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THE SYRIAN INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON
An analysis of the role of Lebanon in Syrian regime security, from Ta'if to the death of Hafiz al-Asad (1989-2000)

HUSEM Erik

FFI/RAPPORT-2002/03005

FFISYS/828/161.1

Approved
Kjeller 18 December 2002

Jan Erik Torp
Director of Research

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UNCLASSIFIED

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE
(when data entered)

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1) PUBL/REPORT NUMBER	2) SECURITY CLASSIFICATION	3) NUMBER OF PAGES
FFI/RAPPORT-2002/03005	UNCLASSIFIED	101
1a) PROJECT REFERENCE	**2a) DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE**	
FFISYS/828/161.1	-	

4) TITLE

THE SYRIAN INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON
An analysis of the role of Lebanon in Syrian regime security, from Ta'if to the death of Hafiz al-Asad (1989-2000)

5) NAMES OF AUTHOR(S) IN FULL (surname first)

HUSEM Erik

6) DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Approved for public release. Distribution unlimited. (Offentlig tilgjengelig)

7) INDEXING TERMS

IN ENGLISH:	IN NORWEGIAN:
a) Security Policy	a) Sikkerhetspolitikk
b) Threats	b) Trusler
c) Foreign policy	c) Utenrikspolitikk
d) Peace agreements	d) Fredsavtaler
e) Defence Policy	e) Forsvarspolitikk

THESAURUS REFERENCE:

8) ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the Syrian involvement in Lebanon following the end of the Lebanese civil war in 1989/90 and until the death of Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad, which marked the end of an era.
The author argues that Lebanon's geo-strategic position, not Syria's ideological orientation, has been central in explaining the Syrian involvement since the Syrian intervention in 1976, and especially in the 1990s.
It is further argued that Syrian foreign and security policy has been mainly driven by concerns for regime stability and security. Security is broadly defined to encompass concerns by the Asad-regime to ward off threats to 1) the legitimacy of the rule of the Asad-regime (political security), 2) military threats from mainly Israel (military security), and 3) threats to the allocative political economy (economic security). The importance of water is also briefly discussed. Lebanon has had a pivotal role in all these sectors of security. Thus, mainly security concerns, not 'Greater-Syria' ambitions have defined Syria's involvement in Lebanon in the 1990s.

9) DATE	AUTHORIZED BY	POSITION
	This page only	
18 December 2002	Jan Erik Torp	Director of Research

ISBN-82-464-0673-6

UNCLASSIFIED

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE
(when data entered)

PREFACE

I would like to begin to thank Jan Wilhelm Kavli and Janne Duesund who generously let me use material they themselves had gathered for their own theses and thus got me off with a good start. I would also like to thank all those whom I interviewed, and all those who helped me before and during my fieldwork in Beirut and Damascus in the fall of 2000. Many thanks to Dr. Elie Karamé; Professor Farid Khazen, Professor Michel Nehme, Professor Hilal Khashan and Professor Judith Palmer Harik at the American University of Beirut (AUB); researcher Imad Mansour at the Lebanese Center for Political Studies; Professor Sataihi at the University of Damascus; Ambassador Vigleik Eide and Senior Adviser Martin Yttervik at the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Damascus; journalist for *The Daily Star*, Sami Moubayed; correspondent for *Middle East International*, Jim Quilty; and to those whom I interviewed but wished to remain anonymous. A special thanks to Joseph al-Agha who arranged many of my interviews and made my very short visit a very fruitful one. And very warm thanks to Zeina Moubassaleh and Amal Bouhabib for taking very good care of me while I was in Beirut.

I would like to thank my supervisors Brynjar Lia and Tore Nyhamar at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), as well as Rania Maktabi, for helping me through the process of writing this thesis and supporting me along the way. Special thanks to Kari Karamé, researcher at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), and Dr. Elie Wardini, Institute for Oriental Studies at the University of Oslo. Both spent hours explaining to me the intricacies of Lebanese politics and provided me with valuable information as well as useful tips for my thesis. Many thanks also to the staff of the NUPI library, who went out of their way to help me find material for this thesis.

I would also like to thank Laila Bokhari at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) for editing, formatting and finalizing this present report.

I want to thank my very good friends and fellow students Britt Skjeppestad and Per Øyvind Langeland for valuable comments on my first draft, and the rest of my friends on the "9th floor" for a very social and fun (and even productive?) working environment.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, Line, Alf and Jens, for just being there for me during this long process.

Oslo, March 2002
Erik Husem

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THE SYRIAN INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON
An analysis of the role of Lebanon in Syrian regime security, from Ta'if to the death of Hafiz al-Asad (1989-2000)[1]

1 INTRODUCTION

"Why is Syria involved in Lebanon's events?"
(Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad in a speech, 20 July 1976)

This question has puzzled many observers and researchers since Syria intervened militarily in Lebanon in 1976. In fact, since then, Syria has fought Israel, the United States, the Palestinians and nearly every Lebanese militia in order to maintain its foothold and secure its influence in Lebanon. Partly due to its determination, Syria succeeded by the early 1990s in establishing a dominant sphere of influence over Lebanon, virtually robbing it of all political autonomy leading some to question whether "there still is a Lebanon" (Malik, 1997). What is it with Lebanon that makes it so vital for Syria to control?

On returning to Lebanon for the first time in 16 years, former *New York Times*- correspondent in Lebanon, Thomas L. Friedman, noted that the country had "increasingly become a Syrian province".[2] Syrian rhetoric, with its numerous references to a "historic unity" of Lebanon and Syria, has entrenched an image of Syrian policy towards Lebanon being guided by Pan-Syrian ambitions. However, this hardly makes sense, since the political costs of such a policy would by far exceed the gains of annexing Lebanon. Others have pointed to the hostile regional environment, noting that Syrian policy has been driven primarily by security considerations, and that Syria merely has reacted to threats to its security. Syria has been surrounded by hostile states, and has even been threatened by internal dissident movements sponsored by foreign powers. This alone does not give an adequate explanation, however. The answer, I believe must be sought in the *combination* of great power ambition and the protection of vital security interests, but with the latter as a first priority. Countering various perceived threats to its security is arguably a number one priority for the regime (one could even argue that the Syrian regime suffers from a "security-paranoia"), but Syria has also sought a role as a regional power. Together, these two considerations have sustained the power of the Syrian regime.

1.1 Main Questions and Limitations

Given this view on Syrian policy, which I will discuss and substantiate in this study, my question is: *How do we explain Syria's involvement in Lebanon in the 1990s?*

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[1] This paper is an edited version of my thesis for the *Hovedfag* degree at the Institute of Political Science, University of Oslo, Spring 2002.

My basic hypothesis is that Syria's involvement in Lebanon is first and foremost based on *regime security* interests, broadly defined to include direct threats to the Syrian regime, as well as indirect threats, such as threats to the legitimacy of the regime. Syria's Pan-Arab orientation must be seen in this context. I further hold that the nature of the Syrian state and of the regional environment explain why Syria has been so determined to control Lebanon. I examine Syrian domestic policy, its foreign policy orientation and behavior, as well as the reactions of the different actors in Lebanon and in the region, mainly Israel. By doing this, I attempt to show that Lebanon has had a very central role in the Syrian regime's overall security concerns and strategies, especially during the 1990s.

This study focuses on a period, which begins with the signing of the Ta'if Agreement in October 1989, marking the end of the civil war in Lebanon and the beginning of Syria's domination,[3] and ends with the death of President Hafiz al-Asad in June 2000, marking the end of an era in Syrian politics.

1.2 Theoretical Approach

I have defined threats to the national security of Syria broadly, ranging from foreign military coercion and political pressure (external) to domestic social and political instability (internal). Thus, when explaining Syrian foreign and security policy, my analysis tends to emphasize both the hostile regional environment and the characteristics of the Syrian Asad-regime. President Hafiz al-Asad's role is central in this discussion. However, I focus on the Syrian state as the main actor and referent object of security. The state dominates in terms of political allegiance and authority and of its command over the instruments of force (Buzan, 1991:58). What is more, the nature of the Asad-regime was such that distinction between the interests of Syria as a state and the interests of the President Asad and the ruling elite were blurred (Perthes, 1995).

1.3 Some General Hypotheses

I have divided the study into three sectors of security: the political, the military and the economic sectors. The first sector concerns Syria's security within the political sector, namely the question of the legitimacy of the Syrian regime's authority both at home and in Lebanon. The main question here is: *what is the nature of the Syrian domination over the Lebanese political system?* One hypothesis is that establishing control over Lebanon was essential to the internal stability and security of the Syrian regime in Damascus, given the precariousness of Lebanese polity, which could threaten to spill over to Syria, and the fact that Lebanon's liberal and open political system had harbored numerous anti-Syrian movements and foreign intelligence services. A second hypothesis is that Syrian domination over Lebanon served as a necessary precondition to Syria's overall security concerns in all three sectors: the political, the military and the economic. Lebanon became Syria's key asset in its confrontation and

---

[2] Thomas L. Friedman "Lebanon: Soul on ice", *The New York Times*, Foreign Affairs, 18 July 2000. Friedman is also the author of "From Beirut to Jerusalem" (1989) and winner of the 1989 Pulitzer prize for his coverage of the Israeli war in Lebanon.

[3] Some will argue that the war ended only in 1991, when general Aoun was ousted by Syrian and Lebanese government forces. In this respect, Ta'if represented the beginning of the end, laying the foundations for peace.

negotiations with Israel, as well as in maintaining domestic stability. Syria sought to dominate Lebanon by controlling the public and political sphere through a policy of legitimacy-discourse and bilateral treaties, propped up by coercion. This twin policy in Lebanon is demonstrated by analyzing the numerous bilateral treaties as well as uncovering evidence of Syrian influence on actions and decisions made by Lebanese actors, as well as of direct Syrian interference and coercion in Lebanese politics.

The second security sector is the military sector. It concerns Syria's security against external threats, mainly Israel. *What role did Lebanon have in Syria's military confrontation with Israel?* My hypothesis is that Syria sought to preserve a strategic balance of power with Israel in order to deter a military assault on Syria, contain Israeli power in the region and negotiate an overall Arab-Israeli political settlement from a position of strength. This dictated, among other things, Syria's domination over Lebanon. A closer look at Syria's foreign policy orientation and behavior in the period since President Hafiz al-Asad came to power in 1970 shows a consistent policy that was pursued into the 1990s and during the negotiations with Israel. Another hypothesis is that Syria sought to harness the state and the resistance movements in South Lebanon during the 1990s. This enabled Syria to put pressure on Israel to make it more amenable to Syrian demands. This hypothesis is substantiated by evidence of an actual Syrian influence or control over resistance activities and the coupling of the guerilla warfare with Syria's position in the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations. Syria's influence over Lebanon's political system has already been discussed above, but I attempt to show that the coupling of Lebanon's political position towards Israel with that of Syria suited mainly Syria's negotiating strategy, and it was essentially forced on Beirut.

The third security sector concerns Syria's economy and its ability to sustain its economic performance, both in a domestic and foreign policy context, as well as Syria's access to water resources. *Did the Syrian regime exploit Lebanese economic and water resources in order to sustain and maintain its power in Syria?* My hypothesis is that the Syrian regime used its military presence and political influence to derive economic benefits, as well as to secure access to water, to bolster Syrian domestic stability both on elite and public levels. However, rather than a cause for Syria's intervention and presence in the first place, these benefits were *consequences*, and potentially a cause for Syria's *continued* domination over Lebanon in the future. I point to several economic indicators as well as to broader political concerns.

There are of course linkages across sectors. In fact, "[i]n some sense, all security is political" (Buzan et al., 1998:141). Threats and defenses are constituted and defined politically. A military defeat; or cutting the economic benefits for core elites; or important concessions to Israeli demands over the Golan; all these would have political repercussions on the Syrian regime. Conversely, military action may be defined in political or economic terms, following the Clausewitzian dictum that: 'War is the continuation of politics with the admixture of other means' (ibid.: 167). Therefore, the discussion of one of the security sectors in this study will sometimes show a linkage to the other sectors. The discussion of political security will inevitably touch military matters. Military and economic security have linkages to political

security. However, broadly speaking, the three different security sectors essentially involve different spheres of Syrian policy in the 1990s. The political sector mainly concerns Syria's domination in Lebanon; the military sector mainly concerns Syria's conflict with Israel; and the economic sector mainly concerns the Syrian regime's relationship with its constituencies. But all have a political impact on the legitimacy of the Syrian regime, and thus on its stability.

1.4 Studies of Syrian Foreign and Security Policy

Syria and Syrian foreign policy have been the subjects of much research over the years, mainly because of Syria's role in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Syrian foreign policy has also received much attention due to Syria's involvement in Lebanon. The Lebanese war and the actors involved also attracted the attention of a large body of researchers all over the world, not to mention Lebanon's own academia. In sum, the volume of academic works on both modern Lebanese and Syrian politics is quite substantial.

