Syria's Omnibalancing Act

Making sense of Syria's support for the Hezbollah

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1. Research design

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to arrive at satisfactory answers as to why the Syrian regime persists in supporting the Lebanese Hezbollah in spite of compelling reasons why it should cease this policy. Through the study of this problem I intend to identify by inference what the determinants shaping Syrian foreign policy are; is it predominantly domestic pressures or external threats? The relevance of elucidating this problem is that it will allow us to answer the question of whether Syria should be treated as a *rouge* regime that cannot be reasoned with, or if a greater understanding of the constraints and pressures facing the regime can clarify if it is merely playing the cards at its disposal in order to balance threats to its hold on power.

The leadership strategy of late Syrian President Hafez al-Assad is often described as one of shrewd security maximizing calculations in accordance with the realist school of international relations. Through dramatic departures from the behavior one could expect from a leader steeped in Baathist ideology[1], Hafez al-Assad gained a reputation as a brilliant strategist with a clear eye towards Syria's national security goals (Hinnebusch 1991, 2001, 2002b, Ehteshami & Hinnebusch: 1997, Quilliam 1999, Zisser 2001). In 2000 Hafez al-Assad died, having appointed his son, Bashar al-Assad, as his successor.

Bashar al-Assad initially had no other claim to power besides being the son of his father. Without the personal authority and legitimacy of Hafez, it is debatable whether the security policy of the Baath regime can be said to be the personal domain of the president to the same extent as during his fathers' presidency. The foreign

[1] Cases in point are the Syrian intervention in Beirut in 1976 to protect the Christian forces against the leftist-Palestinian alliance, siding with Iran in its war against Iraq, and joining with the US-led coalition in its campaign to drive Saddam Hussein's forces out of Kuwait in 1991.

policy stances that Syria has taken since 2000 has thus renewed debate as to whether domestic pressures and legitimacy requirements have produced policy which is more influenced by irredentist ideology and a need to placate vested power interests (Pipes 1990, Lawson 1996, Deeb 2003, Rabil 2003), than one that maximizes Syria's influence within the changing regional power structure.

After the terrorist attacks on the USA on September 11th 2001, U.S. President George W. Bush declared a Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). Central to this doctrine was that the U.S. would aggressively pursue 'terrorists' wherever they might be located, and would also target any state that supported them or gave them sanctuary (White House 20.9.2001). Any doubts as to the seriousness of the ultimatum made by the Bush-administration evaporated with the toppling of the Taliban government in Afghanistan later that year. Two years later the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq was demolished for being suspected of being willing and able to aid and abet 'terrorists' in the future, in addition to allegations of a secret Iraqi program for production of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

Bearing this in mind, Syria is in the unfortunate position of having had a prominent place on the U.S. State Department's list of State Sponsors of Terrorism (DOS: 2003a) since 1979, largely due to the support it allegedly provides to among others the Lebanese Hezbollah, who are classified as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the U.S. Government (Washington File: 2003). This was a manageable problem for Syria until the U.S. launched its global campaign to eradicate its 'terrorist' enemies. Pundits soon started to speculate as to whether Syria and the Hezbollah would be next on Washington's to-do-list (Blanford 28.4.2002, Byman 2003, and Glass 24.7.2003). These arguments gained stock with bellicose statements by U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage:

> "Hezbollah may be the 'A-Team' of terrorists and maybe al-Qaeda is actually the 'B' team. And they're on the list and their time will come. There's no question about it – it's all in good time. And we're going to go after these problems just like a high school wrestler goes after a match. We're going to take them down one at a time". (CBS 18.4.2003)

The U.S. demands that Syria withdraw its troops from Lebanon cease to meddle in Lebanese affairs, and desist in supporting the Hezbollah won international legitimacy by being put forth in a United Nations Security Council resolution (UNSCR 1559: 2004). Syria withdrew its troops from Lebanon in March 2005, but is still considered to be supportive of the Hezbollah and other political factions in Lebanon who are sympathetic to Syria's interests. UNSCR 1559 can potentially open the way for far more comprehensive and multilateral sanctions, augmenting the sanctions the U.S. has imposed unilaterally under the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003 (SALSA) (White House 11.5.2004). As of yet, however, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld has stated that the prospect of military action is not imminent (DOD 17.5.2004).

Under tremendous international pressure to alter its policy on the Hezbollah, it would seem prudent and rational, as understood by realist theory, for Syria to seek appeasement, to bandwagon, with the U.S. and its allies. Not only is there a case to be made for the possibility of economically benefiting from improved relations with the Western powers, but the risk of forcefully having to engage the military might of the U.S. should be enough to warrant a change of policy on the part of the Syrian regime. On the face of it, not complying with the demands that are made of Syria with regards to the support of foreign militant groups may indicate, if not outright irrationality, then surely a failure in perception.

Syria under Bashar al-Assad, however, has not made any attempt at all to make amends with the U.S. or the U.N. with regards to the Hezbollah[2]. Although its relationship with Lebanon changed dramatically during spring 2005, it was moved as much by the increasingly untenable situation within Lebanon as any measure of foreign pressure. On the contrary, the regime has reiterated its position that it regards the Hezbollah as a legitimate resistance organization and that its relationship with Lebanon is a bilateral affair of no concern to the international community. Syria's

[2] UNSCR 1559 demands calls for the disbandment of all militias in Lebanon without mentioning Hezbollah specifically.

standard response to questions of when they would pull out of Lebanon was that any pull-out from Lebanon would have to be part of an agreement that would entail the end of Israeli occupation of all Arab lands (Ghattas 15.9.2004). Indeed, as late as September 2004 Damascus blatantly intervened to extend the term of pro-Syrian Lebanese President Emile Lahoud (BBC 3.9.2004) against the wishes of the U.S. and the U.N. Nonetheless, during the spring of 2005 Syria pulled out its troops from Lebanon. Even so, there are persistent accusations Syrian intelligence and security services are still active in Lebanon, and pro-Syrian politicians are still in positions of influence in the Lebanese government. Significantly, pro-Syrian president Emile Lahoud is still in power despite accusations that parliamentarians were coerced into amending the constitution allowing for the extension of his presidency by three years in 2004. The reversal of this decision is stymied by the minority alliance of the Shiite parties the Hezbollah and Amal, in collusion with former general Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement.

1.2 Point of departure

The guiding question of the thesis is therefore the following: *Why does Syria continue to support the Hezbollah in the face of significant international pressure to desist, and what does this tell us about the forces driving Syrian foreign policy?* In other words, why does the regime continue to follow a strategy of balancing against the powers that are arrayed against them at this time, when this option seems to lead the country further down the road to a conflict they presumably cannot win? Of further interest is also the question of whether the rise of Bashar al-Assad following the death of Hafez al-Assad resulted in a change of priorities in the security and foreign policies under evaluation.

1.2.1 Claims of the thesis

The ultimate goal of the Syrian regime is to remain in power. However, there are certain boundaries that the regime cannot cross in pursuit of that end goal. Most

salient among these is that it cannot concede the Golan Heights to Israel. The retrieval of the Golan Heights is therefore Syria's most important national security aim, the attainment of which significantly depends upon the instrumental role of the Hezbollah. In other words; Syrian support for Hezbollah has to be understood within the context of Syria's conflict with Israel, specifically concerning the Golan Heights.

This thesis claims that the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad can be described as deftly pursuing the policy which will optimally enhance its grip on power from threats *both* foreign and domestic. Enmity towards Israel and skepticism towards U.S. intentions are in many respects what binds the Syrians together. These are not contentious issues. However, this thesis contends that the regime does not *need* to conjure up external threats to deflect more serious domestic threats, that the regime is not under pressure from domestic sources to such a degree that it stymies a rational foreign policy. This implies that the policies of the regime are not under the spell of irredentist ideologies of pan-Arabism or Great-Syrianism, although issues of identity clearly cannot be dismissed altogether by the regime if they are to secure a minimum of legitimacy. As such, we can establish that the policies of Bashar al-Assad has not altered course significantly, as he is, just as his father since the 1990s, trying his best to placate the U.S. concomitantly as not loosing sight of the core interests of the Baathist regime. The intensified threat from the U.S. on the terrorism issue is seen by the regime in Damascus as an effort by the Israeli – U.S. alliance to rob Syria of any opportunity to balance Israel in the regional game. The classification of the Hezbollah as a terror organization by the U.S. and Israel is therefore regarded by Syria as a means of de-legitimating its security policy, not one of defending international security.

1.2.2 Hypotheses

The hypotheses for this study take the form of two statements that correspond to two different models for explaining the foreign policy of Syria. Each of the models are based on one of the two broad schools of thought that dominate the debate on the

issue at hand. One emphasizes external threats and constraints, the other highlights the precariousness of Third World regimes. The claim of this thesis asserts that Syrian foreign policy can for the most part be described according to H^1, but needs to be augmented by elements pertaining to H^2 in order to fill in content to the aims of the regime that are exogenous to pure power-balancing behavior.

Model I

Hypothesis

H^1: Syrian support for the Hezbollah can be explained by the instrumental role the Hezbollah serves in countering external threats. This perspective corresponds to the neorealist understanding of states' foreign policy conduct. Threats to the regime originate from outside the state, and often in the course of shifts in the structure of the distribution of power in the system of which it is a part.

Predictions

Alliance with Iran

The hypothesis predicts that Syria will align with Iran, manifested in support for the Hezbollah, to counter the threat that is posed to Syria by Israel. The establishment of the Hezbollah was in its day to a large extent the result of efforts by agents of the Islamic Republic of Iran. One of the tenets of the Iranian revolution was that it must be exported across the world. The one place in which they achieved a measure of success was among the dispossessed and radicalized Shiite population of Lebanon. By facilitating the works of followers of the Iranian Ayatollah in Lebanon, Syria ensures good relations with Iran as a badly needed friend in an increasingly hostile environment. In a strategic situation with enemies on all sides Syria can ill afford to estrange a close ally, and will therefore continue this policy.

Regaining the Golan Heights

By controlling the warfare of the Hezbollah, Syria can pressure Israel to heed Syrian claims on the Golan Heights-issue without having to take the consequences of those actions. Directly confronting its prime adversary, Israel, would be virtually suicidal.

Since there is a large gap between what it perceives to be its security needs, and the resources it has at its disposal, it has to be creative in the manner in which it goes about attaining those goals. Discreetly supporting a militia that is a substantial threat to Israeli security is an example of such inspired policy-making. Although one would be hard pressed to claim that this relationship any longer gives the Syrian regime plausible deniability in pressuring Israel, the policy has so far been sufficiently indirect to ward off most accusations that attacks by the Hezbollah constitutes a clear *casus belli* against Syria.

Power projection

By exercising influence upon the actions and fate of the Hezbollah, Syria maintains a powerful instrument of power in Lebanese affairs. As long as the Hezbollah is actively pursuing its conflict with Israel, Syria can continue to use that as a catch-all argument for its meddling in the political affairs of Lebanon. In other words, the continued presence of a formidable militia responsive to Syrian needs helps to ensure Syrian influence in Lebanon. Syria regards Lebanon as a critical country to its security, the subject of a 0-sum game with Israel. They are concerned that Lebanon will enter into a peace treaty with Israel, leaving Syria behind, if left to their own devices. With nominal control over the Israeli-Lebanese border, Syria gains strategic depth, and increases deterrent as well as offensive capability. This argument is assessed to hold true even after the Syrian army's withdrawal, as it will only take a few hours to reposition troops to their former locations in Lebanon.

Model II

Hypothesis

H²: Continued Syrian support for the Hezbollah can be explained as a reaction to domestic pressures. This alludes to an understanding of there being specific considerations to take when analyzing the policies of Third World states, meaning that the regime is threatened by fissures along ideological, religious and sectarian lines (domestic threats), more so than from external threats. As a result of this, Syria has to continue to support the Hezbollah as it is the manifestation of a policy of

belligerence against Israel, which in turn is needed to legitimate the regimes' hold on power.

Predictions

Need for belligerency

The model does not maintain that there are no significant external threats, merely that the domestic sphere contains the most serious threats for the regime. As a result, regimes have to legitimate their policies according to radical ideologies, conjuring up threats against which only the regime can protect them. According to this reasoning, it is logical for the regime to keep the Golan issue alive in order to consolidate its rule. Because of the everlasting conflict with Israel, Syria is in a continual state of emergency. Accordingly, the dispute with Israel gives the regime the occasion to cloak repression as security necessities.

Need for radicalism

An oft cited aspect of the domestic level of analysis especially relevant for Syria is the ethnic composition of the regime itself. In a fractious society that is divided along religious, tribal and ethnic lines, a regime must balance competing pressures to legitimate their rule. The use of religious, ethnic and tribal loyalties is seen as key to this end. The extent of stability in the regime is seen as a function of a groups' control over the state's instruments of coercion, and the consequent need to pay heed to demands from other groups (Kessler 1987).

Preserving regional stature

Syria is loath to bee seen in the Arab world to buckle under international pressure from the U.S. and Israel. In one sense, they are trapped by decades of propaganda and rhetoric against the proponents of western power and values. The Hezbollah is regarded in the Arab world as something as rare as a successful Arab resistance movement, and is for this reason greatly revered by an audience far beyond its Lebanese Shiite base. The protection of the Hezbollah against vilification by the U.S. administration can therefore be seen as a matter of defending Arab honor.

1.2.3 Limitations

The scope of the thesis will have to be somewhat restricted considering the need for brevity. The case at hand cuts across the issue areas that are the most salient for the Syrian regime, and indeed, for the region as a whole. It concerns the war of attrition on the Lebanon – Israel border, Syrian influence in Lebanon, the conflict over the Golan Heights, Syrian – Iranian relations, and the fate of Syria in the U.S.-led GWOT. All these issue-areas are interrelated to such a degree that to wholly omit one of them would not enhance analytical clarity through parsimony, but would risk significantly weakening internal validity.

The timeframe will be from the implementation of the Taif Accords that ended the Lebanese Civil War in 1991 to the period preceding former Lebanese premier Rafiq al-Hariris assassination in February 2005. The analysis will start in 1991 because that is when it is believed that Syria began to dictate the rules of the game in relation to the conflict with Israel, and the internal dynamics in Lebanon. In short, the Hezbollah remained the only militia that was not disarmed after the conclusion of the Lebanese civil war in order for it to continue resistance against the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon. It is first and foremost the relationship with the Hezbollah that concerns this thesis, although it will inevitably touch on the other parts of the dispute as well. It is also a watershed year in the regional and global dimensions. The Soviet Union officially collapsed, marking the end of Soviet patronage, and Operation Desert Storm (with Syria participating on the allied side) ushered in the peace talks in Madrid that were to mark the start of the Middle East Peace Process. I will not strictly adhere to these provisions when discussing the attributes of Hafez al-Assad's leadership. The cut-off point is chosen because that event proved to be a turning point in Lebanese – Syrian relations which we do not yet see the full ramifications of.

1.2.4 Justification for the study

It is exceedingly important in these heady times of GWOT to search for rational explanations for the actions of the supposed enemy. With the preponderant use of

moral terminology of ‘good’ versus ‘evil’ to describe the struggle, it may become deceptively easy to assume that Syria is guided by a morally deficient regime bent on spreading destruction, ensnared in radical ideologies, subsumed by domestic strife, not willing or able to pursue the policies that will most benefit their country.

This attitude has long traditions in studies of the Middle East. Edward Said (1978) coined the term *orientalism* to describe the tendency to portray the constructed image of the ‘orient’ as the significant other against which Europeans and Americans defined themselves. To the extent that ‘the West’ (the occident) regarded itself as rational and enlightened, it followed that ‘the East’ (the orient), was irrational and backward. The tendency to ascribe the political culture in the Middle East as inherently authoritarian and violent lends itself, however unwittingly, to this tradition. Despite being beset by security challenges that can be said to have its roots in the legacy of colonialism, I believe that the policies of Syria can still mainly be described according to theories developed to study the foreign policies in the rest of the world. However, that the actors’ particular circumstances have to be given consideration to properly understand that the arrangement of preferences might diverge from that which at first glance might seem rational from a Western perspective. The primary reason for this assertion is that I believe that policy in the Middle East, as most everywhere else, is determined by the categories of power, threats and opportunities. Nevertheless, it is still, perhaps an ambitious, aim to be sensitive to the particular facets of the region under study, while avoiding stifling reductionism (Gerges 1991). If a case can be made for this, then it is not unreasonable to expect peace with Israel some time in the future, and it can give direction to efforts at addressing Syria’s relationship with the Hezbollah that are not based on prejudiced assumptions.

1.3 Research strategy

1.3.1 Why a case study?

There is disagreement as how to define precisely what a case study is and how it should be delineated from other methods of social inquiry. I follow the teaching that it is not a matter of whether the data is qualitative or quantitative, but of choosing the research design and strategy that is best suited to the research question (Andersen 1997, Yin 1994). A case study was the strategy of choice in this instance, not because of the fact that the data under scrutiny is exclusively qualitative. Using the criteria of Robert K. Yin (1994: Ch.1) the decision to venture a case study was taken because the research-problem at hand is very much a matter of analyzing a 'why-question' about a contemporary event over which we have little or no control. Still following Yin's definition, a further reason is that the phenomenon under study is not readily separated from its context because the boundaries between context and phenomenon are not clearly evident. The phenomenon under study here, the use of the Hezbollah as a proxy for boosting Syrian regime security, is clearly not easily separated from the context of the Arab – Israeli conflict.

Explanatory case study

Due to the nature of the main question being asked, why Syria continues to support the Hezbollah when it risks the wrath of the United States by doing so, it seems to qualify for an explanatory case-study research strategy. As Yin (1994:5) defines it, an explanatory case study is a study where:

> "The analyst's objective should be to pose competing explanations for the same set of events and to indicate how such explanations may apply to other situations".

Indeed, this is precisely what our intention is in this study. I posit two competing explanations that are grounded in two different theoretical perspectives, and thereby seek to strengthen one set of assumptions on the nature of policy-making in Syria

over another. The design can thus be termed as one of theory testing and testing of antecedent conditions using within-case process tracing (Van Evera 1997).

Generalization

It is not the aim of this study to arrive at conclusions of universal validity but to attempt to find conclusions that are valid for a particular class of phenomena under certain circumstances (Andersen 1997:16). The case chosen, the regime of the state of Syria, is a case of a post-colonialist, Third World, Arab state that is regarded as a *rogue state* by the USA, and the finding of the study can therefore perhaps shed light on the constraints, pressures and opportunities that influences other parts of Syria's foreign and security policies, and even other regimes in that category. That is, if indeed the study finds evidence that the particular circumstances of the Syrian regime has influence on the outcome of its foreign policy calculations. As such the thesis can be categorized as a theoretically interpretive study (Andersen 1997:68-73, Ch.5). However, the objective is not to establish statistical generalization, but analytical generalization for the theoretical propositions of the thesis (Yin 1994:35-36).

