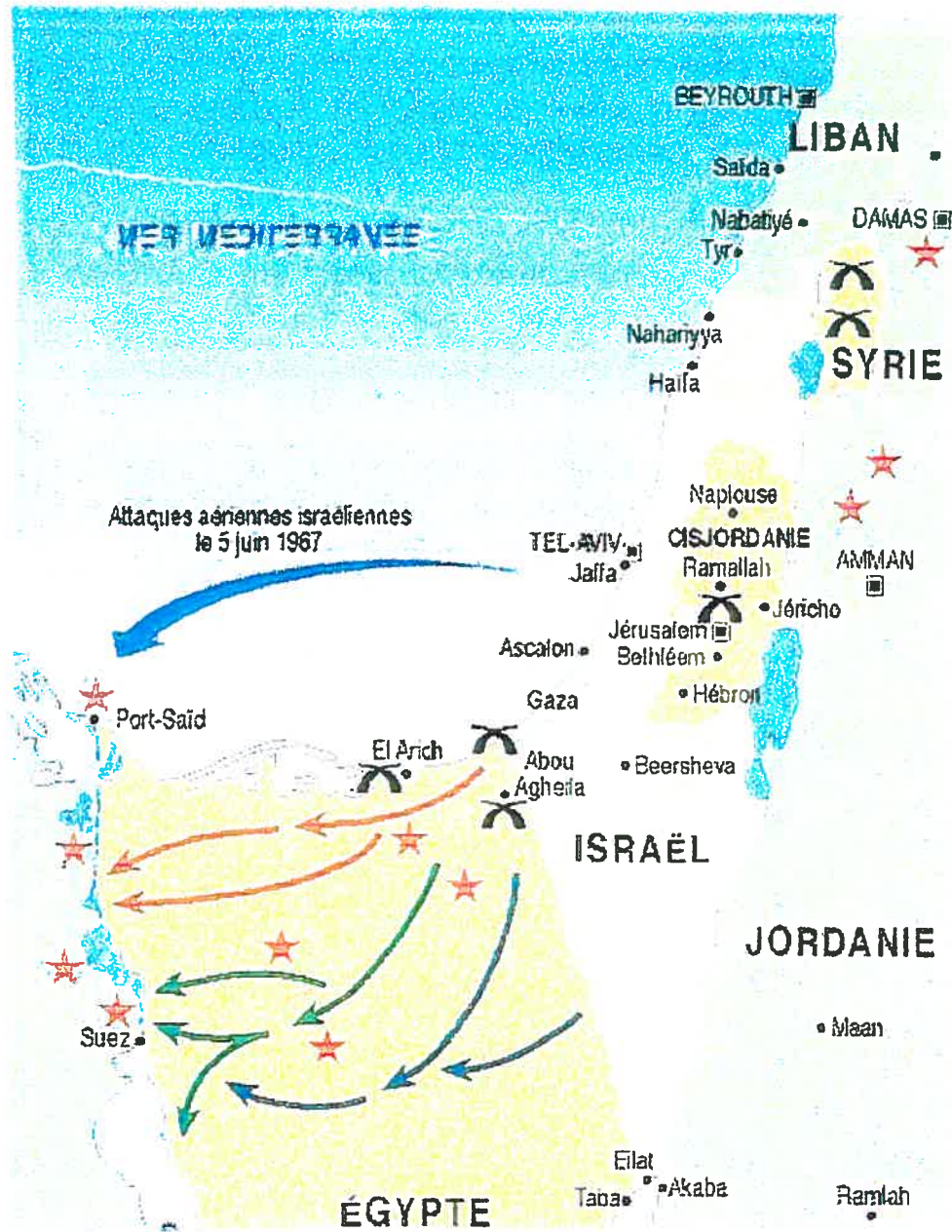Figure 2: Military Imports of Israel and Syria (1963-1993).