There are roughly two schools of research on Syrian foreign and security policy. The first includes scholars primarily from Israel and the United States, along with a few Lebanese scholars. The Jewish-American Daniel Pipes explains Syrian foreign policy by using paradigms like "Greater Syria" (1990) and the "Alawi regime" (1996). The notion of "Greater Syria" (*Bilad al-Sham*) refers to the idea that Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine constitute one geographical, cultural and political entity and that all borders between them should be eliminated (Abukhalil, 1994a:126). This is based on the short-lived experience of the Arab Republic 1918-1920, which centered on Damascus, and was subsequently carved up by the mandate powers into colonial entities, which subsequently evolved into independent and, in the Syrians' view, artificial states. Syria never recognized the legitimacy of the other states. Moreover, the Asad-regime harbored expansionist ambitions. The intervention in Lebanon was the first step towards dominating the entire Levant.[4] This view tends to over-emphasize the ideological component of Syrian politics, and to take the regime's political discourse at face value, overlooking its pragmatic policies. Conversely, in another volume on Syrian foreign policy, Pipes asserts the view that Syrian foreign policy is guided by the narrow self-interests of Asad and his Alawi-minority regime, and that he (or his regime) will do anything to stay in power. The Israeli professor Moshe Ma'oz (1988; 1995) along with other Israeli researchers (Avi-Ran, 1991; Olmert, 1992) also tend to supportr the "Greater Syria" paradigm, sometimes adding a religious-ideological (anti-Semitic) dimension to Syria's hostility towards Israel.

A common denominator for this school is the somewhat unbalanced approach to the study of Syrian politics. They tend to underscore an image of Syria as a "rogue state", focusing on particular aspects of Syrian politics while overlooking other ones.

The other school, mainly of European origin, appears in my view to give a more balanced analysis of Syrian foreign policy. These scholars share the view that Syrian foreign and

[4] The term "Levant" is originally French and dates from the French mandate-period in Syria and Lebanon in the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. I use it throughout this study to refer to the region encompassing today's Lebanon, Syria, Israel/Palestine and Jordan.

security policy under Asad has been characterized on one hand by a pragmatic (Realist) policy, which has sought to keep Asad in power and preserve regime stability, and on the other hand by an Arab nationalist orientation, centered on the struggle with Israel and on the Palestinian question. They have also emphasized Syria's interaction with other states, notably Israel, in explaining Syria's behavior, thus underscoring a *reactive* element in Syria's foreign policy conduct.

While the notions of "Greater-Syria" and the "Alawi-regime" are not altogether dismissed as explanations of Syrian security and foreign policy, the latter school of research offers broader and more complex explanations. Instead of using an either/or approach to explain Syrian security and foreign policy, they tend to range them in an order of priorities.[5] The British scholar Patrick Seale (1988) for instance, uses *national interest* as the key factor in explaining Asad's behavior, while acknowledging factors like prestige and power. However, such a positive view may be attributed to the fact that Seale remains the only Western scholar who has had direct access to Asad and that he continues to represent Syria's position in Western media. The German scholar Volker Perthes (1995) on the other hand highlights the importance of *class interests*, adding a domestic-politics dimension to the explanatory factors. Fred Lawson (1984; 1996), an American, emphasizes domestic aspects too, especially the economy, when he explains Syria's intervention and presence in Lebanon. The British professor Raymond A. Hinnebusch (1991; 1998) on the other hand examines external factors, notably the Israeli threat, and underscores the autonomy of the Syrian regime in the decision-making process.

As'ad Abukhalil uses the concept *raison du régime* (1994a:127), considering Syrian foreign policy as being determined mainly by the interests of the regime in power. According to this view, Asad's Alawi-dominated regime has sought to generate a cover of legitimacy for its authoritarian rule through a Pan-Arab (or sometimes Syrian nationalist) discourse and political orientation. However, Abukhalil's approach is in fact close to those of Seale, Perthes, Lawson and Hinnebusch in that *national* or *state* interests are viewed as intimately linked to regime interests. There also seems to be a broad consensus within this school that Syrian foreign policy under Asad was guided by both regime/state security and ideological considerations, but that whenever these interests conflicted, security got first priority.

The somewhat different approaches emphasize two things of importance for this study: firstly, that domestic factors play a role in determining foreign policy; and secondly, that the distinction between broad national interests and more narrow regime (elite) interests tends to be blurred (see Perthes, 1995:133). While most concede that Asad was an Arab nationalist at heart, and that the idea of a "Greater Syria" still had some resonance among certain layers of the regime, the *raison du régime* explanation emphasizes the calculating and prudent character of the policies of Asad's regime, imbued with a strong sense of political realism. However, while this explanation rejects the notion of "Greater Syria" as a determinant of Syrian foreign policy, it does acknowledge a Syrian desire to wield considerable influence over the states in

[5] I refer only to their main works.

the Levant. We could say that it was a "Greater Syria"-ambition in *geopolitical terms*, i.e. the perceived need for Syria to have a decisive influence over the political and security affairs of its neighbors in order to contain Israel, and to bolster the security of its regime. Syria kept a close watch on Lebanon and Jordan for fear that they may be drawn closer to Israel and the Western powers. However, as a state, Jordan was much stronger than Lebanon and was therefore considered less of a security threat. While the net result for the Lebanese actually may not have differed that much from total annexation, as Friedman suggested,[6] the paradigm of *raison du régime* gives a different rationale for Syrian foreign policy, and thus a different framework to understand and explain Syrian policies in Lebanon.

1.5 Plan for the Study

Following this introduction, I present a brief historical and contextual background. Other background material, specifically related to each of the three security sectors are presented in chapters Three to Five. Chapter Three studies Syria's political security and demonstrates Syria's domination over the political system in Lebanon. I show that this reflects both immediate security concerns (preventing subversive activities against Syria) and more long-term indirect security concerns (the legitimacy of Syrian presence in Lebanon, considered vital to the achievement of Syria's security in the military and economic sectors). Chapter Four studies Lebanon's role in Syria's military security, mainly in the Syrian two-track confrontation strategy against Israel. The Fifth chapter studies the economic aspects of the Syrian domination in Lebanon and how these affect Syrian economic security. I have also included the question of water resources in this chapter. The Sixth and final chapter summarizes the findings and briefly looks at the latest developments after the death of President Hafiz al-Asad in 2000.

1.6 On Method and Sources

1.6.1 Method

This study is an interpretive case study of Syria's involvement in Lebanon. I have sought to understand this phenomenon within its social context through an inductive empirical approach. It is an approach in which the analysis essentially is a "thick description" of the phenomenon, rather than a tightly structured and theory-based approach. An interpretive case study starts from the assumption that access to reality is through social constructions such as history, identities and interests. I therefore used a qualitative approach, which enabled me to uncover and understand the meaning of certain actions and patterns of behavior.

1.6.2 Data and Sources

This study does not present facts and objective data so much as observations, interpretations and non-quantifiable or non-tangible concepts such as power and security. Without knowing the state of mind of the actors themselves, there is always a degree of uncertainty involved in

[6] Thomas L. Friedman, "Lebanon…", Foreign Affairs, *The New York Times*, 18 July 2000.

making inferences. However, the evidence presented here should be used based on common sense criteria (Buzan, 1991:99). The challenge was to gather enough data to present a case that was both plausible and convincing.

Most of my "sources of evidence" were secondary sources such as books, periodicals and reports. During a two-week stay in Beirut and Damascus (22 September-5 October, 2000), I was also able to conduct several informal interviews, mostly with researchers and journalists, which gave me valuable extra input. I will comment briefly on the different sources of data and the problems related to their use.

1.6.2.1 Books and journal articles

Despite the very large volume of literature, there were some problems related to their use. For one thing, researchers could use different concepts to explain the same phenomenon, or the same concepts to explain different phenomena. The variation in the use of concepts like "*raison du régime"*, "*raison d'Etat"*, and "regime security" could in fact all point to the same thing. Conversely, "*raison du régime"* had different implications for Daniel Pipes and As'ad Abukhalil. Other concepts, such as "legitimacy", "power", "national interests", and "security" were sometimes defined differently by different researchers. It was therefore important to distinguish between them and have a clear definition of my own concepts. Only a few authors applied an explicit theoretical framework to their works, however. The bulk of the literature was essentially empirical.

Another problem was that all literature was potentially biased. Authors could be politically or emotionally involved in the events they described. For instance, Lebanese and Israeli researchers may not have had the sufficient distance to the events to treat them in a balanced manner. The problem tended to be that important data were omitted and that focus was on events and phenomena that underscored what appeared to be predetermined or biased conclusions. However, the data they did use was essentially accurate. It left me with the sometimes very difficult task of judging the credibility and usefulness of the sources. The problem was partly solved through "triangulation", using multiple sources of evidence to corroborate my findings (Yin, 1994:90-94). Another method, more demanding and sometimes difficult, was to judge the credibility and "objectivity" of the author, based on sometimes rather vague personal characteristics, such as nationality, political affiliation, international academic reputation, as well as scanning their collected works in search for imbalances and biases. This approach led me to focus my attention on the "second school" of research, mentioned above, and generally put me on guard when dealing with all kinds of sources.

1.6.2.2 Official documents and statistics

I have relied on selected official documents, mainly treaties, for parts of my thesis. These were relatively easy to get hold of on the internet from official web-sites. As public documents they are generally considered to be reliable sources (Dahl, 1973:42-47). Accurate statistical data, on the other hand, proved much more difficult to find. Syrian official statistical data were often scarce, and when available, they tended to be inaccurate, incomplete or contradictory (see

Perthes, 1995:13). The last year for which there existed full economic data in Syria was 1986 (Robinson, 1996:37). International bodies such as the World Bank and the United Nations similarly had incomplete data. Most independent statistical sources therefore presented estimates. Lebanese official sources were somewhat more available, but proved equally incomplete. Lebanon's official statistical agency reopened after the war only in 1996. Also, some data, like demographic data or the number of Syrian guest workers were probably censored due to the political controversy and sensitivity which is associated with them in Lebanon. I thus had to rely to a certain extent on secondary literature. These shortcomings hindered an accurate presentation, but the available data should nonetheless point out tendencies.

1.6.2.3 Newspaper articles and small periodicals

I have used articles from newspapers and small periodicals to fill in some of the empirical gaps in the secondary literature. Contrary to the state-run Syrian press, the Lebanese printed press is relatively free and outspoken. It sometimes works under a self-imposed quasi-censorship, however, avoiding certain political taboos and controversial issues, liable to upset Syrian or government interests. The general rule has been that those who have had a low or non-existent political profile in Lebanon, i.e. reaching only a small segment of the population, have been relatively free to speak their minds.[7] For instance, the Lebanese non-Arabic dailies, like *L'Orient Le Jour* and *The Daily Star* are subject to fewer restrictions due to their editions in French and English, respectively, as they have a much smaller audience than their Arabic colleagues. Similarly, Lebanese academics have been able to address questions that have normally been considered taboo as long as they have done so in foreign, non-Arabic journals. However, Lebanese journalists have occasionally been prevented from printing their stories or threatened with reprisals for what the government has considered "slander" against itself or against "a sisterly state".[8] This, and the general political climate in Lebanon, have caused journalists to restrict themselves to merely describing events or quoting other people's statements. There has been little investigative or critical journalism in Lebanon, with a few notable exceptions. Emile Khoury in *L'Orient Le Jour*, actually a pseudonym for several of the paper's journalists, and Gibran Tuenih, the outspoken editor of the Arabic daily *al-Nahar*, are two such exceptions.

I have also relied on some foreign press, but most importantly on the internationally renowned biweekly periodical, *Middle East International*. I have screened every issue from July 1989 to December 2001. Its board of editors consists of renowned British researchers and former diplomats. It is essentially pro-Palestinian, but I found it generally balanced and authoritative when dealing with Syrian and Lebanese issues. I have referred to it as a source when referring to analyses or when describing events that were not widely covered by other media. I have similarly used the internet-based *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, a monthly publication by

[7] Conversation with Kari Karamé, researcher at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), in Oslo, 22 November 2001.
[8] See Amnesty International Report 1996 and 2000.

the *American Committee for a Free Lebanon*. Political orientation aside, I considered it a fairly reliable source of data.

I have had to rely on sources in English, French and Norwegian since my Arabic is inadequate. This did not pose as a problem considering the large body of literature, including that of Arab origin, published in English and French.

1.6.2.4 Interviews

I spent two weeks in Beirut and Damascus conducting several interviews. My sources were essentially researchers and journalists. These "guided conversations" (Rubin and Rubin, 1995) were mainly helpful to the overall analysis, pointing out tendencies and topics to pursue further, as well as confirming or negating hypotheses I had made beforehand. My questions centered on a few topics, starting with broad questions and then following up and probing for details. I soon discovered, much to my surprise, that the interviewees were quite frank and open when discussing topics, which I had presumed were taboo or sensitive. This I think had to do with the political climate in Lebanon during my stay, when the question concerning the Syrian presence was publicly and vividly debated. It spurred me to be more straightforward.

