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Brothers in Arms

**An Analysis of the Syrian Military and
Political Domination of Lebanon**

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Titel Title	Brothers in Arms: An Analysis of the Syrian Military and Political Domination of Lebanon
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Sammanfattning Abstract <p>The Syrian de facto occupation of Lebanon since 1976 is usually interpreted as the expression of the Syrian regime's adherence to traditional power considerations, rather than to the ideology of the ruling Ba'th party. In particular since Syria originally intervened on the side of the pro-status quo Lebanese Christians, and helped them defeat the anti-status quo Lebanese Muslims and Palestinians. In other words, they intervened against its traditional allies. The central question posed in this study is: Why is Lebanon so important to Syria that it is willing to make large human and material sacrifices in order to retain its grip on this small strip of territory? The traditional answers to this question are not satisfactory; the need for an alternative approach is apparent.</p> <p>While not refuting the description of Syrian policies as being based on pragmatic considerations, this analysis attempts to show that Syrian policies toward Lebanon in fact originate in the fundamental values promoted by Ba'th ideology. By employing a cognitive theoretical approach, the perceptions held by the Syrian leadership at the time of Syrian intervention are taken into account. This approach allows a number of key images to emerge, notably the image of an external plot against the Arab nation; one of the cornerstones of Ba'th ideology. When studying the modern day relationship between Syria and Lebanon, the same focus on Arab unity and the historical brotherly ties between the two countries can be identified. Hafez al-Asad's death and the rise to power of his son, Bashar al-Asad, has not lead to a radical change in Syrian policy, rather it is apparent that the same considerations and the same underlying images still guide the Syrian</p>

decision-makers.

The result is that although pragmatism guides Syrian policies, the ideology of the Ba'th party sets the frames for this pragmatism and that a traditional two-state model cannot be applied on the relationship between Syria and Lebanon. The central finding in this study is that the Syrian leadership will go to great lengths to ensure Lebanon stays Arab and preserve the last remains of Arab unity in the face of the Zionist enemy. In the struggle against Israel, Syria and Lebanon are to remain Brothers in Arms.

Nyckelord

Keyword

Syria, Lebanon, Occupation, Domination, Civil War

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I. INTRODUCTION

When Syria in early June 1976 intervened in the ongoing conflict in neighboring Lebanon, it moved its troops into Lebanese territory to stay for an indefinite period of time. Not even today, after more than ten years of peace in Lebanon, with the Lebanese political system rebuilt and the Army reconstructed, does Syria show any intentions of withdrawing its troops.

The Lebanese leadership approach the issue carefully and Syria's allies in Lebanon, such as Speaker of the House Nabih Berri, talk of vicious political campaigns that seek to "embarrass and to expel Syrian troops". Berri demonstrates what seems to be the general attitude among the leadership: "it is in the interest of neither Lebanon nor Syria to at times ask for Syrian assistance, and at others adopt an adverse attitude toward Damascus."¹

Popular discontent, however, is widespread and the sectarian differences that provided such fertile soil for the various conflicts erupting in the mid seventies again threaten to rock the boat as voices are heard against Syria's continued presence in Lebanon.² It seems, however, that the mounting opposition against Syria cuts through sectarian division lines, and that the on the surface so important confessional background plays a minor, if any, part in how the Syrian

¹ Speaker of the House Nabih Berri quoted in Abu-Rizk, Zeina, "Berri Suggests New Approach to Syria Debate", *The Daily Star*, April 4, 2001

² See for instance, al-Azar, Maha, "Student Anti-Syrian March to go Ahead Despite Threats", *The Daily Star*, March 14, 2002. Sectarian tension has plagued Lebanon ever since its formation. When the State of Greater Lebanon was created, it was through merging the *mutasarrifiya* of Mount Lebanon, a political entity which enjoyed a privileged status under a Christian governor though still a part of the Ottoman Empire, with the surrounding districts Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon, Tyre and the plains of the Beqa'a valley. These being areas dominated by Muslims, its inhabitants in general felt no enthusiasm over being part of a Lebanon politically dominated by Christian Maronites. Petran, Tabitha, *Syria*, 1972, p 61. A map of Lebanon is found in Appendix.

presence is viewed.³ Whatever the case may be, it is clear that Syria is quite unwilling to let go of Lebanon. No major political decisions are made in Beirut without clearance from Damascus and, in unison with its allies, Syria insists that the Lebanese government is unable to maintain internal stability and security without the assistance of the Syrian army. What is Lebanon to Syria? Why is this small strip of territory important to the much larger Syria? Why did Syria intervene in 1976 and why is it so eager to retain its grip on Lebanon?

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this paper is to *examine the reasons for Syrian intervention, and continued presence, in Lebanon*. Most previous research done on the subject provides economic or purely military-strategic explanations for Syrian policies toward Lebanon, while ideology is awarded a subsidiary role. By examining the issue from a cognitive viewpoint, and employing a theoretical model that takes into consideration the role of individual leaders and the impact of ideology in policymaking,

I intend to argue that the Syrian intervention in Lebanon was brought about by a number of key images held by the Syrian decision-makers, notably the image of an external plot directed at the Arab nation, which is a cornerstone in the ideology of the ruling Ba'th party.⁴ My contention is that the image of an external conspiracy was a perception held by the major actors and subsequently I claim that the intervention was not the final proof of Syrian lack of adherence to ideology as has been argued, but rather an act fully in line with Ba'thist

³ Gambill, Gary C., "Is Syria Losing Control of Lebanon?", *Middle East Quarterly*, spring 2001, p 44. See also Blanford, Nicholas, "Sectarian Tensions Run High at Civil War Flashpoint", *The Daily Star*, April 14, 2001

⁴ The basic features of the Ba'th party ideology will be discussed in chapter III.

ideology.⁵ As for the continued Syrian presence in Lebanon, I argue that this policy is the expression of Ba’thist ideology as well, albeit in a combination of several other factors, and not simply the result of a cost-benefit analysis conducted by the Syrian leadership.

Hence, it is my contention that the Syrian intervention on the side of the Christians, and the continued Syrian presence in Lebanon, is first and foremost the result of Syrian adherence to Ba’thist ideology. Again, that is not to say that there is only one reason for Syrian policy, this is of course not the case. Rationalistic and pragmatic considerations within the frames of ideology have always characterized the Asad regime, as will be discussed in subsequent segments of this paper.

Furthermore, I argue that not so much the notion of ‘Greater Syria’, but indeed the belief that the populations of Syria and Lebanon are one and the same people was a fundamental factor in shaping the perception Syrian policymakers had of the situation in 1976 and have had substantial implications for the relationship between the two countries in the post-war era.⁶ The main actor in this case is the Syrian President Hafez al-Asad, whose personal influence on Syrian policy will be analyzed and discussed throughout this paper.

⁵ The realist approach to Syrian policies will be addressed in chapter II.

⁶ My argument in this respect should be distinguished from those that claim Syrian policies aim at annexing Lebanon and creating a ‘Greater Syria’, similar to the ‘Gross-Deutschland’ of the 1930s or the ‘Greater Serbia’ of the 1990s. The difference between my argument and the above mentioned will be discussed in greater detail throughout the study. The territorial state of Lebanon as it is known today, came into being in 1920, when the State of Greater Lebanon was proclaimed under the French mandate. Historically, geographic Syria was the region marked off by the Taurus mountains in the north, the Sinai peninsula in the south, the Mediterranean to the west, and the Arabian desert to the east. The modern states of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel were carved out from this region. For a more extensive account of Lebanese and Syrian history, see Petran, Tabitha, *The Struggle over Lebanon*, 1987, or Salibi, Kamal in Shehadi, Nadim & Haffar Mills, Dana (eds), *Lebanon : A History of Conflict and Consensus*, 1988

Guiding questions

Presenting some specific questions will help clarify the approach this paper intends to take in examining and analyzing Syrian policies toward Lebanon. For example, how does cognitive theory explain foreign policy and why is the use of a cognitive approach appropriate in this study? How have Syrian policies toward Lebanon been interpreted as the result of classical pragmatic considerations and why is this approach inadequate? How can Syrian policies toward Lebanon be interpreted as the expression for Ba’thist ideology? Finally, can conclusions be drawn from the result of this study about the relationship between Syria and Lebanon today?

Restrictions on the scope of inquiry

In order to answer these questions, a delimitation in the scope of inquiry has to be made. The overall focus of the paper is the time of Syrian intervention in 1976 to the early 21st century. However, since this time period constitutes much too wide a scope, I will limit the research to two important events in this period. The natural starting point is, of course, the decision to intervene in 1976. I have identified this as the point where Syria took the final step to physically interfere in Lebanese affairs. The second case study is the Ta’if Agreement of 1989 and the series of bilateral agreements signed between Syria and Lebanon starting May 1991. The Ta’if Agreement ended the civil war in Lebanon and awarded Syria with unprecedented influence in Lebanese affairs.⁷ In this context, the impact of the death of Hafez al-Asad and the inauguration of his son Bashar as president will be analyzed and discussed. Although this study intends to focus

⁷ See, for instance, el-Khazen, Farid, “Lebanon: Independent No More”, *Middle East Quarterly*, winter 2001, p 44

on these two important events in the relations between Lebanon and Syria, perhaps the main thrust will lie on that first decision to intervene in 1976. It was, after all, at this point in time the Syrian agenda was set, an agenda that Syria seemingly swears by to present day.

While the first case study is intended to show how Syrian policy toward Lebanon in 1976 was influenced by Ba’thist ideology rather than pure pragmatism, the second case study should be seen as an attempt to show how Syrian policy continues to be formulated on the same basic notions formulated during the initial intervention. I have identified these two events as important milestones in the relations between Lebanon and Syria; the intervention as the first major physical interference by Syria in Lebanon, and the Ta’if agreement as the formal acknowledgement of Syrian predominance in Lebanon. I expect that by examining these events, I can recognize characteristics in Syrian policy toward Lebanon that will help answer the central question posed in this study: Why is Lebanon so important to Syria that it is willing to make large human and material sacrifices in order to retain its grip on this small strip of territory?

Method and sources

The method used consists of gathering as much relevant literature, articles, official documents and theoretical studies as possible, and then analyze the material using a cognitive theoretical approach. It has been my objective to base this study on the broadest scope of material feasible. Therefore, a substantive amount of time has been spent at archives and libraries on location in Beirut. Since my personal knowledge of the Arabic language is insufficient to interpret official documents written in Arabic, I have had to rely on translations made by

other scholars, but also translations carried out by a translator on my assignment. Nevertheless, a vast amount of material has been examined and during that process, it became clear to me that other scholars explain Syrian foreign policy to an overwhelming degree in terms of rationalism, pragmatism and opportunism. In other words traditional, if not Machiavellian, realism. The material used consists of theoretical studies previously made on the relationship Syria-Lebanon, as well as empirical material regarding Syrian actions on Lebanese territory and the political cooperation between the two nations.

An important source when trying to understand Asad is Patrick Seale. Although Seale is not a Syrian official, he was Asad's semiofficial biographer, and as such he had unique access to, and understanding of, Asad and his policies. Seale interviewed Asad on numerous occasions and spent many years in Syria working on a biography on Asad. Seale's work, *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East* offers a valuable insight into how Asad viewed the world and how he perceived the situations he found himself in. For this reason, I have used Seale not as a source on factual events, but rather as a source on Asad's psychological reactions to different occurrences.

It should be noted here that I have approached the two case studies in slightly different ways. The first case study is for obvious reasons far more documented and has been analyzed from many different angles throughout the years. A proper study of the internal discussions leading to the Syrian adoption of the Ta'if agreement has not been carried out, at least not to my, and the experts' I have consulted, knowledge. The result is that there is a lack of information on the Syrian decision-makers' perceptions of the situation in 1989. This is, however, only a minor problem for the study at hand, considering the fact that a

paramount assumption is that the Syrian images conceived in 1975-1976 have continued to guide Syrian policies in Lebanon. Verification for this assumption is found in the various policies pursued by Syria discussed in Chapter IV.

Raison d'être of the study

Why study Syrian policies toward Lebanon? What makes the Syrian military and political presence in Lebanon a worthwhile object of study? The particular dynamics of the Syrian intervention makes this a highly unusual case. Normally, a state intervening in another state undergoing civil conflict will act in support of either pro-status quo or anti-status quo groups. In this case, Syria shifted its support in the midst of the 1975-1976 war from its traditional allies to the pro-status quo groups. This, above all, has been interpreted as the final proof that Syria was guided by pure rationalism and pragmatism; it was considered the ultimate evidence that ideology played little part in the foreign policy of the Asad regime. As Patrick Seale puts it: "The lion of Arabism was slaughtering Arabism's sacred cow."⁸

Naturally, the answer to the question of what precipitated the Syrian intervention on the side of its traditional foes, has repercussions for how the Syrian occupation is understood and, in the extension, how the nature of the Syrian-Lebanese relationship is interpreted. Besides the impact Syrian policy has had on Lebanon, there is also a larger context to take into consideration. In the seemingly never-ending Arab-Israeli conflict, Israel has managed to sign peace treaties with two of its four Arab neighbors, not counting the Palestinian state-in-making, of course. Israel's northern borders to Lebanon and Syria are

⁸ Seale, Patrick, *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East*, 1988, p 285

the only borders where the Jewish state is still in a state of war. Despite the Israeli withdrawal from the “security belt” of southern Lebanon in May 2000, claims that Israel continues to occupy Lebanese territory are still heard.⁹ The joint claim of Lebanon and Syria that the occupied Sheba’a is Lebanese territory, and not Syrian, is contested by the maps of the international community and the United Nations. The Lebanese resistance movement, Hizballah, motivates its continued fighting against Israel by arguing that Lebanese territory remains under occupation and therefore their struggle must be labeled as legitimate resistance.

The special situation in Lebanon has direct implications on the Arab-Israeli conflict and, subsequently, on the peace and stability of the region. By understanding what guides Syrian actions in Lebanon, we get one step closer to understanding the very complex Arab-Israeli conflict. However, it should be noted that this study does not aspire to explain this conflict, it is restricted to the Syrian-Lebanese relationship, and the repercussions on the regional conflict therefore fall outside the frames of this thesis.

⁹ During Ehud Barak’s Premiership in Israel, there was some progress in Syrian-Israeli relations and there was even hope that the issue over the Syrian Golan Heights, occupied by Israel since the 1967 war, would be close to a solution. However, the Syrian-Israeli track was put aside for the main Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and after the collapse of the latter and the outbreak of the second Intifada in the fall of 2000, the issue remained unsolved. See MacAskill, Ewen, “Barak Hints at Exit from Golan Heights”, *the Guardian*, March 1, 2000

II. COGNITIVE THEORY

This chapter discusses theories on foreign policy and explains the main features of a cognitive approach to analyzing foreign policy. I begin with briefly discussing the “mainstream” view on the Syrian presence in Lebanon, an approach I consider simplistic and inadequate in analyzing Syrian policies toward Lebanon.

The Traditional view

The rational actor

The words of Thucydides illustrate the traditional view on the international system quite accurately: “...the standard of justice depends on the equality of power to compel and that in fact the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept.”¹⁰ In the conflict between Athens and Sparta, the Athenians presented the people on the island Melos with an ultimatum: either surrender or perish in the struggle against the superior Athenian military might.

Supporters of the realist school claim that the theories presented by Thucydides can just as well be applied to any modern conflict. Nazi-Germany and Czechoslovakia could for instance, replace Athens and Melos; the result of the analysis would still be the same. Thucydides distinguished between underlying and immediate causes of war and, in his view, the underlying causes were the ones that really mattered.