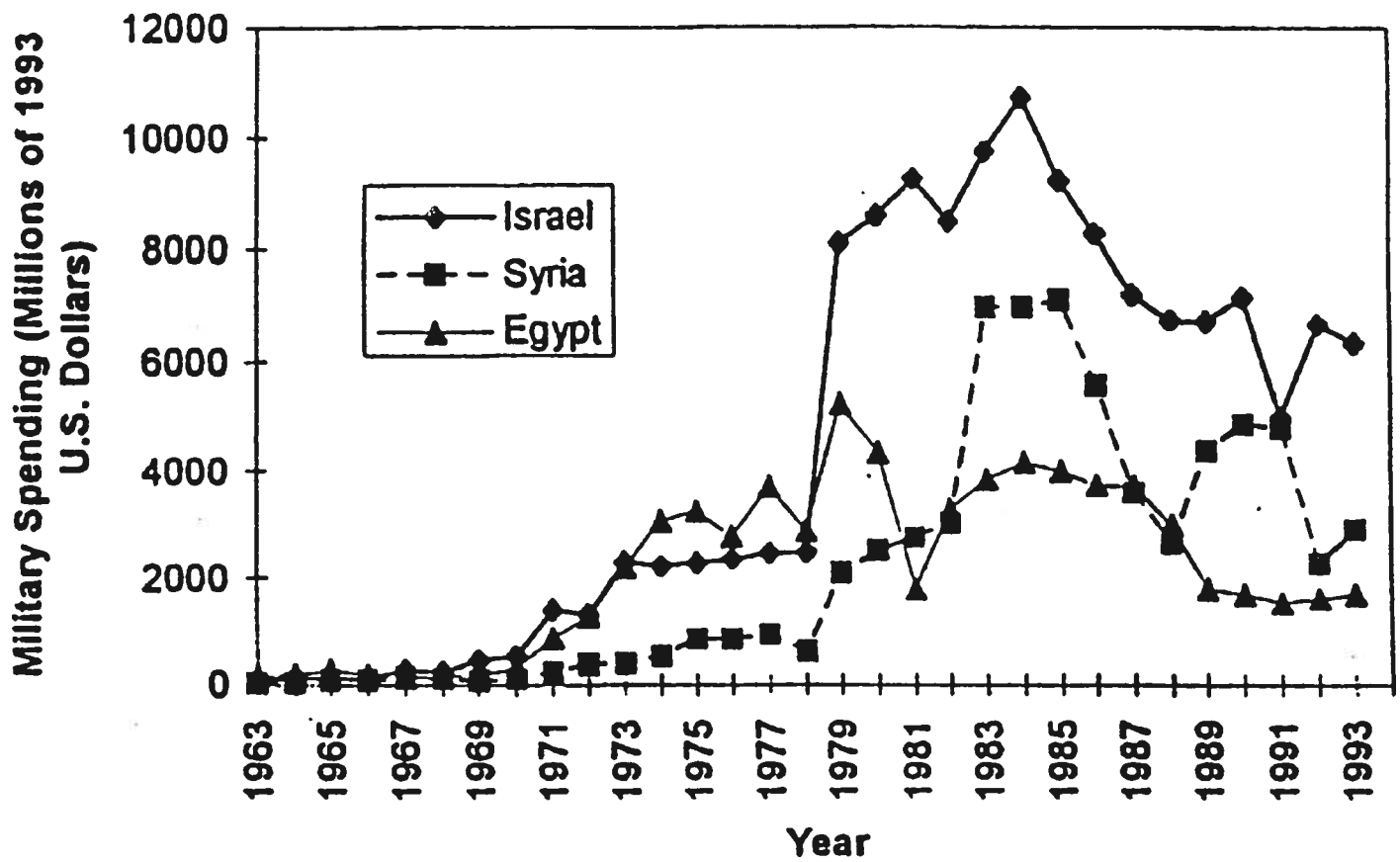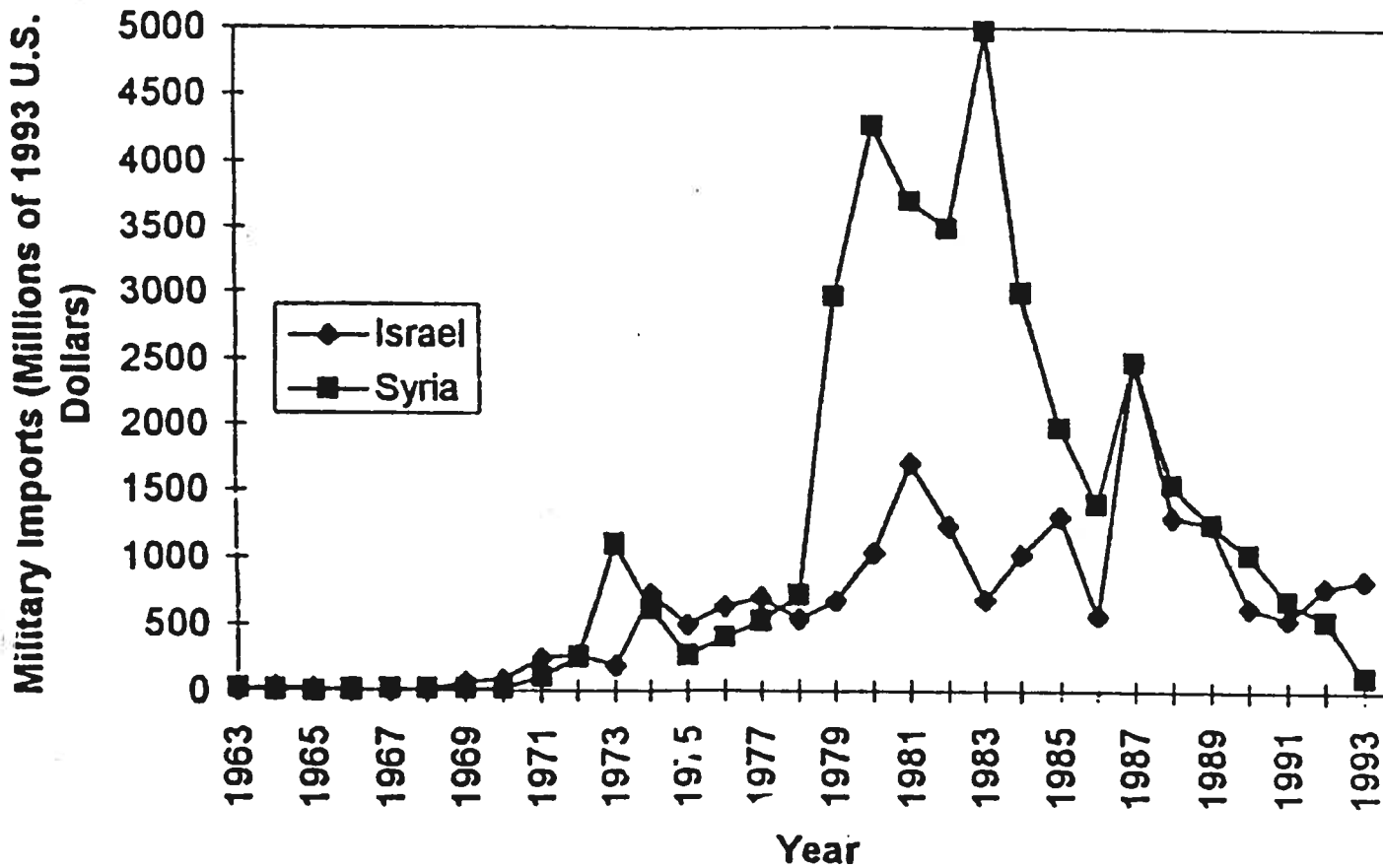
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