The control problem

In this case I have absolutely no means to control the behavioral events being observed. Control over unwanted variation therefore has to be established through analytical control, meaning that the limitations imposed through the design of the study makes it analogous to an experiment. In other words, the strategy must reduce the likelihood of the effects on the dependent variable in reality being caused spuriously by hidden variables. Such incidences could in this study for instance be that Syrian support for the Hezbollah continues as the result of bureaucratic in-fighting in the regime, or that the continuation of the policy is not the result of calculated policy but the result of organizational ineptitude. Most counter-claims that come to mind are, however, weakened by reiterating the basic reality that the leadership of Bashar al-Assad has made no qualms concerning his strong support for

the organization despite the unequivocal warnings enunciated by both the U.S. and the U.N.

Problems of inferrence

There clearly might be problems in inferring from the data *why* Syria supports the Hezbollah to the question of *what* this tells us about the forces driving Syria's foreign policy. The logic of inference in this study is to see which of the propositions in the study is best supported by the data, which of the propositions that has the weaker links in its chain of assumptions. Unfortunately, there is no precise instrument of measurement available to allow us to definitively refute one hypothesis and keep the other. At best, the contrasts in explanatory power and validity will be sufficient to declare one strengthened at the expense of the other. This can hardly be termed a strong test, and is in keeping with the definition Stephen Van Evera (1997:32) gives of a *straws-in-the-wind test*:

> Most predictions have low uniqueness and low certitude, and hence provide tests that are indecisive both ways: passed and flunked tests are both "straws in the wind". Such test can weigh in the total balance of evidence but are themselves indecisive.

The reasoning for this less than optimistic outlook for the study is that it is unlikely that we can conclude in any absolute manner. Even if one hypothesis is judged stronger than the other, and thereby increasing the likelihood of the operation of its governing theory, the 'loosing' theory cannot be dismissed as such.

The admittedly relatively low level of certitude with which we can perform the analysis in this case is, I believe, aptly compensated by the relevance of the issue being debated. No regime is ever likely to be true to any pure model-types, and this one is likely to contain elements of both models. However, the identification of one explanatory model's superior explanatory power can give an indication of the true nature of the threats and motivations of the Syrian regime. This problem arises because the regime under study is notoriously opaque and the issue is a current and

continuing one, but the potency of the information that can be ascertained precisely because of this fact countermands much of the criticism.

Units of analysis

I posit that it is the regime, or the elite of the ruling Baath party – military government structure of Syria that is the appropriate unit of analysis. This is understood as President Bashar al-Assad and his closest circle of confidants. I contend that the prime motivation for all calculations of the regime is the enhancement of its survivability. Hence, the identification of the determinants of Syrian foreign policy is virtually indistinguishable from the forces the regime contends with in its quest for survival. Since the case focuses on the regime's relationship with the Lebanese Hezbollah organization it follows that this is a subunit of the study.

1.3.2 Variables

Each of the two models makes a different set of assumptions pertaining to the processes and motivations of the Syrian policy in question. The test of the internal validity of the study is whether the causal relationships proposed in the models can be established. The two alternative hypotheses I propose are thus different propositions as to what the intervening and condition variables are, and what their relative explanatory power is in predicting the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Although the two hypotheses have common elements, they cannot be equally true at the same time, thereby enhancing internal validity (Yin 1994:108-109). The first hypothesis states that to *regain* the Golan Heights is an imperative Syrian goal, whereas the second states that it is merely the *claim* to the Golan that is important, because the regime is reliant on perpetuating a state of conflict with Israel.

Common assumptions

The first assumption is of course the one iterated in the research question, connecting the independent (Syrian policy of supporting the Lebanese Hezbollah) and dependent variable (regime security). It is premised upon the non-compliance of Syria with the demands made upon it by UNSCR 1559, more specifically to the provisions regarding the operations of the Hezbollah continuing under the auspices of the Syrian regime. It is an obvious weakness of the study, but an inevitable trade-off when choosing a current topic for study, that there is a pervasive risk that the hypothesis will be falsified by tomorrow's newspaper. However, even if this should come to pass before the completion of the study, the enduring procrastination of the Syrian regime, to the point of being subject to U.S. sanctions and a UNSCR resolution, will still serve to identify the forces at play in the regime's calculations.

The next assumptions form the intervening- and condition variables in the casual chain of events leading from the independent to the dependent variables. In this respect, the method of inference follows the logic of backwards induction. The risks inherent in this method is that all factors that have lead to a particular result are given status as casual-factors, and that problems of interaction effects are not taken seriously (Andersen 1997:137). Nevertheless, through erecting models that are grounded in established theory, sufficient analytical control for unwanted variation should be in evidence. First of all, as a remote cause common to both models; the role of the Hezbollah is the fruit of a strategic partnership between Syria and Iran. Secondly, and also common for both models, that Syria is in a position to control the actions the Hezbollah to the extent that they do not execute operations when it is not in the interests of the Syrians to do so, and ultimately to convince them to terminate military activity altogether when the time comes. Obviously, if Syria does not have the ability to direct or potentially restrain the Hezbollah, the Israeli's would have scant reason to predicate their relations with Syria on the activities of the Hezbollah.

Model I

For Model I the next link in the chain is that the aim of the pressure Syria exerts through the use of its Hezbollah-proxy is the attainment of the Golan Heights from Israel. This model assumes that the regime can conduct foreign and security policies without letting domestic considerations impact its calculations. The usage of the Hezbollah for the furtherance of power-political goals thus signifies a high level on the dependent variable. In other words, that the Hezbollah fulfills a purely instrumental role for the Syrian regime in two respects. On the one hand the Hezbollah represents a method of exerting pressure on Israel within the context of the Syrian – Israeli negotiations, whereby Syria can use the Hezbollah to remind Israel of its position. On the other, as a bargaining chip in those negotiations, where tranquility on Israel's Northern border can be had in exchange for the handing over of the Golan Heights. Furthermore, that not being coerced into accepting a peace deal that is considered as anything less than honorable is significant for the political, military- and economic security of the regime. Meaning that the Golan issue is a paramount goal for the Assad-regime, the nexus of its quarrel with Israel, and that failure on this issue could potentially jeopardize the regime's claim to power. The logic underpinning this argument is not necessarily that the regime cannot be seen to soften its approach to Israel, but that abandonment of the Golan Heights will be regarded as treachery and signaling that Syria is at the mercy of its enemies. Demonstrating such weakness could precipitate a coup against the regime, or from within the regime against the current clique surrounding Bashar al-Assad.

Model II

Model II assumes that the level of regime security is relatively low; that the support to the Hezbollah follows from a low reading on the dependent variable. It argues that the justification for the policy of supporting the Hezbollah is not necessarily simply to reap the gains it might provide in negotiations with Israel, but merely the insurance that the conflict will continue to be violent and intractable. The perpetuation of the conflict is an end in itself. This leads to the next assumption, that the Syrian regime is reliant upon a sense of legitimacy derived from Baathism and Pan-Arabism from

significant parts of the Syrian population. It is possible that as the Baath regime is commonly referred to as a dictatorship; it might not be receptive to the opinions of anyone but the members of the ruling elite. Thus the case has to be made that even the Assad-regime in some form or other needs to legitimate their rule. This in turn will largely be conditioned on the degree of vulnerability of the regime, and to the extent that ideology and hostility is employed as legitimating tools.

Arrow diagrams

The two hypotheses can be arrow-diagrammed in the following manner (Van Evera 1997:12-15). The alliance with Iran is posited as a remote cause Y of independent variable A, pressure on Israel q, regaining the Golan Heights is r, while the degree of Syrian control over the Hezbollah is condition variable C. E is the designation for the condition variable of the importance of retaining the Golan Heights. All this in turn affects dependent variable B.

H^1:

$$\begin{array}{c} C \\ x \\ Y \rightarrow A \rightarrow q \rightarrow r \rightarrow B \\ x \\ E \end{array}$$

The second model has the same remote cause, independent and dependent variables, and condition variable C; otherwise the variables have been changed. Here, the intervening variables g is conflict with Israel, h is legitimacy. The condition variable F represents ideology and D the composition of the regime. This lends itself to an arrow diagram in the following way:

H²:

C F

x x

Y → A → g → h → B

x

D

1.3.3 Data gathering

In the second part of Yin's definition of what constitutes case study strategy he emphasizes that there are also requirements for data collection and analysis encompassed by the strategy to allow for a comprehensive approach.

> The case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result, relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as an other result, benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (Yin 1994:13).

The relevant data in this study is understood as the information that is garnered in the interaction between the variables and the context they function in, and is in this sense constructed by the author (Andersen 1997:Ch.1). The great majority of data in this project is collected from secondary data sources. This means that the prime sources for my understanding of the subject matter has been from books, articles and reports dealing with the topics that are discussed. Each source, be they acclaimed scholars or political participants, are under the influence of conceptual lenses that impair an absolute objective understanding. As, of course, am I. This entails that it is imperative to consult a broad range of sources in order to get a comprehensive picture as possible of the processes under study. In other words, when consulting the sources an effort has to be made to attempt to triangulate the evidence to maximize the internal validity of the study.

Preliminary research led me to the realization that the research question of this thesis was a prime example of an issue that had been the bone of contention for researchers

of the Middle East for years; could the foreign policies of Arab states be described in the same manner as Western states, or were there special considerations to take that precluded generalization? This divide presents itself in that different camps of scholars seem to prefer one of the hypotheses over the other. There seems to be discrepancies between writers that can very broadly be divided into an American/Israeli tradition, and a European/Arab tradition. It is beyond the scope of this study to extrapolate on the reasons for the emergence of two trends of understanding along more or less geographic lines. It should be mentioned that this is a rather crude generalization, but nonetheless a noticeable tendency.

On one hand, researchers in what can perhaps be termed the conservative American tradition (Pipes 1990, Lawson 1996, Deeb 2003, Rabil 2003) accentuates the ideological impetus of the policies of the regime. Within this broad tradition we find researchers affiliated with institutions such as RAND, the Middle East Institute, Brookings Institution, the American Enterprise Institute, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, the Middle East Review of International Affairs, the Heritage Foundation, the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, the Middle East Quarterly, the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies and the Middle East Intelligence Bulletin.

The European and Middle Eastern scholarly tradition, on the other hand, emphasized the regimes apparent strict rational pursuit of security and power objectives (Hinnebusch[3] 1991, 2001, 2002b, Ehteshami & Hinnebusch: 1997, Quilliam 1999, Zisser 2001[4]). I assess that the following resources roughly belong on this part of the divide: The Middle East Research and Information Project, Catham House, Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, Middle East Report, and the Journal of Palestine Studies. A development within this sphere is a school of thought on the security policy of Third World states that contends that due to persistent low levels of state

[3] Raymond Hinnebusch is an American, but is presently at St. Andrews University in Scotland.

[4] Eyal Zisser is an Israeli, and as such an exception to the generalization of the geographical divide as well.

consolidation and weak levels of regime legitimacy, alternative models of analysis have to be employed in these cases as the dominant paradigm of neorealism is insufficient as a explanatory tool (Ayoob 1984, 1993, 1995, David 1991).

This distinction seems to be valid between writers who write about the issue as the subject for American foreign policy, usually within the context of GWOT, and area-specialist as well. The Syrian regime and their actions are for the most part seen as inimical to American interests in the region. Some researchers have clearly taken sides in the conflict between the USA and Syria/Hezbollah, conceptualizing Syria and the Hezbollah as challenges to be met (Leverett 2005 most explicitly). Area-specialists, although belonging to different schools of thought on Middle Eastern affairs, tend to approach the subject matter more as deserving of study in its own right.

This thesis seeks to bridge the gap between the divides already described. It draws on sources form the entire spectrum of writing on the subject matter, accrediting them all some explanatory power. It seeks to find the middle ground between the extremes of describing Syria as a state not at all taking domestic concerns into consideration, and of Syria being beset by internal pressures to such an extent that it cannot pursue a rational foreign policy.

It would have been preferable if I had been able to conduct interviews with policymakers in Syria, Israel, and with the Hezbollah. But in addition to time and funding constraints there are a number of obvious problems with this technique in this instance. First of all the topic is one that concerns security issues for the actors. In the unlikely event that interviews could be arranged, it is highly unlikely that much useful information could be elicited as they are sure to be mindful of giving their opponent any help in uncovering their true intentions. The autocracy of the Syrian regime and the secrecy inherent in the Hezbollah organization also pose significant challenges in this respect.

My own perceptions and understanding of the conflict are tainted by my personal experiences in the region. Having worked in the U.N. forces in South Lebanon for 18 months, I have had a close vantage point for observing the conflict first hand. During this time, and in the course of trips to the region since, I have had innumerable discussions with locals and fighters on both sides. Even though this clearly does not qualify as scientific data gathering, it surely played an important part in forming my appreciation of the subject matter.

1.3.4 Plan for the study

The plan for the study is in accordance with the logical structure of the case as presented. After this introductory chapter in which I have outlined the research strategy for the thesis, follows a presentation of its theoretical basis, where the theoretical propositions relevant to the problem at hand are discussed. In this chapter the aim is to properly establish the theoretical foundation for the two models from which the hypotheses are derived. In chapter three the empirical subjects for analysis will be presented. The discussion will not adhere strictly to the sequences of the arrow diagram, but according to the theoretical propositions of each model, allowing for improved readability. Chapter four will conclude with a synthesis of the previous two models.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Levels of analysis

The referent object of this analysis is the elite of the regime of the Syrian Arab Republic. It is this elite that controls the state apparatus and has at its disposal the resources of the state. As such, I assert that regimes have as their primary goal to secure their hold on the reins of power, and to maximize their state's power relative to other states.

> Any formulation that does not make security its centerpiece will inadequately explain Third World state behavior, domestically and internationally. This is the case because the elites who make and implement domestic and foreign policies in the Third World are preoccupied, if not obsessed, by state and regime security, and they shape their policies accordingly (Ayoob 1995:191).

Neorealist precepts[5] presuppose to a great extent that states are consolidated entities that can consequently be counted on to follow predicted uniform patterns of behavior. However, we have to take special considerations when analyzing the Middle East, as states in this region generally have not yet reached the same level of consolidation and legitimacy as their Western counterparts (Ayoob 1984:43-46, Hinnebusch 2002a:1-2). We cannot assume that the specific patterns of behavior of European states applies to states that are in crucial respects different (Korany, et al. 1993:10). The point is to be cognizant of the fact that the regimes' objectives are prone to be tainted to some extent by their particular historical experiences.

To allow the analysis to encompass the full spectrum of security threats the regime faces, these will be conceptualized as emanating from three distinct levels of analysis; the domestic, regional, and global, although in reality these levels are intertwined and

[5] These will be discussed in Chapter 2.3.

can be difficult to separate from one another. These threats will be divided into three sectors of security; political, military and economic. Again, the division among them is due foremost to the need to enhance analytical clarity. It follows from the choice of analytical question that this thesis will be primarily concerned with the domestic and regional levels, and that the global level is first and foremost interesting to the extent that in intrudes in the regional system and thus affects the choices and constraints of the regime.

2.1.1 The global level

Core – periphery relations

The global level is interesting in the analysis of regime security to the extent the global power structure impacts the dispositions of the regime in question. The Middle East is still marked by its experience of being subjected to colonialism, particularly in the sphere of economics, but the historical experience has also left marks in the perception of threats posed by western powers. Accusations of imperialism still hold potency, and there is pervasive distrust of Western powers, including Israel.

According to Johan Galtung (1971) global society can roughly be divided into a core and a periphery. The industrial former colonial powers make up the core, whereas the countries with a colonial past constitute the periphery. Defining characteristics of this system are that the periphery is dependent upon the core, but not necessarily the other way around. The peripheral countries are dependent upon the core much more than they are dependent upon other peripheral countries, despite the commonalities they share. The elites in these countries are even closer to elites in the core than to their own countrymen, because they rely on the benevolence of the core elite for their prerogatives.

The post-colonial peripheral countries in the Middle East are as a consequence penetrated by the interests and power of the core countries (Ayoob 1993:36-41). Although quite a few years have elapsed since the days of the British and French

empires most of the countries in the region are to this day essentially raw-material producers for the industries of the industrialized world. This leads to a desire to not strain relations with the core to such a degree that economic links are jeopardized. The dependence of Third World countries upon the West is thus often construed as a security issue by the Third World due to the historical baggage of colonialism (Ayoob 1989).

But there are limits to the applicability of the theory. First of all it is a theory which is chiefly concerned with the economic aspect of the global structure. In terms of political dependency there are examples of concerted efforts towards political coordination throughout modern Arab history, especially in the fifties and sixties. The inroads of foreign domination gave rise to collective efforts to counterbalance it. Opposition forces that resulted from the instability of this penetration resulted in revisionist states such as Baathist Syria, which balked at the establishment of the state of Israel (Hinnebusch 2002a:4)

Secondly, one can hardly claim that there are significant shared interests between the elite in Syria and the elite in the core countries – for instance the U.S. The relationship could perhaps more aptly be described as one of bargaining, though the weaker party is deeply influenced be the powerful nation's ability to use rewards and punishments (Moon 1983). There has also been a notable effort to reduce the impact of dependency on the core by investing heavily in industry during the 1970s, and through gaining access to Gulf oil money. But this strategy has proved to have its shortcomings, and dependency persists (Hinnebusch 2002a:4-5).

The US – Israeli axis

As long as the two superpowers were intent on balancing each other, regional powers like Syria could exploit the schism to their advantage by renting out its loyalty to the Soviet bloc. The Israeli relationship with the U.S. came to fruition within this context, as they had a shared strategic interest in balancing Soviet-backed Arab power (Cobban 1991:Ch.3). Since the Communist empire collapsed, however, the U.S. has

rushed to fill the power vacuum in the Middle East and hindered attempts by among others Syria to assert itself in the region (Ehteshami & Hinnebusch 1997: 10-11). The reasons for the U.S.' keen interests in being dominant are not only a matter of domination for its own sake or maintaining access to cheap oil in the Gulf, but of safeguarding the security of Israel. In the words of Mohammed Ayoob (1984:47):

> But this is not a typical Third World conflict, for the simple reason that Israel, in terms of its ideological origins, its pattern of colonization in Palestine, the organization of its society and polity, the composition of its elite (even under Likud), its links with strong and important European and American constituencies (both Jewish and Gentile) and the intensity of one superpower's commitment to its external security (some would argue its expansion), is a European state. Israel may be physically located *in* the Third World but it is not *of* the Third world.

This indicates that the Arab-Israeli conflict is not just another negligible Third World confrontation among peripheral states, but that the dominant global power of the day, the U.S., has a vested interest in the security of Syria's mortal enemy, Israel. The level of cooperation and commitment is such that it can be termed an alliance on par with the ones existing within the Atlantic Alliance, in spite of the lack of any written pact.