Some of the data I have used in this study were derived from so-called "off-the-record" conversations with people I interviewed; they did not want to be quoted. This kind of data concerned illicit activities or politically sensitive issues, particularly the extent of corruption in Lebanon (see p.37), the loyalty of the Lebanese Army towards Syria (see p.43), and the extent of Syrian patronage and economic involvement in Lebanese businesses (see p.77). This information was corroborated by several other independent sources, which made me rely on its authenticity and use it my analysis. The problem remains that an independent judge cannot verify this data on a objective basis, i.e. by checking the sources I have referred to. Only another study may reveal whether these findings were indeed correct.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Modern Syrian History in Brief

2.1.1 An Arab national identity

Syrians have for long defined their identity as part of the Arab nation and consider Syria as "the beating heart of Arabism" (Hinnebusch, 1991:377). Indeed, it was in historical Syria that the concept of Arab nationalism first emerged as a reaction to the centralizing policies of the Young Turks in the 1910s (Karpat, 1982:2,9). The basic assumptions of Arab nationalism were that there existed an Arab nation based on a common language and cultural heritage, that this nation should form a single independent political entity, and that this ultimately should determine political actions and loyalties (Hourani, 1946:101).

The *Umayad* caliphate in Damascus, with its high saliency in Arab mythology,[9] seemed in 1918-1920 to be reinstated when the Arab revolt succeeded in taking Damascus and establishing the first independent Arab state. When the allies reneged their disputed war-time commitments to the Arabs,[10] partitioned the Arab territories, and imposed mandatory rule, it dealt a serious blow to Arab nationalist aspirations and created a deep-seated feeling of betrayal in the Arab nationalist movement. What was worse than the mere partition of the territories was the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine that not only endangered the prospect of unity for the Arab territories but also threatened to dominate the Palestinians politically and the region economically (Hourani, 1946:107). The Palestinian cause remained especially close to Syrian hearts since Palestine before the partition had formed the southern part of Syria and Palestinians therefore in some sense were considered their "cousins" (Hinnebusch, 1991 :380).

The Syrians also rejected the creation of Greater Lebanon. The Catholic Maronites, long-time French protégés in the region, wanted a Christian Lebanese state, independent and separate from Syria and with strong ties to France (Salibi, 1988:25). The already autonomous Maronite Mount Lebanon annexed parts of the Syrian coast and the fertile Bekaa-valley, territory that was mostly Sunni. The new Lebanese state also rejected the Arab cause and looked to the French colonial power for support, which in the eyes of the Syrians added an extra illegitimate dimension to it (ibid.: 31-32). The Sunni Muslims in Lebanon opposed being put under Maronite domination and wanted a reunification with Syria. In the late 1930s, Arab nationalists, mostly Sunni, and supporters of Lebanese independence were pitted against each other, sometimes in violent clashes. In 1943, however, a National Pact was reached in a compromise to appease both sides. The Muslims recognized Lebanon's independence while the Maronites recognized the state's Arab identity, but the parties continued to look at each other with mistrust. While the Maronites worried for their future when France no longer could protect them, the Sunnis looked to Syria for support for their Pan-Arab aspirations against the Western-oriented Lebanese government. To them, Lebanon was historically a part of Syria and a part of the Arab world (ibid.: 202).

2.1.2 A period of instability

In 1946, the French reluctantly gave up their hold over Syria, and left behind a parliamentary system and a political elite ill-prepared for independence. The direct rule, as well as a divide-and-rule policy, had hindered development of political autonomy and governance experience among the notables. This opened the political scene to new actors. Among the many political parties and movements to emerge in Syrian politics, like the Communist Party, the Nasserist movement and the Pan-Syrian Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP),[11] the Syrian Ba'th-party became the principal manifestation of Arabism. It emerged on the political scene in 1946 and

[9] Of course, the *Abbasid* Caliphate of Baghdad was just as popular in Arab mythology and was similarly used by the Iraqi regime for its own nationalist purposes.
[10] The actual concession made by Britain to the Arabs in the infamous MacMahon-Hussayn correspondence has been the subject of much controversy in academic as well as political circles.
[11] The Syrian Social Nationalist Party, founded by the Lebanese Antun Sa´ada in 1932, advocated the notion of a "Greater Syria", but was a rival to Asad's Ba'th party. It drew support from Libya and the PLO (Abukhalil, 1994:126-127).

quickly gained wide elite and mass appeal (Hudson, 1977:262). Ba'thism did not call for a revolutionary transformation, but rather a rebirth (*ba'th* in Arabic) of the Arabic heritage, restoring Arab dignity through unity. Islam was seen as a vehicle for Arabism and a cultural heritage to which all Arabs, including the Christians, owed much. This accommodation to traditional values was counterbalanced by its commitment to Arab unity against imperialist intrusion and a socialist transformation of society (Hudson, 1977:264). But the conception of Arab nationalism remained somewhat foggy and romantic, and there emerged the somewhat paradoxical assumption that a strong territorial state was a prerequisite for developing Pan-Arab unity; a territorial base for the unification efforts (Ayubi, 1995:144). This conception became the foundation for Nasser's, and later the Syrian and Iraqi regimes' nationalist policies (Cleveland, 1994:297-303).

The party attracted many Syrian officers. The first military coup in 1949 marked the beginning of a period of successive coups and political instability. Arabism was at the same time the main source of legitimacy and to instability as the different political factions outbid each other, competing for Pan-Arab leadership. Also, heavy-handed rule and internal factionalism eroded government legitimacy (Hopwood, 1988:36). The short-lived union with Egypt in the United Arab Republic (1958-1961) was a desperate attempt to restore stability, but it broke up and led to a new military coup in 1963. In its foreign policy, Syria took a radical and aggressive position towards Israel without the military capabilities to back it up. Later, Hafiz al-Asad would attribute the humiliating loss of the Golan in 1967 to this factor (Seale, 1988).

2.1.3 A reorientation of Syrian foreign policy

In 1970, Hafiz al-Asad, then Defense-minister and Air Force Commander, seized power in a military coup. The radical government of General Salah Jadid was ousted and Asad established a regime that would prove to be very durable.

To Asad, security for Syria was security for the regime, and the quest for security became an obsession for him (Muslih, 1998:67). On the domestic scene, Asad at once set out to broaden his base by introducing institutions of political participation, like the elected People's Council, and developing a rational bureaucracy. The Ba'th-party, with its elaborate hierarchy, its network of popular organizations and branches in the armed forces gave the regime some structural legitimacy (Hudson, 1977:262; Seale, 1988:178), but was foremost a formidable instrument of control and indoctrination (Cleveland, 1994:356).

However, the main threat to Syria's security came from external enemies, Israel in particular. Lebanon's role in Syrian foreign policy and security must be seen in this context. In Asad's view, the 1948 and 1967 wars and Israel's capture of Arab territories had shown that Israel was an aggressive and expansionist state. Although the 1973 war had demonstrated new Arab military capabilities, it became evident that Israel would not disappear. Henceforth, Syria would base its aspirations on more realistic terms, setting its ambitions on mainly two feasible objectives: containing Israel and getting back the Golan (Seale, 1996b; Hinnebusch, 1998:139). While the latter objective was pursued primarily on the diplomatic level, the first

was stated in strictly geopolitical and military terms. Asad was determined to prevent Israel from outflanking his defenses near the Golan through Lebanon or Jordan. The concept of "strategic parity" with Israel became the basis for a Syrian military build-up with aid from the Soviet Union and the Gulf monarchies.[12] With the conclusion of "strategic alliance" with Jordan in 1975, it was Lebanon who came to bear the brunt of the Syrian strategies. Besides, Lebanon as a state was considered much weaker than Jordan, and therefore a greater security threat.

Syria's intervention in Lebanon in 1976 demonstrates how Pan-Arab considerations were subordinated Syrian security interests. After a year of civil war in Lebanon, the Maronite forces were on the verge of defeat by the Leftist coalition of Palestinians and Lebanese Druze.[13] The prospect of a radical Lebanese state and the almost certain Israeli intervention this would lead to, entailed a Syrian intervention (Seale, 1988:279; Abukhalil, 1992:131; Hinnebusch, 1998:140-142). But the intervention did not remove the Israeli danger. Syria was soon engaged in new fighting in Lebanon, this time against the Maronites who sought Israeli help. In 1978 Israel invaded South Lebanon, then pushed all the way up to Beirut in 1982. The invasion was partly meant to establish a sphere of influence in Lebanon and chase Syria out. It lead to direct fighting between Syrian and Israeli forces in which Syria took a heavy toll. Even American forces, originally deployed as part of the peacekeeping Multinational Forces in Lebanon between 1982-84, were involved in attacks against Syrian positions in Lebanon. Although Asad found himself in a very dangerous position, he refused to back down and managed to emerge as the main power in Lebanon. With Soviet political and military backing, and the successful use of Islamist Shi'ite proxies, Asad managed to regain the initiative and forced the American and French troops to withdraw (Hinnebusch, 1998:143-144; Seale, 1988:394-420). Following the assassination in 1982 of Lebanese President and Maronite leader Bashir Gemayel, whom the Israelis (mistakenly) had counted on to help them turn Lebanon into an Israeli satellite state, the American-brokered May 17th agreement was abrogated in 1983 and the Israeli army (IDF) was forced to withdraw to its so-called "Security-zone" in South Lebanon in 1985.

The Syrian intervention in Lebanon was also partly intended to contain another archenemy of the Syrian regime, Iraq. Since the split in 1963, the two rival Ba'th-regimes had competed for Arab leadership. Their rivalry brought Iraq to support Syria's opponents in Lebanon. For Syria, the prospect of a radical pro-Iraqi Lebanese state was perhaps just as threatening as an Israeli intervention.

The civil war in Lebanon raged on and ended only in 1991 when Syria quashed the Iraqi-backed Maronite forces of general Michel Aoun. Throughout the war, Syria maintained its position in Lebanon and gradually extended its influence over the Lebanese factions through

[12] "The Gulf monarchies" refers to the members of the Gulf Co-operation Council, notably Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar and Bahrain.
[13] The warring factions in Lebanon were divided into mainly two camps; a Right-wing *status quo* oriented camp, predominantly Maronite, and a radical Leftist coalition of Palestinian, Druze and Sunni Muslim forces. While these terms are not necessarily very precise, they conform at least with the Syrian view of the Lebanese civil war (Dawisha, 1980:12).

shifting alliances and military backing. By never allowing any one side to get the upper hand, the civil war served Syria's position in Lebanon, and may have led to the Lebanese popular demand for Syria to stop the war (Abukhalil, 1992:131-132). Syria had managed to keep its contenders out of Lebanon, although its alliance with Tehran allowed for a continued Iranian role in supporting the Islamist Hizbullah-guerillas under Syrian supervision.

Lebanon had been a threat to Syria and the regime and therefore forced Asad to intervene. The threat was not just a military threat. It was also political in that an unstable revolutionary regime in Lebanon would most certainly encourage opposition to the Ba'thist regime in Damascus. The civil war could also spill over to Syria as it had done in 1860, when fighting between Maronites and Druze in Lebanon spread to Damascus. Maintaining Lebanese stability was therefore of paramount importance to maintain Syrian regime stability and legitimacy (Dawisha, 1980:17). But, as it turned out, Syria's intervention became part of the problem.

2.1.4 Syria's Arab legitimacy

Syria believed that only through Arab unity could the Arab states pressure Israel to cede all occupied territories and conform to UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 which *inter alia* demanded that Israel withdraw from territories occupied during the 1967 war. It was therefore important to avoid any bilateral negotiations with Israel, which pitted the Arab parties against one another. But the Sinai II agreement in 1975 and the following Camp David Accords in 1978 shattered the illusion of Arab unity as the largest Arab power and Syria's main ally, Egypt, sought a separate peace agreement with Israel. Syria's tough opposition to Camp David, its position as the only frontline-state in the Arab-Israeli conflict and its historical Pan-Arab credentials gave it an Arab legitimacy that earned it the right to define the norms of Arab behavior vis-à-vis Israel. It was from this position that Syria was able to expel Egypt from the Arab League for its "defection". It also earned Syria the right to draw on the oil-wealth of the Gulf monarchies, which supported it with substantial financial aid (Hinnebusch, 1991:378).