¹⁰ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1972 (translation Rex Warner), p 402

In this case, he attributed the war to the growth of the Athenian Empire and its need for expansion that alarmed other city-states in the region. The actual events that triggered the war had little meaning; in this view war was inevitable and would have come about sooner or later in any case. Even though dissenting views on the superiority of underlying causes when explaining war can be found, modern realists usually embrace the deterministic approach employed by Thucydides as well; the outbreak of World War I has largely been interpreted in the same fashion.¹¹ When acting on the international arena, policymakers are expected to weigh the advantages against the disadvantages in a rational manner, to finally make the decision that best serves the national interest. Since there is no central power that controls the international system, sovereign states will always continue to increase their military might to defend their sovereignty.

This, in turn, leads to other states feeling threatened and the insecurities about a neighboring country's intentions will cause a state of constant alert among the leaders of a country. This is the spiral model usually referred to as the "security dilemma". In other words, according to traditional international relations theory, states are rational actors, acting on the international arena with clearly defined interests and objectives. Foreign policy serves as the tool for bridging the borders of the concerned states, and its leaders determine policy after close examination of the alternatives. Consequently, foreign policy is determined by existing states with predetermined borders and stable identities. The point of

¹¹ See Lebow's discussion on the deterministic approach of traditional historians and political scientists. He argues that the Thucydidean analysis produces an image of events as more unavoidable than they were. Had the Cuban missile crisis led to war, it would, for instance, have been interpreted as the inevitable result of almost twenty years of Cold War between the two superpowers. "Ideology, the nuclear arms race, competition for spheres of interest, and domestic payoffs of aggressive foreign policies would all have been described as important underlying causes of the war. In retrospect, World War III would appear as inevitable a World War I." Furthermore, Lebow argues that immediate causes of war in fact do exercise a decisive influence on the

origin for foreign policy is the national interest, and foreign policy is guided by what is perceived by the decision-makers as a threat to the national interest.

Explaining Syrian policy

The mainstream/realist analysis of Syrian policy

In the majority of studies of Syrian policies, the ideology of the ruling Ba'th party is portrayed as simple political rhetoric, designed to create a mythology around the Syrian political leadership.¹² Since Syria is anything but a democracy, the character of the leader himself is usually given a lot of importance in studies of Syrian policies. Therefore, when Asad is, for instance, portrayed as “a pragmatic, moderate and perhaps even colorless leader lacking in inspiration”, the author subsequently claims that the policies of Syria are to be interpreted in the same fashion.¹³

The descriptions of Asad all point to the same professional statesman who is “cautious, pragmatic, tough, determined, ruthless, energetic, patient, astute, calculating, remote, and intelligent”.¹⁴ The mythology produced by the Ba'thist rulers, it is claimed, should not be confused with the actual political agenda set out by the Syrian regime. In other words, the Asad regime is largely considered to use ideology to enforce its own hold on power, but ideology, according to this view, plays no part in the actual foreign policymaking. The realist analysis of Syrian policies toward Lebanon will not surprisingly produce the image of a rational actor, behaving in accordance with classical national security-

course of conflicts and should not be underestimated. Lebow, Richard Ned, *Between Peace and War : The Nature of International Crisis*, 1981, pp 1-3 & 334-337

¹² See, for instance, Zisser, Eyal, “Asad of Syria: the Leader and the Image”, *Orient*, June 1994

¹³ Zisser, 1994, p 259

¹⁴ Ma'oz, Moshe, *Asad: The Sphinx of Damascus*, 1986, p 196

considerations, rather than being guided by a particular ideology.¹⁵ Asad's aspirations, it is said, "have been reduced to two goals: control Syria during his lifetime, then pass power on to his family and his co-religionists after his death. To assure the survival of his community, Asad rules pragmatically. He follows his interests rather than abstract ideals."¹⁶ These two aspirations were accomplished, Asad remained in power until he died in the summer of 2000 and his son Bashar al-Asad was "elected" president.¹⁷ An analysis of this sort will, however, fail to explain why the Syrian leadership in 1975-1976 did not simply let the Christians of Lebanon be defeated by the leftist/Muslim forces, who after all, were their allies.

Furthermore, it fails to explain why the Syrian decision-makers took the risk of intervening in the Lebanese conflict, despite the lack of popular support. Indeed, during the time period of 1976-1982 Syria was troubled by serious internal tensions itself; the revolt of the Muslim Brotherhood was not completely put down until February 1982. It would seem that a Syrian leadership guided by purely realist considerations would have benefited from a neighboring Lebanon ruled by leftist forces with no tendencies to come to a peace-agreement with Israel. Some scholars also stress the economic aspects of Syrian intervention: "Beirut was an immensely rich entrepôt, an inlet and an outlet for Syria. The whole Lebanese economy was a glittering prize."¹⁸

¹⁵ See Chalala, Elie, "Syrian Policy in Lebanon 1976-1984: Moderate Goals and Pragmatic Means", *Journal of Arab Affairs*, spring 1985, p 72

¹⁶ Pipes, Daniel, "Understanding Asad", *Middle East Quarterly*, December 1994, p 50

¹⁷ The election of Bashar al-Asad was preceded by the Syrian parliament amending the constitution, changing the minimum age of a Syrian president to 34 years. Luckily, Bashar happened to be exactly 34 years old and he was elected with 97 % of the votes. Of course, Hafez al-Asad had won the election the year before with 99.98 % of the votes and perhaps Bashar's slightly lower figure indicates that he still has a handful Syrian citizens to convince before completely filling his father's shoes? BBC News, *Syrians Turn Out for Bashar*, July 10, 2000. See also Brown, Derek, "Syria: A Family Business", *The Guardian*, June 12, 2000

¹⁸ Roberts, David, *The Ba'th and the Creation of Modern Syria*, 1987, p 117. Another scholar to point to the economic reasons for Syrian intervention is Fred Lawson who stresses the importance of the Beirut port for Syria. There is, however, no evidence that shows that Syria ever took special interest in the Beirut port.

Granted, the economic gains have been substantial for Syria. It is my contention, however, that these gains were a bonus that the Syrian leadership was happy to receive, but there is no compelling evidence to prove that the discussions among the leadership ever focused on intervention based on economic gain. As for Hafez al-Asad himself, there is nothing to indicate that his interests were of an economic character. Patrick Seale points out the ascetic lifestyle of Asad in an article published shortly after his death in 2000: “Although he started out as a soldier, Asad rarely wore uniform or harangued the crowd from a balcony. He seemed to shrink from human contact, spending long hours at his desk and living a dull, exemplary life with his wife and children. Money, women or luxuries seemed to have no hold on him. Power was his drug.”¹⁹

This is not to say that Asad did not realize the importance of economic issues, but these issues were not central to the discussions the Syrian leadership had prior to the intervention in Lebanon. Nevertheless, I will argue in a later segment of this paper that economic aspects have influenced the continued Syrian occupation of Lebanon to a greater extent than it did the initial intervention. It is true, the concern for a too autonomous Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), acting independent of Syria, could provide a realist-minded Syrian leadership with incentive to take some action to prevent such a situation from arising. It is also true that the risk of sectarian violence spreading to Syria was a reality, in particular since Asad himself, along with many of his ministers, belonged to the Alawi sect.²⁰ In other words, despite the secular

Furthermore, Lawson does not explain why Syria would gain more from occupying an entire country than from simply developing the Syrian coastal city ports. Lawson, Fred H., *Why Syria goes to War: Thirty Years of Confrontation*, 1996, pp 76-97

¹⁹ Seale, Patrick, “Hafez al-Asad”, *The Guardian*, June 12, 2000

²⁰ The Alawis are members of a Shi’i Muslim sect who regard Ali, the Prophet Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law, his rightful heir. According to the Alawi, Ali was robbed of his rights by the first three Caliphs. The

character of the Ba'th rule, many viewed Asad's regime as an Alawi, and subsequently minority, rule. But would these factors necessitate intervention on the side of the Christians? The answer is, in my opinion, no. For the reasons stated above, I argue that the realist approach to explaining Syrian policies toward Lebanon is inadequate and needs to be complemented with the study of additional factors influencing the formulation of Syrian policy.

Why a cognitive approach?

It is important to understand that the relationship between Syria and Lebanon has other dimensions than the simple two-state relationship it is reduced to in realist analysis. To show the workings of ideology in this relationship, I believe that a different theoretical approach must be employed; an approach that takes into consideration the perceptions and pre-held beliefs of the decision-makers, thus illuminating the weaknesses of rational choice theory and the traditional views on decision-makers. To achieve the stated purpose of this study, I have chosen a cognitive approach. This suggests that the starting point for the analysis is an assumption that ideas and ideology have had a greater role in Syrian policy than traditional views acknowledge. As Andreas Bieler puts it, "cognitive approaches are based on a positivist understanding of social sciences as are mainstream IR approaches. This involves a separation of subject and object and the search for causal relationships. Meaning-oriented behaviouralism is one way of how cognitive approaches attempt to identify causal connections between ideas and policy outcomes".²¹ The intention is to show the relationship

Lebanese Imam Musa al-Sadr, founder and spiritual leader of the Shi'i Amal (now headed by Speaker of the House Nabih Berr) until his disappearance in Libya in 1978, declared the Alawi sect officially part of the Shi'a community. For more on the "Alawi rule" in Syria, see Hinnebusch, Raymond A., "Asad's Syria and the New World Order", *Middle East Policy*, no 43, 1993. For more on Musa al-Sadr and the Shi'a community in Lebanon, see Norton, Richard, *Amal and the Shi'a: Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon*, 1986

²¹ Bieler, Andreas, "Questioning Cognitivism and Constructivism in IR Theory: Reflections on the Material Structure of Ideas", *Politics*, May 2001, p 94

between Ba’thist ideology, the perceptions of the decision-makers and the policy outcome toward Lebanon. In this process, mainstream explanations of Syrian policies will be criticized and in some cases dismissed. “By correlating particular beliefs/motivations/values with a particular behaviour in a particular context, it becomes possible to derive empirically testable hypotheses about uniformities of behaviour under specific conditions.”²² The view that Asad and the Syrian leadership made the decision to intervene in Lebanon on the grounds that Syrian national security would be in jeopardy if the PLO and the leftist militias defeated the Christians in Lebanon is not necessarily faulty in itself. But it is of hindsight character and it ignores the reasons behind the conclusions reached by the Syrian leadership.

If the Ba’thists in Syria saw the defeat of the Christians of Lebanon as a threat to Syrian national security, then why was that so? It is my contention that had the Syrians let the PLO and leftists crush the Christians, and established close ties with a “new” Lebanon, this would have been described in identical self-explanatory terms.²³ Instead, we need to examine which images, derived from which context, against which specific background led to the Syrian policy of intervention and occupation.

Theories of cognition

Perception and misperception

Considering the importance traditional theorists award the decision-makers of the states, it would seem as a logical next step to put emphasis on the actual

²² Neufeld, Mark A., *The Restructuring of International Relations Theory*, 1995, p 74

²³ For more on the shortcomings of Realist theory, see Hårdig, Carl Anders, 2001, “The Dissidents: An Analysis of the Postmodern Critique of Realism”, Unpublished research paper, American University of Beirut

process of decision-making and the effect of decision-makers' perception of the situation at hand. After all, the actor's perception of a given situation is one of the immediate causes of his behavior. For scholars trying to analyze the behavior of states, the believed motive of the decision-maker has a direct impact on what direction the analysis will take: "Our understanding of the actor's images and beliefs affects the further questions that we ask about that event and the behavior that we expect of the actor in other cases".²⁴ When studying foreign policy behavior it is important to recognize that there are many factors that influence the policymaking process. To be sure, there is never one factor that alone dictates a country's foreign policy. It is therefore imperative that one focuses on the appropriate level of analysis.

Robert Jervis identifies four levels of analysis:

1. The decision-making process
2. The bureaucracy
3. The nature of the state and the workings of domestic politics
4. The international environment

Which level of analysis one should decide to use depends on the situation at hand: "Which level one focuses on is not arbitrary and is not a matter of taste – it is the product of beliefs (or often hunches) about the nature of the variables that influence the phenomena that concern one".²⁵ Certainly, the importance of each level may vary from one issue to another and depending on how detailed we want the answer to be. Returning to Thucydides' study of the Peloponnesian War, decision-making analysis may explain why the war broke out when it did,

²⁴ Jervis, Robert, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 1976, p 30

²⁵ Jervis, 1976, p 15

but the external factors may have been such that war would have broken out sooner or later. Furthermore, the importance of variables at each level may vary with the stages of a decision. There may be domestic reasons for the timing of a change in policy while bargaining with the bureaucracy dictates the options available for decision-makers and the decision-makers' perception of the situation will influence which option is chosen.²⁶ Focusing on the decision-making level inevitably leads to dealing with individual statesmen, a preoccupation that according to Snyder, Bruck and Sapin may lead to intensifying the tendency to view the decision-maker in isolation rather than as part of a social system. "Concentration on the personality of diplomats or policy-makers – without making explicit the relevant assumptions about their roles in a governmental context – unleashes the ugly specter of the problem of not being able to decide which aspects of the individual's personality are really crucial to an explanation of his behavior qua decision-maker."²⁷

Jervis argues that examining all different levels of analysis makes clear that it is often impossible to explain crucial decisions and policies without studying the images and beliefs held by decision-makers. "[T]hese cognitions are part of the proximate cause of the relevant behavior and other levels of analysis cannot immediately tell us what they will be."²⁸ Jervis employs a two-step model in which a decision-maker's perceptions are considered as one of the immediate causes of his behavior, rather than explaining foreign policy as the direct consequence of variables found in any of the other three levels of analysis. The first step is simply to look at the images held by decision-makers and determine what perception they have of a given situation.

²⁶ Jervis, 1976, p 17

²⁷ Snyder, Richard, Bruck, H. W. & Sapin, Burton (eds), *Foreign Policy Decision-Making*, 1962, p 41

²⁸ Jervis, 1976, p 28

The second step is to relate these images, if not to reality, then at least to the information available to the decision-maker. Scholars need to examine how statesmen come to develop their images of other actors and understand what makes them perceive threats.²⁹ By focusing on a decision-maker's perceptions and images, the social context of the actor is automatically included in the calculation; it is impossible to explain a decision-maker's images and beliefs without considering the social system within which he operates.

Ideology and policy

Regarding the role of ideas, what matters in the cognitive approach is their causal effects on policy, not the origin of new ideas or the self-interest of their proponents.³⁰ Cognitive theories should not be considered a major challenge to existing mainstream international relations theories, instead they “demonstrate that an ideas approach is always a valuable supplement to interest-based, rational actor models”.³¹ In other words, the use of a cognitive approach should not indicate a complete dismissal of traditional models. It should, however, indicate the need for development and modification of them. According to cognitive theory, ideas acquire causal relevance when they become legitimized as organizational rules and procedures in institutions.³² Some scholars claim ideas also acquire causal relevance when used by powerful actors as “weapons” when legitimizing policies.³³ Even if these two requirements are not fulfilled, ideas and ideology have an impact on the decision-makers' perception of a situation; ideology provides a worldview that will inevitably influence the

²⁹ Jervis, 1976, pp 29-31

³⁰ Goldstein, Judith & Keohane, Robert O. (eds), *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change*, 1993, p 7 & Jacobsen, John Kurt, “Much Ado About Ideas: The Cognitive Factor in Economic Policy”, *World Politics*, no 1, 1995, p 291

³¹ Jacobsen, 1995, p 285

³² Yee, Albert S., “The Causal Effects of Ideas on Policies”, *International Organization*, no 1, 1996, pp 88-92
See also Goldstein & Keohane (eds), 1993, pp 20-24

³³ Jacobsen, 1995, pp 298-300

formulation of policies. For instance, an actor's response to another actor's behavior will depend on the perception of the reasons for the other's behavior. If the actor is perceived as behaving according to situational dictates, i.e. if the actor is seen as having no other choice but to behave the way he did because of external circumstances, the analysis will take on a entirely different course than if he had been perceived as acting by his own free choice. "Thus a teacher will react one way to a student whose bad work he attributes to laziness, another way to one who he believes to have had a poor education, and still another way to one whose abilities are severely limited."³⁴ How a decision-maker perceives another actor's reasons for acting, will affect how he predicts that actor's future behavior and subsequently his own behavior towards him.