2.1.2 The regional level

The security complex

The regional level is the conceptualization of a level of analysis between the international and the state. In our case the region we are concerned with is the one encompassing the Arab states, Israel, and Iran. Even more specifically; it is primarily the triangle of relations between Syria, Lebanon, and Israel that will be in focus, although other Arab states and Iran come into play within certain contexts. According to Barry Buzan (1991:188):

> In security terms, 'region' means that a distinct and significant subsystem of security relations exists among a set of states whose fate is that they have been locked into geographical proximity with each other.

What Buzan says these 'security relations' mean is that there exists among them relations of enmity and amity that are more significant among these states than with other adjacent states. Especially enmity can be a durable element when it contains facets of historical antagonisms between peoples. As is apparent, the type of relations in a region is not necessarily contingent on the distribution of power among the states as balance of power theory argues. By adding the amity – enmity dimension it is easier to geographically delineate the region in question.

Buzan (1991:190-202) terms the security region with these augmentations as a *security complex.* The national securities of these states cannot in any meaningful way be analyzed apart from each other. The complex is a durable empirical phenomenon which stands out from its general background. Usually a high level of threat/fear is mutually experienced among the participants. There can arise some confusion in defining the boundaries of the security complex at hand. This is because there are multiple 'nodes of security interdependence' within the Middle Eastern security complex. Israel's Arab neighbors vs. Israel are one, and the upper Gulf region containing Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Syria is another. It is primarily the former that will be the topic of this thesis, but the latter is also of importance.

2.1.3 The domestic level

Westphalia vs. Arabia

There are particular challenges facing the Middle East regional system that takes us beyond the neorealist understanding outlined above. The state system was imposed upon the region from outside powers in the aftermath of colonialism. This was done with scant regard for local sensibilities and identities, and is a contributing factor to the many conflicts that have plagued the region since (Ayoob 1993:42). The borders were drawn with European interests of domination in mind, and an element of arbitrariness.

> This late development of modern state structures has meant that they still lack legitimacy (in their modern form) in large parts of the Third World. Defined, as they have been, primarily by boundaries drawn by the colonial powers for the sake of administrative convenience or in some form of trade-off with colonial competitors, these structures have not yet developed the capacity to ensure the habitual identification of their populations with their respective states and the regimes that preside over these post-colonial structures within colonially-dictated boundaries (Ayoob 1984:45)

Contrary to the assumptions of neorealism, this means that the actors in the system are not impermeable. Identities in the region are also not necessarily tied to the state, but are bound to levels under and above that of the state (Hinnebusch 2002a:7-10). This means that the legitimacy of the state structure has been a contentious issue, and resistance to it has often been seen as resistance to the imperialistic design of foreigners.

For Syria's part it is the pan-Arab movement and not Islam which has been the most important suprastate identity (Telhami & Barnett 2002:7). The Arab nation has commonalities across state borders which are much stronger than for other Third World regions. The levels of linguistic, cultural, and religious homogeneity are very high (Noble 1991:55-60), and appeals to the greater good of the Arab nation with concomitant unity schemes have been a staple of Arab politics for years (Barnett 1996b).

However, the role of pan-Arab identity has declined in recent decades as the state has proved to be the most viable means for the organization of political life. Among the reasons for this is the fact that all attempts at pan-Arab unification have failed. But in spite of this, there is still enough residual feelings of community left to make the *Arab-card* a force to be reckoned with, especially in times of crisis (Ehteshami & Hinnebusch 1997:14-15).

Degrees of 'stateness'

The above mentioned colonial legacy poses enormous challenges for each state's ability to adequately gain the legitimacy it requires. Mohammed Ayoob (1993:33-36)

describes this as a matter of how much *stateness* a regime possesses. Stateness is defined as the combination of coercive capacity and infrastructural power, plus the degree to which:

> "the citizenry identifies with the idea of the particular state that encompasses them territorially".

To manage this, states of the region have been in short supply of the two prerequisites European states had comparatively more of when they came of age; time and freedom from outside pressures (See Ayoob 1995, Ch. 2). The extraordinary strain this implies for the societies involved accounts for some of the volatility the region has experienced.

This problem of legitimacy is not unique to the Middle East, but is shared by most developing countries. Michael C. Hudson (1979:4) refers to Dankwart Rustow's three prerequisites for political modernity that are lacking in the Third World; authority, identity and equality.

> The legitimate order requires a distinct sense of corporate selfhood: the people within a territory must feel a sense of political community which does not conflict with other subnational or supranational communal identifications. If distinct communal solidarity may be understood as the necessary horizontal axis for the legitimate political order, there must as well be a strong, authoritative vertical linkage between the governors and the governed (ibid.)

The third prerequisite, equality, referring to ideas of freedom and democracy are also fundamentals for acquiring legitimacy, and is in conspicuous short supply in the Middle East. Considering Max Weber's (1990:91-104) three sources of legitimacy; tradition, charisma and legality, one can venture that only charisma is readily available for most leaders as a present resource for remedying these shortcomings. This is due to the fact that the establishment of states divided the Arab nation and broke with most former forms of legitimacy[6]. Charismatic has usually been attained

[6] However, this might not be the case with regards to the monarchies in the Arab world.

by championing the core Arab concerns. These are generally speaking pan-Arab political coordination and resistance to all hints of foreign domination. The establishment of the state of Israel and the ensuing Palestinian problem is commonly regarded as the focal point of these concerns, and legitimacy is to a large extent conferred in accordance to the degree of fidelity to the Arab position on this issue (Hudson 1979:233-234).

As a consequence of these factors it is not uncommon to venture that for Third World states the primary threats to the stability of the regime are not external, but arise on the domestic scene (Ayoob 1984, David 1991). A manner in which this is dealt with is by *externalizing* conflicts, meaning that threats that arise domestically are given an external explanation by the regime in order to legitimate repression and alleviate pressure for ameliorating the problem. Threats can originate from a multitude of sources; ethnic fissures (the question of the Kurds and Palestinian refugees), identity based problems, unfulfilled development expectations, problems concerning the praetorian society, and water shortages (Korany et. al. 1993). In the neo-mercantilist economy of Syria there are bound to be disputes over capital accumulation. Fred H. Lawson (1996) contends that this is an important factor in explaining the level of external hostility of the Baathist regime. The regime adopts revisionist foreign policies to divert attention from domestic problems, and use the momentum this generates to legitimate and solidify its hold on power.

2.2 Foreign policy determinants

2.2.1 Role conception

The topic of role conception goes to the national identity of the nation as such. K. J. Holsti (1979) writes that a nation's role can be described as the pattern of attitudes, decisions, responses, functions, and commitments toward other states.

> A national role conception includes the policymakers' own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in subordinate regional systems. It is their "image" of the appropriate orientations or functions of their state toward, or in, the external environment. (Holsti 1970:245-246)

In Syria's case its role has traditionally been as one of the staunchest defenders of the dream of Arab unification. As the practicality of this project proved to be insurmountable, Syria reverted to the purest, most uncompromising, bastion of core Arab values of championing Palestinian rights, and concomitantly, refusing any concessions towards the state of Israel. Holsti claims that this role conception has principally domestic roots; geographical factors, state resources, ideology, etc. However, it is also the case that it is related to, and buttressed by, the external environment. In other words, one could posit that the external environment and the domestic domain reinforce one another, to the extent that the decision-maker is constrained by expectations from both spheres. This could potentially pose difficulties for states as Syria if there develops dissonance between what constituents expect from their government and what is prudent policy concerning external factors. In other words, there arises conflict between the requirements of the roles Syria plays as pan-Arabist and sovereign nation (Barnett 1993).

Geopolitics

One look at the map should suffice to explain the Syrians preoccupation with security. It has virtually no natural boundaries, a very short coastline, scarce water resources, has current or potential enemies on all sides, and is comprised of mainly desert. Domestically is has relatively few resources at its disposal. Granted, some additional oil reserves were discovered in the late 1990s, but these are minute compared to their eastern neighbors. The economy is weakly developed, and does not accrue the state much leverage abroad, on the contrary, the economy greatly relies on foreign aid and investment. Syria's location in the heart of the Middle East is a mixed blessing. On the one hand, without a significant deterrent capability, it is vulnerable

to all neighbors whom might covet control over parts of its territory. On the other, precisely this strategic location can be one of the states most important assets. This centrality greatly contributes to the diplomatic weight accredited to Syria. As the famous dictum goes; there can be no war without Egypt, and there can be no peace without Syria.

The origins of irredentism

Syria was one of the great losers of the dismemberment of *Bilad ash-Sham* (Greater Syria) after the First World War. The sentiment in Damascus was that the imperialist powers had done the Arabs a historic injustice by truncating a potential great Empire and dividing the Arabs in order to better protect their interests in the region. Thereafter, the impulse in Syrian politics was to attempt to merge with the rest of the perceived pan-Arab nation in order to assert their former greatness. Alas, frustration was the order of the day as the state boundaries proved resilient to change. This legacy was expressed in Syria's utter rejection of the state of Israel's right to exist; it was regarded as a foreign imposition, an affront to the legitimate aspirations of Arab nationhood (Hinnebusch 2003:4). The view that came to dominate Syrian political culture was thus that its nationalist aspirations had been thwarted by the Western imperialist powers. Consequently, anti-imperialism/Zionism, and pan-Arabism were two dominant determinants of Syrian foreign policy.

'Beating Heart of Arabism'

Syrians, perhaps more so than other Arabs, have historically seen their lot as inseparable from the wider Arab nation. The notion of an Arab nation separated by false national boundaries has been a powerful force in Syrian politics, as evidenced by the failed unity projects in 1958-61 and 1978.[7] The ignominious failures of these projects and the lack of coherence in the policies of the Arabs in relations with Israel

[7] The United Arab Republic (1958-61) was the attempt to amalgamate Syria and Nasser's Egypt into the nucleus of a pan-Arab state. The project of attempting to unite with Iraq was aborted in 1978.

have severely dampened the impetus for adjusting Syrian needs for the greater Arab good.

But still there is much political power to be derived from referring to the Arab cause. It is hard to argue against that the legacy of Arabism has shaped the identities of generations of Syrians, not least the governing circles (Barnett 1996a). The regime presents itself as an ideological one, drawing sustenance from its pan-Arab ideology, emphasizing its Arab soul. This has been for the Assad regime a source of strength when seeking to legitimate its claim to power, considering the low status of the Alawi sect that dominates the regime, and the lack of support from the traditional power centers of the Syrian state (Zisser 2001:Ch. 1). Syria is a player in the Arab arena, and it sees itself as the bearer of the rights to champion the Arab cause. This is not least due to the fact that Syria is among the few Arab states in the region that has not acquiesced to Israel's demand for peaceful relations. Accordingly, Syria has made no qualms in demanding special rights and responsibilities towards its neighboring states, especially with respect to Lebanon. Not necessarily an expansive "Great Syrianism" – this is justified as totally compatible with the idea of a greater Arab nation (Härdig 2002). Hence, the security needs of the Syrian state are indistinguishable from Arab security; if a policy is beneficial for Syria it must be good for all Arabs (Hinnebusch 1991:377-379).

Tapping into Islamism

As members of the minority Alawi sect, the Assad family has had challenges acquiring the prerequisite Islamic credentials for their claim to power. Indeed, the Baath ideology is secular in nature, but Syria is still a predominantly Muslim country, and the Alawites are regarded as heretics and apostates by the majority Sunni Muslims. Hafez al-Assad felt particularly vulnerable to attacks against his Muslim credentials in the midst of Syria's crackdown on PLO-Leftist forces in Lebanon in 1976. At this time Sunni Islamists were a serious concern for the stability of the regime, and coming to the aid of Christian forces that were routed by Palestinian and Muslim forces fuelled the fire of Sunni radicalism. Hafez al-Assad's close

relationship with the Shiite cleric Musa al-Sadr, head of the Higher Shiite Council in Lebanon, was to pay dividends. By issuing a religious ruling (*fatwa*) that the Alawis were a legitimate branch of Shiite Islam, Hafez al-Assad was granted some of the Islamic legitimacy he lacked. It stands to reason that this was primarily a strategic allegiance between the two leaders. The mighty minority ruler of a Sunni state acted as patron for the leader of a deprived segment of a multi-confessional society (Ajami 1986:173-175). In later years, the regime increasingly adopted an Islamic discourse to deflect the lack of Islamic character of the secular regime (ICG 2004b:16, Zisser 1999b). Nonetheless, Hafez al-Assad's brutal repression of the Islamist opposition in the early 1980s indicates clearly his firm grip on power, and that the threat from the Islamists was limited.

2.2.2 The conflict with Israel

The conflict with Israel is a fundamental part of the legitimating basis for the Baath regime. An important motivation for the establishment of the Syrian state's instruments of power was the perceived need to be able to defend itself against the external threat posed by Israel. Throughout its history the end purpose for the development of its institutions, industry, and military forces have been the preparation for the inevitable war to come. This is indicated by the militarization of the Baath party structure, and the fact that a significant proportion of the country's state employees are working for the security services. However, although the state is perpetually planning for war, and its primary goal is to defend against external threats (Israel), it has a very limited offensive capability (Perthes 1996a, Zisser 2004b). In an interview with the Syrian weekly Abyadh wa-Aswad, Abd al-Halim Khaddam, vice president and a long-time pillar of the regime[8], expressed his views on the role of the regime in the following way:

[8] Khaddam left Syria in 2005. He has since become one of the most vocal critics of the rule of Bashar al-Assad. However, his credibility as a reformed democrat is widely doubted by the opposition.

> "Those who suggested changing and replacing the regime do not know the danger therein for the future, the security, and the stability of the state, and do not know what can happen afterwards. Or, they know the danger, want it, and aspire to it, for reasons that are not connected to the good of the state, but serve the plans of foreign elements and of Israel…" (Champress 24.8.2004)

The Importance of the Golan Heights

Because Hafez al-Assad was Minister of Defense during the Six-Day War, when the Golan Heights fell to Israel, its retrieval became a personal matter for the Syrian leader. His leadership became known as a testament to rational power politics trumping former ideological ideals. All pretences of fighting for Arab unity, already weakened in the 1967 and 1973 wars with Israel, the intervention in Lebanon in 1976, the brutal suppression of the Muslim revolt in Hama in 1982, were finally laid to rest with the joining of the Allied coalition in the war against Iraq in 1991. Being from a minority sect, not trusted as a Muslim by his countrymen, being accused by the Muslim Brotherhood of being a traitor and having made a deal with the Israelis over the Golan Heights, not actually conceding anything to Israel with respect to the Golan Heights became not only an issue of righting a personal wrong, but also one of not loosing credibility as a Syrian and Arab. Reneging on the promise of regaining the Golan Heights was unfathomable (Rabil 2003: 33-34, Harik 2004:29-31).

Furthermore, the Golan Heights would add some of the strategic depth Syria lacks in its conflict with Israel. Granted, with modern weaponry, distance and the lay of the land has lost some of its significance compared with earlier times, but with only 50-60 kilometers from the Golan Heights to Damascus it holds a tremendous psychological importance. Strategic depth is also the main concern for the Israelis who argue for the continued annexation of the Golan Heights. This leads to a situation best described as a 0-sum game, where advantage for one party is regarded as loss for the other. None of the parties will feel secure so long as the territory is in the hands of its opponents, and sharing is extremely difficult and perhaps unlikely.

Culture of resistance

Israel plays the role of the significant other in Syrian politics. It is the rival against which they measure their progress and the enemy against which they must defend themselves. Sadowski (2002:149) writes that it is difficult for Westerners to fully comprehend the fear Israel conjures up in Syrian minds. This is not necessarily just the product of sophisticated political propaganda, but the result of traumatic historical experiences as well. Israel has defeated Syria in four wars (1948, 1967, 1973, 1982), occupies part of their territory (the Golan Heights), bombed the country's infrastructure to bits (1973), conducts surveillance in incessant preparation for an eventual new war, and has managed to infiltrate operatives clandestinely into their capital to assail Israel's enemies[9]. In Syrian schools the children are taught a heavily one-sided and xenophobic version of the Arab – Israeli history that perpetuates fear of the intentions of the Israeli state (Eldar 9.12.2004). Hafez al-Assad himself was reportedly under the impression that Israel in its essence is an expansionist power, which is on a perennial course of conquest to one day encompass the entire area from the Nile to the Euphrates (Rabil 2003:45, Zisser 2001:105). Indeed, the political culture of Syria, writes Yasin al-Haj Saleh (2003), is imbued with a pervasive fear of anything construed as being foreign, that is, of Western origin (Haddad 2003, Pipes 1990:152-53). Another tendency is the alarmist and mobilizational nature of the public discourse. Taken together with the treatment of homogeneity as an essential virtue, the result is an atmosphere which is not conducive to moderate policies and the transformation of enemy images.

2.3 Model I: External threats

It is imperative to stress that the two models are not mutually exclusive, nor do they necessarily predict different policy outcomes. They do, however, point to different

[9] The most recent example was the assassination of Izz el-Deen Sheikh Khalil by a car bomb in Damascus 26 September 2004 (BBC 26.09.2004). The operation is widely attributed to Israel in collaboration with unnamed Arab intelligence services (BBC 27.09.2004).

sources of motivation for foreign policy behavior and are indicative of the strategy one can presume the Syrian regime employs.

2.3.1 Balance of power dynamics

For better or worse, the European state system is the primary organizing principle in the region (Barnett 1996b), and it is anarchic in the sense that it is not governed by any higher authority. Power is unevenly distributed among the nations which lead to a very unstable system. These differences have changed rapidly during the recent history of the Middle East, and balances are restored more often than not through wars (Hinnebusch 2002a:20-21). The lack of developed institutions and norms to govern interactions among them also ensures the prevalence of conflict and propensity towards violence (Ehteshami & Hinnebusch 1997:12-13).

Within the security complex the behavior of the states can probably to a great extent be understood in terms of neorealist power balancing. Neorealism holds that states operate within a system which is defined by the relative distribution of power among them. Since states wish to dominate other states and protect against other state's attempts at domination, less powerful states will align in order to balance the more powerful ones. A state will want to balance against states that might pose a threat by curbing a hegemon before it becomes too strong. The alternative, to *bandwagon*, involves allying with the stronger power in order to deflect the threat, but this involves trusting that the stronger power will have only benign intentions. Trust is not a common commodity in the Middle East (Waltz 1979). L. Carl Brown (1984) launched the term the *Near Eastern Game* to describe the workings of power politics in the Middle East. Here, the great powers have hindered any of the regional states' attempts at achieving hegemony and thereby the means to organize it in order to resist outside penetration and rivalries among the regional powers has foiled great power ambitions at regional domination.