The loss of Egypt made it all the more important to control Palestinian resistance movements. Championship of the Palestinian cause was regarded as an ideological imperative and an essential component of regime legitimacy (Hinnebusch, 1991:381). It was part of the Pan-Arab struggle of which Syria claimed leadership. But it also served Syrian strategic interests since it enhanced Syria's position as a regional power not to be ignored. Given the significant Palestinian presence in Lebanon, Lebanon was a key to controlling the Palestinian "card" (Hinnebusch, 1998:140; Rabinovich, 1984:37). Syria supported Palestinian raids on Israel from Lebanon while forbidding them from the Golan as long as it served Syrian interests. However, Asad insisted on controlling the Palestinian movements. For him, "the Palestinian problem was too important to be left to the Palestinians" (Seale, 1988:348).

Fighting Palestinian and Muslim forces in Lebanon dealt a serious blow to Syria's Arab legitimacy, however. Asad blamed the Palestinian and Lebanese Leftist forces for pursuing their own narrow objectives, threatening the very unity of Lebanon which Syria had an

obligation to preserve (Asad quoted in Rabinovich, 1984:183-218). Lebanon was a special responsibility for the Syrian parent-state (Hinnebusch, 1991:378), just as it was its Arab responsibility. In a speech broadcast from Radio Damascus in mid-1976, Asad gave an elaborate explanation, justifying the intervention and highlighting his views on Lebanon and the Palestinians:

> The people in Syria and Lebanon have been one through history[...]The partitioning of Lebanon is an old Zionist aim[...]It is a plot against Islam and Arabism and serves the interests of the enemy - Zionism and Israel[...]The Palestinian resistance is currently fighting[...]against the interests and goals of the Palestinian people[...]Syria is the land of Palestinian struggle.[14] (Asad, in Rabinovich, 1984)

Syria's insistence on first looking out for its own security interests brought it at odds with its own Pan-Arab orientation, and its Arab legitimacy worn thin on both the international and domestic scene. Syria's alliance with revolutionary Iran against Iraq during the 1980s alienated the conservative Gulf-monarchies, which gradually halted all aid to Syria. Asad saw in Iran a powerful anti-American and anti-Israeli ally, and was frustrated by Iraq's diversion of focus from the united Arab conflict with Israel by launching war on Iran in 1980. But this logic was lost on the other Arab states. Moreover, curbing the PLO in Lebanon, as well as the Islamist Hizbullah towards the end of the civil war, seriously undermined Syria's legitimacy since it seemed to be doing Israel a favor (Hinnebusch, 1991:401). The Syrian-backed offensive against the PLO-loyal forces during the "War of the Camps" (1985-1988), made Palestinians rally around Arafat and seek a new patron in Egypt. The Palestinians were from then on lost as a "card" for Syria to play against Israel, although a number of Palestinian politico-militant organizations, like the new and important Hamas-movement, continued to enjoy sanctuary in Damascus. By mending its fences with Egypt, the PLO regained its freedom of action, while Egypt came in from the cold. The pro-Western Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan gravitated further away from Syria, by its continuing backing for Syria's enemy, Iraq and its improved relations with the PLO after its relinquishment of its historical claim for the West Bank in mid-1988, seeking a negotiated solution with Israel which included the PLO. And then finally, at the end of the 1980s, Iraq emerged triumphantly to challenge Syria again, backing General Aoun against the Syrians in Lebanon. Isolated in the Arab world, and deplored by the United States, Asad now held on to his last "card" in the Syrian-Israeli conflict: the Lebanese front.

2.2 The Decision-Making Process

2.2.1 The Asad-regime

A recurring debate in the study of Syria is the nature of the Syrian regime. Some analysts, like Pipes (1990; 1996) and Ma'oz (1988) portray the regime as a minority regime, mainly serving and benefiting the Alawi community. The Alawi community represents about 12% of the

[14] These are fragments of a long speech. They give, however, a picture of the main themes of Asad's legitimacy discourse for his policy in Lebanon. As I see it, they are not taken out of their context.

Syrian population, which is predominantly Sunni (about 74%).[15] As a consequence, Syrian policy must be analyzed through this minority-rule perspective. Syrian security policy is a question of sustaining the Alawi domination.

However, scholars like Hinnebusch, Perthes and Seale point instead to group and class coalitions in explaining Syrian decision-making. They build on the studies of Batatu (1981) and Drysdale (1981) who found that the social pillars of the Syrian regime in the 1960s and 70s were mainly peasants and urban public workers. The Ba'th-party emerged as a reaction to the power of the historically dominant group in Syria, the Sunni absentee landowners and commercial elite. From 1963 the Ba'thist regime marginalized this group by pursuing a policy, which favored the rural areas, including the minorities (Drysdale, 1981:5).

The military officer corps was itself predominantly of rural and minority origin. Especially the Alawi community from the rural province of Lattakia in NorthWestern Syria used the military as a social ladder and as a backdoor to politics. They became especially involved in the Ba'th-party. Alawi officers eventually gained control over both the armed forces and the party, aided by strong group cohesion based on bonds of kinship and common rural origins. In 1970 a group around Hafiz al-Asad seized power. However, it is misleading to assume that the Asad regime was Alawi in structure and orientation (Zisser, 1998). The Alawi community in Syria was divided religiously and geographically (Batatu, 1981:334-336).[16] What was more, several prominent and powerful figures were Sunnis of rural origin. Thus, Syrian politics were rather shaped by urban-rural cleavages rather than ethnic-religious ones (ibid.: 343). However, Asad broadened his power-base by co-opting segments of the urban, mainly Damascene, bourgeoisie through a limited "open door" economic policy (*infitah*).[17] A "military-merchant complex" developed, an alliance of convenience between the Alawi officers and the Sunni bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie needed political connections to evade regulations or get privileges, while the officers needed the bourgeoisie to gain access to investments from the Gulf and to enrich themselves (Hinnebusch, 1997:252; Robinson, 1998:161). However, the bourgeoisie had only marginal influence over the regime outside the economic sphere.

The four pillars of the Asad-regime were: the armed forces, the security services, the Ba'th-party and the bureaucracy (Hinnebusch, 1995:78). However, after taking power in 1970, Asad used the military to free himself of ideological constraints. The Ba'th-party from then on mainly served to rubber-stamp the regime's decisions and harness society. Asad's main instruments of power were the armed forces and the omnipresent security services. The commanders of the elite divisions were mainly relatives of Asad and served to check any coup attempt, as well as the powers of each other (Perthes, 1995:150-151).[18] The security services monitored each other, the military and society. Regime cohesion was maintained through

[15] The Alawis make up around 10%, Christians 10% and Druze, Ismailis and Shi'ites 6%.
[16] Hafiz al-Asad came from the *al-Matawirah*, one of four Alawi tribes.
[17] This policy explains why the Damascene bourgeosie did not join the in the violent urban uprisings against Asad that were spurred by the Muslim Brotherhood.
[18] Asad's praetorian guard, the Defense Brigades, was commanded by his brother Rifaat al-Asad, until 1984, when he attempted a coup against the president. Asad's cousin-in-law, Adnan Makhluf took over command, before handing it over to Asad's son Basil. The other elite-divisions were mainly headed by Alawi-officers from Asad's tribe.

bonds of kinship, but also of personal loyalty based on a network of patronage. However, Asad himself depended on their loyalty. The many leading figures of the regime have been characterized as "barons", referring to a feudal-like system where they owed allegiance to the president but had substantial personal power bases of their own (Hinnebusch, 1995:76). Asad balanced these "barons" against each other, occasionally curtailing their powers.[19]

While a bureaucratic politics-approach is clearly misleading in the Syrian case there is a broader decision-making structure of powerful military commanders and political figures. Although Asad enjoyed a wide degree of freedom of action, and his word was final, security and foreign policy issues were nevertheless discussed with his closest associates in the regime (Zisser, 1998).[20] If one were to find constraints on Syrian foreign policy, it was in the supportive elites of the regime. There were internal divergences, e.g. over the attitude to adopt towards Israel and negotiations, and also towards the Gulf War coalition against Iraq (Seale, 1988; Hinnebusch, 1991:389-390). The military was reputedly hawkish and pushed for a more confrontational policy towards Israel. Elements in the military leadership were opposed to the 1976-intervention in Lebanon for various reasons. However, Asad always maintained control over the decision-making process (Hinnebusch, 1991:387; Perthes, 1995:7-8). As long as the state was able to satisfy the needs and interests of its key supporters through the allocation of state resources, regime cohesion remained strong.

President Asad remained the main decision-maker. As a committed Arab nationalist, he wished to be considered as an Arab leader of Nasser's stature (Hinnebusch, 1991:387; Seale, 1988:339-350). It was therefore important for him to gain legitimacy for his policies in the Arab world and be considered as a regional power by the international community. But he was first of all a shrewd and calculating Realist, a textbook example of the Machiavellian Prince or Morgenthau's prudent leader, and would not risk the stability of his regime for ideological gains. While he considered legitimacy to be important, domestic stability remained paramount.

2.2.2 Is there a Syrian public opinion?

For Syrian foreign policy to be constrained by a national identity, there must be a public opinion, elite or other group that is able to sanction the regime should it fail to live up to its obligations. Indeed, the concept of legitimacy is meaningless without someone to give it.

But as we have seen, Asad met few constraints within the regime. And although the "modernizing" development of the 1950s and 1960s made the Syrians more politically conscious (Hudson, 1977:260), the Ba'thist state essentially forbade any opposition. While the regime built some of its legitimacy on a structural basis of a large government and bureaucracy, it also harnessed society through the single party and its mass organizations to

[19] Asad's crack-down on the profitable smuggling of cigarettes and cultivation of drugs in Lebanon is an example (see 6.2.3). Rotating leaders to different positions in the hierarchy was another strategy in order to prevent any one from becoming too independent and powerful.

[20] Asad's closest associates for the last thirty years have been Foreign Minister and later Vice-President Abd al-Halim Khaddam (Sunni), a close friend of Asad; head of Military Intelligence, Ali Duba (Alawi); Military Chief of Staff, Hikmat Shihabi and Defense Minister Mustafa Tlass (both Sunnis). Rifaat al-Asad, the President's brother, was also part of the inner circle before he was put under house arrest and later exiled.

mobilize support for its foreign policies (Hinnebusch, 1991:390). Some have seen this as a consequence of a half-literate and easily manipulated public (ibid.). Others have attributed this to the firm grip that the President and his security services held over the people, and the display of power that emanated from the cult of Asad (Seale, 1988; Perthes, 1995; Wedeen, 1999).

There was, however, a "public mood", binding the regime to certain "core" issues (Hinnebusch, 1991:391; Abukhalil, 1994b:85). These were the Arab-Israeli conflict, regaining the Golan and settling the Palestinian question. While the public had virtually no say in foreign policy and security matters, Asad and his regime were careful not to stir up public discontent. Former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, for instance, noted Asad's concern for the public opinion in negotiating the disengagement agreement in 1973 (Kissinger, 1982:1087). The Islamist uprising in the late 1970s and early 1980s, came in part as a reaction to the Alawi-dominated and secular Ba'thist regime, as well as the regime's fighting against the PLO in Lebanon.

But the regime possessed considerable coercive and rhetoric means to maintain its autonomy of action. Asad's regime fully demonstrated its determination and capability to use force to quell opposition when it put down the Islamist uprising. After some initial hesitation, the rebel-stronghold in Hama was leveled with the ground in a brutal carnage in 1982.[21] Hama served as a warning to all (Seale, 1988:332-334). One could argue that, in contrast to the period of negotiations with Kissinger, a mere three years after Asad's seizure of power, the Hama-massacre consolidated the regime's power and made it no longer bound by public opinion. But domestic stability and public support, to the extent that the existence of genuine public support can be ascertained, clearly remained a source of strength to Asad's regime. Asad was aware of the weakness of his own power, his regime's power, and that of Syria as a state (Zisser, 1998:2). Although Syrians were probably willing to bend on some technicalities concerning a peace treaty with Israel, and had accepted certain unpopular actions (such as the intervention in Lebanon on the side of the Maronites), they appeared to genuinely stand firm on the core demand of regaining full sovereignty over the Golan. Asad "would not long survive a separate treaty with Israel that fell significantly short of this consensus." (Drysdale and Hinnebusch, 1991:6).

3 SYRIA'S POLITICAL SECURITY

3.1 Introduction

Why did Syria insist on controlling the Lebanese political system? The Syrian military intervention in Lebanon in 1976 resulted in a large number of analyses and explanations

[21] Estimates concerning the number of deaths range from 5,000 to 10,000 (Seale, 1988:334).

concerning the motives.[22] While they vary in their focus, the main argument (and indeed the most common and convincing) is that the Asad-regime feared the consequences of the civil war. The immediate concern in 1976 was that a destabilized situation in Lebanon, where a PLO-friendly Leftist-faction was on the verge of victory, would prompt Israel to intervene, bringing it up to the Syrian border around its Golan-defenses. An Israeli intervention, ostensibly to save the Christians was also liable to lead to a partition of Lebanon, possibly the establishment of an Israeli-friendly Maronite state. Conversely, the prospect of a Sunni-dominated revolutionary regime in Lebanon equally alarmed Asad, since it could very well become hostile to the Syrian minority-regime as well and harbor anti-Syrian movements and groups (Rabinovich, 1984:48). In all, Lebanon's geo-strategic position made it a potential political threat to Syrian security (Salem, 1994b:78). Therefore, after communicating with Israel through US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, to avoid alarming Israel and provoke a war, which resulted in the "red-line" agreement,[23] Syria intervened militarily in Lebanon to crack down on the Leftist-faction (Seale, 1988:278-280; Kissinger, 1999:1039-1051).