Snyder et al., in a similar fashion, insist that state action grows out of the decision-makers' "definition of the situation."³⁵ When policy-makers are faced with an adversary acting in a way that is contrary to their interests, their response will depend on what they believe motivated the adversary's actions. If, for example, it is believed that the other's intentions were to deliberately cause harm to the state, the response will be more extreme than if it is believed that the result was unintended. Similarly, the response will be milder if there is an understanding that the actor had no choice but to pursue a certain policy.³⁶ Predicting a state's behavior presents observers with a number of difficulties. For one thing, it is important not to confuse the actor's predictions about his own actions under given circumstances for the most likely course of action should a hypothetical situation become reality. As Jervis argues, sometimes observers are in a better position to judge actors' intentions than they are

³⁴ Jervis, 1976, p 33

³⁵ Snyder et al., 1962, p 173

³⁶ Jervis, 1976, pp 39-41

themselves: “[A] decision-maker may think he knows how he will act under given circumstances, but these predictions may prove to be incorrect.”³⁷ There are, of course, many reasons for inaccurate self-prediction. Misjudging the emotional reaction to an event, re-evaluation of goals and beliefs once faced with a *fait accompli*, the context in which the events take place may be different from what was expected; listing all possible reasons for inaccurate self-prediction would require a whole book. After all, decision-makers are only human, and humans normally lack the ability to look into the future.³⁸

Breaking the myth of the rational actor

The cognitive approach constitutes a challenge to classical theory only in that it questions the view of the rational decision-maker.³⁹ In fact, theories of perceptual distortion point to a decision-maker quite different from the rational character described by traditional theory.⁴⁰ The rational decision-maker is a common variable in traditional social science theoretical models. It is assumed that policy-makers rationally weigh the different alternatives against each other and eventually reach the decision that under the circumstances best would serve the policy-makers’ interest.

³⁷ Jervis, 1976, p 55

³⁸ Jervis, 1976, pp 55-56

³⁹ As a result of the shortcomings of rational choice theory and the traditional view of decision-makers, a tradition of behavioral theories has emerged within the discipline of international relations, especially in the context of deterrence theory. At the core of this emerging tradition lies “prospect theory”, which in contrast to most existing theories “suggests that non-rational choices are both stable and predictable.” This study does, however, not focus on the specifics of deterrence theory. Nevertheless, the importance awarded perception and non-rationality in this behavioral tradition is quite useful in the present study. Lebow, Richard N., & Gross Stein, Janice, “Rational Deterrence Theory: I Think, Therefore I Deter”, *World Politics*, no 2, 1989; Berejikian, Jeffrey, “A Cognitive Theory of Deterrence”, *Journal of Peace Research*, March 2002, p 170. For more on prospect theory, see Farnham, Barbara, *Avoiding Losses/Taking Risks: Prospect Theory and International Conflict*, 1994; Levy, Jack, “Prospect Theory and International Relations: Theoretical Applications and Analytical Problems”, *Political Psychology*, no 2, 1992.

⁴⁰ For a good discussion on perceptual distortion theories in relation to classical theory, see Holsti, Ole R., “Models of International Relations and Foreign Policy”, *Diplomatic History*, winter 1989, pp 30-31

It is also assumed that so-called “trade offs” are dealt with rationally, i.e. choices between alternatives are made after a cost-benefit analysis, indicating which decision would yield the most benefit at the least cost, while accepting that some objectives must be sacrificed.⁴¹ Instead, studies on human behavior seem to indicate that the “rational actor” exists only in theory. In reality, the “irrational actor” is a far more frequent variable in policy-making. “Decision-makers are not merely rational calculators; important decisions generate conflict, and a reluctance to make irrevocable choices often results in behavior that reduces the quality of decisions.”⁴² Also, the pre-held beliefs among actors will influence their behavior: “[R]esearch on cognition and decision-making demonstrates that individual choices are as much a function of consistent heuristics and biases as they are the result of calculated costs and benefits.”⁴³

Having determined that decision-makers should be regarded “imperfect actors”, i.e. actors vulnerable to perceptual distortions, and not the rational, clear thinking decision-making machines traditional theory seems to indicate, it is appropriate to discuss the different explanations forwarded regarding the “irrational actor”. Jervis argues that the principle of cognitive consistency is what helps decision-makers, and humans in general, to make sense of new information. A simple way of putting it is that “people see what they expect to see, and hear what they expect to hear.” A principle rich of empirical verification in the field of human psychology, cognitive consistency can, according to Jervis, help us understand decision-makers’ foreign policy behavior: “We tend to believe that countries we like do things we like, support goals we favor, and oppose countries that we oppose. We tend to think that

⁴¹ Lebow, 1981, p 101

⁴² Holsti, 1989, p 31

⁴³ Berejikian, 2002, p 166

countries that are our enemies make proposals that would harm us, work against the interest of our friends, and aid our opponents.”⁴⁴ Viewed in this way, a country’s foreign policy can become understandable, even if it contradicts or ignores facts and considerations an outside observer would regard as imperative in taking a decision.

Rational and irrational consistency

By distinguishing between “rational” and “irrational” consistency, Jervis acknowledges the fact that the principle of consistency is useful in processing incoming data and provides continuity to decision-makers’ behavior, and that it is not necessarily irrational for an actor to adjust incoming information to fit their existing images and beliefs.⁴⁵ It becomes irrational when it closes decision-makers’ minds to new information or different points of view, and irrational consistency can create unfortunate results.⁴⁶

In the short run, irrational consistency can be useful as well since it helps making quick decisions when a situation demands action. Nevertheless, persistent denial of new information reduces policy-makers’ ability to learn from the environment. Jervis argues that policy-makers must balance persistency and continuity on one hand, and openness and flexibility on the other.

⁴⁴ Jervis, 1976, pp 117-118

⁴⁵ It should be stressed that cognitive theory is not incompatible with the view of rational choice, but the norm of the decision-makers as being rational is fundamentally challenged. Furthermore, within cognitive theory there are, of course, differences of opinions as to how much one should deviate from traditional/realist explanations. In this study, however, it should be clear that the fundamental teachings of realist theory are acknowledged as valid and useful. “Putting aside the rationality of the substance of the beliefs, it can be claimed that the cognitive bias are consistent with rational behavior properly understood.” Jervis, Robert, “Rational Deterrence: Theory and Evidence”, *World Politics*, no 2, 1989, p 199

⁴⁶ Jervis, Robert, “Hypotheses on Misperception”, *World Politics*, April 1968, p 455

According to Jervis, the phenomenon of “premature cognitive closure”, i.e. the inclination of a person to stay faithful to an established view and reject discrepant information and make decisions before evaluation all information, often affects policy-makers. New information will be assimilated to an adopted expectation or belief and critical information will be misunderstood, denied or simply ignored for the sake of consistency.⁴⁷ Furthermore, when policy-makers finally do realize that there may be a need to reformulate an image, it is highly likely that they will adopt the first new image that in their mind provides a decent fit. In other words, the basic assumptions on which the first image was based still remain, despite the fact that they might be gravely incorrect.

Preexisting beliefs also have a masking effect. For example, when a decision-maker needs to determine whether or not an opponent is being sincere “the belief that the other side is bluffing is likely to mask the perception that it will actually fight because the behaviors that follow from these two intentions closely resemble each other.”⁴⁸ Incoming information that can be explained by a decision-maker’s pre-existing belief will not be considered as supporting alternative beliefs, regardless of how well it fits these alternatives. Jervis claims that advocates of a certain policy become convinced that their alternative will promote *all* objectives at once, rather than acknowledge the sacrifice of even one objective. “Rather than engaging in trade-offs, an actor strives to insure that he does not fall below some minimum level on any of his goals.”⁴⁹ Conversely, opponents of the policy will adopt a belief that all objectives are harmed by the policy. To employ a cognitive approach is to acknowledge the role of ideas and ideology in policymaking. Instead of regarding ideas as exogenous to states’

⁴⁷ Jervis, 1976, p 187

⁴⁸ Jervis, 1976, p 194

⁴⁹ Jervis, 1976, p 129

interest formation and state interaction, cognitive theory includes the ideological mindset of decision-makers.⁵⁰ Traditional theory tends to overlook the flaws inherent in the image of a rational decision-maker and the focus of the analysis will inevitably end up on the structural constraints faced by the actors. The literature on cognitive processes is, of course, quite extensive; this study has dealt only with a fraction of it.

⁵⁰ Bieler, 2001, p 94

III. THE DECISION-MAKERS AND THEIR IDEOLOGY

Employing Jervis' two-step model leads us to ask a question: What were the images held by Asad and his fellow decision-makers at the time the Lebanese civil war broke out? To answer this question, we must first examine who the decision-makers were, what ideology they adhered to, and in what setting they were operating. This chapter has two main purposes. First, it is intended to provide insight in Ba'th ideology and the beliefs held by the key decision-makers. Second, it attempts to show why the decision-makers' beliefs and images is of importance to the present study.

The Syrian leadership

Ba'th ideology

A small decision-making committee consisting of President Hafez al-Asad, Foreign Minister Abdul-Halim Khaddam, Air Force Commander/Chief of National Security Naji Jamil, and Chief of Staff Hikmat Shihabi, made the most important decisions regarding Lebanon at the time for the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975. The members of this group were all longtime adherents to Ba'thist ideology and subsequently tended to hold common normative orientations.⁵¹ Naturally, this statement demands closer look at what Ba'thist ideology means. The Syrian political arena had since the 1950s experienced a struggle between two nationalist forces, *Hizb al-ba'th al-'arabi al-ishtiraki*, or the Arab Socialist Ba'th (renaissance) Party and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP)⁵².

⁵¹ Dawisha, Adeed I., *Syria and the Lebanese Crisis*, 1980, pp 70-71

⁵² In literature, the SSNP is sometimes referred to as the Syrian Nationalist Party (SNP) or the Parti Populaire Syrien (PPS). In this study, however, I will restrict myself to using the acronym "SSNP".

The Ba'th Party regarded the whole Arab world to be one 'nation', while the SSNP considered 'Greater Syria' to be a nation distinct from the rest of the Arab world.⁵³ In other words, it was a matter of Arab nationalists versus Syrian nationalists. Of course, this distinction is not as easily made in reality; the SSNP and the Ba'th in fact have similar origin. The founder of the SSNP, Antoun Sa'adeh, organized and forwarded the 'Greater Syria' theory as the central theme for his political movement in the 1930s. Sa'adeh's works predates the founding of the Ba'th party and there can be no doubt that its founders, Michel 'Aflaq and Salah al-Din Bitar, were influenced by the same philosophical currents.⁵⁴ Ba'thist ideology consists of three main pillars, (Arab) unity, freedom, and socialism.

The meanings of these concepts have, of course, been interpreted differently throughout the evolution of the party. After the Arab defeat in the 1967 war, however, the concept of Arab unity has increasingly become synonym with anti-Zionism and Syria has taken the role as Israel's most adamant opponent.⁵⁵ In the first constitution for the Ba'th party from 1947, emphasis was put on the "clear commitment to the political unification of the Arab world".⁵⁶ 'Aflaq himself made it a point to distinguish Ba'th socialism from Marxism or Leninism: "As for Ba'th socialism, its meaning is limited to the economic organization which aims at restoring supervision in distributing the wealth of

⁵³ Seale, 1988, pp 49-52; Hudson, Michael C., *The Precarious Republic: Modernization in Lebanon*, 1968, pp 171-172. Views differ among scholars as to what extent Ba'thist and SSNP ideology are to be considered opposing ideologies. Daniel Pipes, for instance, maintains on the one hand that ideology held none or little importance to Asad, and on the other hand that Ba'thist ideology in reality only aims at creating a 'Greater Syria' in the same tradition as Hitler's 'Gross-Deutschland', i. e. pan-Syrianism as opposed to pan-Arabism. While the notion of the historical region of Syria as a province in the greater Arab nation in my opinion certainly played an important role in the Syrian intervention in Lebanon, I question Pipes' ambiguous account of the role of ideology in Syrian foreign policy. Pipes, Daniel, *Greater Syria: The History of Ambition*, 1990

⁵⁴ Roberts, 1987, pp 11-12

⁵⁵ Olson, Robert W., *The Ba'th and Syria, 1947 to 1982: The Evolution of Ideology, Party, and State*, 1982, pp 108-109

⁵⁶ Kienle, Eberhard, *Ba'th v. Ba'th: The Conflict between Syria and Iraq 1968-1989*, 1990, p 2

the Arab nation, at establishing bases for the economy so as to guarantee economic equality and justice among the citizens".⁵⁷ Ba'thist socialism was meant to complement the Arab nation but not replace the object of loyalty with a non-nationalist doctrine. Communism, where a non-Arab loyalty was promoted, would according to this view be as much of a threat to Arab unity as Colonialism.⁵⁸ As a result, communism was always viewed with some suspicion in Syria, despite the socialist character of the Ba'thist regime. The Ba'th socialism was not put in the service of internationalism, but nationalism. This focus on the Arab nation appealed mainly to the Muslim masses throughout the Arab world, including Lebanon where the Muslim communities felt unfairly treated by the Christian minority.⁵⁹ However, the secular character of the Ba'th party put it on collision course with Islamist fundamentalist ideologies, hence the conflict with the Muslim Brotherhood between 1976 and 1982.

The political system

In 1963 a number of Ba'th officers, including Hafez al-Asad, took control over the government through a military coup, and ousted the regime that was held responsible for the failure of the Syrian-Egyptian venture in the United Arab Republic.⁶⁰ Tensions within the Ba'thist leadership led to yet another coup in 1966 and finally, after the unsuccessful Syrian intervention on the side of the

⁵⁷ 'Aflaq, Michel, *Fi Sibil al-Ba'th*, 1959, pp 96-97 (translation Georgina 'Aramouny)

⁵⁸ Roberts, 1987, pp 68-69

⁵⁹ When the State of Greater Lebanon was created, it was after consultation with those of the Maronite sect who acquired the paramount political control of the Lebanese system. The Muslim communities were presented with a *fait accompli*, and did to a large extent not perceive the Lebanese as a nation by themselves, but rather as a part of a greater Arab nation. Furthermore, with the Muslim communities growing at a much higher rate than the Christian communities, the system dominated by the Christians became increasingly difficult to justify. Of course, for the Christians, their political dominance was their insurance as a minority. Petran, 1972, p 61; Salibi, Kamal, *Lebanon and the Middle Eastern Question*, 1988, pp 3-20

⁶⁰ The Ba'th Party being the increasingly influential force in Syrian government and army, close ties were soon formed with Egypt, the country leading the anti-Western forces at the time. Early 1958, the UAR was proclaimed, uniting Egypt and Syria under the Egyptian President Nasser. The marriage between Syria and Egypt only lasted three years and in 1961 Syria withdrew from the UAR after a right-wing coup that brought conservative elements to the government. Seale, 1988, pp 67-80

Palestinians in the Jordanian civil war, Hafez al-Asad seized power in the fall of 1970.⁶¹ Asad's Syria was dominated by three main decision-making institutions; the Ba'th party, the Presidency and the Defense Establishment.⁶² The Ba'th party is according to the Syrian constitution the leader-party in the state, heading a coalition of parties in a Progressive National Front. While the constitution acknowledges the existence of numerous additional parties, in reality Syria has a one-party system. The organizational structure in the Ba'th party is of pyramidal form, at the top is the Regional Command as the highest decision-making institution.⁶³ In a system of this sort, a strong power elite is bound to emerge at the top of the pyramid.