2.3.2 Balance of threats

According to Stephen Walt (1987) the traditional theory of power-balancing is too simplistic. He finds that states balance not against power alone, nor do they strictly follow ideological affinities, but they predominately balance against threats. The level of threats one state can pose against another is determined by the aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intent of the other state (ibid.21-26). In his study of the Arab states, he found that not only military power was relevant in determining behavior, but so was political power. In the Middle East, this was identified as the image of being true to the Arab cause, of being seen to be a true champion of Arab interests (ibid.149). In this respect, Walt goes beyond a strict material understanding of power, and introduces perception as an important determinant of foreign policy behavior.

2.3.3 Leadership dominant model

The conduct of foreign policy in this model can be described as what Hinnebusch (2002a:10) calls the *leadership dominant model*. Here one essentially refuses any other domestic factors influence, other than the convictions and perspectives of the leaders of the regime themselves. This often results in analysis where decisions are highly personalized. Third World countries are notoriously under-institutionalized (Korany et. al. 1993:12-13), and this can lead to the assumption that they are not very responsive to domestic factors. This has lead to an understanding of the foreign policy among states such as Syria as being particularly suitable for analysis using the precepts of neorealism. Still, this is probably an overstatement; since even dictatorships need some form of legitimacy, and has to take into consideration a vast number of variables in their decision-making process (Korany & Dessouki 1991:21). Especially when considering the policies under Bashar al-Assad, while the president is probably still the most powerful actor in the system, the conduct of foreign policy

is more appropriately described as that of a single group[10], the elite of the regime, than that of a predominant leader[11] (Hermann &Hermann 1989).

2.4 Model II: Domestic threats

2.4.1 Omnibalancing

A central challenge for this thesis is not to get bogged down in any one of the three levels of analysis. The answers we seek lay in the regime's attempts to balance conflicting pressure from all three levels. Steven David (1991) writes that what is characteristic of the security policies of Third World states is that they have to face threats both on the external and internal arenas, and that these threats are often interconnected. This means that strategies have to be adopted to counter internal and external threats simultaneously, a phenomenon he labels *omnibalancing*. Furthermore, that Third World states are usually so weak that the most dangerous threats for the regimes are domestic in origin. David cites empiric studies that point to the fact that regimes in the Third World are far more likely to be overthrown by domestic opponents than be overtaken by external threats.

According to Neil Quilliam (1999:11-14) this theory incorporates elements of the main paradigms of international relations; realism augmented by globalism on the international level, and pluralist and globalist maxims on the domestic level. The unit of analysis is the regime of the state in question, and in accordance with the precepts of realism it is understood that politics in international relations is concerned with power, interests, and rationality. In the external realm it is assumed that anarchy reigns, with survival at the top of the states priority list. But balance of power is

[10] "Single group: A set of individuals, all of whom are members of a single body, collectively select a course of action in face-to-face interaction and obtain compliance." (Hermann &Hermann 1989:363)

[11] "Predominant leader: A single individual has the power to make the choice and to stifle opposition." (op.cit.)

considered incomplete as an explanation of behavior as it overlooks the domestic dimension of threats that regimes are faced with.

> The essence of the difference is that omnibalancing asserts that realism must be broadened to examine internal threats in addition to focusing on external threats and capabilities(that is, structural arguments), and that the leader of the state rather than the state itself should be used as the level of analysis. (David 1991:237)

Because of the arbitrariness of Third World borders, David recognizes the vulnerabilities of low identification with the state structure and hence problems of legitimacy for the regimes, and the continual threat to their rule this results in. The low level of institutionalization often leads to regimes being seen as an alien imposition on society. Conversely, regimes are usually relatively independent from the society in making foreign policy. The main guiding question in deciding policy for the regime is therefore not whether it gains the state as such, but whether it serves the regimes interests of remaining in power. And if a situation arises in which there is a conflict between what is beneficial for the state and what enhances the survivability of the regime, the latter consideration will always prevail.

2.5 The two-level game

Robert D. Putnam's theory on the *Two-Level Game* (1988) is to an extent similar to omnibalancing in that it bridges the gap between the domestic and international levels of analysis. Putnam's main point is that when decision makers negotiate possible agreements with opponents on the international level (Level I), they have to take into consideration what is possible to ratify within their own constituency at a later stage (Level II). The realm of possible agreeable results for the constituency is called a *win-set*, and has to overlap with the win-set on Level II of the opposing side in the negotiations as well for there to be a successful agreement. This theory is relevant as a supplement to David's omnibalancing because it helps to show how the issue of the Golan Heights functions as a constraint as for the Syrian regime.

2.6 Defining key concepts

Security

National security

When one speaks of security policy, understood as the quest for freedom from threat, one has to be clear about what it is that is to be secured. Barry Buzan (1991:18-19) contends that;

> When this discussion is in the context of the international system, security is about the ability of states and societies to maintain their independent identity and their functional integrity.

For the purposes of this study the referent object is the governing elite of the regime of the state. Conceptualizing national security as the security of the regime at its helm gives us the opportunity to see threats arising from both the domestic and international levels. The question remains, however, as to when an issue advances to the level of national security.

> The answer to what makes something an international security issue can be found in the traditional military-political understanding of security. In this context, security is about survival. It is when an issue is presented as posing an existential threat to a designated referent object. (Buzan et. al. 1998)

This entails that, in political terms, when something is given the status of a security threat it justifies that extraordinary measures are taken to handle the problem. In other words, it gives the authorities the legitimacy it needs to use force. It also gives the state more general powers to mobilize the resources of the state or to legitimate the attainment of special powers. What constitutes a threat is dependent upon what is being threatened. Since we have established that it is the regime that is to be protected from threats, we can identify these as originating from mainly three sectors; the political, the military and the economic.

Political security

In this sector the object that is to be secured is the constituting principle of the state. Usually this is a matter of defending the sovereignty of the state, but it applies as well to the ideology of the state (Buzan et. al. 1998:22). Anything that could be said to threaten the national identity of the state, in this case the legitimacy of its ideology, would be a political threat. Especially weak states (under-institutionalized, weak state legitimacy, etc.) (Buzan 1991:Ch. 2), such as Syria, are vulnerable to political threats. For Syria's part, any qualms about the quality of Bashar al-Assad's policies and leadership abilities would come into this category.

Military security

This is the sector which is the traditional territory of security studies. The threat is constituted by the use, or threat of use, of military force. Not only does this threaten the armed forces of the state in question, but it potentially also threatens all the other constituent parts of the state. It could destroy the military, depose or eliminate the regime and obliterate the economy, and so on (ibid: 116-118).

Economic security

> "Economic security concerns access to the resources, finance and markets necessary to sustain acceptable levels of welfare and state power" (ibid: 19).

It is, however, contentious how serious an economic issue has to become before it qualifies as one of national security. This is partly because in most economies a measure of insecurity is considered normal, and even desired. Because of this inherent insecure quality of economics, it is essentially a political question when it rises to a security issue (ibid: 123-131). This might be a subjective judgment of when the normal workings and welfare of society is impaired, or it adversely affects the political and/or military sectors. For the purposes of this study I will also include the need for fulfillment of expectations of a reasonable standard of living, because perceived failure by the regime to provide a viable future for its constituents could very well provide the thrust for regime change.

Legitimacy

As we have noted previously[12], legitimacy is the measure of the perceived lawfulness of the regime, its representatives and 'commands' by the subordinates of the regime. It is a quality derived by social acceptance and appropriateness in that it refers to norms to which subordinates accord assent (Bogdanor 1991:333). The term says something about the bond between the ruling elite and the population. In practical terms it means that if a regime is seen as legitimate the population will accept the decisions it makes as legally and morally binding.

It is imperative that we here make it clear that there is a distinction between state- and regime legitimacy. Ali E. Hillal Dessouki (1993:80-81) writes that a regime might not be beyond invoking state security for the protection of regime security. For example by exaggerating external threats, driving fear into the population, creating the need for state protection, diverting attention, all for the end purpose of remaining in power.

Power

Power can be defined as the capacity to impose ones will upon the behavior of another. The type of power that interests us here is Weber's (1990:73-81) 'power as domination'. This is a kind of power where the dominated will follow the will of the dominator. This is accomplished either by the dominated realizing that it is in his interest to do so, or through the authority of the dominator to order the dominated to follow his will.

The question of power becomes crucial when examining the nature of leverage the Syrian regime exercises, or does not, over the Hezbollah. Unfortunately, it is hard to escape that the detection of this power becomes somewhat nebulous, owing to the secretive nature of the Baath-regime and the delicacy of the question at hand.

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[12] Max Weber (1990:88) states that any regime must seek legitimacy if it wishes to endure, and this legitimacy has three sources; legality, tradition, and charisma.

Proxy

It is pertinent for the following discussion to clarify what is meant by the term 'proxy', as the arguments contained herein venture that the Hezbollah functions as a proxy to Syria. I will use the definition proposed by Bertil Duner (1981), who argues that there are several dimensions to the relationship between proxy and principal that must be satisfied if the principal truly has a proxy at its disposal. 1) Compatibility of interests: Syria and the Hezbollah clearly have a common interest in aligning against their common enemy, Israel. 2) Material support: the proxy (Hezbollah) is likely reliant on the support and complicity of the principal (Syria) in order to operate. 3) Exercise of power: The basic assumption in this study is that it is Syria that has the ability to make demands upon the Hezbollah, which the Hezbollah in turn has limited means to resist. It could be argued, however, that Hezbollah has some power over Syria as well, in that it to some extent legitimates Syria's interest in Lebanese affairs. Also, it could choose to attempt to lessen its dependence upon Syria, leaving the regime in a difficult predicament. 4) Asymmetry: There is clearly a division of labor in the relationship, where Hezbollah does the fighting, and Syria enables and allows them to carry on. If these elements were not in evidence, the relationship between them would have to be characterized by different categories, such as partners or independent actors, which would impair the validity of the arguments presented in the thesis.

3. Domestic and external challenges

Having gained independence in 1946[13], as part of the de-colonialization that swept the former European colonies after the First World War, the Syrian state entered a tumultuous period of thoroughly unstable governments. This instability gave way to the Baathist coup of 1963. These were heady days, and politics often took the form of competing for the most radical positions. It is widely agreed that before the advent of Hafez al-Assad, Syria was the 'banana republic' of the Middle East, plagued with coups and countercoups, permeated by transnational currents and the victim of its neighbor's machinations. This led to the unfortunate events of the 1967 war, and a new approach was called for. The young the young Hafez al-Assad seized the moment and ousted his rivals in a bloodless coup in 1970 (Cleveland 1994, Seale 1988:72-154). Within twenty years it transformed itself into what has been termed a *regional middle power* (Ehteshami & Hinnebusch 1997:6-9, Hinnebusch 2001:139).

3.1 Adjustment to post-Cold War realities

3.1.1 Global level

Loss of Soviet Union – rapprochement with the U.S.

The new realities that Syria faced after the end of the Cold war were starkly brought home by the loss of its superpower patron, the Soviet Union. Syria was never a traditional satellite. Nevertheless, Syria was in many respects a socialist economy and state system along the lines of Eastern European communist regimes. Thus the Baath regime became an anachronism (Zisser 2001: 45-46); most apparent in the manner the leader of the state was subject to a cult of personality (Pipes 1996:6-8). The

[13] Syria was granted independence from France already in 1936, but the France later reneged on the agreement. France did not withdraw their forces until 1946.

infusion of military aid was crucial in Hafez al-Assad's strategy of achieving strategic parity with Israel. Qualitatively, this never came to be, but the - at least assumed - military potency of the Syrian Armed Forces was sufficient to pose an effective deterrent against Israeli ambitions of regional hegemony. In order to postpone any real domestic reforms that might threaten internal stability, the Syrians in the 1990s sought to make amends with the emerging sole remaining superpower, the U.S., thereby safeguarding its regional role (Zisser 2001:48-50).

The threat of the U.S. GWOT

The threat of action from the U.S. has a legal basis in the SALSA[14]. Within this document is contained the most important accusations leveled against the Syrian regime, its alleged attempts at attaining biological and chemical weaponry, its efforts to control Lebanon, and support of "terrorist" organizations. These accusations are exemplified in the testament of Ambassador Cofer Black, Coordinator for Counterterrorism:

> Syria continues to provide safe haven and political cover to Hizbollah in Lebanon, a group responsible for killing hundreds of Americans and numerous others in the past. Syrian support for Hizbollah continues to be a major impediment towards progress in our counterterrorism efforts. Syria allows resupply of Hizbollah from Iran via Damascus. Syria also allows wanted Hizbollah terrorists, including Imad Mugniyah, to transit Syria and find haven there. The Syrian military presence in Lebanon supports Hizbollah actions there (DoS 2003b).

The accusations are given further weight by being reiterated in the report by the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (2004), the so-called 9/11 Commission. Here the Hezbollah, with explicit Syrian backing, is implicated in various 'terrorist' attacks throughout the Middle East, even to the extent of possibly indirectly being implicated in the 9/11 attacks through possible association with al-Qaeda (Fighel & Shahar 2002). Hezbollah is also believed to have an extensive network inside the U.S. (Goldberg 28.10.2002), and would potentially

[14] See p.7.

be able to launch attacks on U.S. soil, although the U.S. government currently believe they primarily use their U.S. presence as a means to recruit and raise funds (F.B.I. 2003)[15].

Enemy at the gates: Occupation of Iraq

It is certain that the invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq by US and UK forces in spring 2003 irreversibly altered the balance of power in the region, but it is still too early to determine how it has been altered. This is because the foreign forces now stationed in the country are set to withdraw at an as of yet undetermined point in the future, the future integrity of the Iraqi state is not assured, and Iraq's relations with Syria still hang in the balance (Lesch 2005: 189-197). Whether the presence of a large contingent of U.S. troops in Iraq poses significant challenges to the security of the Syrian regime is debatable. The U.S. forces in Iraq most likely cannot redeploy to Syria without abandoning Iraq to its fate. Bringing more troops into the region does not seem possible at this juncture as the U.S. military is stretched to its limits as it is with large operations being conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan. It would also take considerable time and effort to persuade both U.S. constituents and the international community that force needs to be applied to the Syrian regime after the amount of contention the Iraqi campaign aroused. Furthermore, other foreign policy challenges, such as Iran and North Korea, seem to be given priority.

3.1.2 Regional level

The domination of Lebanon

During the 1970s and 1980s the main theatre of confrontation in the Arab – Israeli struggle took place in Lebanon. Syria managed to form alliances with armed elements in Lebanon to fight the Israelis on their behalf. Exploiting the warring factions of the

[15] Accusations that Hezbollah indeed has global reach have been disputed by scholars that have taken an academic interest in the phenomenon (Harik 2004, Hajjar 2002).

civil war-plagued country; Syria managed to indirectly harass not only the Israelis, but also dealing the US severe blows that were eventually to lead to the withdrawal of the U.S.-led Multinational Forces[16] (Cobban 1991:54-57).

The Syrian impetus for dominating Lebanon was a response to political, military and economic threats (Husem 2002). Militarily there was a clear need to deny the Israelis the possibility of ever using the Bekaa Valley as an invasion route to Damascus. Politically, there was a need to be seen to be confronting the Israelis somewhere, and Lebanon served this purpose better than the Golan Heights (Cobban 1991:18-21). Economically, the anything-goes business culture served as pressure relief for the semi-socialist Syrian economy, in addition to the opportunity to accumulate capital through illicit activities such as smuggling, counterfeiting, and participation in the drug industry (Rabil 2003, Pipes 1996). Syria legitimated its presence through the crucial role it played in bringing the last of the warlords in the civil war to heel, and negotiated the Taif Accords that were to end hostilities in 1991 (Perthes 1997), but since then the Syrian role became increasingly solidified to the point that it virtually controlled Lebanese political life completely. No decisions of importance were made in Beirut without being approved in Damascus in advance (Pipes 1996:46-49, Leverett 2005:40-45). This stifling of Lebanese political life has since produced a considerable backlash from parts of the Lebanese polity.

Volker Perthes (1996b) concurs with the assessment that Lebanon holds an important position in Syrian security policy, but takes issue with the notion that the regime has ambitions of annexing the country or otherwise incorporating it into Syria proper. He maintains that the prime concern for the regime is the restitution of Syria's territorial integrity, meaning the Golan Heights. The documents formalizing the relations between the two states[17] were not the first steps towards annexation, but the

[16] The Multinational Forces (MNF) were a peace-keeping force comprised of US, French and Italian troops whose mission it was to assist the authorities in Beirut in the early 1980s.

[17] The 1991 Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation, and Coordination. This has since been complemented by several lesser agreements regulating relations on a wide range of economic and administrative areas.

assurance of continuation of stable relations after a Syrian withdrawal of its forces. Relations between the two states have since, at best, been strained. Regardless, Syria is still assessed as having considerable influence in Lebanese affairs.

The South Lebanon War

Iran helped establish Hezbollah as an extension of the Islamic revolution, with the aim of eventually overthrowing the Lebanese government and erecting an Islamic government along Iranian lines. However, when the civil war came to an end with the signing of the Taif Accords, Hezbollah was forced to reinvent itself. This seemed to follow a two-pronged strategy, which pleased its Syrian and Iranian patrons respectively. First, in contravention of the Taif Accords that stated that all militias had to be disarmed and disbanded, Syria managed to excuse the Hezbollah on the grounds that it needed to continue its resistance against the Israeli occupation, thus the 'resistance card' was given a new lease on life (Norton & Schwedler 1993:73-74). Second, Hezbollah decided to vie for seats in the parliamentary elections of 1992. This decision implied that Hezbollah recognized the legitimacy of the Lebanese state, hence would not attempt to instigate an Islamic revolution, but would work within the confines of the state to promote Islamic values and protect its constituents (Fadlallah & Soueid 1995:69). Hezbollah has participated in all parliamentary and local elections since 1992 (Hamzeh 2000) and has become the largest political organization in Lebanon. This transformation to respectability and legitimacy was part of a strategy of survival where the armed resistance against Israeli occupation became national, not only Shiite and Islamic, and by integrating itself into the Lebanese political system (Norton 1999:21) achieved this end, in addition to becoming an indispensable part of the political landscape, shedding its terrorist image (Ranstorp 1998). Part of the reason for the success of this strategy could be that the organization, contrary to popular belief, is not merely reliant on the continuation of its armed role, but has a solid communal basis among the Shiite population and is therefore able to shift its strategy according to changing circumstances (Chartouni-Dubarry 1996).

The mechanics of attrition

During the 1990s the Hezbollah attacked the positions of the Israeli Defense Forces and its Lebanese proxy, the South Lebanon Army[18], on a daily basis. The attacks were for the most part a combination of mortar and rocket assaults resulting in few casualties. With the use of improvised explosive devices, famously in the form of roadside bombs, however, Israeli casualties mounted. Israeli retaliation for any attacks on its forces was customarily sustained shelling with heavy artillery and aircraft against suspected firing points (Jaber 1997: 38-42). The mechanics of attrition on the battlefield of South Lebanon were largely based on a balance of terror (Gambill 1998); knowledge in the respective camps of what the capabilities of the rival were, and an understanding that none of them really wanted an all-out conflagration (Hirst 1999). Whether retaliatory or preemptive, if Israeli shelling caused civilian casualties the response from Hezbollah was more often than not the launching of Katyusha rockets against Israeli towns (Murden 2000). In this manner the rules of the game were at times breached, and the violence spiraled out of control. The most serious and infamous such incidents were the Israeli Operation Accountability in 1993 and Operation Grapes of Wrath in 1996.