Whatever the motivation, the call from the Maronite Lebanese President Suleiman Franjieh (as it happened, a close friend of Asad) for Syrian help was answered with a military intervention against the Leftist faction. Although Syria's crushing of its Muslim and Palestinian "brethren" seriously undermined the regime's legitimacy, Asad maintained that it had been necessary to maintain the unity and stability of the Lebanese state, as well as to protect it from Israel (Asad, in Rabinovich, 1984). This was, and continued to be Syria's main argument for maintaining a military presence. However, beyond that, it seems that Syria's domination and military presence in Lebanon served Syria's own security as well as its regional foreign policy objectives. I will discuss the military and economic aspects in the next two chapters. Suffice to note here that political control over Lebanon was a necessary precondition for these concerns.

Political security concerns the organizational stability of states, systems of government and the ideologies that give them legitimacy. (Buzan, 1991:19). It is about warding off threats that are not of a military or economic nature, against the legitimacy of the regime and its right to dominate and monopolize the use violence. In practice, Syrian political security was about suppressing political opposition to the rule and policies of the Asad-regime. Prior to the 1990s, this was essentially a domestic Syrian issue. Once the war in Lebanon was over, however, the Syrian public hardly questioned Syria's role in Lebanon. On the contrary, those who cared rather praised Syria's stabilizing and protective role in Lebanon. Besides, by the beginning of the 1990s the Asad-regime had consolidated its power in Syria and had eliminated the main elements of opposition. Therefore, "Syrian political security" will focus on warding off continued political threats to Syria's domestic stability emanating from Lebanon, such as undermining activities from opposition movements, as well as warding off threats to Syria's

[22] See for instance Dawisha, 1980; Rabinovich, 1984; Lawson, 1984; 1996; Seale, 1988; Pipes, 1990; Avi-Ran, 1991; Olmert, 1992; Hinnebusch, 1998.

[23] The "red-line" agreement was an informal understanding whereby Israel accepted a Syrian intervention in Lebanon, as long as Syria refrained from deploying ground-to-air missiles, from using its air force against Christian objectives and from moving its ground forces south of the ("red") line between Sidon and Mashgara (Cobban, 1991:21). However, Syria received permission from Israel to use planes to bomb General Aoun out of the Presidential Palace in 1991.

presence and domination in Lebanon, crucial for the Asad-regime's broader security concerns and regional objectives.

3.1.1 The character of Syrian policy in Lebanon

From the outset of Syria's direct military and political involvement in Lebanon following the 1976 intervention, Syria sought to establish its sphere of influence in Lebanon. Syria pursued a two-pronged strategy. The first element consisted of containing and controlling the main politico-military actors, the Lebanese warlords and militias, and the foreign states' influence in Lebanon, like the United States and Iraq, during the late 1970s and 1980s. Syria wanted exclusive influence over the political development in Lebanon. Syria played an active role in mediating peace initiatives that suited Syrian security concerns, while undermining initiatives that sought to leave Syria out. Syria's divide-and-rule strategy during the civil war finally earned it an exclusive position in Lebanon's post-war political system. Syria used its position to consolidate its power and control the state and resistance movements in South Lebanon during the 1990s.

The second element concerned establishing a frame of legitimacy for Syria's domination in Lebanon, one that referred to the notion of historic and fraternal ties and the existence of a security-interdependence, set in a legal treaty framework. This legitimacy-discourse served mainly to keep Western (notably US) pressure off Syria's back. It was not a very convincing discourse, however, and it was challenged mainly by voices in the Lebanese Maronite community, which saw Syria exploiting the civil war for its own ends to the detriment of Lebanon's sovereignty, and its Christian communities. But the legitimacy-discourse was propped up by Syrian coercive practices and formed a frame of reference for the political discourse in Lebanon, giving the Syrian domination a convenient façade of legality.

3.2 The Frame of Legitimacy

3.2.1 The legitimacy-discourse

Relations between Syria and Lebanon were historical, although how far back they extended, or how deep they ran was first and foremost a political question. In Arab nationalism, Lebanon was, and always had been, an integral part of Syria and the Arab world. Lebanon was created by the mandate powers in 1920 by adding Syrian territories to the autonomous Mount Lebanon-governorate. On the other hand, Lebanese nationalists (mainly Christians) insisted on the distinctiveness of Lebanon in a Muslim and authoritarian environment. Some even suggested a distinct Lebanese ethnicity (Salibi, 1988). The 1943 National Pact, however, defined Lebanon as an Arab state, although it remained non-aligned. This proved to be difficult for a small state situated in the middle of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It became even more so when conflict over the political system resurfaced in the 1960s and led opposing Lebanese factions to seek external patrons (Salem, 1994b).

The triumph of Syrian interests in the Lebanese war resulted in the alignment of Lebanon with the Arab camp, mainly Syria, against Israel. As a result, Syria came in a position where it could define and form official Lebanese discourse to its own ends. Thus, Lebanon's alignment was defined as being based on fraternal and historic ties with Syria and on a common struggle against Israeli occupation and aggression. Syrian-Lebanese relations were defined in terms of a sub-security complex.

Asad went to some length explaining Syria's intervention in Lebanon in a speech to the Syrian provincial councils 20 July 1976.

> The people in Syria and Lebanon have been one through history. Genuine joint interests ensued […] A genuine joint security also ensued. Close kinship between the people in the two countries also ensued. (Asad quoted in Rabinovich, 1984:188)

Asad later reiterated in the same speech:

> [T]he only consideration which has defined and defines […] the dimensions of the Syrian intervention in Lebanon […] is the interest of the people of Lebanon, because our history is one and our destiny is one. (ibid.: 218)

Concerning Syria's protective role, Asad declared in an interview to *The Los Angeles Times* 14 August 1983:

> It is a mistake for anyone to believe or to think that we will ever leave Lebanon as a morsel which it is easy for the Israelis to swallow because Lebanon is an Arab country to which we are bound by a common history and a common destiny. (quoted in Seale, 1988:413)

This line of argument became the very basis for the legitimacy-discourse in Lebanon in the 1990s. On a huge billboard facing the hotels that line the seafront in Beirut was a smiling President Asad with his arms outstretched like a welcoming host. He said: "We did not create the bond between Syria and Lebanon. God did."[24] Although generally unconvincing, the omnipresent references to the "historic unity" became the basis for politics in Lebanon. Lebanese politicians had to pay lip-service to this discourse to have a political career. The Syrian legitimacy-discourse became similarly embedded in Lebanon's new constitution in 1991 as well as in the many bilateral treaties with Syria.

3.2.2 A legal frame for Syrian domination

The Ta'if Agreement of 1989, which laid the basis for Lebanon's second republic not only legally cemented Syrian domination over Lebanon, but also entrenched the themes of

[24] "Lebanon Chafing as Syria's Partner", *The New York Times*, 12 April 2000.

acceptable political discourse. The contents of the Ta'if Agreement were further institutionalized through the subsequent bilateral treaties.

3.2.2.1 The Ta'if Agreement

The Document of National Understanding was signed by 62 Lebanese MPs[25] on 22 October, 1989, in Ta'if, Saudi Arabia. The talks that led to the agreement were held under the auspices of the Arab Tripartite Committee (Morocco, Algeria and Saudi Arabia) on behalf of the Arab states. They had grown concerned for the situation in 1988 when the Iraqi-backed General Aoun's "war of liberation" against the Syrians threatened Lebanon with an actual partition, and an open conflict between Syria and Iraq.

The final document, better known as the Ta'if Agreement, was ratified and implemented not so much for its content, since it differed only slightly from earlier proposals, like the 1985 Tripartite Agreement, that had failed to end the war (Faris, 1994). Rather, the Ta'if Agreement ended the war because of the new regional situation. It came at a time when the Lebanese factions were exhausted after almost 15 years of war and Syrian forces controlled much of the ground. The implementation of the agreement was made possible by the new situation emerging from the Gulf crisis in 1990. In return for Syrian participation in the anti-Iraqi coalition, Syria received free reins in Lebanon and tacit support for its sphere of influence by the American Bush-administration (Lia, 1997:16). The Gulf crisis also effectively neutralized Iraq as a rival in Lebanon. The Ta'if Agreement must thus be seen in a regional stability context since it had repercussions outside Lebanon (Maïla, 1991a:14). It is worth noting that the Ta'if-discussions were conducted outside Syrian influence. However, the agreement's concessions to Syrian interests were due to Syria's strong position on the ground in Lebanon and to its influence over several of the MPs participating in the talks. For those who did not favor a strong Syrian influence, the agreement was simply the best they could get. They were not willing to hamper a chance of ending the war.

The Ta'if Agreement, ratified by the Lebanese National Assembly in August 1990, mended the imbalances of the pre-war political system that were at the root of the conflict, and laid a constitutional basis for the re-imposition of state authority over Lebanese territory. Political power was re-distributed, reflecting the growing demographic and political weight of Lebanon's Muslim communities.[26] Power shifted from the formerly supreme Maronite President to the Sunni Prime Minister. The Shi'ite Speaker of Parliament was strengthened. This re-arrangement of power actually changed the Lebanese political system from a presidential system to a collegial system. The three main political positions, the so-called "troika" and still reserved for the three main sects, balanced each other's powers (Salem, 1998:18). Together their power was supreme, but whenever they disagreed, which eventually became quite frequent, Syria, as guarantor of the Ta'if Agreement and Lebanese stability,

[25] These were the only surviving MPs after the war. They had been elected in 1972, the last election before war broke out.
[26] The allocation of seats in Parliament was changed from the former 6:5 ratio of Christian-Muslim representation, to an even 1:1 division of seats. The 1:1 ratio actually favored the Christian community, which at the time probably only accounted for a mere 40% of Lebanon's population. It was meant to allay their fears of being completely marginalized from the new political system.

would act as a mediator and tip the balance in its own favored direction (Hinnebusch, 1998). It was anyway clear to all parties involved that Syria remained the dominant power due to its strong military presence, and it came to control all major political decisions (Abukhalil, 1994a).

The sectarian reshuffling of power was set for an interim period, while sectarianism gradually was phased out. A "national unity"-government was to be formed as soon as possible, to build a national consensus and end sectarianism.

The Ta'if Agreement further stipulated a gradual imposition of government control over all Lebanese territory, within a deadline of two years, except for the parts that were occupied by Israel or controlled by UNIFIL, and the Palestinian refugee camps. All Lebanese and foreign militias were to be disarmed within six months. This task was given to the new and re-organized Lebanese army under Syrian auspices. However, Hizbullah's armed wing along with a few Palestinian resistance groups were allowed to keep their arms, allowing for a continued armed campaign against the Israeli occupation in the South. At the end of the two-year deadline:

> [T]he Syrian government and the Lebanese national accord government, shall decide on the redeployment of the Syrian forces in the Beqaa area and the western Beqaa approaches in Dayr al-Baydar to the Khamana-al-Mudayraj-Ein Dara line. Should the need arise for the forces to be deployed in other locations, this shall be decided by a joint Lebanese-Syrian military committee with the Agreement of the two governments to determine the scope of the Syrian forces and the duration of their presence in these areas.

This made any redeployment of the Syrian forces a *joint* Syrian-Lebanese decision. And although the agreement set a time limit for redeployment, it did not make a specific demand for a complete Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon.

This made any redeployment of the Syrian forces a *joint* Syrian-Lebanese decision. And although the agreement set a time limit for redeployment, it did not make a specific demand for a complete Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon.

> Lebanon cannot serve as the source of a threat against Syrian security nor can Syria serve as the source of a threat against Lebanese security. Hence Lebanon shall not allow itself to serve as the transit point or base for any force, state or organization interested in harming its own security or the security of Syria. Similarly, Syria which meticulously upholds the security, independence and unity of Lebanon and the Agreement between the two countries shall not allow any activity that threatens Lebanese security, independence or sovereignty.

It is worth noting that while the text defined a security interdependence regime, it laid down two sets of obligations. Lebanon committed itself to Syria not to allow its own territory to be used to threaten its own security and that of Syria. Syria, however, committed itself to Lebanon not to allow the Lebanese territory to be used to threaten Lebanese security (Nasrallah, 1993:106). It was a *de facto* legitimization of Syrian intervention in Lebanon whenever Syria defined a security threat.