Nepotism and corruption is the logical consequence when power is placed in the hands of a few, and Syria is no exception. The power of the party was only held back by the power of the Presidency. Hafez al-Asad restricted the influence of the Ba'th elite and made sure to tie the top leadership to him personally. A personal bond did not always guarantee loyalty however; the most serious attempt to topple Asad's regime was carried out by his own brother, Rif'at, in 1984.⁶⁴ As for foreign policy, the main decision-making body was the National Command. Of course, the choice of names for these decision-making bodies reflects the Ba'th ideology; while internal Syrian affairs was determined by the *Regional* Command, issues regarding the Arab nation was determined by the *National* Command. Hafez al-Asad chaired both the

⁶¹ Dawisha, 1980, pp 23-25 & Seale, 1988, pp 162-165

⁶² Dawisha, Adeer I., "Syria under Asad 1970-78: The Centres of Power", *Government and Opposition*, 1978, p 341

⁶³ Dawisha, 1978, pp 342-343

⁶⁴ It is unclear whether Rif'at initially sought to overthrow his older brother's rule, or if he only sought recognition of his stature in the existing political system. Whatever the intent initially had been, Rif'at's actions lead to a military standoff between forces loyal to Rif'at and those still loyal to President Asad. However, the standoff never led to outright civil war, Hafez al-Asad prevailed and Rif'at was exiled. Seale, 1988, pp 421-440

Regional and National Command, and an additional five out of the seventeen members of the latter were also members of the former.⁶⁵

The role of Hafez al-Asad

Naturally, the most influential member of the decision-making committee formed to deal with the Lebanese crisis in 1975 was Asad himself, who had spent the previous five years strengthening his hold on power in Syria. Asad's rule came to be the most stable period in Syria's history as an independent state. Immediately upon seizing power, he began to widen the regime's support base by including representatives of all political groups and organizations in a "People's Assembly". Of course, this was mainly a cosmetic feature, much like the idea of the Progressive National Front.

Asad toured the countryside and attempted to create a true sense of fresh start in the Syrian people, who had grown weary of coups and counter-coups.⁶⁶ Asad also set out to improve Syria's standing in the Arab world. Relations with Egypt and Jordan were dramatically improved and in 1971 Syria, Egypt, Libya, and Sudan formed the Federation of Arab Republics. Although the Federation never became an active force, it allowed Syria to participate in inter-Arab relations to a greater extent.⁶⁷ It was in the October war 1973, however, Asad gained the recognition and standing in the Arab world he needed to give Syria the role of a leading Arab nation. It is of importance to understand Asad's strong position in Syrian – and, for that matter, Arab – politics, to understand the utility of Jervis' cognitive theory in this study. Ba'thist ideology is in many aspects an ideology of "the Arab street", just like Nasser before him, Asad showed upon seizing

⁶⁵ Dawisha, 1978, p 343

⁶⁶ Seale, 1988, pp 169-174

⁶⁷ Dawisha, 1980, pp 25-26

power that he understood the need to speak to the masses in the Arab nation. However, unlike Nasser, he is often described as being uncomfortable with the populist approach and was considered anything but a charismatic speaker. Perhaps this is why he mainly ruled from behind the scenes, thereby creating a myth around his person. Asad is portrayed as a shrewd and intelligent leader by his admirers as well as by his enemies. According to all accounts, Asad was the linchpin of the regime without whom nothing was possible. “Asad is smart, adaptable and a workaholic who keeps his finger on the pulse of the country and remains the center of high policy. He is perceived to know what every member of the elite is doing.”⁶⁸ The mythology around his person and his sometimes ruthless tactics made Asad the central figure in Syrian politics. For this reason, analyses of Asad’s speeches and statements are of significant importance for the current study.

The level of analysis for the study at hand

The character and power structure of the Ba’th party ruling in Syria, suggests that the most appropriate level of analysis for studying Syrian foreign policy toward Lebanon is the decision-making process. This is not to suggest that Syrian policy has not been influenced to any degree by bureaucratic practices, domestic politics, or the international environment. On the contrary, as we shall see, the two latter levels have been of substantial importance for the decision-makers’ perception of the situation. I do, however, suggest that in the decision-making process, more specifically in the images held by the decision-makers, is where the main source of Syrian policies toward Lebanon can be found. Not least considering the emphasis on the historical kinship between the two

⁶⁸ Hinnebusch, 1993, p 2

countries found in Ba’thist ideology. The decision-making committee formed during the 1975-1976 war in Lebanon was a relatively small and ideologically homogenous group and this makes the task of examining their perceptions meaningful. The following analysis of the Syrian intervention in Lebanon and its subsequent occupation of the country will be based on Robert Jervis’ cognitive approach to explaining foreign policy.

IV. THE SYRIAN INTERVENTION IN THE 1975-1976 WAR

This chapter will discuss the first of the two important events chosen to examine the Syrian-Lebanese relationship. This event is the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war and the subsequent Syrian intervention with regular army units. The time period is from April 1975 to October 1976, at which point the Syrian intervention had ended the first phase of the Lebanese civil war.

The Lebanese Civil War

Inter-Arab fighting and Syrian diplomacy

There is wide consensus among observers of the Lebanese Civil War that the starting point of the war was the events of April 13 1975 in the Christian East Beirut area Ain al-Rummaneh, when members of the Kataeb Party and the National Liberal Party (NLP) ambushed a bus full of Palestinians in response to an attack directed at the Christian leader Pierre Gemayel.⁶⁹ The eroding of the Lebanese State had, however, been underway for many years when the Ain al-Rummaneh incident took place and political/military violence had been an increasingly common occurrence throughout the first half of the 1970s.⁷⁰ The

⁶⁹ While it has been claimed that the Palestinians on the bus were civilians, Farid el-Khazen contends shooting began from both sides when the bus was stopped at a roadblock set up by Kataeb and NLP members. In other words, he claims that the Palestinians were guerrillas and not civilians. Whatever the case may be, this incident has largely been viewed as the immediate cause of war. el-Khazen, Farid, *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon 1967-1976*, 2000, p 287. For the “innocent civilians” version, see Dawisha, 1980, p 85; Petran, 1987, p 166

⁷⁰ The reasons for the Lebanese civil war are, of course, manifold. The situation in the Middle East during the second half of the 1960s created problems that the Lebanese political system would prove incapable of handling. The Arab-Israeli war of 1967 created a flood of Palestinian refugees pouring into Lebanese territory, and the clashes between the Jordanian army and the PLO in 1970 precipitated the introduction of armed Palestinian guerrillas on a large scale. In fact, there had been a gradual Palestinian military and political entrenchment in Lebanon during the latter half of the 1960s, which altered the nature of Lebanese politics. The increasingly brutal military raids in southern Lebanon carried out by Israel caused an acceleration of the influx of Shi'a peasantry to large slum belts surrounding Beirut in the early 1970s. The old political elite was forced to become more radical and yet, at the same time, found itself more marginalized. The Arab defeat in the 1967 war widened divisions in the Lebanese political establishment and started to tear apart the fragile bonds between the leaders of the different communities. Adding to this was the disastrous effect the Lebanese economy had on the

incident and its aftermath created the worst political deadlock in Lebanese history and the polarization among the different communities was increasing.⁷¹ The Kataeb was by many Christians perceived as the last line of defense against the prospect of the PLO taking full control over the country.⁷² Clashes between the Kataeb and the PLO became a common occurrence during the spring of 1975, and both sides carried out kidnappings and killings on sectarian basis. To be sure, the violence was not confined to Beirut; it soon spread to Tripoli in the north and to Sidon and Tyre in the south.

After failed attempts by Arab League officials to defuse the conflict and the collapse of the Rashid al-Solh cabinet, President Suleiman Frangiyeh resorted to forming a military cabinet on May 23.⁷³ Far from cooling the situation, this move received massive resistance from the Muslim communities, in particular since it included the Christian Army Commander Iskander Ghanem as Minister of Defense, a man regarded by many as highly partisan.

countryside; the growth of Lebanon's service and trade sector took place at the expense of the agricultural sector and Lebanon's peasantry was increasingly pauperized. The country's dependence on import from the West was reflected in the chronic deficit in the trade balance; in 1951 it was LL223 million, in 1960 LL968 million, and in 1970 LL1.6 billion. The exchange rate in 1970 was roughly LL3.00 = \$1.00. Seale, 1988, p 274; el-Khazen, 1993, pp 56-58 ; Gorja, Wade, *Sovereignty and Leadership in Lebanon 1943-1976*, 1985, pp 79-80; Nasr, Salim, "The Crisis of Lebanese Capitalism", *MERIP Reports*, December 1978, pp 4-6. For a non-academic, but excellent, account of the Lebanese conflict, see Fisk, Robert, *Pity the Nation*, 1990

⁷¹ el-Khazen, 2000, pp 288-289; Petran, 1987, pp 166-167

⁷² The Christian character of the Kataeb Party is beyond question, although throughout the party's existence it has had non-Christian members. In 1969, the Kataeb's membership was constituted by 90% Christians, the overwhelming majority Maronite. Another important predominantly Christian political party at the time of the outbreak of civil war was the Chamounist NLP. On the left side of the political spectrum, a major political force was the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), led by Druze chieftain Kamal Jumblat until his assassination in 1977, at which point his son Walid Jumblat assumed leadership. Although the PSP drew many members from the Lebanese Druze community, Jumblat's party was based more on ideology than on confessional background and was therefore of a relatively cross-sectarian character. For more on the Kataeb, see Stoakes, Frank, "The Supervigilantes: The Lebanese Kataeb Party as Builder, Surrogate and Defender of the State", *Middle Eastern Studies*, October 1975; For further reading on the Lebanese political scene prior to the outbreak of the civil war, see David and Audrey Smock's study of the Lebanese political system. Smock, David R. & Smock, Audrey C., *The Politics of Pluralism : A Comparative Study of Lebanon and Ghana*, 1975, pp 121-123

⁷³ el-Khazen, 2000, p 294

Kamal Jumblat, speaking on behalf of various Muslim and leftist groups under the collective label the Lebanese National Movement (LNM), declared political war against the Kataeb, calling for the complete political isolation and economic boycott of the party, while the Kataeb and its fellow rightist parties were the only ones to welcome the formation of the military cabinet.⁷⁴ It was the formation of the military cabinet that triggered the first major decision in Damascus regarding the Lebanese crisis on May 24. It concerned sending Foreign Minister Khaddam and Chief of National Security Jamil on a peace mission to Lebanon for discussions with almost all the Lebanese politicians, as well as PLO-leader Yasser Arafat.⁷⁵ The two Syrian envoys managed to bring about the resignation of the military cabinet and bring forward Rashid Karame as al-Solh's successor as Prime Minister. In fact, Khaddam played a crucial role in designing the Karame cabinet, helping the Sunni leadership and Arafat to overcome their differences as well as moderating Jumblat's position.⁷⁶

A divided national government

The military cabinet resigned two days after it was formed; its main accomplishment was to have unified the opposition against President Frangiyeh. For the first time, a clear sectarian division became visible; the conflict had taken on a much broader character, threatening to tear apart the entire Lebanese social and political system.⁷⁷ Frangiyeh's acceptance of

⁷⁴ Petran, 1987, pp 167-168. The problem of applying the classic distinction between left and right on the Lebanese political system is discussed by el-Khazen: "If a group (political party or community) in Lebanon advocated progressive and liberal policies towards a domestic issue (for example, secularism, tax laws, personal status law), while at the same time having a conservative or moderate position on the populist pan-Arab issue of the day, that group was labeled reactionary by Arab nationalists. If a party subscribed to an Arab nationalist platform but was uncompromising on other issues and had undemocratic practices, that party was viewed as progressive." For the purposes of this study, however, it is sufficient to equate Christian groups with rightist/pro-status quo groups, and Muslim/Palestinian groups with leftist/anti-status quo groups. el-Khazen, 2000, pp 381-382

⁷⁵ Dawisha, 1980, p 69

⁷⁶ el-Khazen, 2000, p 297

⁷⁷ Dawisha, 1980, pp 86-87

Karame as Prime minister was almost certainly a result of Syrian pressures. Frangiyeh and Karame were political rivals and the latter was a strong supporter of the Palestinian cause and subsequently not particularly sympathetic toward the Christian position. The appointment of Karame did little to improve the political situation, the LNM continued to veto Kataeb members joining the cabinet and the relationship between Frangiyeh and Karame was characterized by everything but cooperation.⁷⁸ While Khaddam was working on the formation of the Karame cabinet, fighting accelerated on all fronts and a state of de facto anarchy prevailed throughout the country. Khaddam's second trip to Beirut finalized the formation of the Karame cabinet.