Hezbollah managed to greatly enhance its credibility as a national resistance movement by the use of its own media outlets, most important among them the al-Manar (*The beacon*) television station (Jorisch 2004), available all over the world on satellite. By filming its operations, giving its own news broadcasts, interspersed with unabashed propaganda, it won respect and admiration for successfully punishing the military might of Israel. This made it all the more difficult for the Lebanese government to disregard the political clout of the organization, and all the more of an effective instrument of policy for Syria. Conversely, the tactic aided in demoralizing its Israeli enemy by beaming the images of Israel's difficulties in defeating a

[18] The SLA was initially run by Maj. Sa'ad Haddad and consisted of mainly Christians. After his death Lahad took over, and the composition of forces changed, ironically, to predominantly Shia Muslim. The UN did not recognize the SLA as a legitimate military force, and referred to it as the DFF (De Facto Forces).

disproportionately less trained and equipped enemy across the world (Ranstorp 1998).

Hezbollah prevails

Over time this became a considerable burden for Israeli politicians who had to face ever increasing demands that the troops be pulled out (Arian 1999). The dilemma for Israeli politicians was that they seemed to be trapped by earlier statements as to the virtue of the so-called 'security zone'. In effect it amounted to no more than an 'in-security zone' (Norton & Schwedler 1993). The vast majority of IDF losses were incurred on Lebanese soil, and the zone itself, meant to function as a buffer, did not hinder the Hezbollah from launching rockets into Israel when they chose to do so. Pressure for a withdrawal of Israeli forces started to increase, not just from the peace movement, but also from retired military personnel, whom questioned the validity of the Israeli government argument for remaining in Lebanon. The harshness of the Israeli conduct in fighting the resistance served to undermine support for the governments' policies in Israel, and wrought international pressure as the legitimacy of the Israeli policies, not least concerning the legality of the zone itself, was heavily criticized. Especially the Israeli strategy of creating massive refugee flows to pressure the authorities in Beirut to curb the Hezbollah (Deeb 2003:187, Sayigh 1996) was detrimental to Israel's international and self image. (Norton & Schwedler 1993:71-73)

The Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon in April 2000 earned the Hezbollah tremendous respect in the Arab world. The organization was widely heralded as the first Arab force to have defeated the hitherto thought invincible Israeli army. Hezbollah immediately ceased the opportunity to make itself into an important player by taking control over the border area from the coast to the foothills of Mount Hermon, using its newfound elevated position to confront the Israelis and inspire other Arab groups in the region. This policy was in keeping with the wishes of the Iranian spiritual leader Ali Khamenei (Blanford 11.12.2000). The frontline is now for the most part limited to the area of the Cheeba farms, which is below Mount Hermon.

3.2 Negotiations with Israel

The reasons for the failure of the peace negotiations between Israel and Syria have been the subject of hefty debates. The fault lines seem to run between those whom venture that the Syrians never intended to arrive at a deal at any rate, but were only negotiating for the sake of being seen as negotiating, and those whom ascribe the blame for the failures to the conduct of the parties involved. One of the oft cited pieces of evidence for the disingenuousness of the Syrians was the fact that Hezbollah activity did not cease during the talks. Martha Neff Kessler (2000) points to the pent-up misgivings and distrust that had accumulated between the parties. Syrian refusal to condemn terror-attacks in Israel during the negotiations, and Israel's Grapes of Wrath operation in Lebanon, gave weight to these suspicions, and contributed to the collapse of the talks.

3.2.1 Failure at Shepherdstown

The January 2000 negotiations between Syria and Israel in Shepherdstown, U.S., ended in ignominious failure for both sides as no deal was reached. The leaders of both sides were heavily criticized by their own for conceding too much at the outset without guaranties for attaining their core demands in return. Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Barak did not seem to be genuine in his attempts to close a deal, despite the fact that the Syrian side had showed historic flexibility on many issues. The Syrian's had signaled they were willing to include security arrangements and normalization of relations. However, Barak was concerned by polls showing the Israeli public was opposed to withdrawal from the Golan (Bishara 1.2.2000). Hafez al-Assad was under the impression that Israel had acceded to full withdrawal, and consequently felt betrayed. Patrick Seale (2000) maintains that Israel had in fact conceded that the Golan was Syrian, but that the package that Israel required for final agreement was not agreed upon. The U.S. President Bill Clinton made a last-ditch effort to persuade Hafez al-Assad to continue talks in Geneva in March 2000. The U.S. proposal was a revised Israeli position giving most of the Golan back to Syria, but exempting access

to Lake Kinneret, a key Syrian demand. Assad was outraged and refused the proposal (ICG 2004a:1-2, Zisser 2001:124-126).

3.2.2 Strategic decision for peace

Hafez al-Assad had, as we have seen, been the most uncompromising element of the steadfastness front ever since he took power. His Arabist credentials were an important part of his regional stature, and he could ill afford to put this commodity at risk in the twilight years of his reign. However, he realized that peace with Israel was bound to come piecemeal through numerous bilateral agreements (al-Asad & Seale 1993).When the Americans came to leak the provisions of the plan, where Syria would normalize relations if Israel withdrew to the 1967 border, Assad was chided by his own for abandoning his uncompromising stance (Siegman 2000). The Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, was aware of the political value of Assad's reputation, but had an interest in letting the Israeli public know the to lengths to which Assad apparently was willing to go to reach an accommodation in order to convince his constituents that peace was feasible (Perlmutter 2000).

This turn of events caused speculation as to the genuine will of the Syrians to contemplate peace with Israel. Along with increased attacks by the Hezbollah against Israeli forces in South Lebanon, which the Israelis attribute to the Syrians, there was increased skepticism centering on the possibility of the Syrians only wanting to let the talks continue for their own sake, thereby maintaining the status quo, and their regional position (Ben-Ahron 2000). Pipes (8.1.1996) maintains that Hafez al-Assad's decision to enter into negotiations in the first place was an attempt to improve relations with Washington, not Tel-Aviv. While being seen as making an attempt to better relations with Israel, Syria can continue its alliance with Iran and pursue its regional ambitions unhindered.

Since then, Bashar al-Assad has signaled that he is willing to resume negotiations with Israel (Alon & Ashkenazi 7.9.2004, Rød-Larsen 5.1.2005, Lesch 2005:173-175). He has stated that he is ready to resume negotiations with Israel without

preconditions, and has dropped previous demands that the talks be contingent upon agreements being achieved between the Israelis and Palestinians (AP 7.10.2004). It has emerged that Syria has amended the Baath party platform to include peace with Israel as a strategic objective, but the Israelis remain skeptical to Syrian intentions as long as Hezbollah continues to pose a danger to their security and the Syrian media is unrelenting in its anti-Israeli propaganda (JP 16.10.2004). The current Israeli government has made it clear that it is committed to a strategic objective of peace with Syria, but that no negotiations will take place while Syria continues to support Hezbollah in Lebanon and Palestinian rejectionists in Damascus (AP 11.10.2004), despite statements from top Israeli soldiers to the effect of rescinding the military rational for continued occupation of the Golan Heights (Schiff 16.8.2004).

3.3 The domestic scene

3.3.1 The succession

The self-evident problem with a rule based to such a great extent on the personal attributes and legitimacy of one person is; what happens when he dies? This problem was pre-empted by Hafez al-Assad by grooming his son Bashar al-Assad for the smooth succession of power after his death (Lesch 2005: Ch. 4)[19]. In the event, Bashar al-Assad became the heir apparent, was given rapidly increasing responsibilities in the running of state affairs, and Hafez al-Assad reshuffled the security establishment to ensure no other contenders emerged. An example of this was the infusion of a fresh cadre of young officers into the armed forces (Zisser 1999a:11-12). Even though the top-ranks of officers still are of the same generation as the Hafez al-Assad generation, this signals that the role of the armed forces is still

[19] Bashar al-Assad's older brother Basil al-Assad was Hafez al-Assad's first choice, but he died in a traffic accident before he was formally appointed as successor.

one of a 'praetorian guard' where the best and brightest are to be harnessed into leaders of the future.

Despite common assertions about the regime of Bashar al-Assad being in the grip of the so-called "old guard" of Alawi security barons of his fathers' generation, Bashar al-Assad has rejuvenated much of the old regime with new talent. This transformation has taken place in all the Presidents sources of power; the Party, the military, and the security services. He also draws on his father's legacy, on the role of the presidency itself, his position in the Alawi community, and also from being seen as being of the generation of the future. He has built a reputation of being in tune with modern times, of understanding new technology, globalization, and therefore being the one poised to take Syria into the future (Perthes 2004a: 87-98, Perthes 2004b:8-11).

3.3.2 Domestic reforms

Initially the reforms in Syria were a direct response to the new challenges of the post Cold-War era. Contending with the lack of oil-rent form the Gulf and the removal of the Soviet umbrella, Syria needed to expand the sources of economic security (Plaut 1999). Reforms were initiated to loosen government ownership of trade and industry, and to attract foreign tourism and investments. This was done by liberalizing ownership of banking and foreign exchange, encouraging foreign investment, relaxing rent control, and increasing autonomy of state owned enterprises (Perthes 2004a:99-103, ICG 2004b:7, Ghattas 28.9.2004). at the same time as to reassure the vested power interests in the party and security establishment that their positions were secure, and that they would benefit from the new policy (Pipes 1996:19-23, Kanovsky 1997). This policy, together with the improved investment climate following the Peace Process, generated considerable short-term growth for the Syrian economy. The main benefactors from this growth were the Sunni urban elite.

The 'Damascus Spring' turns to winter

The political opening that followed in the wake of the economic reforms was soon brought to a halt. Once again the government imposed strict regulations for political

activity, censorship was tightened, and Baath party members all around the country came forth with accusations towards those whom dared to criticize the government of being collaborators with enemies of the state (Perthes 2004a:103-108, Blanford 30.9.2003, ICG 2004b:7-8). According to Amnesty International (Amnesty International Report 2004), the security services still abduct and harass Syrians on political and consciousness grounds. The media and judicial systems are still far form on par with international standards.

4. Analysis

4.1 Model I: The Great Game for the Levant

4.1.1 The rational actor extraordinaire

Hafez al-Assad was one of the most prominent political figures of the late twentieth century. He commanded immense admiration among his countrymen, and grudging respect among his enemies. He gained a fierce reputation as a negotiator, tactician, and strategist. His personal charm impressed foreign leaders, but belied the brute authority he was capable of exercising domestically when necessary (Rabinovich 1998:50-53). The regime of late President Hafez al-Assad is in many respects the epitome of the independent rational actor as understood in the realist school of international relations. Ever since Assad came to power the recovery of the losses of the 1967 war has been the paramount goal of the Syrian state. It has been assumed that Hafez al-Assad himself had a realist understanding of international relations, and sought to maximize Syria's power potential in order to balance that of Israel (Quilliam 1999:27). Assad's attempt to build an alliance with the other Arab regimes in the Levant (Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians) was more a product of the realization of the weakness of the Arabs relative to Israel than an effort to revive the concept of Greater Syria. The purpose was to build some measure of Arab unity to the extent it would balance against the power of Israel (Rabil 2003:45-46, Leverett 2005:37-39).

Regime survival

The core aspiration of the regime, irrespective of its stated aim, has always been the survival of the regime. All other considerations take a back seat to this overriding aim. All other goals the regime may pursue are considered valuable only in so far as they contribute to the attainment of regime survival (Pipes 1996:13-17).

> The over-riding, all-pervading objective has been the maintenance of the regime: not out of any particular responsibility to the populace at large, not in the service of any particular grand vision, but simply as an end in itself (George 2003:9).

It is the position of Ehteshami & Hinnebusch (1997:ch.4) that the Syrian regime is sufficiently unobstructed by domestic constraints to warrant a reading of its foreign policy as approximating that of the rational actor. What characterizes Syrian foreign policy is that it is the pursuit of clearly defined goals; reclaiming occupied territory, maintaining spheres of influence, and deterring enemies of the state, not being bound by ideology and irredentism (Melhem 1997:4). The goals of the regime have been consistent over time, and scaled down relative to the radicalism of the pre-Hafez al-Assad era. No longer is the eradication of Israel and a de facto unification of the Arab states on the agenda, but reclaiming the Syrian territory occupied by Israel and the containment of Israel's influence in the region is likely to be the main objectives until they are obtained.

Realpolitik

Arabism and the need to restore national and personal pride are undoubtedly important security policy determinants, but pragmatism has been the guiding principle since Hafez al-Assad took power. For Hafez al-Assad, structural considerations have been the salient factor, meaning Syria's relative material strength to its main rival, Israel. Although Hafez al-Assad demonstrated a preference for secularism, in accordance with Baathism, he did not shy away from working closely with both Saudi Arabia and Iran when it was considered advantageous to do so. He was driven solely by an appreciation of *realpolitik;* pan-Arabism and pan-Syrianism have both failed to capture the clear calculus that has guided Syrian security policy (Sadowski 2002:151, Kessler 2000:70). Nevertheless, even the Assad regime sought to root its foreign policy within the framework of its worldview, which was at its core of Arab hue (Zisser 2001:69).

4.1.2 Alliance with Iran

Syria's close relations with the clergy of the Islamic republic of Iran stems from the days of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), when Arab Syria took the Persian side against the Arab state of Iraq. This decision was very costly to the Arab credentials of Hafez al-Assad in the region, but it made perfect sense from a power-politics point of view. This relation enhanced Syria's standing later when it functioned as arbiter in the reconciliation process between Iran and the Gulf-states. It was further cemented when Syria accepted Iranian support for the establishment of the Hezbollah organization in Lebanon, where a special role as anti-Israeli militia was reserved for Hezbollah in the aftermath of the Lebanese civil war, with the clear intent to exert pressure on Israel on behalf of Syria and Iran (Ehteshami & Hinnebusch 1997:116-138, Ranstorp 1997: Ch. 4, Harik 2004: Ch 2). The maintenance of this alliance became a priority not least because of the need to counter the threat posed by the newly formed alliance between Israel and Turkey[20]. Syria was now surrounded by enemies, and was grateful for all the assistance it could possibly get, irrespective of the fact that the two states were on the opposing ends of the political spectrum in the Middle East (Rabil 2003:181-182, Zimmerman 2004, Haeri 8.10.2004).

The core unifying factor between Syria and Iran was the understanding that Israel had to be contained. Bolstering and facilitating the actions of Hezbollah became a prized asset for curtailing the American – Israeli attempts at domination of the region. For Syria, the prospect of a Lebanon sympathetic to Israeli and U.S. interests was an untenable prospect. Thus, Syria had the means of exerting pressure on Israel, while Iran, in addition to having a stake in the Arab – Israeli conflict, also had a means of disseminating its particular brand of political Islamism (Agha 1996)[21]. Of course, any rapprochement between Syria and Israel will sorely test the alliance, but the benefits

[20] The alliance between Iran and Syria is not one of mutual defense, merely of cooperation concerning equipment and training. Relations between Syria and Turkey have improved markedly since the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. The two countries now have a shared interest in coordinating their policies with regard to the question of the Kurds (DS 9.11.2004).

[21] The relationship suffered many crises, however, during the Lebanese civil War. The two states were embroiled on opposing sides not least during the 'War of the Camps' (Agha 1996:26-28).

for both parties seem to be sufficient to withstand even this strain (Zisser 2001:82-85).

4.1.3 Militarily benefits of support for Hezbollah

Cost-effectiveness

The Syrian leadership was aware that despite the goal of strategic parity of the 1980s the disparity of forces with Israel is hopelessly asymmetrical (Luft 2004). There is still a balance of sorts due to the fact that Israel is ostensibly more vulnerable to losses than Syria. Sharing the lack of strategic depth, Syria will be able to inflict substantial losses on Israel, even though they will lose any military contest eventually, but the prospect of the potential costs poses enough concern on the Israeli side to maintain reticence to enter into the contest to begin with. The other aspect of this balance is that Syria's armed forces are primarily defensive in composition. They are not by any means capable of mounting an assault on Israeli territory with the intention of holding it. At most, it has been speculated that they have the capacity to stage a 'land grab' on the Golan. Considering this situation, Syria has managed to employ Hezbollah as a cost effective means to exert pressure on Israel while not putting itself directly in the firing line (Ehteshami & Hinnebusch 1997:67-68, Erlich 2001, Harik 2004:27). Syria has thus reduced the costs of war by using Lebanon as a battleground.

Balancing and deterring Israel

Patrick Seale (1996a) insists that Syria sees it in keeping with their national interest to prevent Israel becoming the dominant player in the Middle East. The fear of Israeli designs on its environs is a permanent underpinning of all Syrian calculations. Particularly the 1982 invasion of Lebanon fed into Syrian fears of Israel's intent to subjugate resistance to Israeli power in the Levant (Schiff & Ya'ari 1984: Ch. 2). Syria thus sees its relationship with Lebanon as part of the larger game with Israel. This means that Lebanon cannot be neutral as long as the conflict between Israel and

Syria remains; it will necessarily be under the influence of either Syria or Israel. In other words, the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon and self-proclaimed cessation of its meddling in Lebanese affairs are considered grave security risks as it could only benefit Israel, no matter what the Lebanese preferences are (Agha & Khalidi 1995: 17-19, Perthes 1997, 1999:55, Zisser 2001:146-149). The leader of Hezbollah's Political Council and MP for South Lebanon, Mohammed Raad, corroborated this reading in an interview with Graham Usher (1997:66):

> "Lebanon's strong ties with Syria serve to counter American political and economic pressures in the region".

Syria therefore regards the Israeli efforts to vanquish Hezbollah as part of a strategy to reduce Syria's influence and ability to wield power in the region (Hinnebusch 2004). Irrespective of the notoriety Hezbollah has acquired in the international arena, Syria believes that any acquiescence to Israeli sensibilities would be appeasement to Israeli occupation, and would thus be highly detrimental to its interests.

Hafez al-Assad's abandonment of the goal of strategic parity with Israel gave way to the notion of comprehensive peace only because it was considered the only way to stop Israel from picking off the Arabs one by one. Until that comprehensive agreement materializes, retaining the power of the Hezbollah is paramount in Syria's deterrence- and negotiation strategy (Seale 1996b). A further factor underscoring this point is the obviously weak position of Syria in its regional environment. When Israel launched retaliatory air raids inside the territory of Syria itself in October 2003, it was with the blessing of the Bush-administration. The weakened state of the Syrian regional posture is evident in the weak responses of the Syrians to the air-assaults. Despite the fact that a blatant military strike against their sovereign territory there were really no expectations of Syria retaliating. To do so while sandwiched between Israel and the regime-toppling might of the U.S. Armed Forces in Iraq would be highly unadvisable (Siegman 15.10.2003).