Concerning Lebanon's alignment with the Arab camp:

> Lebanon which has Arab affinities and an Arab identity maintains loyal ties of brotherhood with all Arab states. It maintains preferred relations with Syria based on the roots of close affinity, history and common interest.

The Ta'if Agreement institutionalized Syrian influence over Lebanon in the name of mutual security and fraternal bonds. While the discourse defined a Syrian-Lebanese mutual security interdependence, the center of power remained in Damascus.

3.2.2.2 The Treaty of Brotherhood, Co-operation and Co-ordination

The Syrian-Lebanese Treaty of Brotherhood, as it is commonly referred to, was signed in Damascus by the two presidents on 22 May 1991. The treaty was a "framework treaty", setting the general lines for the "special relationship". It suggested that a range of treaties should be concluded at a later stage covering the different sectors agreed upon. At the same time it put down a set of specific rules for the co-operation and co-ordination between the two states.

The treaty-text went further in institutionalizing Syrian influence over Lebanon than the Ta'if Agreement, but not without initial difficulties. Several Christian MPs, as well as the American ambassador in Beirut, objected to the text since it was judged too favorable to Syrian interests. Syria wanted the text to include the term "strategic complementary" to describe the Syrian-Lebanese relationship, a term that stemmed from the 1985 Tripartite agreement. It clearly referred to Syria's view of the relationship as a mutual security interdependence. Eventually, the words were changed to "fraternal ties" and the treaty was finally adopted (Maïla, 1991b:76).

The treaty reiterated the section on mutual security from the Ta'if Agreement, but spelled out somewhat more clearly the conditions for a Syrian re-deployment, namely "[a]fter the political reforms are approved in an constitutional manner as stipulated in the Lebanese national accord and after the deadlines specified in this accord have expired". To most Lebanese, especially in the Christian opposition camp, and indeed to most outside observers, this meant a Syrian redeployment after the two-year deadline from the ratification of the Ta'if Agreement in September 1990. At the time it seemed like the general understanding (Norton, 1997:7; Salem, 1994a:50).[27] But Syria later maintained that the conditions for its redeployment had not been

[27] See also Fida Nasrallah "Syria's strategic redeployment in Lebanon", *Middle East International*, 23 October 1992; Émile Khoury "La declaration Khaddam, un casse-tête", *L'Orient Le Jour*, 19 November 1992.

fulfilled as long as the political reforms of the Ta'if Agreement, mainly ending sectarianism, had not been fully implemented.[28] As long as sectarianism continued to dominate politics in Lebanon, Syria feared for its stability, and therefore required a continued military presence in Lebanon.

The treaty also required for the two states to go beyond co-operation in the security sector. Lebanon and Syria were to engage in the "highest level of co-operation and co-ordination in all political, economic, security, cultural, scientific and other fields", tying Lebanon even closer to Syria and opening for extensive co-operation in, among other, the economic sector.

Another new dimension of co-operation was foreign policy. Article five of the treaty clearly placed Lebanon in the Arab camp and underlined the common (Arab) destiny of Syria and Lebanon. "Therefore the two governments shall co-ordinate their Arab and international policies, co-operate to the fullest extent possible […] and co-ordinate their stands on regional and international issues." This was a direct reference to the imminent negotiations with Israel. The Syrian-Lebanese Treaty of Brotherhood prevented any party from concluding a separate peace agreement with Israel. While Palestinians and Jordanians were probing Israel for a bilateral peace-treaty much like Egypt's Camp David treaty, Syria was determined not be left alone to confront Israel in its demand for the return of Golan.

Finally, the treaty set up several joint bodies to implement the objectives spelled out in the treaty. The most interesting here is the Supreme Council, which consisted of the two presidents, along with "a number of other members from both countries." The Council charted out the general policy for the co-ordination between the two states, but also supervised the implementation of the decisions made in other bodies, usually made up of the ministers involved. Its decisions were "binding and effective". While the text required the Council's decisions to conform to the "constitutional provisions", it was too ambiguous to clearly delineate the limits of the Council's executive powers. Given that Syria's president Asad presided over this council, it gave its recommendations a political weight that was difficult to ignore (Picard, 1991:142). The Tripartite Arab Committee was henceforth completely eclipsed as a brokering institution, allowing Syria almost exclusive influence in Lebanon.

3.2.2.3 The Defense and Security Pact

The Defense and Security Pact of 1 September 1991 in many ways finalized and concretized Syria's efforts to formally assure its influence and its political security (Nasrallah, 1993:109). In accordance with the Syrian-Lebanese Treaty of Co-operation, The Defense and Security Pact obligated Lebanon to actively pursue and prosecute all those that posed a threat to Syrian security.

> [T]he military and security organs and departments in each of the two countries should take the necessary measures to achieve the…[b]anning of any activity or

[28] "Khaddam: le redéploiment Syrien aura lieu après les réformes prévues par Taef", *L'Orient Le Jour*, 17 November 1992.

> organization in all military, security, political, and information fields that might endanger and cause threats to the other country.

Given the fact that Syria's authoritarian regime effectively controlled Syrian society, making the question of security threats to Lebanon essentially a theoretical one, this pact was clearly aiming to bring the liberal and open Lebanese polity under control The Pact also called for extensive co-operation between Syrian and Lebanese security services with the aim of exchanging information and "eliminating threats". Syrian intelligence in co-operation with Lebanese security services was legally entitled to scrutinize all Lebanese residents for "security reasons". Since it in practice was largely up to Syria to define the threats to its security, the pact gave Syria virtually a free hand in Lebanon to pursue critics of its regime. It also limited the freedoms of expression, association and press, effectively muzzling the opposition to Syria's domination in Lebanon. Many Lebanese "disappeared", meaning they were arrested by Syrian security services and put in prison somewhere in Syria, a practice clearly not sanctioned by any bilateral treaty.

The Pact was reminiscent of the Israeli-Lebanese treaty of May 17th 1983, which Asad had been so determined to stop. It would have allowed Israel very much the same privileges as those Syria now obtained. The restrictions and the dependency on Syrian political sanctioning made many Lebanese doubt in the "free elections" and the autonomy of the Lebanese political system (Maïla, 1991b:87; Nasrallah, 1993:109).

These treaties defined the relationship between Syria and Lebanon in terms of legitimizing the Syrian domination over Lebanon. By referring to historic ties, fraternal bonds and mutual security concerns, the Syrian regime gave its domination an air of legitimacy. In addition, the treaties, and the fact that they were ratified by the Lebanese National Assembly, bestowed on it a legal legitimacy, soothing to some extent American concerns (Hudson, 1994). The treaties confirmed the mutual recognition of the two state's sovereignty and independence, in fact the first time Syria officially recognized the Lebanese state (Maïla, 1991b:88), but this was not formalized through diplomatic representation in either capital (Nasrallah, 1993:110). Moreover, the Syrian-Lebanese relationship clearly favored Syrian security interests. Finally, the legitimacy-discourse was not universally accepted and hence, coercion rather than legitimacy formed the backbone of Syrian domination in Lebanon.

3.3 The Syrian Domination in Lebanon

The Lebanese political system both before and after the war was essentially an oligarchic system where political leaders and representatives used their positions to consolidate personal power and economic interests. Once in power, they remained relatively free in their dispositions. Their relationship with their constituencies was mainly one of patronage, providing them with services and favors in return for their votes and allegiance. Traditional clan-based allegiances and patronage systems remained deeply entrenched in modern Lebanon. The majority of the public remained poor and without influence on the political system, which generated a general disinterest in politics as well as a gap between the public and the political

elite (Rougier, 2000:4). Also, the political "troika" eclipsed the powers of the Assembly and the Cabinet (Salem, 1998; Khashan, 1997:28). The political elite's relative autonomy made it susceptible to Syrian influence since the majority of the public and large parts of the political system were shut out from the main decision-making circles. While some Lebanese politicians still depended on their constituencies, like Druze leader Walid Jumblatt and Amal leader Nabih Berri, they also depended on Syria's sanctioning. Moreover, the Syrian domination offered a chance to make a political career to politicians who had no traditional power base or constituency, but who were willing to support Syrian interests. In sum, there were no real prospects for a political career without an initial Syrian approval. This gave Syria a formidable influence over Lebanese politics.

Syria's domination in Lebanon was based, firstly, on its alliances and the ability to reward its allies with political positions, in which they could continue to serve Syrian interests; secondly, on Syria's ability to control the political setting and define the rules for political discourse, punishing those that did not abide by them; and thirdly, on a policy of divide-and-rule that sustained sectarianism, while preventing any faction, friend or foe, from becoming independent of Syria.[29]

3.3.1 Political alliances

There is a popular myth in Lebanon that external forces instigated the civil war. Responsibility, many Lebanese say, lies with the PLO, Syria, Israel, Jordan or Iraq, depending on one's political position (Abukhalil, 1994a:124). Surely, foreign intrusion contributed to dragging out the war, but this kind of conspiracy theory only conceals the underlying intrinsic causes of the war. The fact that Lebanese factions and leaders were more than eager to seek foreign backing for their domestic political agendas provided an opening for Syria's successful alliance strategies in Lebanon.

Syria's Pan-Arab orientation attracted some Lebanese political leaders and movements like the Syrian wing of the Ba'th Party and the SSNP. But these had marginal influence in Lebanese politics. Most of Syria's alliances with Lebanese factions during the war were rather based on Syria's *political and economic power*, i.e. its ability to lend economic and material support, or sometimes even direct military assistance. This later became the basis for its post-war domination, as Syria remained the main military power in Lebanon. It is, of course, difficult to determine the motivations behind the Lebanese political alliances with Syria. I can therefore

[29] See Wedeen (1999) for a discussion of the dominating practices of the Asad-regime. She argues that the concept of "power" is difficult to verify. We do not know whether the "active consent" of the ruled emanates from conviction or from fear. Rather, the personality cult of an authoritarian regime, notably in Syria, is so "transparently phony" that it cannot possibly generate legitimacy or any active consent in a meaningful sense. It is the practices of ubiquitous personality cult and mass rallies, the display of power rather than the literal content of the official discourse, that produce the "taken-for-granted" image of the regime's power. It defines the rules for permissible speech and behavior and leads in turn to the entrenchment of power. The regime may not control the minds of people, but it controls the main "settings" of society through coercion, sustaining its domination. This approach effectively combines the legitimacy discourse with the coercive practices, based on the notion that "all power has a need to justify itself" (Weber 1990:87). It enables us to both identify the sources of legitimacy in the official political discourse and the coercive practices behind it.

only suggest their motivations based on their actions and to some extent on their discourse. In so doing, we may distinguish three main sources of motivation.

Firstly, the need for a powerful patron, either against domestic political rivals or against external enemies, led some to turn to Syria. This was probably the case with the Shi'ite militia Amal. When Asad's regime came under attack from Syrian religious circles for its secular outlook in the early 1970s (the Alawi sect was not recognized as an Islamic school), the leader and founder of Amal, *Imam* Musa al-Sadr, issued a *fatwa* recognizing the Alawi sect as a Shi'ite sect, thus bolstering the regime's Islamic credentials (Seale, 1988:173; Abukhalil, 1990:9). Sadr on his hand needed a patron to back his embryonic political party and was rewarded with Syrian weapons and training. The Amal movement became a loyal Syrian proxy throughout the Lebanese war, fighting Gemayel's pro-Israeli government and effectively curbing the influences of Iraq, the PLO and Iran (Hinnebusch, 1998:145-147).[30] Sadr also helped Syria conclude a strategic alliance with Iran in 1980 (Agha and Khalidi, 1995:3-5).

Nabih Berri, the Amal-movement's leader from 1982, was an even more loyal and valuable political ally of Syria. His position as Speaker of the Assembly since 1992 gave him power over the Assembly's work and agenda. He proved himself valuable whenever Syria or the government needed the Assembly to pass important issues concerning Syrian interests. In return for his support, Syria rewarded him with political backing, all-important in the Lebanese post-war political system, and especially since the Islamist party Hizbullah (*Party of God*) began challenging Amal's position as champion of the Shi'ite community in the late 1980s.

A second motivation, was personal interest for political and economic power in a clientelistic and corrupt political system. Political power brought huge economic benefits. Ministers, MPs and state officials used their positions to "sell" off government contracts to the highest bribes and to distribute services and employment to their constituencies. Pervasive corruption on all levels of government led to millions of dollars being spent on lubricating the clientelist neo-patrimonial system every year.[31] Many made fortunes allying themselves with the Syrians, or simply tacitly accepting the order of things as it proved beneficial.