The Syrians managed to maneuver around the main dilemma of the dual veto of Kamal Jumblat and Pierre Gemayel by not including either of them in the cabinet, which consisted of three Christians and three Muslims.⁷⁹ Despite the internal tension, the situation remained relatively stable for almost two months. There was, however, little faith in the long-term success of the Karame cabinet among the actors and the various militias used the time of calm to prepare for future battles.⁸⁰ By late August it became obvious that the first Syrian attempt to solve the Lebanese issue by diplomatic means was a failure as heavy fighting broke out in the Beqa'a valley and northern Lebanon. Soon the law of the gun ruled the entire country and the violence had taken on clear sectarian overtones. An army intervention in the north triggered further escalation of violence throughout the country and the scale of renewed destruction evidently prompted

⁷⁸ Illustrative of the weakness and internal division plaguing the Lebanese government at this point, is the fact that Camille Chamoun, the ex-President and political enemy of Karame, held the post of Minister of the Interior. While representing his own party NLP as well as the excluded Kataeb, he controlled the internal security forces. Karame himself, besides being Prime Minister, held the Defense portfolio and thus at least in theory controlled the armed forces. Dawisha, 1980, p 88

⁷⁹ The fact that Jumblat's attitude changed after a two-day visit to Damascus was of major significance for the survival of the soon-to-be born Karame cabinet. el-Khazen, 2000, pp 295-297

⁸⁰ Dawisha, 1980, pp 89-90

Syrian decision-makers to believe the time had come for further action. Following the intervention of the Lebanese army in clashes between armed men from Tripoli (dominated by Muslims) and Zgharta (dominated by Christians), the army killed fourteen militiamen from a Sunni militia, an act that was widely perceived as an army intervention on the side of the Christians.⁸¹ Once again, Khaddam was sent to Beirut, this time accompanied by Syrian Chief of Staff, Hikmat Shihabi. The Syrian envoys stayed for a week and formed a “Committee for National Dialogue”, and managed to make the warring factions agree to a cease-fire. At this point, the Sinai II agreement had changed the regional considerations for the Syrians.⁸² Over a period of two months, the National Dialogue Committee held nine sessions discussing political, economic and social reform.⁸³

Tensions between Damascus and the PLO

Despite the Syrian diplomatic efforts violence did not subside. Furthermore, tensions were starting to show between Damascus and the PLO. Nevertheless, PLO and leftist forces still enjoyed Syrian support for a number of operations against Christian towns in late January 1976. Around the same time, Syria

⁸¹ Despite the fact that Karame held the Defense portfolio, the Army Commander and the majority of the officers were Christians. As in almost every case in the Lebanese conflict, the accounts for what happened differ substantially depending on the author’s perceptions and preconceptions. According to Dawisha and Petran, the army sided with the Christians and subsequently killed Muslim militiamen. el-Khazen’s slightly more detailed account tells a less incriminating story; the army deployed as a buffer zone between the two fighting factions and ended up being targeted by both sides. The Muslim militiamen were, according to this version, killed when forcing their way through an army checkpoint, after having carried out an attack on a beach resort. Dawisha, 1980, p 90; Petran, 1987, p 176; el-Khazen, 2000, p 314

⁸² The Sinai II agreement, signed in September 1975, was the final settlement between Egypt and Israel. In the agreement negotiated by Henry Kissinger, Egypt pledged to never again use arms in order to liberate Arab territory occupied by Israel. Sinai II was preceded by Sinai I in January 1974, the first armistice agreement between Egypt and Israel, which formed the foundation for a closer bond between the US and Israel, in particular through American financial aid to the Jewish state. The fact that attached to the second agreement was a secret letter from President Gerald Ford, promising American support for a continued Israeli presence on the Golan Heights in the event of a peace agreement with Syria, bears witness to the validity of Syrian concerns with the Sinai II agreement. Neff, Donald, “It Happened in January”, *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, Jan/Feb, 1997, pp 74

⁸³ el-Khazen, 2000, p 316

deployed units of the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA) in the north in response to appeals by leftist leaders.⁸⁴ In February, the third major Syrian attempt to solve the Lebanese crisis by peaceful means, the Constitutional Document, was announced.⁸⁵ Jumblat rejected the Constitutional Document since it did not adopt the LNM program for reform, which among other things called for the abolition of confessionalism. At a time when the military balance was in favor of the leftist forces, Jumblat was not in a mood to compromise and refused to lay down arms and stand behind the Syrian mediated agreement.⁸⁶ The growing rift between Arafat and Damascus did not immediately lead to military confrontation between PLO forces and Syrian forces, but the divergence in policies was obvious in the beginning of 1976.

This deterioration of Syrian-Palestinian relations would prove fatal for the Palestinians since Syria retained control over Palestinian forces such as Saiqa and the PLA in addition to regular Syrian army units. The Syrian mediators returned to Damascus and violence started escalating again early March. Evidently still firm in their belief that Lebanon must remain a unified state, Asad and his decision-makers ordered units of the Syrian controlled PLA and Saiqa to halt an advancement of the Lebanese Arab Army (LAA), a breakout faction from the Lebanese Army, on the presidential palace in Baabda.⁸⁷ Asad would not tolerate the leftist/PLO calls for the resignation of President Frangiyeh. It was at this point that Syria shifted its support from the

⁸⁴ Dawisha, 1980, p 99

⁸⁵ el-Khazen, 2000, p 327

⁸⁶ Dawisha, 1980, pp 121-122

⁸⁷ According to el-Khazen, Arafat's Fateh staged the Lebanese army rebellion in January 1976, which led to the disintegration of the Lebanese army and the creation of the Lebanese Arab Army, under the command of Sunni First Lieutenant Ahmad al-Khatib. This split in the army was only the beginning; soon the Lebanese army had been sliced up into sectarian factions, fighting alongside the militias in the war. If this is correct, what on the surface appeared to be a popular Muslim uprising within the army was in fact an intentional attempt by Arafat to further destabilize and cripple the state, and in the extension, create more problems for the Syrians. el-Khazen, 2000, pp 332-334

leftist/Muslim forces to the rightist/Christian forces.⁸⁸ As it happens, Syria's objective to contain the Lebanese conflict coincided with American interest. The Americans also shared the Syrian unwillingness to see a Lebanon dominated by Jumblat and the PLO, albeit for different reasons.⁸⁹ In short, American approval for Syrian military intervention was, or at least should have been under the circumstances, logical and expected. In May, Elias Sarkis was elected President, to Jumblat's great dislike. By the end of the month, the political positions of Syria and the leftist/Muslim forces were helplessly polarized. Saiqa and the PLA were clashing with other Palestinian groups and Arafat openly challenged Damascus by denouncing the Palestinians fighting against their own countrymen. On May 31 1976, the Syrian leadership decided to commit Syrian armed forces to Lebanon on large scale.⁹⁰ By September 30, the Christian-Syrian alliance had by all substantial standards defeated the leftist/Palestinian forces.⁹¹ In other words, Syria had militarily intervened against its traditional allies on the side of the Lebanese Christian community, which had always looked more to the West for protection than to Syria. Should this be interpreted as proof that Asad and his fellow decision-makers ignored the ideology of the Ba'th party with its call for Arab unity and socialism?

The intervention from a cognitive viewpoint

Perceptions

From the above account, it is apparent that the Syrian leadership was willing to go to great lengths to prevent the continued disintegration of the Lebanese society. When their diplomacy failed, they were even willing to launch a

⁸⁸ Dawisha, 1980, pp 123-124

⁸⁹ el-Khazen, 2000, p 341

⁹⁰ Dawisha, 1980, pp 134-135

⁹¹ el-Khazen, 2000, pp 345-348

domestically widely unpopular military campaign.⁹² What were the images held by the Syrian decision-makers at this time? Why did Syria “betray” its former allies and use its regular army to defeat them? Three closely interrelated images (or rather one overarching image with three main components) appear to have dominated in the small decision-making committee.

- The image of a foreign conspiracy against the Arabs by the Americans and the Israelis.

It is evident that Asad and his decision-makers were convinced the Lebanese war was fueled deliberately from the outside to divert attention from Kissinger’s Sinai II negotiations between Egypt and Israel. Foreign Minister Khaddam made a statement in the Beirut daily *al-Nahar* in September 1975 saying: “turmoil in Lebanon was part of a conspiracy to serve the hidden objectives of the Sinai II agreement.”⁹³ Although the hostility towards the US decreased as the Americans became increasingly involved as an emissary between Syria and Israel, the suspicion never seems to have left the minds of the Syrian decision-makers. Not even when the US gave its blessing to the Syrian military intervention in Lebanon did the suspicions subside; the endorsement was seen as another part of the scheme and the belief that the Americans were fueling the conflict remained.⁹⁴ While Asad in his own view had intervened in order to keep the Christians Arab and set the Palestinians straight, the response from the Arab world was initially overwhelmingly negative. In fact, the Americans and the Israelis were among the strongest supporters of the Syrian action.⁹⁵

⁹² Dawisha, 1980, p 112

⁹³ Quoted in el-Khazen, 2000, p 316

⁹⁴ Dawisha, 1980, pp 170-171

⁹⁵ Seale, 1988, pp 283-286

Nevertheless, Asad believed they were the main culprits behind the conspiracy, and considering the degree of Israeli satisfaction with the Syrian intervention once it was underway, the Syrian leadership had reasons to feel they had been deliberately drawn in to the conflict by external forces.⁹⁶ Asad's previous experiences of American diplomatic efforts probably fueled such suspicions. After all, he had gone through a duel with US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger following the 1973 war a few years earlier in which he had constantly felt that Kissinger ran the errands for the Israelis.⁹⁷ The fact that Kissinger also had negotiated the Sinai II agreement between Israel and Egypt, unquestionably leaving Israel the main, if not sole, beneficiary, can only have increased his suspicions. The decision-maker's need for cognitive consistency led him to interpret everything the Israelis and Americans did as another part of the conspiracy. It is my contention, that this image of a foreign conspiracy was adopted early on in the minds of the Syrian decision-makers and formed the framework for the conclusions reached by the Syrian leadership throughout the Lebanese crisis.

- The image of a plot to draw the Palestinian resistance into a final showdown in which it would be destroyed.

⁹⁶ Initially, the Israelis were not overwhelmingly excited about letting Syria enter Lebanon. However, after some convincing by the Americans, coupled with the adoption of a new, for the purpose better suiting, image according to which the Syrians would actually be weakened by the campaign in Lebanon, they went along with the American line. Seale, 1988, p 279

⁹⁷ It is not unreasonable to conclude that Asad's own assessment of Kissinger's negotiation tactics is near identical to that of Seale, who suggests that Kissinger manipulated the situation to the extent where he even played off the superpowers against each other for Israel's benefit: "Kissinger chose to portray Brezhnev's impatient message as an ultimatum, an unacceptable challenge which the United States could not but take up. He ordered a worldwide alert of US forces to face down the Russians. Israel's local misdemeanors and ceasefire violations were swallowed up in an East-West crisis largely of Kissinger's devising." William Quandt provides a somewhat less cynical view of Kissinger's Middle Eastern negotiating efforts. According to Quandt, President Nixon and Kissinger put more pressure on the Israelis than any American policy-makers had ever done before, and in the final agreement between Syria and Israel, the town of Quneitra captured by the Israelis in the 1967

This image is intelligible considering the Syrians perceived themselves as the protectors of the Palestinian cause. “We are against those who insist on continuing the fighting. A great conspiracy is being hatched against the Arab nation... Our brothers in the Palestinian leadership must understand and be aware of the gravity of this conspiracy. They are the prime targets.”⁹⁸ Asad did not see how the inter-Arab fighting in Lebanon could promote the Palestinian cause. In his mind, Arafat and Jumblat were playing it into the hands of the Israelis. In fact, it enraged him that they did not understand the necessity of closing ranks in the face of the conspiring enemy. “Any Palestinian or Arab potential diverted from the battle against Zionism and directed towards national forces is a reactionary move, even if those national forces happen to be right wing.”⁹⁹

As Syrian-Palestinian relations improved, the tone became milder and Asad expressed the feeling that the Palestinian leadership “fell victims of Kamal Jumblat who convinced Arafat and his mates that the left was able to establish a progressive leftist state in Lebanon.”¹⁰⁰ Jumblat was accused of being an American-Israeli agent, probably the first western agent to work for the establishment of a leftist state.¹⁰¹ Such accusations are, of course, part of the political game and it is not likely that the Syrian leadership actually believed Jumblat was an American agent. But it does seem to indicate that their minds were set on the notion of an international conspiracy.

war was returned to Syria, albeit after Israeli troops leveled most of the buildings, leaving a ghost town for the Syrians to reclaim. Seale, 1988, p 224; Quandt, William, *Decade of Decisions*, 1977, pp 207-252

⁹⁸ Asad quoted in Seale, 1988, p 283

⁹⁹ Asad quoted in Dawisha, 1980, p 148

¹⁰⁰ Dawisha, 1980, p 150

¹⁰¹ Petran, 1987, p 195

- The image of a Zionist plot to partition Lebanon and make the Christians set up a sectarian state of their own.

This view was quite common among the Syrian leadership. If this was achieved “Arab nationalism as a bond between Arabs would be discredited, Islam would be made to seem intolerant, the Palestinian program for a secular democratic state embracing Muslims, Christians and Jews would appear hollow, and Israel would reign supreme over a balkanized Levant.”¹⁰² Asad perceived the situation as a struggle between Syria and Israel over who would dominate the Levant as a whole: “There is a great struggle taking place between heart and mind. In our hearts we say: ‘No Israel, not on any terms.’ In our minds we say: ‘We must turn to other things, so let us give Israel a chance to withdraw to its original frontiers, let us give it a chance to prove it will no longer try to expand.’ It is a very difficult problem.”¹⁰³

Asad was convinced that American and Israeli agents were working together in Lebanon to worsen the situation and bring about the destruction of unified Lebanon. Asad’s strong conviction that the Lebanese situation was, at least in part, constructed by his enemies, coupled with the traditional Syrian reluctance to separate “Syrian” from “Lebanese”, led him to the conclusion that in order to foil his enemies’ plot against him, the fighting in Lebanon had to stop.¹⁰⁴ From Khaddam’s statement that “Lebanon was part of Syria and it will be claimed back in the event of any attempt to partition the country, and this would include the Mountain and the four provinces”, it is evident that Asad was not alone in the committee to hold these views.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Seale, 1988, p 275

¹⁰³ Asad quoted in Dawisha, 1980, p 78

¹⁰⁴ Seale, 1988, p 276

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in el-Khazen, 2000, p 320

On the surface, this is an expression of the ‘Greater Syria’ theory; the emphasis on the fraternal bond between Syria and Lebanon must be one of the most frequent habits among Syrian decision-makers and their allies. This habit is surely to a certain degree a conscious propaganda ploy, but nevertheless, in my opinion, an expression for the true convictions of the Ba’thist leadership. It is also the source of various scholars’ misinterpretation regarding the issue of what the goals of the Asad regime truly have been. What the Syrian rhetoric is referring to is, of course, that Syria and Lebanon gained independence simultaneously and that the French rulers artificially imposed the borders.¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, since World War II, according to one of the leading newspapers in Damascus, Syria had been “the guarantor and protector of Lebanon’s independence and Arabism”.¹⁰⁷ The point that the very need for Syria’s “protection” of Lebanese independence in fact highlights the Lebanese *dependence* and lack of the former, is apparently lost on the Syrian leadership. In their minds, Syria could never violate Lebanon’s independence, Syrian and Lebanese independence is to them one and the same. However, this should not be interpreted as proof that the Asad regime in reality has aimed to create a ‘Greater Syria’ in likeness to the Nazi ‘Gross-Deutschland’. According to Ba’thist ideology, Lebanon and Syria are parts of the same *region* in the greater Arab nation, not a nation distinct from the rest of the Arab world.

¹⁰⁶ Both Syria and Lebanon were promised independence in 1941 by the Free French Government under de Gaulle, albeit with certain limitations on their sovereignty. The Allied powers were in the midst of the war against Nazi-Germany and the Syrian and Lebanese governments were expected to cooperate fully in this conflict and help bring about the fall of the Vichy administration in the Levant. For a classical work on the Syrian and Lebanese road to independence, see Hourani, Albert, *Syria and Lebanon : A Political Essay*, 1946, p 279

¹⁰⁷ al-Thawra, July 9, 1981 (translation Georgina Aramouny)

The origin of images

Having determined what the perception of the situation was among the Syrian leadership, we go to step two. From where were these images derived? The regional situation helps explain some of the conclusions reached by the Syrians in the mid-1970s. The Egyptian President Sadat, Asad's ally from the October 1973 war, was by 1975 in the midst of a second round of disengagement talks with Israel; these talks would lead to the Sinai II agreement in September 1975. Kissinger's "step-by-step diplomacy", the strategy of holding bilateral talks between Israel and one Arab state at the time was effectively ripping apart whatever Arab unity there had been to begin with. It is evident that Asad felt betrayed by Sadat. He also felt that the plight of the Palestinians now was on his shoulders alone. Iraq, with its rival Ba'th regime, was hostile towards Syria and Saudi Arabia was an uncertain card after the death of King Faisal.