4.1.4 Political benefits of support for Hezbollah

The 'resistance card'

The purpose of Syrian influence in Lebanon is not just keeping the Israelis out, but as a means for retaining the 'resistance card', the support of Hezbollah, as a means of exerting pressure and of deterrence (Blanford 14.9.2004). By establishing a clear link to the issue of the Golan Heights the Israelis know they will never have security on the Northern border until they vacate all land occupied during the 1967 War (Norton &Schwedler 1993:76-77, Roumani 23.9.2004). Syria calculates that not only is the capability by Hezbollah to inflict damage on Israel its most important deterrent against possible Israeli attack, but it is the best asset it can bring to bear on the Israelis to release the Golan from their grip (Hajjar 2002:18, Harik in Assaf 4.1.2005).

> "We want the Golan and we will not surrender on that. Hizbollah is our best card to guarantee our interests….It is our trump card to pressure Israel. We don't have a credible army or the technology we need to fight or resist anyone! Yet Syria is the only regional country that can control Hizbollah". (ICG interview with a Syrian close to President Bashar, Damascus, April 2003, ICG 2004a).

By supporting the Hezbollah's activities in South Lebanon the Syrians managed to establish a proxy to confront Israel on its behalf, at the same time as the government in Beirut, while beholden to the line of Damascus, were not allowed to fully establish sovereignty over all its territory. This gave Syria a two-tracked strategy, whereby it positioned itself as the patron of both the Hezbollah and the Lebanese government, while at the same time being granted status as the guarantor of stability in the country (Ehteshami & Hinnebusch 1997:147-153, Usher 1997). By its involvement in Lebanon, Syria has not sought to end civil strife in that country. On the contrary, it has made efforts to exacerbate the conflict for the purpose of making its role as patron seem indispensable for the stability of the country, and safeguarding the position of its most useful proxy; the Hezbollah (Harik 1997, Deeb 2003, Zimmerman 2004:98-102). The success of its policy, and the failure of the Israeli policy of driving a wedge between the Beirut government and Hezbollah, is

evidenced by the key role Syria turned out to inhabit in the efforts to reach a closure to the main conflagrations in the South Lebanon War in the 1990s Operation Accountability (1993) and Operation Grapes of Wrath (1996) (Harik 1997: Ch. 6).

Signaling Israel

Despite reported attempts to restart the negotiations between the parties, irrespective of the ups and downs of the peace process with the Palestinians, periodic flare-ups on the border is seemingly a manner in which the Syrians convey to the Israelis that they are still a force to be reckoned with (Blanford 23.4.2002). With the travails of the Intifadah non-abating, Syria, with the employment of Hezbollah, stoke the fears of the Israelis of having to manage a second front. Reports steadily surface with news of increased missile-capability of the Hezbollah, indicating the continued importance placed on the Lebanese asset by Iran and Syria both (Ross 24.6.2002).

Syrian support of militant groups, Hezbollah included, clearly allows the Syrians to approach the negotiations with Israel from a position of strength (Young 19.4.2001). By inflicting pressure on Israel in Southern Lebanon the Syrian's aim is to forge an inseparable link with the Golan-issue; the fighting only stops if the Golan Heights are returned (Norton 1999:2, Kessler 2000:85, ICG 2002). The Israelis know that it is within the power of the Syrians to unleash Hezbollah. Rabil (2003:137-138), however, notes that this sends mixed messages to the Israelis. On the one hand it surely gives the Syrians leverage, on the other hand, holding on to that leverage gives the impression that the regime is indeed only interested in the talks for their own sake, that Syria cannot be serious about eventually having normal state-to-state relations if it intends to arrive at that point by the use of Hezbollah.

The Palestinian connection

By encouraging the al-Aqsa Intifadah, launched in 2000, through its satellite television station al-Manar the Hezbollah, and by extension Syria and Iran, were able to increase their pan-Muslim and pan-Arab credentials (Blanford 11.12.2000). Hezbollah's success in South Lebanon quickly became an asset in the pan-Islamic

arena. The power of the example was all too evident when Hezbollah flags started appearing at rallies in the occupied territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The second Intifadah (2000→) differed from the first one not least in its use of roadside bombs and other sophisticated attacks upon Israeli military installations, techniques perfected by the Hezbollah and presumably passed on to various Palestinian radical organizations (Palti & Levitt 2004, Zimmerman 2004, MacAskill 15.10.2004). Of course, the increased ferocity of the Intifadah due to the example set by the Hezbollah was an important part of the psychological warfare between Israel and Hezbollah, and its supporters.

4.1.5 The same under Bashar al-Assad

The succession of Bashar al-Assad to the presidency in 2000 has unquestionably ushered in a new era in Syrian politics, with burgeoning reforms of the policies and institutions of the old regime. However, the foreign and security interests and aims of the country are still consistent with that of Assad the elder, with retrieval of the Golan Heights as the first priority (Seche 19.5.2003). The issue determining policy in all areas is still the perennial contest with Israel. It is still viewed as a 0-sum game. Syria's forces have relatively speaking fallen irretrievably far behind the ever increasing qualitative gap with Israel's (significantly due to huge quantities of U.S. aid). The regime has sought to remedy this situation by attempting to acquire a chemical-weapon capability, large stockpiles of ballistic missiles, and strengthening its alliance with the Hezbollah (Perthes 1999:42-44), ostensibly employing the organization as a proxy in the same fashion as during the time of Hafez al-Assad, but perhaps with slightly less acumen (Goldberg 14.10.2002, Rabinovich 21.8.2003, and Leverett 2005:112-120).

Syria likely still regards Lebanon as essential to its security, despite being pressured into conducting limited troop-withdrawals from Lebanon already in 2004 in order to assuage American tempers (BBC 18.12.2004). However, this had little discernible effect on Syria's ability to orchestrate Lebanese politics, as evidenced by the

unconstitutional extension of the mandate of president Lahoud. Even after the complete withdrawal of early 2005, the Hezbollah remains armed, influential, and likely still aligned with Syrian interests.

4.1.6 Threats on a global scale

Perennial conflict with the USA

There is a strand of thinking prevalent, particularly in some U.S. and Israeli circles, that the interests of the U.S. and Syria are bound to be in conflict. This is because the U.S. is in the Middle East with the *stated* aim of spreading democracy and freedom, which is in direct contravention of the sources of power the Baath regime rests on (Vulliamy 13.4.2003). Syria is frequently depicted as a state which terrorizes its citizens, uses Hezbollah to dominate Lebanon for economic and military purposes, funds terrorism against Israel in order to keep the conflict alive (in order to put Israel and the U.S. in a bad light and itself as the vanguard of Arab rights), and amasses chemical and biological weapons for purposes of blackmail (Gordon 2003, Gambill 2003).

The nature of the threat against Syria after 9.11.2001 is different from the warnings that used to come out of Washington, which were warnings to alter policy, but fell short of ultimatums. As long as Syria cooperated, however reluctantly, with the U.S.' top priorities, such as joining the allied side in the 1991 Gulf War and peace negotiations with Israel, Syria was not pressed too hard on other outstanding issues. It was also realized that Syria was essential to any comprehensive peace deal in the Palestinian – Israeli conflict, and isolating the regime would not bring this about. Throughout most of the period under study, until the passing of the SALSA, the regime in Damascus could be forgiven for calculating that it only had to listen with half an ear to the warnings coming out of Washington. It had become somewhat of a routine that Washington issued dire warnings to Syria for facilitating the activities of 'terrorists', while at the same time making efforts to establish a dialogue with

Damascus to ensure their cooperation in fighting the very same 'terrorists' (Abdelnour 2003c, Katzman 2002).

The threat under GWOT

The situation after the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Iraq and the GWOT clearly presents Bashar al-Assad with threats on a scale his father never had to contend with. With Israel seeing its struggle against the Arabs as part and parcel of the U.S. GWOT, Syria has to come to grips with global penetration in a very direct form (Leverett 2005:142-144, Lesch 2005:98-110). The all too costly Syrian defense budget is only a third of the direct military aid Israel annually receives from the U.S. (Williams 19.11.2003). Thus, the current threat is of a stated willingness by the U.S. to instigate a change in the government of Syria. Furthermore, Syria's refusal to support the U.S.-led attack upon Iraq (Leverett 2005:134-142), after its commencement was a forgone conclusion, is seen as evidence that the regime is incapable of conducting a rational foreign policy, thereby affirming its classification as a rouge regime, and validating the U.S. policy of preventive war (Abrahams 2003).

President Bush has made it clear that he will brook no ambiguity on Syria's behalf with regards to his alleged support for terrorism. In addition to the continued support Syria gives to organizations on the U.S. State Departments terrorist-list, the regime is also under suspicion of helping the Iraqi Baath regime squirrel away the infamous weapons of mass destruction under the noses of the invading U.S. forces. Especially with Syria's strategic position in relation to the efforts of the U.S. to fight the insurgency in Iraq, cooperation of Syria is a necessity (ICG 2004a:6), as lack of Syrian assiduousness in monitoring its own border is considered a boon for the anti-U.S. insurgency (Abdelnour 2003b). Syria has repeatedly been accused of allowing insurgents to pass into Iraq from their territory.

The U.S. has adopted a comparatively confrontational stance that accentuates the whip, but holds no other carrots than the avoidance of the whip. In an apparent drive to rid the region of all belligerent actors, whether they are states or not, the Bush-

administration does not seem concerned with attaining a comprehensive view of what role Hezbollah has in Lebanese society. So long as the organization constitutes a hostile military force, it is a target for the U.S. (ICG 2003:4-7). Without offering any bargains, the intention seems to be the restructuring of the Middle East, and there is no room for negotiating with unfriendly regimes in this new era (Salhani 2004, ICG 2004a:2-6, Zisser 2003b).

Terrorists?

Whether Hezbollah should be categorized as a terrorist movement or not, is a highly contentious issue that is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully delve into. Hezbollah itself, and Syria for that matter, strongly disagree with the U.S. definition. They maintain that theirs is a just cause, and is fought within the confines of a national liberation struggle. From the Syrian perspective, the threats leveled against them from the U.S. are entirely of Israeli making. Accusations of the Hezbollah being 'terrorists', as the Israelis have maintained for years despite differences of opinion with the Europeans, are seen by Hezbollah and Syria as attempts by Israel at linking their quarrel with Syria over the Hezbollah into the realm of the GWOT, and thereby robbing the organization of any legitimacy (Heradstveit & Pugh 2003).

4.1.7 Shortcomings

Is Bashar al-Assad a rational actor?

According to balance-of-power theory, the logical behavior by a weak power under a high level of external threat is to bandwagon. Hafez al-Assad's decision to join the coalition against Iraq in 1991 could be read as an instance of this mechanism. He had recently lost his superpower patron when the Soviet Union fell apart, so he realigned on the side of the remaining superpower to draw what benefits he could from the new disposition of the power structure. Likewise, if one strictly adheres to this logic, one could be forgiven for ascribing the regime in Damascus problems in perception, of not appreciating, for whatever reason, their grave predicament in relation to the GWOT. On the other hand, if Syria's policy was determined solely by external

threats, then it should have concluded a treaty with Israel along the lines of Egypt and Jordan a long time ago, as well as acquiescing to the demands made upon it by the U.S. and U.N. It would therefore seem prudent to seek explanations for Syria's policies that lie beyond the scope of strict neorealism.

Unlike under the presidency of Hafez al-Assad, there is not the same level of consensus among observers that security policy is the sole preserve of president Bashar al-Assad. According to Ammar Abdulhamid (8.10.2004) foreign policy in Syria is not the domain of Bashar al-Assad, but of the cronies of his father in the military and security establishment, who cannot grasp the changing regional and global environment, and subsequently are delusional concerning the power of the Syrian state. Fresh blood has replaced many of the geriatrics of Hafez al-Assad's generation throughout the state system, *except* in the area of foreign relations. There, the likes of Farouq al-Sharaa[22] are still setting the agenda. They might accept him as president, but it is assumed they hold more sway over the president in policy matters than was the case with Hafez al-Assad. Bashar al-Assad is still seen by some as lacking the political capital his father had accumulated by leading the country through dire straights (Perthes 2004a). Therefore his brazen statements on the invasion of Iraq[23], for instance, could be seen as a throwback to the early years of his father's reign (Zisser 2003a).

Considering the difficulties of ascertaining reliable information on the inner workings of the Syrian regime, we can with some justification deduce that as long as Bashar al-Assad is in fact in power there are not other centers of power strong enough to unseat him. Syria's apparent irrationality of some of the regime's actions could be the result of pressures it is subject to that are not visible to outside observers.

[22] Sharaa became the new Vice President in 2006, replaced at the Foreign Ministry by his former subordinate Walid al-Muallem.

[23] Syria was adamantly opposed to the US-led invasion of Iraq, and made threats against the invading forces.

Is Hezbollah still a threat?

It is possible that too much is made of Hezbollah's threatening ability after the Israeli withdrawal in 2000. Some analysts even go so far as to say that Hezbollah has evolved beyond Syria's control, and that they conduct their deliberations independently (Zisser 2002). Despite keeping up appearances in the Cheeba farms area, the border-zone has experienced its calmest period in thirty years after Israel vacated its troops (Blanford 25.9.2004). However, this can be also be read as an indication of the discipline of Hezbollah (Friedman 15.6.2004) and the level of control the Syrian regime wields over their proxy. In fact, there is evidence that the activity of the Hezbollah militia has been in strict accordance with the unwritten rules of the game, that the acts of violence perpetrated by them has been mainly as responses to perceived provocations by the Israeli military (Pedatzur 16.8.2004).

Does Syria control the Hezbollah?

As long as Hezbollah continues to pose a military threat to Israel, it is plausible to expect that Syria exerts a considerable influence over its armed activities. The comparatively low level of activity on the Cheeba-front can be seen as a result of Syrian apprehension to needlessly provoking the Israelis (Zisser 2000, Sobelman 2004, Shatz 13.5.2004, Leverett 2005:117-119). Without the Israeli occupied zone in South Lebanon to act as a buffer, the stakes in that dangerous game has become close to unacceptable for the Syrians. This is because of the stated Israeli claim that Syria controls the activities of Hezbollah, and therefore, that Syria will be held responsible for any transgressions of the Hezbollah. Keeping this in mind, Perthes (1999:57) maintains that Syria does not wish to be dragged into any military adventures due to indiscretions by the Hezbollah, and have tightened its control over Hezbollah's ability to independently launch operations (ICG 2002). So, the activity that has taken place on the Lebanese – Israeli border is most likely conducted with the consent, if not under the direction, of the Syrian government, even if the organization has its own goals that does not always correspond to Syrian wishes (Sobelman 2002).

Nevertheless, it is obviously a Syrian decision to continue the aggressive posturing in the disputed border areas. The presence of large numbers of identifiable Hezbollah guerillas on the border, particularly in the Cheeba-region, under nominal Syrian control, ensures that there still is a resistance-card to be had by the Syrian regime. The international community does not concur with Syrian and Hezbollah claims that the territory is Lebanese, and the local inhabitants have no desire to see their homes placed in peril in the present circumstances (O'Shea 2004). Interviews given to the International Crisis Group in 2004 give rather diverging impressions as to the ability of Syria to actually close down the armed wing of Hezbollah if it came to pass without their consent. A Syrian opposition activist was quite convinced that Hezbollah was totally infiltrated by Syrian intelligence and would surely do their bidding. Whereas a Lebanese close to the Hezbollah leadership was adamant that any Syrian efforts to that effect would require a 'very risky military operation', as the organization is quite a force to be reckoned with (ICG 2004a:14).

Some argue that the Syria of President Bashar al-Assad does not, as his father did, maintain some distance between himself and Hezbollah (The Shatz 29.4.2004, Brom 2001, Roumani 11.10.2004). Ziad K. Abdelnour (2003a), for instance, says that Hezbollah receives more direct assistance from Iran through Syria than was the case before, and in addition, has set up training camps in Syria proper. Gambill & Abdelnour (2002) posits that Hezbollah's strategic importance and the support they lavish on the Syrian role in Lebanon makes Bashar al-Assad dependent upon Hezbollah to such a degree that it smacks of weakness in the Syrian regime.

The Iranian connection

It used to be the conventional belief that the Hezbollah was an Iranian invention, and subsequently, that Iran directed the organization to a considerable degree (Ranstorp 1994). Due to the influence of Syria in Lebanon, it is to be expected that it is Syria which determines the rules that Hezbollah is forced to adhere to, not Iran. Iran provides ideological guidance, inspiration, and funds, but there is no way Iran can materially support Hezbollah without going through Syria (Deeb 2003, Gambill &

Abdelnour 2002). Past experiences[24] show that Syria will not hesitate to rein in Hezbollah if it serves a greater security related purpose. However, it is most likely important for Syria to refrain from being too heavy handed in their relations towards the organization as that would strain their relations with Iran. This relationship probably takes precedence over the usefulness of Hezbollah if those two interests should come into conflict (Jaber 1997: 35, Ranstorp 1997: Ch. 4).

Hezbollah's Lebanese constraints

The evacuation of the Israeli occupation in some respects bereaved the Hezbollah of its *raison d'être*. Having attained legitimacy from all segments of the Lebanese polity as the national liberation movement for South Lebanon, it suddenly stood without a significant occupation to resist, and consequently had no apparent justification to continue as an armed force. To loose its role as feared guerilla organization, the savior of the South, and its weapons, would surely diminish its political clout. Many Lebanese now believe it is time for the Hezbollah to lay down their arms, realizing this could reduce the threat of Israel and the U.S. imposing their will in the area by force (Noueihed 5.3.2004). Lebanon's political landscape has grown increasingly weary of the organizations ill repute in the West, aware of the negative impact it has on the economy (Economist 6.9.2003), and harbor lingering suspicions as to the ultimate goals of the organization (Young 26.10.2000).

There are, however, indications that this need not necessarily happen. In a study conducted by Judith Palmer Harik of the American University of Beirut (Harik 1996), it was discovered that the electoral support-base for the organization did not conform to the expected profile of deep religiosity, low socioeconomic status and high levels of political alienation. Harik posits other explanations for the expected survivability of the party even after the armed struggle with Israel comes to a complete end. Hezbollah has managed to carve out a niche in the Lebanese political landscape for

[24] Syria cracked down on the Hezbollah in the late 1980s when they clashed with Amal, who were even more beholden to Syrian interests.

itself, and fulfills the patron-function according to the traditional Lebanese way of conducting politics, facilitated by expatriate funding to complement the decreasing Iranian funds. Due to the constraints placed upon the organization in parliamentary participation, and the political engineering of Syria, the moderate trend in Hezbollah has been strengthened, albeit the rhetoric of the leadership has held the sway of the faithful. Nicholas Blanford (11.12.2000) is adamant that Hezbollah's potential for electoral clout dispels the traditional view of the organization as a mere foreign policy tool for Syria and Iran. He states that the electoral politics of Hezbollah is conducted autonomously, without Syrian interference, and is a credible and respected organization in the Lebanese polity. As such, Hezbollah is responsible to a constituency, not just a foreign patron, and that constituency does not want another war. Whether Hezbollah would wither away if Syria discontinued its transfer of arms is an open question, but it is highly unlikely that the organization would survive the loss of its popular base of support.