And finally, a third motivation was sheer political necessity. Because Lebanon was a small state in a hostile regional environment, it could not dispense itself of a strong foreign ally. The influence of the other regional powers had been contained by Syria. The United States and France (or the EC/EU), and indeed any other foreign power, lacked the means or the political will to challenge Syria in Lebanon. Since Syria effectively controlled Lebanese politics, many Lebanese politicians and parties realized they had to make do with the current situation. The Damascus-Hizbullah alliance seems to fit this description. The fighting against the Israeli occupation in South Lebanon by Hizbullah's armed wing, the Islamic Resistance, has earned the party immense popularity and respect. It would not have been possible without Syria's approval. While Hizbullah received spiritual guidance and material and financial support from

[30] Amal fought the PLO militias in the War of the Camps (1985-1987) and then the Hizbullah (1987-1989).
[31] Samir Kassir "Au Liban, un pouvoir sans responsabilité, des querelles sans enjeux", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, October 1994.

Iran, all equipment was channeled through Damascus. Syria's strategic alliance with Iran precluded Tehran from intervening in Syria's sphere of influence. Syria also had the means to disarm the resistance movement if it wanted to.[32] Although Hizbullah had a broader political base, terminating the resistance-activities was liable to seriously weaken the party's political power. Syria on its hand used the Islamic Resistance as an effective proxy against the Israeli forces (IDF) and its proxy, the South Lebanon Army (SLA).[33]

Although they did not command political parties or militias (Abukhalil, 1985:35-43), Sunni notables such as Salim al-Hoss and Saeb al-Salam of Beirut, and Omar Karami of Tripoli, had traditional power bases of their own. But even they seemed to choose loyalty to Syria out of political convenience. The powerful multi-billionaire Rafiq al-Hariri similarly chose to side with the Syrians, although his position was much more autonomous due to his strong ties to Saudi Arabia, the West, and his enormous personal wealth and power.[34]

Several Christian leaders similarly chose co-operation over confrontation, although the majority of their Christian communities, especially the Maronites, vehemently opposed any Syrian interference.

The pro-Syrian orientation of Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, appears to be one of necessity too. The Druze had historically played a prominent role in Lebanese politics that had exceeded their small demographic weight (7%), mainly due to their strong cohesiveness. Playing along with Syria assured them a continued strong influence (Abukhalil, 1985:31). However, a few Lebanese Druze in South Lebanon fought with the SLA.

The alliances with leaders of all the important Lebanese factions gave the Syrian domination an appearance of a cross-sectarian Lebanese consensus. But more importantly, they gave Syria access to all the power institutions in Lebanon, bolstering the Syrian domination and legitimacy discourse. For instance, the Syrian regime justified its presence by referring to President Franjieh's plea for help in 1976. Until Syria was formally requested to withdraw from Lebanon by the Lebanese President and government, Syrian forces would remain stationed in Lebanon to secure its stability.[35]

The so-called political "troika" dominated post-war Lebanon. They constituted a virtual triumvirate where the three leaders, the President, the Prime Minister and the Parliament Speaker were all-powerful. However, constant bickering and struggling for power between the two strongest institutions, the President and the Prime Minister, allowed Syria to play the role

[32] Interview with Professor Michel Nehme of the American University in Beirut, Beirut, 26 September 2000.
[33] The South Lebanon Army was established by major Haddad in 1976 with Israeli support. He was replaced by General Lahad in 1984. The militia, counting around 2,500 active, consisted mainly of Christian officers, but recruited a large portion of its rank-and-file from the Shi'ite and Druze communities (Lia, 1997:21).
[34] Hariri made his fortune in the service of the Saudi royal family and married a Saudi Princess.
[35] Interview with Professor Sataihi, of the University of Damascus, Damascus, 3 October 2000; See also interview with Syrian Vice-President Khaddam: "Selon Khaddam, Bechir Gemayel a proposé à la Syrie d'annexer une partie du Liban", *L'Orient Le Jour*, 4 February 1995.

of mediator and patron (Hinnebusch, 1998:150). The Speaker, was more a counterbalance to the powers of the other two than an independent power in his own right (Salem, 1998:20).

3.3.1.1 The Presidency

The alliance with the Lebanese president was important to preserve Syrian influence for mainly two reasons. Firstly, the President even after Ta'if remained an important political figure with substantial power. Secondly, the President was a Maronite. A pro-Syrian president could allay Christian fears of being marginalized and help imbue the Syrian domination with an air of legitimacy.

Elias Hrawi, a man with no apparent power base of his own, was hastily chosen for President in 1991 under Syrian auspices and heavy security precautions in the Syrian military headquarters in Chtaura, near the Syrian border. His predecessor, President Muawad, had just been assassinated after only two weeks in office.[36] Muawad had been Syrian-friendly, but also a bridge-builder, and had sought a political compromise with general Aoun while keeping Syria at a distance and allowing the Arab Tripartite Committee an important mediating role. President Hrawi on his hand did not waver in his allegiance to Syria (Maïla, 1991a:17). He formally asked for Syrian assistance to oust general Aoun, and bombed him out of the presidential Palace in Ba'bda in October 1991 (Winslow, 1996:279). Aoun sought refuge in the French embassy and then went into exile.

After ousting Aoun, Hrawi received all the backing he needed from Damascus in acquiring more power over the Cabinet's work, contrary to the intentions of the Ta'if Agreement. His quarrels with Prime Minister Salim al-Hoss led him to constantly consult with Asad in Damascus and finally led to Hoss' resignation, allowing the more pro-Syrian Omar Karami to take over. Syria's part in this was especially revealing as the new cabinet was announced by the Syrian press *two days before* Hoss' formal resignation. The decision, contrary to the Lebanese constitutional practice, had already been made in Damascus.[37]

In 1995, President Hrawi's term was coming to an end, which caused Syria to worry about his successor. Damascus first opposed the idea of extending Hrawi's term since it would require an amendment of the constitution.[38] But by the end of the summer Syria faced difficult negotiations with Israel over the Golan and feared that allowing a free presidential election could jeopardize its position in Lebanon, and even the country's stability (Winslow, 1996:288).[39] Syria therefore extended Hrawi's presidential period by three years (half of a normal presidential term). The Lebanese cabinet and National Assembly were simply informed of the decision. The Assembly then amended the constitution (117 against 11).

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[36]The murder of Muawad remains unsolved, although people have pointed the finger in multiple directions, including Syria. See Jim Muir, "Can Hrawi and Syria get rid of Aoun?", *Middle East International*, 1 December 1989; and Robert Fisk (1992: 640-641).

[37] "Hoss demissionerait aujourd'hui", *L'Orient Le Jour*, 19 December 1990; Samir Kassir "Au Liban, fragile domination syrienne", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, March 1991.

[38] According to the Lebanese constitution, the President cannot run for two consecutive terms.

[39] Godfrey Jansen "Constitutional coup", *Middle East International*, 3 November 1995.

President Hrawi finally stepped down from office in 1998 and left the post to the former Commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces, General Emile Lahoud. Again, Syria handpicked the Lebanese president. Lahoud had helped to oust Aoun and was widely respected, also among Maronites, for his job in re-building the armed forces as a professional and politically neutral body. Presidents Hrawi and Asad reached a consensus on a sole presidential candidate in early October, which left other would-be candidates with no hope of running for the Presidency.[40] Once the decision had been made, the Assembly hastily amended the constitution barring high civil servants from candidature to allow Lahoud to run for the Presidency.

Lahoud was considered a strong president, with more integrity and autonomy than his predecessor. The fact that he did not go to Damascus for consultations all the time underscored this relative independence, and boosted his popularity also among Lebanese Christians. With Lahoud, power shifted back to the President after a period when politics had been dominated by a very powerful Prime Minister (see below). But when political realities eventually exposed Lahoud's loyalty and subservience to Syria, his popularity plummeted.[41]

3.3.1.2 The Prime Ministers and cabinets

The power-balance of the "troika" tilted back from the President towards the Prime Minister when the powerful Rafiq al-Hariri took office in 1992 (Winslow, 1996:287). Hariri's takeover was welcomed by the Lebanese after the two former governments of Karami (1991-1992) and Solh (1992) had failed to address the economic problems following the war, leading to riots and social unrest in the spring of 1992. Throughout his period in power (1992-1998), Hariri enjoyed a unique personal power due to his wide patronage network, which included political leaders, government officials, business leaders and even high-ranking officials in the Syrian regime. He also held large shares in almost every major business and media corporation in the country (Salem, 1998:21-22). Although he was not Syria's candidate in the 1992 elections, his takeover was received with immense expectations.[42] Hariri's intimate ties to Saudi Arabia, and his good relations to the West were considered important to attract investments.[43] But the continued fighting in South Lebanon hampered his attempts to restore confidence in the Lebanese economy. Hariri's ambitious reconstruction program plunged the country into huge foreign debts. Lebanon also witnessed an increasingly authoritarian regime during his period in power with tough restrictions on the media and suppression of the opposition. Despite some initial independent initiative, Hariri loyally supported Syria's position in the negotiations with Israel. When Hariri resigned in 1998, and the respected but much weaker Salim al-Hoss took over, the Prime Minister office was again eclipsed by the Presidency.

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[40] Reinoud Leenders "Time for a strong President", *Middle East International*, 16 October 1998; "Assad's choice", *The Economist*, 10 October 1998.

[41] One thing was the inability to guarantee a deployment of the Lebanese Army to the Israeli border after the question of an Israeli withdrawal came up in 1999 due to Syrian pressure (see next chapter). More humiliating yet was the incident where Lahoud did not attend the funeral of King Hussein of Jordan in Amman because Hafiz al-Asad initially had not made up his mind. When Asad decided to go in the last minute, it was already too late for Lahoud.

[42] Jim Muir, "The bandwagon rolls on", *Middle East International*, 18 December 1992.

[43] Samir Kassir "L'oligarchie financière au pouvoir á Beyrouth", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Decembre 1992.

3.3.1.3 The National Assembly

The National Assembly served mainly as a rubberstamp for the dominating political "troika" and as a convenient façade of legitimacy for the Syrian domination. It was instrumental in passing new laws and treaties, as well as making necessary constitutional amendments in favor of Syrian interests. Since the end of the war, it had a pro-Syrian majority. In 1991, the government appointed 40 new MPs to fill the vacant seats from the war, backed by Syria and with the tacit support of the United States. The idea of holding by-elections under international supervision was dismissed by Syria who had little interest in elections that might undermine its influence in Lebanon (Norton and Schwedler, 1994:50).

However, Syria's wish to hold elections in Lebanon in 1992 met opposition. Political leaders of all Lebanese confessions warned of the consequences of margina-lizing the Maronites who threatened to boycott the elections in protest of Syria's military presence, which they feared would hamper free elections. But Syria insisted, probably because Syria wanted a compliant Assembly before the Ta'if Agreement-deadline for the Syrian redeployment later that year (ibid.; Salem, 1994a:55). It was also in Syrian interest to have a friendly Assembly in 1995 when president Hrawi's term would expire and a new president would have to be elected.[44]

The parliamentary elections in 1992 and 1996 were marred by several irregularities suggesting government and Syrian interference (Salem, 1994a:55-56). There were allegations of rigged elections and the use of coercion against opposition candidates, but none of these reports could be confirmed (Khashan, 1997:36-42). Moreover, the electoral lists were widely inaccurate.[45] They contained the names of thousands of people that were deceased, while the names of thousands of new eligible voters were missing. There were numerous reports of irregularities at the polling stations too, but there were no independent bodies to monitor the elections or to prevent such things from happening. However, the government did intervene directly by censoring the media's coverage of the elections and of opposition candidates.

The main element of government interference was the new electoral law, which was approved by the Assembly and which allowed gerrymandering. While the Ta'if Agreement had established the Governorates (*muhafazat*) as electoral districts to encourage cross-confessional voting, the elections were held by districts (*qada)* in the Beeqa valley and in Mount Lebanon (Bahout, 1993:55-59). In 1996 the electoral law was altered again, this time dividing only Mount Lebanon, officially to allow for more fairness (Salem, 1997:27-28). On both accounts, the election law assured the election of Syria's protégé, Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, at the expense of several of Mount Lebanon's Christian candidates. The boycott only facilitated Syria's ascendancy over the Assembly. In some districts, candidates won their seats in parliament with only very few votes (41 being the lowest in 1992!) (Norton and Schwedler, 1994:56). But the boycott did deprive the Assembly of a broad-based legitimacy. The Assembly functioned politically and was recognized by the United States and France.

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[44] Fida Nasrallah "Why Syria forced the elections on Lebanon", *Middle East International*, 25 September 1992.
[45] The government's lists set the number of voters to 2,5 million out of a total population of around 3,5 million.

In 1996, the election law allowed for the consolidation of power of several of Syria's allies at the head of large parliamentary (and often sectarian) blocs: a Sunni bloc in Beirut headed by Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri; a Shi'ite bloc in South Lebanon headed by Amal leader Nabih Berri; and the blocs of the Franjieh and Karami clans, President Hrawi and the powerful Minister of Interior, Michel Murr (Khashan, 1997:38; Salem, 1997:28). This clearly violated the principle of ending sectarianism as stipulated in the Ta'if Agreement, but the government argued that sectarian representation in the Assembly was necessary to preserve the precarious peace.