In brief, Syria was alone with only Lebanon and Jordan at its flanks. As for these two countries, Asad viewed them as vulnerable to Israeli power and manipulation. In military terms, Asad feared "a left hook through Lebanon or a right hook through Jordan." Of course, the threat was not only military: "Israel might turn its flank politically by gaining a preponderant influence over either of these neighbors, or it might entrap him [Asad] by escalating its conflict with the Palestinians. What was at stake in the confrontation with Israel was not just Syria's security, although that peril was real enough, but also its nationalist reputation, its regional stature."¹⁰⁸ The belief among Syrian policymakers that Israel in one way or another was involved in destabilizing Lebanon was most probably derived from this analysis of the situation. To be sure, the notion of Israeli attempts to destabilize Lebanon was not fabricated in the minds of the

¹⁰⁸ Seale, 1988, p 268

Syrian policymakers. Ever since the Palestinian guerrillas started operating from Lebanese soil after the 1967 war Israel had retaliated in ways that went beyond mere punishment or deterrence of Palestinian operations. Israel would hit Lebanon in response to Palestinian operations regardless of the culpability of the Lebanese state. There can be no doubt that the Israelis were aware of the weakness of the Lebanese army and the problems the Lebanese state was wrestling with at the time. Between 1968 and 1975 there were over forty major Israeli attacks on Lebanon.¹⁰⁹ The Syrian intervention in Lebanon was carried out against the wishes of the majority of the Syrian people and it was approved by the US and Israel. Why would Syria undertake such an unpopular adventure with the support of only its traditional enemies?

It is true; the strategic threat to Syria posed by a divided Lebanon was a major concern in the decision-making process. However, the Syrian determination to preserve the unity of Lebanon suggests that there is more to it than military-strategic considerations. Asad was a true believer in the illegitimacy of Israel and the necessity of preserving Arab unity. If a problem should arise within the Arab nation, Asad believed it should be dealt with internally. His conviction that Israel was fueling the conflict in Lebanon and his annoyance with this “interference” can be identified in several statements. “[T]he problem in Lebanon concerns the Arab nation, so it is in consequence an internal Arab problem. Israel on the other hand – even if we accept that it is a state with an ancient history in the area, which is an incredible assumption – has no right to interfere in the internal affairs of the Arab nation... The Arabs form one nation, and Israel is alien to it and has no business at all with what goes on in this nation. This is axiomatic and hardly stands in need of argument.”¹¹⁰ The

¹⁰⁹ Seale, 1988, pp 273-275

¹¹⁰ Asad quoted in Dawisha, 1980, p 110

constant tipping of the scale to keep the balance between the warring factions until the situation demanded open intervention by regular Syrian army units shows a deeply held belief that there must be no defeated Arab party, not a even a defeated right wing.

V. THE TA'IF AGREEMENT AND ITS AFTERMATH

This chapter will discuss the Ta'if Agreement, which ended the Lebanese civil war and reasserted Syria's dominance in Lebanon after a period of reduced Syrian influence. It will also discuss the series of bilateral agreements that were signed between Lebanon and Syria in the early 1990s. Here, I attempt to answer two main questions: What were the consequences of the Ta'if Agreement for the relationship between Syria and Lebanon? How is Ba'thist ideology reflected in the post-war relations between the two countries? While chapter IV was an account for how the Syrian intervention was brought about by Ba'thist ideology, this chapter attempts to identify Ba'thist ideology in Syrian policy in post-war Lebanon.

In this discussion I will address the arguments of several mainstream scholars claiming that Syria is in fact in the process of colonizing or annexing Lebanon. My intention is to show that Syria's policies are indeed guided by the same principles that brought about the intervention in 1976, i.e. the fundamental belief in the Arab nation and Arab unity. I start with outlining the important features of the Ta'if agreement, followed by an account for the course of events that led to the near complete Syrian occupation of Lebanon. Against this background the bilateral agreements, which can be seen as continuations of the policy laid out in the Ta'if Agreement, are discussed. Finally, I analyze the Syrian policies using the findings in chapter IV regarding the Syrian perceptions of Lebanon.

The Document of National Understanding

A new Constitution for the Lebanese Republic

The agreement that officially ended the Lebanese civil war was signed in Ta'if (Saudi Arabia) in the fall of 1989 by 58 of the 62 surviving members of the Lebanese parliament of 1972 under Arab league auspices.¹¹¹ The Syrian intervention in 1976 had been followed by two Israeli invasions (1978 and 1982) and numerous wars between the sectarian militias in Lebanon. In other words, Syria's commitment to Lebanon had become a longer and more painful undertaking than expected by the Syrian leadership. The Israeli invasion of 1982, reluctantly supported by the US,¹¹² had severely reduced the Syrian influence in Lebanon and the Syrian army seemed incapable of once and for all stabilize the situation between the militias that ruled throughout the second half of the 1980s.¹¹³

To be sure, the signing of the agreement did not end the fighting over night. It took the determination of the Arab world, i.e. the former sponsors of the warring parties, and the ousting of the leader of a military cabinet to implement the Ta'if Agreement. Thus the Lebanese civil war in reality ended with a final act of war, not a peace agreement. The Document of National Understanding, or the Ta'if Agreement as it is more frequently called, put in writing what the National Pact of 1943 only said in words regarding the confessional system the Lebanese republic was governed by.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Norton, Richard A., "Lebanon after Ta'if: Is the Civil War Over?", *Middle East Journal*, summer 1991, p 461

¹¹² Hårdig, Carl Anders, 2000, "The Politics of Identity: US-Israeli Relations 1982-1984", Unpublished research paper, American University of Beirut

¹¹³ Norton, 1991, pp 457-461

¹¹⁴ The National Pact of 1943, a gentlemen's agreement between the Christian leader Bechara al-Khoury and the Sunni leader Riad al-Solh, set forth the formula upon which Lebanese politics would be based for decades to come. It was here the governmental positions were distributed among the different religious communities, the

It contains parts that had been included in agreements drafted by Syria in previous failed attempts to end the fighting.¹¹⁵ So it happened that despite the fact that the Syrians were not the party to forward the agreement, their spirit nevertheless penetrated it. More importantly, their interests and wishes were being met and this led to a quick adoption of the agreement by the Syrians.¹¹⁶ The bulk of the Ta'if Agreement regards the textual changes made in the Lebanese constitution.

Other parts regard ending the state of war, disbanding the various militias, and – the focus of this study – Lebanese-Syrian relations.¹¹⁷ When the Ta'if was negotiated, Israel was still occupying a part of southern Lebanon. Consequently, the agreement deals with the withdrawal of Israeli forces as well as Syrian forces.¹¹⁸ However, the Syrian forces were viewed as imperative in the implementation of the early stages of the Ta'if, i.e. the ending of the state of war and disarming of the militias, and therefore the agreement awards them special status. In the actual political system the most important change was the reduced power of the President. In the new constitution the President loses most

President had to be a Maronite Christian, the Prime minister Sunni Muslim, the Chairman of the Chamber of Deputies Shi'a etc. The National Pact affirmed the Arab identity of Lebanon, and assured that Lebanon would remain neutral, not giving any outside power a privileged position on its soil. For an extensive study of the National Pact of 1943, see el-Khazen, Farid, *The Communal Pact of National Identities: The Making and Politics of the 1943 National Pact*, 1991.

¹¹⁵ The previous agreements referred to are the Constitutional Document from 1976 discussed in chapter IV, and the Tripartite agreement from 1985 which was an agreement between the three main militias in wartime Lebanon and was signed by Elie Hubeiqā for the Lebanese Forces, Nabih Berri for the Shi'a Amal, and Walid Jumblat for the PSP. The Tripartite agreement collapsed when President Amin Gemayel, Samir Geagea (who in the process overthrew Elie Hubeiqā as leader for the LF) and other Christian leaders rejected it. See el-Khazen, 2001, p 44

¹¹⁶ Norton, 1991, p 461

¹¹⁷ A full English version of the Ta'if Agreement can be found in the Beirut Review, no 1, 1991 (translation Paul Salem)

¹¹⁸ As noted in the introduction, the Lebanese and Syrian governments claim Israel still occupies Lebanese territory since it retains control over the Sheba'a farms, which according to Israel and the UN is Syrian, not Lebanese, territory. Regardless of the validity of the Lebanese claim on the Sheba'a (historically most of the population in this area in fact did fall under the authority of Sidon, a Lebanese coastal city), this issue should simply be regarded a pretext for further actions by the Lebanese resistance, Hizballah. In this study I regard UN

of his executive powers and becomes “the head of state and the symbol of the nation’s unity. He shall safeguard the Constitution and Lebanon’s independence, unity and territorial integrity.”¹¹⁹ The President is after the Ta’if in effect part of a decision-making troika consisting of himself, the Prime Minister, and the Speaker of the House. In other words, the executive power is after the Ta’if theoretically equally divided among the Maronite Christian, Sunni Muslim, and Shi’a Muslim communities. The text in the agreement emphasizes the national unity and Arab character of Lebanon. For the Christians of Lebanon, the issue of Lebanon’s “Arabness” has always been a sensitive one.

Similar to how the National Pact of 1943 affirmed Lebanon’s “Arab face” rather than labeling it an Arab country, the Ta’if text constitutes a compromise so that the Christians would not have to feel that in order to identify themselves as Lebanese, they also have to identify themselves as Arabs. Accordingly, the agreement stresses the democratic and republican character of Lebanon, this to put Christian worries regarding the development of an Islamic state at ease. Furthermore, the notion of any kind of partition is rejected in order to guarantee the unity of the Lebanese state and nation.¹²⁰ The agreement calls for Syrian redeployment of troops to specific areas two years after the incorporation of the Ta’if provisions into the Lebanese constitution. Notably, the agreement does not provide a schedule for a complete withdrawal of Syrian forces; this issue was to be subject for further negotiations between the Lebanese and Syrian

resolution 425 (calling for Israeli withdrawal from Lebanese territory) as implemented and subsequently refer to Israeli occupation of Lebanon as ended.

¹¹⁹ Salem, Paul (translation), “The New Constitution of Lebanon and the Ta’if Agreement”, *The Beirut Review*, no 1, 1991, p 135

¹²⁰ Maïla, Joseph, *The Document of National Understanding: A Commentary*, 1992, p 6

governments. When the scheduled time for Syrian redeployment of troops came in the fall of 1992, the troops remained in place.¹²¹

General Aoun and the “War of Liberation”: The Ta’if is implemented

The Ta’if emerged against the background of Syria trying to impose a President on Lebanon when President Amin Gemayel’s term was up in 1988.¹²² With the Lebanese Forces (LF)¹²³ refusing to accept the Syrian candidates, President Gemayel resorted to appointing Maronite General Michel Aoun Prime Minister. This was of course a severe breach of Lebanese political tradition and caused a deadlock between the religious communities. Furthermore, the appointment of Aoun led to the existence of two rival governments; one under the General’s leadership, and one under Prime Minister Salim al-Hoss, who had taken office in 1987 when Prime Minister Rashid Karame was assassinated.

In March 1989, General Aoun and the LF launched a “war of liberation” against Syria and when the Ta’if agreement was signed in the fall, Aoun refused to implement it. At this time, Syria had regained much of the influence lost in the Israeli invasion of 1982, and was once again viewed by the United States as a stabilizing influence on Lebanese Affairs.¹²⁴ The events in Lebanon correlates with the time of the Iraq-Kuwait crisis and Syria had taken an (not surprisingly) anti-Iraq stance, thus acquiring western understanding of the need for Syrian presence in Lebanon.

¹²¹ el-Khazen, 2001, p 45

¹²² Norton, 1991, p 458

¹²³ The Lebanese Forces was the Christian militia developed by the late Bashir Gemayel, brother of the President and himself President-elect at the time of his assassination in 1982. The LF originally developed as the military wing of the Kataeb (Phalange) party, but a separate political wing of the LF was later created and the separation from the Kataeb was a fact. The LF was one of the most powerful and richest militias in Lebanon during the 1980s. For more on the various militias in Lebanon during the war, see Harris, William W., *Faces of Lebanon: Sects, Wars, and Global Extensions*, 1997

¹²⁴ Harris, 1997, p 203

Syria even received financial support from the West and its allies: “as a reward for joining the coalition against Iraq, Damascus received \$700 million in credits from the Europeans and the Japanese and over \$2 billion in cash or pledges from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states.”¹²⁵ The situation was further complicated for those in the West sympathizing with the Christians of Lebanon by Aoun receiving weapons from Iraq during the early days of his campaign against Syria. Thus the normally West-oriented Maronite community was facing a predicament. Aoun’s policies, though widely popular among the public, were leading them toward isolation and certain defeat.

After years of militia ruling the Lebanese public responded well, at least initially, to the “romantic, secular nationalism” of General Aoun. “Whereas the popular mood inside Lebanon favored a revolution against militias and foreign occupations, American policy favored ‘stabilization’ in the Eastern Mediterranean, which for Lebanon meant a new central regime incorporating the militias and under a Syrian security umbrella.”¹²⁶ In other words, the West acquiesced in the Syrian takeover of Lebanon that the Ta’if prescribed. In the beginning of 1990, the union between the LF and Aoun’s Lebanese Army collapsed and violence broke out between the two.¹²⁷ Finally, in the fall of 1990, the Syrians and their Lebanese allies, backed by the international legitimacy of the Ta’if Agreement drove Aoun out from the presidential palace in Ba’abda into exile in France.¹²⁸ In December 1990, a “government of national reconciliation” was formed. This government was, of course, the

¹²⁵ Sadowski, Yahya, *Scuds or Butter ? The Political Economy of the Arms Control in the Middle East*, 1993, p 33

¹²⁶ Harris, 1997, pp 208-209

¹²⁷ Avi-Ran, Reuven, *The Syrian Involvement in Lebanon since 1975*, 1991, pp 218-219

¹²⁸ Avi-Ran, 1991, pp 221-223

product of the Syrians. When the Lebanese civil war ended, there was no doubt that Syria dominated the scene.¹²⁹

Post-Ta'if Lebanon: The Brotherly Peace

The Treaty of Brotherhood

In May 1991 the “Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation, and Coordination between the Lebanese Republic and the Syrian Arab Republic” was signed in Damascus. The treaty established a formal structure for setting and implementing coordinated policies on the military, political, internal security, and economic levels between Syria and Lebanon. The date chosen by the Syrians to sign the treaty, May 22, 1991, has been interpreted by critics of the Syrian role in Lebanon as a message of significant symbolism; it was the first anniversary of the reunification of the two Yemens.¹³⁰ The pact stipulates that Lebanon conduct all policies in harmony with Syria, in return, Syria will respect Lebanon’s liberal political system and capitalist economy. The language of the treaty is highly influenced by Ba’thist terminology, emphasizing the “distinctive brotherly ties” between the two countries.¹³¹ An interesting feature in the treaty’s third article, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of the Syrian and Lebanese security, is that Syria commits itself to “not allow any action that threatens Lebanon’s security, independence and sovereignty”.¹³² In effect, Syria was given the right to act on anything perceived by the *Syrian*

¹²⁹ Norton, 1991, pp 467-468. A telling example of the Syrian political dominance in Lebanon in the early 1990s is the fact that Asad, not the Lebanese President, was the one to negotiate with Iran regarding the continued presence of Hizballah in south Lebanon. “Syria and Iran Agree Militias Can Remain in Parts of Lebanon”, *The New York Times*, April 30, 1991

¹³⁰ Nasrallah, Fida, “The Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination: An Assessment” in Choueiri, Youssef M. (ed), *State and Society in Syria and Lebanon*, 1993, pp 103-108. For the full text of the treaty in Arabic, see *al-Nahar*, May 23, 1991.