However, the Hezbollah is still not just another Lebanese political party; it defines itself as serving a greater purpose than filling seats in parliament. While choosing to ally with their rival Amal in the parliamentary elections in 2000 in order to assuage fears that the adherents of the two parties would succumb to inter-Shiite strife, and turning down a seat in the new government, Hezbollah retained its ability to act outside the confines of the authorities. By doing so, the organization can maintain its special status as a resistance movement, in accordance with the wishes of Syria, even when this does not necessarily sit well with the Lebanese government or the dominant mood in Lebanon.

As long as Syria remains a powerful force in Lebanon, Hezbollah can still play the part of anti-Israeli guerilla movement. Hezbollah, being an organization indigenous to Lebanon and responsive to its base of support, realizes that its shared interests with secular Syria lies entirely within the confines of the struggle against Israel. Its marriage of convenience could at some point in the future become inconvenient. The goal of retrieving the Golan Heights is paramount for the Syrians, but remaining true

to its supporters and ideology probably guides the party's decision more than other factors (Rabil 2003:77). Besides, Hezbollah is ever aware that an eventual Syrian deal with Israel will more likely than not include the disarming of Hezbollah's military wing (the Islamic Resistance) as a key provision (Norton 1999:23).

The Lebanese opposition

As it happened, Syria's main challenge to its policies in Lebanon, regarding Hezbollah and otherwise, proved to be the Lebanese themselves. With the Israeli occupation over and Hafez al-Assad dead, voices grew louder calling for Syria to extricate itself from Lebanon (Pipes 2000, Economist 19.4.2001, Bar'el 10.1.2005). The unconstitutional extension of the Syria-loyal Lebanese President Emile Lahoud's term for three more years created even more pressure against the Syrian regime. The extension was clearly in breach of the Lebanese constitution, and it was largely heralded as a decision made in Damascus (Rubeiz 29.10, The Middle East 12.2004). Following the assassination of former Lebanese premier Rafiq al-Hariri in February 2005 being widely blamed on Syria (IIIC 2005: "The Mehlis-Commission Report"), Syrian forces withdrew in March 2005. Over a year later, however, Emile Lahoud is still in office. A spate of assassinations and bombings since then has been blamed on Syria, or forces sympathetic to Syrian interests in Lebanon. Furthermore, Lebanese political life is still riveted by fissures between political parties opposed and supportive of Syria, the latter with Hezbollah as the prime protagonist.

Assessment of Model I

This model explains why Syrian support for Hezbollah is a rational policy in meeting external threats. It demonstrates the extent to which Syria's security policy is the preserve of the elite of the regime, and that the survival of this regime is paramount. Furthermore, it sheds light on how Syria sees the issue as one of a regional contest with its arch nemesis; Israel, and its patron; the U.S. However, there are essentially two important weaknesses of Model I. The first is the assumption of the independency of Bashar al-Assad in the conduct of foreign policy. The second point is increased uncertainty regarding the relationship between the Hezbollah and the

Syrian regime. Additionally, the model does not capture the domestic facets of decision making in the Syrian regime, the degree to which domestic pressures have a bearing on its foreign policy. Therefore it alone cannot explain why Syria does not renounce its relationship with Hezbollah.

4.2 Model II: The threat of peace

The primary goal of the regime is the same in Model II as in Model I; the survival of the regime. The main difference is that in Model II the main threat is of domestic origin (Pipes 1990:150). It is therefore necessary to identify and evaluate the weaknesses of the Syrian regime, and what constitutes its domestic challenges.

4.2.1 The precariousness of the regime

The Alawi regime?

The regime of Hafez al-Assad is often described as being of and for the Alawi sect (Pipes 1990). Pipes explains that the religious fractures in society as the major fault-lines in Syrian politics, predominantly the one between the Sunni majority and the minorities, led by the Alawis. There have been fissures along religious lines when Sunnis have had to take orders from Alawis, considered by some to be their inferiors (Pipes 1996:9-13). There is no agreed-upon national identity; the argument goes, as the main source of identity is not the state, but the religious group (Kaplan 1993). The fact that the Assad's themselves are of the Alawi sect, and that many personalities in the power elite also share this background makes this a criticism that is hard to refute out of hand. But it is an assertion that could be overly simplistic, because, even though minorities have been overrepresented, the regime has never been as uniformly Allawi as some critics seem to believe. In a study on the power struggle within the Syrian regime, Nikolaos Van Dam (1996) does not find that the ethnic composition of Syria after Hafez al-Assad took power had any bearing on its foreign policy. Still, it is the prevalence of the notion which is important. Marius Deeb (2003), for

instance, argues that precisely the Alawi sect's need for legitimacy is the prime motivator for Syria's direct involvement in regional disputes. Pipes (1990) , as well, maintains that through the employment of an ideology of pan-Syrianism the clique of Alawis at the helm of the Syrian regime legitimate the necessity of their rule for the continued struggle for dominance of the coveted *Bilad as-Sham* (comprising the territory currently known as Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Israel). In times of hardship, accusations of ethnically based favoritism flourish, and have the potential to undermine the legitimacy of the regime (Drysdale 1982:3-4). For that reason there is a fear of a sectarian backlash against the Alawis in the event of a political transformation that results in Sunni dominance (ICG 2004b:17-18).

Part of the reason for the debate concerning the degree to which the regime is controlled by the Alawis is because there arguably exists two parallel sets of power in the regime, one based on numerical superiority, and the other on qualitative superiority. The formal institutions of power incorporate large segments of Syrian society, and serve the function of infusing the regime with legitimacy, and providing avenues of social mobility for the populace. The other, informal, qualitative, structure of the regime consists of the leadership of the security and military organizations, which is comprised of a majority of Alawis. These are the most important institutions, in that they have inordinate levels of real power, and serve the purpose of ensuring stability and security for the regime, if not for the population at large (Zisser 2001:Ch. 2).

Islamist credendials

The Muslim Brotherhood was nearly exterminated during the crackdowns of the late 1970s and early 1980s, culminating in the literal flattening of the city of Hama. But the Islamist opposition did not disappear, although the tactic of open confrontation was abandoned. Spewing a steady stream of propaganda calling the credibility of the regime into question, any Syrian distancing of itself from Hezbollah will give the Islamists the argument that all their accusations against the regime were proved correct at last. In the event that a treaty is signed with Israel, the regime worries the

Islamist's rhetoric could strike a chord with especially the urban population. Because the regime has stigmatized the Muslim Brotherhood over the years as enemies of the state, it is perhaps ironic that this has resulted in the popularity of that movement. Frustration at the absence of opportunities for making their voices heard, the evocative power of the Palestine-issue, and anger at U.S. policies cause many to turn to political Islamist groups (ICG 2004b:15-16). Some Brotherhood members have begun to cooperate with other more moderate opposition forces, and this is worrying for the regime (Perthes 1999:22, Bronson 2000:100). The party is still banned, and the ferocity with which the regime enforces this policy can be interpreted as an indication of the level of threat they attribute the organization.

To ward off the power of the domestic Islamists the regime has made itself into a safe haven for Palestinian Islamists (Gambill 2002) and Hezbollah. Thereby the regime boosts its standing in the Muslim world and can also silence the indigenous Islamists. However, the popularity of the Hezbollah constrains the ability of the regime to clamp down on them if that option should become desirable for the regime (Hersh 28.7.2003). It is considerably more difficult for the Islamists to assail the regime's credentials when it is seen as the last stand of defense for the Muslims against the 'evil' designs of the Israelis. By co-opting the mainstream moderate religious leaders the regime can deflect the brunt of the pressure for now. The inherent contradiction of placating the Islamists while ostensibly working for an agreement with Israel has found its undeclared modus vivendi for the interim in that the Islamists can accept an agreement that returns the Golan Heights but does not entail normalization with the Jewish state (Rabil 2003:132-138).

4.2.2 Legitimacy through belligerence

Despite the relatively secure position of the Baath regime compared to other Third World states, the regime is nonetheless sensitive to the need to build consensus around their policies. Hafez al-Assad himself was adamant that he alone did not decide foreign policy, and that he had to defer to the institutions of the state (Ahram

2002). In this manner he sought to diversify the responsibility for the negative effects of Syria's posture. It was apparent to Hafez al-Assad that he had to take into account the public mood, that there were limits to how much and how fast he could pursue a policy that went against the legitimating principles that the regime, and indeed the state of Syria, were founded upon (Rabil 2003:143-144, Pipes 1996:117-122).

Due to, among other factors, the low level of literacy, the Syrian public is very much susceptible to manipulation by the government controlled media. The reverse side of this state of affairs is that the public is also vulnerable to enticements regarding trans-state sentiments such as pan-Arabism, pan-Islamism and anti-Imperialism. Said Hafez al-Assad to Syrian Arab Television (2.10.1993, quoted in Pipes 1996:18):

> "I am confident that I enjoy massive popular confidence in our country, and yet, I if did something the Syrian masses interpreted as being contrary to their aspirations, I might pay the price as others did" – an apparent allusion to Arab leaders (such as King 'Abdullah, Anwar al-Sadat, Bashir Jumayyil) who were assassinated for negotiating peace with Israel.

Ehteshami & Hinnebusch (1997) observed that Hafez al-Assad was not above going against the grain of what was considered the Arab line, but was capable of justifying the departures as serving the greater good of enhancing its stance against Israel. The regime needs to be seen as fighting an ideological battle in order to maintain its legitimacy (Wurmser 2000). On the subject of Israel there seems to be a convergence of interest between the strategic goals of the regime and the dominant public opinion (Seale 19.5.2000). Even those forces vehemently opposed to Hezbollah would be sleuth to call for the discontinuation of Syrian support on the grounds that it is not advisable to be seen to be doing the U.S' bidding (ICG 2003:1-2). So, despite the low level of accountability the regime rests on, it can never afford to ignore the public mood altogether as Ehteshami & Hinnebusch (1997:65) reminds us:

> Most important, a 'public mood' has seemed to define certain bounds outside which the regime has not willingly trodden on the core issue of Israel. Such legitimacy as it has enjoyed rests squarely on its claim to represent the national interest against Israel. This is no small matter in a regime where legitimacy is precarious and the nationally mobilized and attentive segment of the public is considerable. This is especially so for an elite whose nationalist credentials are vulnerable to attack because of a heavily minority (Alawi) composition which permits opponents to challenge its Arabism. Regime legitimacy would be gravely compromised by a settlement with Israel that was not perceived as honourable.

According to Daniel Pipes (8.1.1996, 1994), Hafez al-Assad's intransigence in negotiations with Israel can be understood as a policy of merely being *seen* as striving for an agreement, but that actually closing a deal is not a likely preference for Syria. Pipes contends that Hafez al-Assad was concerned actual peace with Israel could alienate core constituencies such as the security establishment, Baath party members, and government employees. Indeed, Marius Deeb (2003:5-6) contends that for the Baath regime, the Golan issue is not even that important in and of itself. The regime is only interested in securing its hold on power through the continuation of the struggle with Israel, and the Golan Heights is the obvious choice for a popular rallying point, without holding any intrinsic security value for the regime.

According to Robert G. Rabil (2003:138-143) Hafez al-Assad's main challenge in laying the groundwork for a smooth transition of power after his death was to decide whether to sue for peace with Israel or not. Rabil asserts that any challenge to the legitimacy to the rule of Bashar al-Assad would relate to this issue. It posed as a dilemma, as a double edged sword, because if Hafez al-Assad concluded a treaty with Israel shortly before the succession, Bashar al-Assad would have to contend with the inevitable grumblings of the old security establishment before he had the chance to consolidate fully his own hold on power. On the other hand, perhaps it was only the leader with the anti-Israel credibility of Hafez al-Assad whom could hope to retain his legitimacy as ruler after signing a peace deal.

There have been no indications that Bashar al-Assad will prove to be more amenable to compromising on core interests in exchange for peace with Israel. Indeed, his fiery

rhetoric in relation to the Palestinian Intifadah and the US invasion of Iraq signals that he might be evoking Arab sentiments in order to ward off legitimacy issues on the home front (Byman 2004:177-184).

Golan as an absolute demand

On the other hand, there is an argument to be made for the importance of the Golan to all of Syria, and hence for the regime. So long as Israel occupies the Golan Heights, Syria is going to be an essentially dissatisfied power (Leverett 2005:120-121, Lesch 2005:20-23), with irredentism a central component of its national make-up. Regaining the Golan Heights is not only a matter of national pride, but also a manner in which the Alawi dominated regime can assure its Arab *bona fides* (Pipes 1996:87-88). The Golan was lost in a war to liberate Palestine and the legitimacy of the regime is still contingent upon its ability to secure its return (Hinnebusch 2003:17). The abandonment of the doctrine of rejectionism was a radical departure for the regime when it decided to allow for the strategic option of peace, but to abandon the Golan as well is something no Syrian regime can contemplate. In the words of Alon Ben-Meir (1997):

> To suggest that the Syrians should also abandon all or part of Golan in the process, in the Syrian view, would be nothing less than asking them to commit strategic suicide. Neither Assad nor his successor can make such a concession and live to see it fulfilled.

Thus, despite the harshness of the Syrian regime, the lack of any outlet for public opinion, or government accountability, there are limits for how far the regime can deviate from the goals it throughout its history has set for itself. That there will be no peace with Israel until all the territory occupied in 1967 is liberated is not a position unique to the ruling elite, but represents a consensus on the part of all Syrians (Melhem 1997:4).

4.2.3 Challenges of an eventual peace

Heightened exepctations

The disappearance of the shadow of war could lead to rising expectations on the part of the Syrian population, expectations of a higher standard of living and quality of life. For the regime this turn of events could spell disaster as economic reforms could mean that the elite will loose its privileges as the main benefactors of the state owned industrial and financial sectors[25]. Even more ominous, heightened expectations with attendant relative deprivation equals demands for increased political representation. Furthermore, the expectations of economic improvements and political openness might be too high to meet, and could potentially undermine Bashar al-Assad's power basis.

No longer would Syria lay claim to a special place among the Arab nations as a frontline state against Zionism, it would become just another poor Arab country. In times of tension with Israel, demands for reform are stifled and the masses concentrate on the greater threat. However, when impending doom is not on the horizon, rule by the militaristic Baath regime is not necessarily the only obvious option for the country, as the population will look to the government to better their lot. In the absence of the extraordinary event of the state being under a security threat that dispels all other considerations, demands for a decent level of quality of life culd become difficult to supress. The end of hostilities would perhaps entail the termination of the Emergency Law which has been the source of legitimacy for the regime's wielding of extraordinary power. The Baath regime might very well be aware that they will have to make dramatic changes, changes that might threaten their hold on economic and political privilege, if they are to succeed in that scenario (Pipes 1996:88-93).

[25] Fred H. Lawson (1984) has presented the argument that increasing difficulties in providing for the client-patron relationship the regime relies upon was a determining factor for the Syrian invasion of Beirut in 1976.

Hesitant reforms

Rabil (2003:123-127) asserts that stability in Syria is predicated on its policies with regards to Israel. In fact Rabil maintains that economic reforms and peaceful relations with Israel would place the regime's survival at considerable risk. The reforms of the regime of Bashar al-Assad has therefore come to be known as the 'Chinese model' (Makovsky 2001), meaning economic liberalization while retaining strict political control, and repressing any signs of dissent in order to ensure stability. Eyal Zisser (1999a:18-20) says the initial political reforms of Hafez al-Assad was merely a means of giving a little leeway to the public mood that demanded more freedoms in the wake of the fall of the Eastern European communist regimes and the prevalence of modern communication technology. However, an incremental evolution towards a western-styled democracy was never intended. On the contrary, the motivation was to introduce new freedoms just to the extent that it alleviated pressure on the regime, and ensured stability. Reforms have ever since been a measured response to economic necessity, not a sudden penchant for liberal values. The political reforms were a sign that the regime felt the need to legitimate their policies to their public, but they never went so far as to be a serious challenge for the regime. The reforms were intended to fulfill an instrumental legitimating function, not as the beginning of a new dawn in Syrian politics (Pipes 1996:23-27, Nelson 1998).

Because, although Bashar al-Assad unquestionably has asserted control over the formal levers of power after his succession, it is the parallel, perhaps even more important, informal system of power constituted by the Alawi "barons" that are the true keepers of the state's power (Eisenstadt 2000)[26]. Reform would undermine the system of patronage, clientalism, and blatant corruption the regime relies upon. There are therefore heavily vested interests in the continuation of the status quo, and trepidation at the prospect of political change (ICG 2004b:11-12). Bashar al-Assad's

[26] It is worth mentioning that the tension between the old and new generation within the regime is not necessarily over the pace and depth of reform, but one of the division of the spoils of eventual reforms (Gambill 2004).

legitimacy and power is very much tied to the regime and institutions he inherited, and has to a considerable degree to take the interests of the status-quo-seeking regime elites into consideration both in foreign policy and in relation to the implementation of reforms (Ezzat & Saad 4.12.2003). Efforts at reforming the economy while not ostracizing regime elements which benefit from the status quo, has heretofore resulted in a rather shallow and slow process. Bashar al-Assad ostensibly realizes that his survival as leader of the state is tied to its stability, which affects the pace and substance of the reforms (Ranwa 6.9.2001, Haddad 7.9.2001, ICG 2004b: *i*). Even though Bashar has ambitions for reforms, he is likely aware of the limits of depth and pace of these if the regime is to maintain its stability, as his presidency is still finding its feet (Leverett 2005:58-98). Ammar Abdulhamid (8.10.2004) claims that Bashar al-Assad was specifically chosen for the task of President precisely because he would ensure stability and legitimacy to the political and military elite of the regime, while they gained ever tighter control over the economy. Bashar probably does not yet have the position or support within the regime to severely alter the course his father had set the country on (Leverett 2005:27-37).

The reforms instituted during the 1990s have served to strengthen the bourgeoisie portion of the powerful military-mercantile class, which in turn has been given increased influence within the governing circles through participation in parliament (Peoples Assembly) (Perthes 1992, Bronson 2000:101-102) in an attempt to co-opt them before they pose any risk to traditional minority based officer corps. In this way, writes Zisser (1999a:21-24), a mechanism for stability has evolved where quietism is ensured as long as the bourgeoisie is allowed and enabled to make money. However, in order for the bourgeoisie to keep on making money, there is an ever present want for more reforms. The merchant class could demand further political restructuring, and the logic of the rule by officers could be put into question. The regime may have created a long-term problem in fixing a short-term problem.

However, further economic reforms are the only measure the regime can take in order not to fall irreversibly behind in the rapidly evolving Middle East region (Perthes

1996a). This, in turn, is exasperating relations within the country as relative deprivation and economic malaise is on the rise. The exploding population increase in Syria is a serious societal and economic challenge. The disadvantaged strata of society used to be the regime's staunchest supporters, but this is likely to change with the rewards for the government policy befalling the already well-off (Zisser 1999a:21-24).

The opening up of parliament to other segments of the population is seen as part of a strategy on the part of the regime to gain the legitimacy it sorely needs in the event a deal is struck with Israel (Zisser 1999a:12). A new standard of public criticism has prevailed, but obviously not to the liking of many parts of the regime (Blanford 29.12.2004, Boms & Chodoff 29.12.2004). However, increasing political latitude by opening up for dissent is a double egged sword for the regime. One the one hand it can increase the legitimacy of the regime. The level of public debate following the openings Bashar al-Assad instigated was indeed unprecedented (Perthes 2004b:13-14). Cabinet reshuffles late in 2004 were seen by some as evidence that another stint of reform were imminent, much due to the immense international pressure on the government, the loss of France's support, and the need to bolster its domestic legitimacy (Blanford 6.10.2004, Gambill 2000). On the other it could serve as the first trickle of an impending torrent of disaffection which could wash away the regime. Nevertheless, a pure 'Chinese model' of one party rule with a functioning free market is less likely than a softening of the political climate with dissenting voices being allowed to be heard, but not to the extent that regime change through the ballot box will be possible (Perthes 2001:148-151, Melhem 1997:6).

The reality of Syria's weakly developed economy determining Syria' status as an essentially dependent state has not been significantly altered since the state's earliest days. The economy in Syria is dependent upon outside sources of revenue, in spite of the quasi-socialist experiments of the Baath party. The foremost economic player in the world is the United States, and the regime has to evaluate its policies towards the U.S. in this light as well, even though there is scant evidence of economic

considerations ever trumping security aims in Syrian history. Nonetheless, it surely is too important for the regime to totally disregard the economic impact of continuing its pariah-status on the international stage.

4.2.4 Shortcomings

Irredentism loosing currency

The importance of irredentist ideology as a factor guiding foreign policy in Syria seems to be undermined by the development of a distinct Syrian national identity. It follows that if identity in Syria is sub- and supra-national that parochial identities and pan-Arab/pan-Islamic irredentist ideologies would be the main forces driving foreign policy, as was arguably the case from the Ba'ath coup in 1963 until the Correctional Movement of Hafez al-Assad took power in 1970. However, it seems that during the 1980s a Syrian national identity took form as the former pan-Arab ideals were abandoned in practical policy. The intervention in Lebanon in 1976 on behalf of the Christian factions, the alliance with Iran when Arab Iraq attacked Iran in 1980, the alliance with Egypt in the early Eighties, which involved an implicit acceptance of the Camp David Agreements and thereby an acceptance of the state of Israel, all severely weakened the belief in the viability of Baathist Syria as the nucleus of a future pan-Arab state. The regime thus seems to have achieved considerable autonomy in the conduct of its foreign policy. The existence of Israel is accepted, even if its legitimacy is rejected, and the prospects of arriving at a less than honorable agreement functions as an indirect restraint on the regime (Hinnebusch 1996).

The decline in ideology is not solely precipitated by the prevailing pragmatism in foreign policy conduct. Yahya Sadowski (2002:139-148) cites important domestic developments in Syrian society as well. The abandonment of the socialist elements of Baathist ideology in favor of market-oriented reform is one such factor. When the revenue following from the capital infusion from the Soviet Union and rent from the Gulf declined, the economy was forced to open up (*infitah*). In addition to the economic necessity of this policy, it also engendered greater integration of additional

strata of the populace, as the monopoly of the traditional economic elite was broken, and was merged with the minority-based political elite. Convergence of town and country and intermarriage within the elite, the shared experience of national institutions (most importantly conscription in the armed forces), and an emerging common high culture, all fostered a feeling of a distinct national identity. However, this sentiment has of yet not been translated into a coherent ideological doctrine. This implies that appeals to trans-state identity can still hold some potency, even though the primary loyalty by all indications is bound to the Syrian state.

As Rabil (2003) points out, one must not forget that the public and popular institutions which are the means by which the population is organized into the government, plays in intrinsic role in ensuring regime stability. Thirty years of state building has borne fruit in that there is a prevalent common interest in preserving domestic stability and not letting centrifugal forces take hold. This was evident in that none of the predicted schisms along sectarian or organizational lines appeared during the succession after Hafez al-Assad's death (Perthes 2001:152). This state-building endeavor has been successful to a considerable degree thanks to the use of many and competing intelligence and security agencies that have been essential in securing the regime's hold on power and its hold over the Syrian public (Rathmell 1996).

Rapprochement with the Islamists

The feared reemergence of the Islamists as a credible opposition force might be overstated by Rabil (2003). According to Eyal Zisser (1999a:14-18) the tendency during the last 15 years has been a steady *rapprochement* between the regime and the Islamists. Some seats have even been allocated to Islamist candidates in parliament. In addition to obviously attempting to co-opt the potential radicals in order to keep them under supervision, the regime seems to have altered its stance fundamentally towards the concept of the Islamist movement. Accepting the fact that the great majority of the Syrian population is Muslim is a manner of preempting Islam-based challenges to regime legitimacy. Furthermore, it seems the regime has discovered the benefits of becoming the most important state ally for many of the rejectionist

Islamist organizations in the region. Zisser does not rule out, however, that there is an inherent contradiction in this policy, considering that too much power to the Islamists could in the future become once again a destabilizing factor. Thus far, however, it seems that the Islamists have been unable to organize themselves into a coherent opposition movement. This could as well, of course, be the successful result of repression by the regime.

Lack of a credible opposition

Perthes (2003) insists that there are no true domestic challengers to the regime. There certainly are oppositional forces, but these have hitherto been content with acting within the confines the regime has set (Zisser 2004a, Abdulhamid 17.9.2004). In an interview with the Lebanese daily as-Safir (15.5.2003) head of the Syrian Security Service, General Bahjat Suleiman, even praised the opposition movement for being responsible in its activities:

> "In Syria, the regime does not have enemies but 'opponents' whose demands do not go beyond certain political and economic reforms such as the end of the state of emergency and of martial law, the adoption of a law on political parties and the equitable redistribution of national wealth" (ICG 2004b:10).

Bashar al-Assad is, perhaps, the leader of a reformist faction within the regime, in opposition to the traditionalists who cannot accept any changes whatsoever from the line of the Baath of Hafez al-Assad, but he is not part of the 'democratic opposition' who wants to see fundamental changes to the way Syria is governed. The aim of Bashar al-Assad is to modernize the regime and the state in order to better meet the challenges of the future, to incrementally evolve the politics and structures of the regime, but with the overriding aim of ensuring the stability and survival of the regime. This has been the goal of Bashar al-Assad even before the death of his father, and did not come about as the result of outside pressure; on the contrary, coercion is more likely to stifle reforms (Strindberg 5.6.2003). Bashar al-Assad is allegedly no opponent of western-style democracy, but he maintains that as of yet, Syria lacks the

economic and educational sophistication to ensure that its implementation will not throw the nation into turmoil (Perthes 2003:14-23, Economist 22.3.2001).

The opposition, working under slightly better conditions under Bashar al-Assad, is apparently not bent on a revolutionary-style reform of the regime as the U.S. seemingly prefers, but favor incremental change that does not risk destabilizing the country. There is scant evidence of the pressure the U.S. is applying towards Syria is being helpful to the Syrian opposition to the regime. The Syrian state is no longer regarded by the Syrians themselves as a particularly strong state (Abdulhamid 2004). The level of economic despair and manifest weakness on the international scene are conducive to feelings of the loss of omnipotent power on the regime's behalf. For many Syrians the rapid fall of the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq shed many illusions as to the ability of their own regime to stand up to the military and political might of the U.S. (ICG 2004b:9). Within an atmosphere of besiegement from the U.S., opposition to the ruling elite can be painted as only aiding the enemy, and consequently dissidents risk being identified as traitors by the very same people they seek to mobilize (Hirst 14.8.2003, Fahim 17.12.2003, Hinnebusch 2004).

The relatively mild reprimands of the regime in response to the outpouring of lament at the lack of political freedoms is a testament to the low level of threat the regime perceives from the dissenters to its hold on power (Cobban 2003), and consequently of the impact those considerations has on the conduct of foreign policy. The result is a situation where the regime is struggling to reinvent itself, to reform, to reappraise the role of the party in the state, and to allow for some measure of dissent, but not yet arriving at the formula for evolving without risking their hold on power (Abdulhamid 27.3.2004).

Assessment of Model II

This model looks at the precariousness of the state and regime, and the need this poses to employ unifying ideologies and exaggerated external threats. Those mechanisms rely on enmity towards Israel, and Hezbollah serves this end. The

problem with this approach is that Syria is not a patent basket-case. First; an argument can be made for the decline of irredentist ideology as a legitimating tool for the regime. That sufficient time has elapsed since the tumultuous days of post-independence Syria to warrant an analysis of the Syrian state, and the regime that controls it as somewhat stable. Furthermore, Syria can in some respects be said to have started to prepare the ground for an improved relationship with Israel, and that the regime might not be as reliant on this conflict as a vehicle for mobilization and externalization of domestic problems. Although the model helps to shed light on the internal pressures the regime faces, it alone does not sufficiently explain Syria's policy of supporting the Hezbollah.

5. Conclusion: Revised omnibalancing

In order to aptly describe Syria's foreign and security policy I propose to revise the omnibalancing model. The point is to acknowledge that domestic currents play an important part in determining the limits in the room for maneuver the regime has in the conduct of foreign policy, but still maintaining that external security threats hold most explanatory power when analyzing Syria's policies. This model predicts that the regime, while primarily concerned with its own survival, is not dependent upon perpetual conflict with Israel in order to legitimate its rule by radical ideology, but that the ideational basis of the regime, and of the national identity, constrict the alternatives as to the nature of the peace that is possible with Israel. The question of Syria's relationship with Hezbollah is a good indicator of the limits and opportunities this represents.

Stephen David (1991) posits that the *main* threat to Third World elites come from domestic sources, and argues that regime-changes in the Third World more often than not comes in the form of domestic opponents of the regime getting the upper hand. However, the regime of Hafez al-Assad reached a considerable level of consolidation. By 1991 it was dubbed the 'strongest weak state' in the Third World by Daniel Pipes (1996:4-6). Although it is obvious that in the instance of Syria, there are very real external threats that the regime must react to. How it reacts is contingent upon its power relative to the power arrayed against it. However, how they choose to react to external pressures cannot be discerned solely from the pure equation of power balancing against one another, but one has to take into account the identity and interests of the regime, as they have come into being through the process of state and regime consolidation (Hinnebusch 2003:2). The role of the nation, as it were, plays a significant part in deciding how to react to outside pressure. This factor is naturally one of domestic origin, and gives guidance and direction. In my view, it serves the purpose of acting as *red lines* across which the regime may venture only at its peril. In the words of one anonymous Syrian official:

> "They want us to expel the Palestinian factions, cut our lifeline support for Hizbullah and get the Syrian army out of Lebanon, and these are core interests in Syrian political identity. So when they ask us to give those issues up, it means that we will give up our identity" (Abdel-Latif 15.4.2004).

In my judgment it is also prudent to include economic considerations as a variable that influences regime stability. Ehteshami & Hinnebusch (1997:15-22) stresses that regimes have to balance between rational reasons of state, the legitimizing role of foreign policy which might seem irrational, and the need for capital accumulation and rent acquisition, and that David's analysis is useful for elucidating the links between the foreign and domestic arenas in this respect.

It is in this nexus of pressures between a need for rationality in the conduct of foreign policy, domestic expectations of fulfillment of a certain foreign policy role, regime legitimacy, internal stability and economic demands that the regime finds itself, balancing between them in order to retain their survival. Indeed, this mechanism is similar to the differences in short, medium and long term goals that Eyal Zisser (2001: Ch.5) stipulates as informing Syrian foreign policy. The immediate goals of ensuring territorial integrity (repossessing the Golan Heights), containing Israel, and furthering Syria's preferences throughout the region contravenes Damascus' longer term aims of arriving at some form of Arab unity project with Syria at the helm.

5.1 The Two-Level game?

I propose that the present challenge for Syrian security policy is the first instance where the absolute core interests of the state have been put in jeopardy. Ever since Syria lost the Golan Heights to the Israelis in 1967, this is the first time they face the prospect of significantly diminishing their chances of ever retaining them, by relinquishing control over Hezbollah, and without being promised any substantial rewards in return. By employing Robert D. Putnam's (1988) conceptual model of the Two-Level game, we might be able to appreciate that there are absolute limits for what the regime can agree to. Even if Putnam ventures that his model is probably

most applicable to democratic settings, where the mechanisms of democracy will ensure the regime's responsiveness to the will of the people, one could argue, as has Stephen David, that precisely this lack of democratic venting of popular displeasure can be highly dangerous for the regime. It is not advisable for the Syrian regime to ever fail in its endeavor to regain the Golan Heights, to do so would probably threaten the stability of the regime. Therefore one could say that there is a very small *win-set* on Level II, meaning that there are not many options that the Syrian regime has in its confrontations with the international community (Level I) that would be to the satisfaction of the Syrian society at large (Level II). By extension, sound judgment on policy, considering what is possible on Level II, could lead to ostensibly sub-optimal outcomes on Level I, at least from the perspective of other actors (the U.S. and the U.N.). In this way the external and domestic levels can be bridged, accentuating the existence of a threshold that it is not likely the regime can venture beyond without putting its security at risk.

5.2 Placating Washington

We see in this case a demonstration of the ability of the regime to attempt to balance the forces they are confronted with. After the end of the Cold War, and thus of Soviet support, it has been in Syria's interest to win the good graces of the U.S. (JP 10.11.2004). In fact Daniel Pipes (1996:88) maintains that even the peace process itself was to a significant degree mainly a matter of placating Washington in its efforts to pacify the Middle East, but the aim for Syria has all the time been to get on the U.S.' good side[27]. Israel has no incentive to withdraw from the Golan Heights in the current situation; the border with Lebanon is relatively calm, the Golan Heights itself is peaceful, and domestic opinion is not in any hurry to relinquish the Golan Heights (Brom 20 04).

[27] Bashar al-Assad reaffirmed his intention to foster amicable relations with the US in an interview with The New York Times 2.12.2003.

Bashar al-Assad's apparent dithering with regard to the demands made upon Syria from New York and Washington is in perfect harmony with the cunning for which Bashar al-Assad's father was so renowned. By conceding to part of the U.S. demands, Bashar hopes to get away with keeping his more valued asset; Hezbollah. He cannot be seen to buckle under U.S.-pressure since so much of Syrian legitimacy is based on being the champion of Arab rights (Rahimi 9.1.2002). Bashar al-Assad has made attempts to appease the U.S. in its hunger for progress in its GWOT. Initially, he won praise from Washington by sharing information on the 9/11-hijackers and granting U.S.-investigators access to Syrian prisons. Also, he closed down the offices of several Palestinian rejectionists' organizations in Damascus. This did not suffice to wet the appetite for more Syrian cooperation, though. The information on the hijackers was soon yesterday's story, and the offices that were closed down were meager press-fronts without any real significance for running operations in Israel (ICG 2004a: 8-10, Zisser 2003b). U.S. demands on Syria to tighten its control over the border areas with Iraq is yet another area that Syria can win the good graces of the U.S. The border has proved to be highly permeable, but Syria has publicly announced that it is making efforts to halt the flow of insurgents into Iraq, with such mixed results that the U.S. weary of Syria's true intentions (Masland 8.11.2004).

However, the U.S. and Syria have persistent conflicting interests in the region. Syria still sees the U.S. as being the purveyor of Israeli interests in the region, keeping Israel's interests close to heart when pushing for talks. Against this back-drop, if the U.S. succeeds in turning Iraq into a U.S. ally, thereby weakening Iran, the Syrians will feel even more vulnerable (Moubayed 25.12.2003). When Syria is then pressured by the U.S. to terminate its bonds with Hezbollah, it becomes imperative not to further alienate the U.S., conforming to the old adage: "keep your friends close, but your enemies closer".

In a sense, the Syrian Regime can be said to attempt to *balance* against Israel, while signaling willingness to *bandwagon* with the U.S. and Europe. The Syrian policy

concerning the West has since 1991 been one of coveting the expected benefits of bandwagoning. As such, the two attitudes are not dichotomous, but are policies driven by different motivations (Schweller 1994). There are different issues at stake for the Syrian regime with regards to the West and Israel, and a strong U.S. identification with Israel's security interest therefore leads to inevitable contradictions. Syria's calculations do not always appear optimal in the eyes of the Western observer when the role of Israel in Syria's security calculations is not fully appreciated.

5.3 Final Analysis: The red line

In conclusion, the Syrian regime is very much a rational calculating regime, which is capable of looking after its own interests, and is not in the throws of radical ideologies, nor is it stymied by unrelenting domestic pressures. In short; it is not a 'rouge' regime, but a state that has security interests that at times are at odds with the U.S. and Israel. The 'rouge' argument used by the proponents of preventive war against Syria, falls on its own merit when one considers the claim by some pundits; that the invasion of Iraq was intended to make Syria reconsider its policies (Lemann 17.2.2003), something that precludes the 'rouge' identity characteristics to begin with.

The analysis shows that there have been no radical departures in the foreign policy in the area of interest under Bashar al-Assad, meaning there is no evidence for concluding that the death of Hafez al-Assad has altered the calculations of the regime with regard to its relationship with the Hezbollah. On the contrary, it seems that the new president is considerably closer to the leader of the Hezbollah than his father ever was. Moreover, the analysis indicates that the attempts at reform observed under Bashar were driven by the need for economic revitalization to avoid political destabilization, not in any effort to fundamentally reform the nature of the state.

Giving up the strategic asset of the Hezbollah without getting something considerable in return is beyond the scope of any Syrian government. It is a red line the regime will not cross. The SALSA is regarded as a matter of the U.S. helping to secure the state of Israel, that it has nothing to do with the so-called GWOT (Moubayed 30.10.2003). The present challenge posed by the U.S. is not only the practicality of the concrete demands being made, but the political ramifications of actually giving in to demands made by a state long demonized as an enemy of Syria. At any rate, threats that are limited to the economic sphere are not likely to force the hand of Bashar al-Assad, as the regime is known to let security matters trump all other considerations (ICG 2004a:8).

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