¹³¹ Rabil, Robert G., “The Maronites and Syrian Withdrawal: From ‘Isolationists’ to ‘Traitors’?”, *Middle East Policy*, September 2001, p 28

¹³² Rabil, 2001, p 28

government as a threat to the *Lebanese* sovereignty. In other words, a formal request from the Lebanese government for assistance was no longer necessary. Furthermore, the treaty establishes joint councils in which the decision-makers of the two countries coordinate their actions. The most important of them is the Supreme Council, which consists of the two Presidents, Prime Ministers, deputy Prime Ministers, and Speakers of the House, and is vested with executive powers. However, the Lebanese members of the council have no decision-making status, neither singly nor collectively, providing Syria with unprecedented influence over the decision-making process in Lebanon.¹³³

The Defense and Security Agreement

In August 1991, the Defense and Security Agreement between Syria and Lebanon was signed.¹³⁴ This was the first of a series of “special agreements” to follow the Treaty of Brotherhood. It stipulates that the two countries should prevent any activity in the political, military, or civil realms that might harm either country.¹³⁵ Of course, the “civil realm” includes the media, which historically has enjoyed a substantial amount of freedom in Lebanon.¹³⁶ A free press was, and still is, a rare occurrence in the Arab world and the fear among critics of Syria was that Lebanon’s media now would be silenced. The treaty assures the Syrian intelligence network full access to its Lebanese counterpart’s resources; data as well as personnel. According to several human rights organizations, the Syrian influence in Lebanese civil society has led to repeated violations of human rights. Since 1991, opponents of Syrian control in Lebanon

¹³³ Nasrallah, 1993, pp 108-109

¹³⁴ For the full text of the treaty in Arabic, see *al-Nahar*, September 7, 1991

¹³⁵ Malik, 1997, p 34

¹³⁶ Historically, Beirut had been a security nuisance for Syria, most of the successful and non-successful coups in Damascus had been planned in Beirut. The liberal social and political life in Lebanon constituted an excellent platform for conspirators against the Syrian regime d’jour. Haddad, Simon, *The Christians of Lebanon in the Context of Syrian-Israeli Relations*, The Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies, fall 2001, p 591

have been arrested and numerous newspapers have been shut down.¹³⁷ During 1994 the Lebanese government suspended all television news broadcasts between March and July, following the bombing of a Maronite Church in Beirut.¹³⁸ Reports of arbitrary imprisonment and torture of Syria's critics certainly intimidated Lebanese media, and in the name of stability and security, Lebanese civil society was severely restrained.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, Lebanon continues to have a relatively free media, at least in comparison to other states in the region. The restraints on free speech and, perhaps to an even greater extent, free assembly are substantial, but the constant Syrian fear of upsetting the fragile communal unity seems to prevent Syria from taking full-out measures to control the Lebanese media.

Facilitating the movement of Syrian goods and workers into Lebanon

There is no doubt that the Lebanese market has been overflowed by Syrian goods and workers throughout the post-war years, and that this state of affairs highly favors Syria. Because of the removal of restrictions on overland travel and the lowering of the duties on goods crossing from Syria to Lebanon through the Border Agreement of 1991, the influx of cheap Syrian products flooded the Lebanese market throughout the 1990s.¹⁴⁰ This forced many Lebanese farmers and merchants out of business, subsequently causing a rise in Lebanese unemployment.¹⁴¹ Simultaneously, Lebanon was flooded with cheap Syrian labor.¹⁴² As put by one of the most critical voices of the Syrian presence in

¹³⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 1993. See also the annual reports by the Foundation of Human and Humanitarian Rights, in particular 1992, 1993, and 1994.

¹³⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 1994

¹³⁹ See, for instance, Amnesty International Annual Report, 1997

¹⁴⁰ For the full text of the Border Agreement in Arabic, see *al-Hayat*, October 8, 1991

¹⁴¹ Throughout the 1990s, the Lebanese economy has suffered from numerous crises. The seemingly never-ending instability, highlighted by Israeli attacks such as the 1996 "Operation Grapes of Wrath", deters large scale foreign investment and keeps tourism at a low rate, at least from the West. For more on the restructuring of the Lebanese economy, see Perthes, Volker, "Myths and Money: Four Years of Hariri and Lebanon's Preparation for a New Middle East", *Middle East Report*, spring 1997

¹⁴² Malik, 1997, p 35

Lebanon: “Lebanon has become an oasis of opportunity for the unemployed in Syria”.¹⁴³ The Labor Agreement signed in October 1994, was paramount for the Syrians to facilitate the entrance of Syrian labor into Lebanon.¹⁴⁴ Although the border between Syria and Lebanon historically always has been porous, the various agreements signed between the two countries during the 1990s have led to an unprecedented level of Syrian-Lebanese integration.

Syria and Lebanon today: ‘Greater Syria’ materialized?

Syrian predominance institutionalized?

The reasons for the Syrian policy of ensuring influence in the Lebanese decision-making process are, of course, manifold. It is my contention, however, that the underlying reason can be traced back to the same “cognition of partition” that guided the Syrian policies in 1976. When using a cognitive approach to analyze the post-war relationship between Syria and Lebanon, the Ta’if Agreement, the Treaty of Brotherhood and Cooperation, and the subsequent series of bilateral agreements must be seen against the background of the previous Syrian experiences in Lebanon. The memory of President Amin Gemayel’s attempt to sign a separate peace treaty with Israel in 1983, known as the “May 17 Agreement”, was still fresh in Asad’s mind.¹⁴⁵ This agreement would have assured an Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon, but only after a Syrian withdrawal. The strategic advantages of the agreement would have

¹⁴³ Rabil, 2001, p 29

¹⁴⁴ For the full text of the treaty in Arabic, see *al-Nahar*, October 14, 1994

¹⁴⁵ The May 17 Agreement was signed after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, in which the PLO was expelled from Beirut and the Syrians were forced to withdraw from large parts of Lebanese territory, thus reducing their influence significantly. It was negotiated under the sponsorship of the US during the deployment of US Marines in Beirut. The American diplomats had neglected to include Syria in the negotiations and Syria found the May 17 Agreement unacceptable on the grounds that no considerations were taken to the security requirements of Syria. However, it appears that the Syrian reservations had more to do with the fact that Syria was not acknowledged as having “special relations” with Lebanon, but was treated as any other foreign power. Korbani, Agnes G., *U.S. Intervention in Lebanon, 1958 and 1982*, 1991, p 73

been significant, at least in one aspect of Syrian security. After an Israeli withdrawal, the mountains of southern Lebanon would once again form a natural defense line and the risk of an Israeli offensive through the Beqa'a valley would be severely reduced. Despite this, the Syrian leadership could not accept an agreement that called for the Syrians to withdraw before the Israelis. Thus foreign minister Khaddam replied when asked if Syria intended to withdraw, "I am prepared to give all of you a guarantee that we shall withdraw, if the Israelis withdraw first".¹⁴⁶ Again, the main Syrian objective was to keep the Christians of Lebanon Arab and prevent any future partition of Lebanon. This focus on the prevention of partition of Lebanon is prominent throughout both the Ta'if and the Treaty of Brotherhood, suggesting that this continues to be a main concern for the Syrian leadership.

It is striking that in the Syrian leadership, many of the prominent figures from 1976 still remained in influential positions in 1989-1990. Hafez al-Asad was the undisputed President, keeping a firm grip on power. Abdul-Halim Khaddam, foreign minister in 1976, was Vice-President and veterans like Mustafa Tlas, Asad's friend since his days in the Military Academy, and General Shihabi were still part of the decision-making elite. It is important to bear in mind that these were men who believed in slow change. They opposed the Syrian merge with Egypt to form the UAR in the late 1950s, not because they opposed the notion in principle, but because they believed the time was not ripe. Their policies since 1970 must be seen with this realization in mind.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Khaddam quoted in Dawisha, Adeed I., "The Motives of Syria's Involvement in Lebanon", *Middle East Journal*, spring 1984, p 230

¹⁴⁷ Dr. Yahya Sadowski, a well known authority on Syrian politics stressed the long-term aspirations of Asad and his followers in discussions with the author during May 2002. Dr. Sadowski is the author of numerous books and articles on the politics and economics of the Middle East. Currently Dr. Sadowski is an associate professor in the Department of Political Studies and Public Administration at the American University of Beirut. With experience from UCLA, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, University of

In other words, if the increased integration between Syria and Lebanon is seen in a long-term perspective, there is no reason to conclude that the final goal for Asad and his colleagues has ever been the creation of a Greater Syria. The Ta'if agreement does not call for a permanent Syrian colonization of Lebanon, nor does it specify when Syrian forces should be completely withdrawn from Lebanese territory. The original schedule for the Syrian redeployment of troops has, however, been changed time and time again. It is clear that “the Ta'if agreement was and is still being implemented within a different balance of internal forces as well as a different balance of regional, Arab forces, than originally intended.”¹⁴⁸ To some observers, this is an indication that Syria is in the process of annexing Lebanon.

The series of bilateral agreements in the beginning of the 1990s have fueled these concerns among those observers critical of the Syrian role in Lebanon. Habib Malik sees the bilateral agreements as “steps toward creeping annexation or absorption by stealth.”¹⁴⁹ He is not alone in his views, as Robert Rabil argues, Lebanon is referred to for the first time as a *Qutr* (province or region) in a meeting in September 1993, when the Social and Economic Agreement was signed.¹⁵⁰ He interprets this as a sign that the Syrian government perceives Lebanon as a province in ‘Greater Syria’. However, the use of this word is commonplace in Ba’thist terminology when discussing Arab states. At closer examination, the habit of referring to non-Syrian territory as part of the greater Arab nation extends to other Arab territory as well, not just Lebanon. Thus Asad, when asked about a possible separate peace with Israel, strongly rejects

California in Berkeley, and the Brookings Institute in Washington DC, Dr. Sadowski can be considered a well established expert in his field.

¹⁴⁸ Krayem, Hassan in Salem, Paul (ed), *Conflict Resolution in the Arab World : Selected Essays*, 1995, p 426

¹⁴⁹ Malik, Habib C., *Between Damascus and Jerusalem: Lebanon and the Middle East Peace*, 1997, p 26

¹⁵⁰ Rabil, 2001, p 29

the idea of anything but a comprehensive peace, “for how can I distinguish between or think Lebanese territory is better than Palestinian territory, or that Palestinian territory is better than Syrian territory? All Arab territory is entangled. There is no preference here.”¹⁵¹ According to Ba’thist ideology, there are no Arab *states*, only Arab *regions* in the greater Arab nation. Subsequently, the Syrians referring to Lebanon as a province or a region should not be interpreted as proof that Syria indeed regards Lebanon as annexed into Syria, thereby finally realizing a main goal set out in 1976. Rather, the Syrian goal throughout the time period of analysis in the present study has been to ensure and preserve Lebanon’s Arabism. Syria intervened in 1976 to prevent partition and preserve Arab unity in the face of the enemy. In the Ta’if Agreement and the series of agreements signed in the early 1990s, the same concern for Lebanon’s Arab identity can be identified.

Granted, the Syrian intervention did ultimately lead to substantial economic gains for certain elites in the Syrian and Lebanese societies. This complicates and delays the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon, but should not be seen as the main force behind the actions and policies of the Syrian government. Rather, it can be seen as an indication that adding to the ideology of pan-Arabism of the Ba’th party, there are further factors that complicate the relationship between the two countries. Yahya Sadowski argues that the financial elite in Lebanon has merged with its counterpart in Syria, both profiting from the current situation.¹⁵² Subsequently, there are many who stand to gain from a continued Syrian presence in Lebanon, in particular since Lebanon’s economy is based on liberal *laissez-faire* principles while Syria’s is

¹⁵¹ Asad interviewed on PLO-Israeli Accord in Damascus Syrian Arab Television Network, October 2, 1993. Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report: Near East and South Asia*, October 4, 1993, pp 46-50

¹⁵² Yahya Sadowski in discussions with the author.

based on a socialist model.¹⁵³ To be sure, the military and strategic importance of Lebanon for Syria is a reality largely *because* of the Syrian notion of “special relations” between the two countries and the image the Syrian decision-makers had of a plot directed at the Arab nation. Had Syria viewed Lebanon as a foreign country like all others, the Syrian leadership most probably would have ended up with a completely different analysis of the situation. But in the eyes of Hafez al-Asad and his fellow decision-makers, Lebanon and Syria were parts of the same province in the Arab nation and subsequently, the disintegration of Lebanese unity had to be prevented.

The tendencies of the “new” Asad regime

When Hafez al-Asad died in the summer of 2000, the rise to power of his son, Bashar, was viewed with both suspicion and anticipation by the observers of Syrian foreign policy. When Bashar was inaugurated, Syria had around 35 000 troops in Lebanon and the Syrian economy was experiencing significant problems.¹⁵⁴ Despite the fact that Bashar al-Asad appears to be moving towards partial liberalization of the Syrian society, the Ba’th party still holds the power in a firm grip.

¹⁵³ The economic developments in Syria and Lebanon took separate paths from the early days of independence. During the period between 1920 and the mid-1940s, Syria and Lebanon had maintained a common currency and a common tariff. The Lebanese economy was, however, based on the same principles that had been guiding the economy of Mount Lebanon since the 1860s, its policies being characterized by *laissez-faire* and low taxes. The Lebanese economy after independence remained highly influenced by France, a predominance institutionalized in the Franco-Lebanese Monetary Agreement of 1948, which regulated Lebanon’s place within the Franc zone, providing the country with only partial access to Lebanese foreign currency reserves held in Paris. The agreement gave Lebanon the ability to set up its own currency, independent from the Syrian pound, which had prevailed during the French mandate, and the Lebanese Lira (LL) was established through the passing of a monetary law in 1949. The decision of the Lebanese government to take a stand independent of the Syrian government disappointed the Syrians and their supporters in Lebanon, who had hoped for a unified Lebanese-Syrian stand against the French. In contrast to Lebanon, Syria developed its economy according to a socialist model and mainly traded with other Arab countries. The rapidly deteriorating economic relations between the two countries culminated in the breakup of the Lebanese-Syrian Customs Union in 1950, followed by an almost total Syrian economic blockade of Lebanon. Owen, Roger in Barakat, Halim (ed), *Toward a Viable Lebanon*, 1988, pp 28-31

¹⁵⁴ Banerji, Robin, “After Asad”, *The Guardian*, June 15, 2000

In fact, the personalized rule of Asad the elder had reduced the party's influence and his death appears to have reallocated power back into the hands of the party leaders, who tend to hold conservative views similar to Hafez al-Asad himself. Ironically, Asad the elder's policies are being kept alive by the elite whose power he himself restricted while being President. One sign of this is that attempts by Bashar to open up the Syrian society have met strong opposition among the older members of the political elite, leading to a "two steps forward – one step back" strategy, very often resulting in uncommitted liberalization policies. For example, in the fall of 2001 Bashar al-Asad signed a press law, authorizing non-government controlled newspapers. However, the restrictions are plentiful and the executive, judiciary, and legislative branches are, according to the law, automatically "above criticism".

Moreover, fines and punishments are severe when an individual is found guilty of breaking the restrictions, the prison terms can go up to three years and the fines up to \$40 000. In other words, Syria's new "liberal" press law is only liberal in comparison to the previous press law which was a quote from one of Hafez al-Asad's speeches: "There is no regulation over printed material except regulation of the conscience – the Ba'th conscience."¹⁵⁵ The same model seems to be applied to other media as well; the approval of private radio broadcasts was accompanied with a ban on news and political content.¹⁵⁶ Simultaneously, the Ba'thist leadership tightens its grip on the opposition, re-arresting political prisoners recently released.¹⁵⁷ A slightly odd result from these seemingly ambivalent policies is that political trials, which used to be held behind closed

¹⁵⁵ Moubayed, Sami, "Syria Heralds Entrance of a Freer Press", *The Daily Star*, September 24, 2001

¹⁵⁶ BBC News, "Syria to Allow Privat Radio Broadcasts", January 30, 2002

¹⁵⁷ See "Amnesty Urges Syria to Free Dissidents", *The Daily Star*, September 5, 2001. See also "3 More Arrested as Damascus Widens Crackdown on Opposition", and Hamza, Issam, "Syria Says Door Still Open For Opposition", *The Daily Star*, September 10, 2001

doors, can now be open for the public. Paradoxically, the Syrian government is applying democratic transparency on highly undemocratic practices.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, reports from human rights groups claiming that reporters are arrested without warrants continue to surface in the West, causing observers of the Syrian political scene to doubt the sincerity of the liberalization attempts of the new Asad regime.¹⁵⁹ Arrests on political grounds are not limited to Syrian territory, Amnesty International claims hundreds were arrested in Lebanon throughout 2001 solely on the grounds of opposing Syrian presence in Lebanon.¹⁶⁰ When the Syrian government resigned in December 2001 following a decree from President Asad and a “new” government was to be created,¹⁶¹ Vice-President Khaddam chaired a six-member committee that evaluated the candidates for the new government.¹⁶²

In other words, the spirit of Hafez al-Asad lingers on in contemporary Syria in the form of his old associates retaining influence on the highest level. On the other hand, the fact that almost all the ministers holding posts regarding economic policy were replaced, and the appointment of Ghassan al-Rifai, a World Bank veteran, as Minister of Economy and Foreign Trade in 2002 may be seen as signs of yet another attempt by Bashar al-Asad to modernize and open up the closed Syrian economy.¹⁶³ Nevertheless, the fact that power still lay in the hands of those in the political elite who hold views and beliefs similar to Hafez al-Asad, indicates that a change in Syrian foreign policy will only come

¹⁵⁸ Sobelman, Daniel, ”Repressive Syria Faces Wave of Political Trials”, *Ha’aretz*, June 19, 2002. See also BBC News, “Syrian Political Trial Begins”, October 30, 2001

¹⁵⁹ See for instance, BBC News, ”Journalists Arrested in Syria”, May 21, 2002

¹⁶⁰ Amnesty International Annual Report, 2002

¹⁶¹ The entire government was not changed, mainly ministers holding posts with responsibility for economic issues were replaced. Nevertheless, the majority - 18 out of 30 ministers - were replaced.

¹⁶² The Syria Report, December 14, 2001. See also Arabic News, December 5, 2001

¹⁶³ World Bank Pressrelease, January 28, 2002

about very slowly.¹⁶⁴ This is not to say that Bashar himself does not adhere to the same ideology as his father. Indeed, his faith in pan-Arabism and the teachings of Ba’th ideology is reflected in his inauguration speech where he expressed his concern for Arab unity in the wake of the Gulf War: “The state of the Arab nation and the weak ties among Arab countries prevailing during the last few decades and especially during the 1990s is no secret.” Bashar vowed to continue the struggle for the Arab nation and the goals his father had fought for, stressing the necessity of building stronger ties between the Arab states: “Initiatives necessary to revive Arab unity should be based on national dignity and Arab values and ethics...Syria, will stay as always, supportive of any step towards solidarity serving the interests of the Arab nation.”¹⁶⁵

As for the May 17 Agreement, it evidently still haunts the present Syrian leadership; Vice-President Khaddam bitterly refers to the agreement as “a slap in the face” of the Syrian, and subsequently of the entire Arab, nation. Regarding the current situation in the occupied territories, Khaddam calls for Arab unity: “What is happening in Palestine is not against the Palestinians alone but all Arabs. Arabs should unite in support of the Intifada to be able to face the Zionists.”¹⁶⁶ Statements like these indicate that little has changed since the days of Hafez al-Asad. Regarding the Syrian policies toward Lebanon there is no indication that the self-proclaimed role as the “protector of Lebanon’s sovereignty” will change. The redeployments of Syrian troops from the Beirut area during 2001 was more likely the result of mounting pressure from anti-Syrian groups inside Lebanon, than an indication of a change in Syrian policy;

¹⁶⁴ It has been suggested that the recent restructuring of the Syrian government has simply been an attempt to purge those ministers not loyal to the Asad family. See for instance, Gambill, Gary C., “Bashar Reshuffles Syrian Government”, *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, vo 2, no 3, March 2000

¹⁶⁵ Bashar al-Asad’s inauguration speech, July 17, 2000 (translation Georgina ‘Aramouny)

¹⁶⁶ Khaddam quoted in Ibrahim, Alia, “Jumblatt Still Backs Syria”, *The Daily Star*, May 22, 2002

the total number of troops throughout the country did not change.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, for those who venture outside the Beirut city limits, the Syrian presence is no less obvious than before. The internal stability of Lebanon remains of utmost importance to Syria; it is only by keeping the internal balance that they are capable of retaining the high level of influence that Hafez al-Asad's policies have produced. Lebanon is kept closely tied to Syria in all areas of importance and is prohibited – should the Lebanese government ever wish it – to hold bilateral negotiations with Israel. As put by Farid el-Khazen, “Lebanon does not have an authoritarian regime, but nor does it have a regime that functions as a democracy.”¹⁶⁸ It is more likely that the Syrian aim is to maintain control of a “free”, parliamentary Lebanon, than that the Syrian policies aim at incorporating Lebanon into Syria proper.

For one thing, the market economy of Lebanon is highly beneficial for certain Syrian economic interests, Lebanon is in a sense Syria's Hong Kong, a place where financial elites can benefit from a capitalist economy but still maintain the socialist political system. However, this is not likely to be the focus of the Syrian leadership's discussions regarding its Lebanon policies, since the main beneficiaries are individuals in the economic elite. In this context, the strategic importance of Lebanon is more likely to be central. To keep Lebanon in conflict with Israel is crucial for Syria at a time when “moderate” Arab governments are less likely to adopt extreme policies against the Jewish state. Hence the willingness to let Hizballah stay armed even after Israel have withdrawn from the self-proclaimed security belt in southern Lebanon.¹⁶⁹ Arab unity is in reality

¹⁶⁷ BBC News, “Syria Begins Lebanon Pull-Back”, June 14, 2001.

¹⁶⁸ El-Khazen, Farid, “The Making and Unmaking of Lebanon's Political Elites from Independence to Ta'if”, *The Beirut Review*, fall 1993, p 61

¹⁶⁹ According to some observers, the Clinton administration convinced the Syrian leadership of the need for political stability in Lebanon at the time for the Israeli withdrawal in the spring of 2000, and pledged to keep the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations alive. This could account for the relative restraint shown by Hizballah since

nearly non-existent, the Syrian leadership is very well aware of this and is determined to not let Lebanon leave its side. The Syrian message seems to be that Syria and Lebanon are brothers in arms, Christian and Muslim Arabs alike, in the face of the Zionist enemy, and if Arab unity deteriorates further, it will not be along a fault line across the Beqa'a valley. This has been the overarching goal of Syrian policy toward Lebanon for over 25 years and it continues to guide Syrian policy in the post-Hafez al-Asad world.

the withdrawal of Israeli forces. However, the Hizballah actions in the Sheba'a Farms would not have taken place without Syrian approval. The Hizballah is in other words still a tool the Syrian leadership can use to put pressure on Tel Aviv. Gerges, Fawaz A., "Israel's Retreat From Southern Lebanon: Internal and External Implications", *Middle East Policy*, March 2001

VI. CONCLUSIONS

In the introduction I stated that the purpose of this study is to examine the reasons for Syrian intervention, and continued presence, in Lebanon. In doing this, I have turned against certain features in what I have termed mainstream explanations for Syrian policy toward Lebanon. This chapter will reiterate the central findings of this study.

The Intervention of 1976

It has been argued that the Syrian intervention proved that Asad conducted his foreign policy on the basis of pragmatic considerations and not ideological beliefs. To make such an argument, however, is to underestimate the power of the cognitive processes at work in decision-making. It is fully in line with Ba'athist ideology to intervene on the side of the Christians when the image of a foreign conspiracy is included in the analysis. It may be the pragmatic course of action, but no less based in the fundamental ideology of the Ba'ath party. Underlying all these images held by Syrian decision-makers is the perception of the Arab nation and the historical indivisibility of Lebanon and Syria as parts of the same province in that nation. This perception has always constituted a fundamental value in Syrian policy towards Lebanon. Demonstrating an attitude of fraternity, Syria has never felt the need to open an embassy in Lebanon and Syrians and Lebanese can travel freely across the border between the two countries. This is in my opinion not to be interpreted as an expression for a Syrian plan to formally annex or colonize Lebanon, rather it should be viewed as an expression for the belief that Syrian and Lebanon are part of the same province in the greater Arab nation. In Asad's view, the Syrians and the Lebanese constituted one people – together with all Arabs. In addition to Asad's deeply held belief that the Arabs should stand together, the concept of Arab

unity held a more fundamental importance in Syria; the Ba’thist regime derived its entire legitimacy from the notion of Arab unity as the highest held virtue of all. For Syria, to allow the social disintegration of Lebanon would be the same as giving up the values that formed the very foundation for Asad’s regime. Of course, there was always the risk of sectarian differences spilling over into the Syrian society. In other words, Asad did not want to risk that the “social virus” spread from Lebanon to the Syrian society, in particular not since his own government, though officially secular, could be considered a minority regime. Hafez al-Asad was by all accounts an extremely cautious and calculating man and he was known to be a highly pragmatic statesman. Having said that, Ba’thist ideology nevertheless did hold a true meaning to him; he was a firm believer in the notion of Arab unity and the inherent illegitimacy of the State of Israel.

In light of Jervis’ cognitive approach, it is not surprising that a man like Asad early on would come to the conclusion that foreign forces were working to destroy the unity of Lebanon and, in the extension, the unity of the Palestinian resistance as well as the entire Arab world. What could be seen as rather surprising is that Asad held on to this view so persistently, should not a pragmatic and intelligent leader like Asad be able to recognize the American/Israeli interest in avoiding a leftist/PLO victory? Using a cognitive approach, it becomes clear that once the notion of a foreign conspiracy had rooted itself in his mind, all incoming information would be adapted to fit inside the frames of the “conspiracy theory”. The reluctance to believe in the sincerity of the Americans and the tendency to adapt to all other environmental changes except for the positive American/Israeli stance seems to verify this. As has been pointed out above, the idea that Israel and the US would conspire to

create instability in Lebanon was not incredibly ill founded, there are too many examples of Israeli covert operations regionally and American covert operations worldwide to completely dismiss such a notion. The Syrian intervention in Lebanon can, in my view, most accurately be explained by examining perceptions held by the Syrian decision-makers at the time for the outbreak of civil war in Lebanon. Asad did not enjoy fighting the PLO and the Lebanese, they should in his view be fighting the Zionist enemy together, they were brothers in arms but they were busy fighting each other. Of course, Asad had his own regime's preservation in mind as well. The concern for sectarian differences creating problems on the Syrian domestic arena was certainly constantly present.

To be sure, Asad's regime did face internal problems of some significance at the time for intervention in Lebanon; it was however dealt with promptly. Even the preservation of the Asad regime can, however, be traced back to the notion of the Arab nation. It follows from the reasoning of the Syrian leadership that they believed the entire Arab nation to be in danger from the perceived foreign plot. Asad saw Syria as the last bastion of true Arabism; Egypt was in the mid-1970s on the verge of complying with the enemy, and was by the end of the decade at peace with Israel. Furthermore, the inter-Arab fighting was fueling the arguments of those claiming that religious minorities in the Arab world are unable to live in peace with each other, thus undermining the Arab position that a Palestinian state, tolerant of minorities, could be established. Asad's ideological beliefs did, in my view, form the framework for his pragmatism in politics. Although I do not contest the claim that pragmatism guides Syrian policy, I disagree with the generally held view that pragmatism *above all* shapes Syrian foreign policy behaviour. My argument is that ideology, more

specifically Ba’thist ideology, *sets the frames* for Syrian pragmatism. In the case of the Syrian intervention in Lebanon, his perception of the situation as being a conspiracy to thwart the Arab efforts of dealing with the Israeli problem, led him to strive to preserve the unity of Lebanon at almost any cost.

The Ta’if Agreement and its aftermath

When Lebanon emerged from 15 years of internal and external conflict, it was under Syrian hegemony. The mainstream explanations regarding Syrian policy in post-war Lebanon is that of either colonization – for financial and strategic gain, and that of annexation – for the purpose of creating a ‘Greater Syria’. As I have pointed out, there are weaknesses in both explanations. First, the “financial and military-strategic argument”: The idea of a Syrian colonization of Lebanon is difficult to disprove and completely dismiss, since the facts of the Syrian occupation of Lebanon point to a highly unequal relationship in which Syria is the clear beneficiary. Nevertheless, this view presumes that the economic gains for Syria were taken into consideration by the Syrian decision-makers when the foundation for Syrian policy in Lebanon was first laid out in 1976. There is no evidence of such considerations on part of the Syrian leadership. Rather, the economic benefits (which by all means have been substantial for *certain parts* of the Syrian elite) in my view must be seen as a byproduct of Syrian policies toward Lebanon, not one of the main causes for them. As for the military-strategic importance of Lebanon, this is very much a reality, but in part *because* of the Syrian tradition of viewing its relations with Lebanon as “special”. In other words, had the border between Syria and Lebanon been a “real” border, and had the Syrians not been so deeply involved in Lebanese affairs prior to their intervention, Lebanon’s strategic importance would have been on a completely different level. As it was, Syria refused to

acknowledge Lebanon as a country among others, the Lebanese society was perceived as intertwined with the Syrian. Second, the argument that Syria has aimed to create a ‘Greater Syria’, mainly forwarded by Daniel Pipes, but featured in other scholars’ work as well, is in my opinion based on misinterpretations of Syrian rhetoric and a misguided understanding of Hafez al-Asad’s goals. These goals must be seen as long-term aspirations, and the preservation of Lebanese unity (alongside restoration of Lebanese-Syrian unity) was a first step towards creating a greater Arab unity. In the case of the Ta’if Agreement and the subsequent bilateral agreements, Syrian policy has, in my view, been guided by the same “cognition of partition” that dominated in 1976. This is verified by the heavy emphasis on the unity and Arab character of Lebanon in the various agreements. It is apparent that the internal stability in Lebanon is of utmost importance to Syria. The efforts to soothe critical public opinion with minor and superficial concessions indicate this.

In the end, Syria shows no interest in completely changing the political system in Lebanon. It is true, however, that Syria repeatedly meddles with the democratic processes in the Lebanese Republic. Nevertheless, in the Lebanese Parliament there does exist a political opposition critical of Syria. Of course, Syria has nothing to gain from openly changing Lebanon’s political system; the real power is already in the hands of Damascus. As long as the Lebanese “democracy” is reasonably controlled by Syria, a small political opposition within the system is apparently deemed a small price to pay for being able to maintain a unified Syrian-Lebanese front against Israel and its allies. From the Syrian point of view, Lebanon and Syria must remain brothers in arms.

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APPENDIX – MAP OF LEBANON