The monopoly of power in the hands of the political "troika", as well as the interference of the government in the elections created a general sentiment of popular resignation.[46] However, although the outcome did secure a Syrian-friendly majority in the Assembly, much of the irregularities must be attributed to local rivalries and poor organization at the polling stations. In both elections, many pro-Syrian candidates even lost their seats or won by a small margin (Khashan, 1997:34-35). Critics have suggested it was orchestrated to give the elections a "fig-leaf of fairness and freedom".[47] But it probably just showed that Syria did not control every bit and pieces of Lebanese politics, nor was it likely to want to do so. Much of Lebanese politics still remained subject to domestic factors, such as traditional patronage ties and pervasive corruption. One should be careful in seeing a Syrian hand in all that goes on in Lebanon.

3.3.1.4 The cabinets

The cabinets in the post-war period were largely eclipsed by the powerful Prime Minister, especially during Hariri's period in power. The first cabinet, the "Government of National Unity", however, included several former militia leaders. This cabinet was also responsible for formalizing Lebanon's "special relations" with Syria, dissolving the militias and re-establishing state authority over Lebanese territory (Salem, 1994a). But cabinet-posts served mainly as a reward to Syria's wartime allies, like Elie Hobeiqa,[48] while most Maronite leaders were marginalized. Only Samir Geagea, former leader of the Lebanese Forces militia, participated in government but resigned in protest in 1992. The cabinets consisted thereafter mainly of people associated with the political "troika", many of them technocrats, and had thus little autonomous power.

3.3.1.5 The judicial branch

The judiciary system was under the control of the executive branch (Moukheiber, 2000). The Ministry of Justice decided all appointments and promotions. Powerful politicians also exerted considerable influence over the courts and judges in cases that were of concern to them (Salem, 1998:21). The judicial system also served as an effective tool of the Syrian domination, since it constantly threatened to open an investigation against government critics and opponents on charges of corruption or embezzlement, true or not. Conversely, the judicial

[46] The turnout for the elections in 1992 and 1996 were 29,57% and 44,11%, respectively (Nassif, 2000:124).
[47] Fida Nasrallah "Why Syria …", *Middle East International*, 25 September 1992.
[48] Hobeiqa was considered responsible for the massacres of about thousand Palestinians in the Sabra and Chatilla refugee camps in 1982. Formerly a Maronite militia leader and close to President Bachir Gemayel, he switched sides in 1985, joined the Syrians and was rewarded with a cabinet post after the war. This, however, alienated the Maronite community.

system prevented investigations against government-allies. The establishment of the Constitutional Court in 1995 attempted to give the judiciary branch some autonomy, but despite a few independent rulings, the Court dared not challenge the ruling political elite.

3.3.1.6 The intelligence services and the Lebanese Army

The Lebanese intelligence services worked closely with their Syrian counterparts and monitored society and the political system to detect threats to the security of Lebanon and Syria. They operated mainly under the orders of Syria's head of Military Intelligence, General Ghazi Kana'an, but it is not unlikely that the different branches of the intelligence and security apparatus also monitored and checked each other, like in Syria. Even pro-Syrian politicians, such as Berri and Hariri (the latter had close ties to Kana'an) complained that their phones were being tapped, at least since 1997.[49] In general, the intelligence and security services maintained a level of fear that reminded people of the limits of opposition and discourse.

The Lebanese Army maintained a neutral position after the war. General Lahoud was widely respected and admired for his job in de-politicizing the officer corps and rebuilding a strong and professional army. Sources and observations suggest that although the Army worked closely with the Syrians, it was not considered totally subservient to Syria. Rather, it appears that it was a respected and strong national body with close ties to the Lebanese public (Bahout, 1998:64-65). As probably was the case in Lebanese society and the political system, there appeared to be much discrete resentment towards the Syrian domination. Syrian artillery positions, positioned in a horseshoe formation in the hills surrounding the Presidential Palace in Ba'bda and the Defense Ministry in Yarza suggested that Syria did not take the Army's loyalty for granted.

3.3.2 Coercion

3.3.2.1 Controlling the political setting

The political discourse in post-war Lebanon was bound by certain limits in respect of the Syrian presence. The main rule was to accept the Ta'if Agreement, to sustain a political discourse acknowledging the security interdependence of Syria and Lebanon, and pay lip service to the "special relationship" and "fraternal bonds" between the two states (Khashan, 1997:38).

Syria's power to set the "rules" for the political discourse was backed by its hegemonic influence over Lebanese politics. But the Syrian military presence, at checkpoints and in barracks in Beirut and other major towns, served rather as a visible reminder of the power-relations in Lebanon, than as a direct coercive instrument. Syria's power was mainly an implicit power. It was the perception of Syria's power (*pouvoir*), its *capability and determination* to intervene forcefully to protect its interests that induced Lebanese leaders to conform to Syrian interests. It gave, of course, an extra impetus to the advice and wishes of

[49] Jim Quilty "Who's on the phone?", *Middle East International*, 1 October 1999.

Syrian officials when consulting with Lebanese leaders. Politicians, and to some extent, the media, practiced an auto-censorship, avoiding issues that were likely to upset the Syrian regime or otherwise hurt Lebanese-Syrian relations.

The basis for this implicit power was laid during the war.[50] Although relatively weak compared to other regional powers such as Israel, Iraq and Egypt, Syria managed to prevail as the principal foreign power in Lebanon.[51] This is widely attributed to Asad's pragmatic and cunning policies and his determination to use whatever means necessary to achieve his objectives (Seale,1988: see especially Chapter 26 "Dirty Tricks"; Abukhalil, 1994a:130-131). This "logic of force" included using proxy militias (as in the War of the Camps), assassinations of political rivals (although an actual Syrian involvement rarely has been proven, there are strong circumstantial evidence) and ruthless attacks on opponents (like the siege and bombardment of the predominantly Christian quarters of East Beirut in 1981). There was also Asad's notorious record in Syria, as well as the many rumors, stories and indeed well documented reports[52] concerning the abuses and brutality of the Syrian and Lebanese security services (Sherry, 1997). Finally, there was the fear that Syria had "ears" everywhere, mainly in the shape of the rumored 1 million guest workers in Lebanon, which greatly narrowed the private sphere (the "back region"). This perception of Syrian capabilities and Asad's will to use them against opponents in Lebanon, instilled fear in many Lebanese, making them tread carefully (Salem, 1998:22).

Even Walid Jumblatt, who enjoyed Syrian backing for his Druze power-base in Mount Lebanon, knew how to remain well within limits when he at times tried to hold Syria at an arm's length in order to bolster his "national unity" discourse. Jumblatt, along with much of the Arab world, privately holds Asad responsible for the assassination of his father, Kamal Jumblatt, in 1977, after he had vehemently opposed Syria's policies. When Walid Jumblatt called on Asad in Damascus after mourning his father, he was greeted with the ominous words: "How closely you resemble your father!" (Seale, 1988:289).

In sum, Syria's military domination during and immediately after the war was gradually replaced by domination in the minds of the Lebanese.[53] However, Syria would intervene politically whenever it felt internal political squabbles threatened Syrian interests.

3.3.2.2 Divide-and-rule

While Syria supported Lebanese parties and leaders to promote its own interests in Lebanon, it was equally concerned with containing their powers. In a sense, Syria's domination in Lebanon largely reflected Asad's rule in Syria. Keeping the Lebanese actors weak made them dependent on Syrian support and mediation, thus securing a lasting Syrian domination over

[50] Interview with Imad Mansour, researcher at the Lebanese Institute for Political Studies, Beirut, 27 September 2000.
[51] In 1995, Syria had a population of 14,1 million, a GDP of $13,6 billion, and a poorly trained and Soviet equipped military force (World Bank Group: http://www.worldbank.org ; Cordesman, 1998)
[52] See Amnesty International's 1997 report on human right violations in Lebanon, as well as the annual country reports. See also the press release by Human Rights Watch in 1997: "Syria/ Lebanon – Disappearances in Lebanon by Syrian Security Forces".
[53] Thomas L. Friedman "Lebanon…", *The New York Times*, Foreign Affairs, 18 July 2000.

Lebanon. Moreover, a continued sectarian political system, sustained by Syria's policy, underscored the Syrian argument that Lebanon still depended on Syria for internal stability. Syria thus pursued a divide-and-rule policy, which preserved the sectarian balance, kept everyone in their place, friends and foes alike, and strengthened Syria's role as a brokering institution (Kassir, 2000:10). Syria mainly used mediation and consultations, often summoning political leaders to Damascus. However, Lebanese leaders often took the initiative themselves to seek support from their Syrian patrons whenever they were caught up in domestic political squabbles (Hinnebusch, 1998:150-151).

Balancing the two principal members of the political "troika", the President and the Prime Minister, was the main element of this policy, preventing either one from becoming too independent of Syria. For instance, Syria accepted Hariri's resignation in 1998 after he clinched with the new and popular President Lahoud. Hariri had previously threatened to resign on numerous occasions if he did not get his way. But he had always been persuaded to stay on, every time after Syria had intervened to mediate and assure him that he had its backing. This time, however, Syria stayed out of it.54 It coincided with the replacement of Abd al-Halim Khaddam with Bashar al-Asad, Hafiz al-Asad's son and presumed "heir" to power, as head of Syria's Lebanon-portfolio. Bashar probably wanted his "own men" in Lebanon. Apparently, he personally picked Lahoud and saw to it that Hariri, who was a close friend of Khaddam, did not get the backing he sought. Although the Syrians did not want Hariri's resignation, they were probably eager to trim his powers. Hariri's return to power in 2000, in turn dealt a blow to President Lahoud's increasing power, thus redressing the balance (see Chapter 7).

This policy may be seen in connection with Syria's domestic situation, especially with what was perceived as the Asad-regime's narrow sectarian base. The 1976-intervention in Lebanon in support of the Maronite forces against the Muslim (predominantly Sunni) leftist bloc was decried by the Islamists in Syria as one minority regime supporting an other (Seale, 1988). While the Sunni urban bourgeoisie and the Muslim Brotherhood were largely neutralized through co-optation and repression, the Sunni majority remained a potential threat to the stability of the Asad-regime. Thus, the "Sunni factor" might have played a role in the decision to tilt the balance of power towards Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri, who had connections with high ranking Sunni Syrian officials and with the Syrian Sunni bourgeoisie. A strong Sunni executive in Lebanon went some way in allaying Sunni fears in Syria of being marginalized.

Syria's South Lebanon proxy, the Hizbullah, was also closely monitored. Syria was weary of Hizbullah's Islamist political ambitions. The party's accommodation to the post-war political system allowed them to run in the parliamentary elections in 1992 where they returned twelve seats, making them the largest single political bloc in the Assembly. The party grew immensely popular during the 1990s due to its near-monopoly on the resistance in the South, its uncorrupt image, and its extensive network of social services (Paulsen, 1996; Norton, 1998). But the 1996 elections revealed the limits of its power. Hizbullah-leader Shaykh Hassan

[54] Reinoud Leenders "Lebanon's democratic coup", *Middle East International*, 11 December 1998

Nasrallah rejected vehemently Amal's invitation to co-operate in the South; a co-operation which offered the Islamists fewer seats than they expected to win on their own. He was forced to make a turnabout, however, after being summoned to Damascus for consultations.[55] Hizbullah's electoral setback in 1996 was mainly caused by domestic conditions, such as the Christian participation in the elections and a growing distaste for Hizbullah's visions for an Islamic state in a multi-confessional Lebanon and its close ties to Iran. But the setback was also due to the efforts of the Syrian and Lebanese governments to curb its political influence. Syria's designs for Hizbullah were for the party to remain an important guerrilla force in the South, and less a political challenge to Amal (Usher, 1997:65). It was partly out of consideration for Syria's image in the West, especially in the United States, but more importantly to preserve the Lebanese political balance (Abukhalil, 1990:13-16; Picard, 2000:38).

3.3.3 The "opposition"

Syria harnessed the opposition to the government in the National Assembly, like Hizbullah and several "independent" MPs, so that it controlled both ends of the political arena (Hinnebusch, 1998:153). It gave Syria an additional check to the policies of the Lebanese government. However, Syria could not completely control the largest opposition to its domination, the Christians, mainly the Maronite community.

3.3.3.1 The Maronite community

The Maronite community constituted about 35-40%[56] of the population at the end of the civil war. It had represented the bulk of the *status quo*-faction in the civil war since it stood to lose much of its traditional privileges and power through a change of the Lebanese political system. It also vehemently opposed any Syrian encroachment in Lebanon and continued to be the staunchest critic of Syria's political domination and military presence in the post-war period.

The initial reaction to the process in Ta'if in 1989 was the rejection of any political solution that did not secure the complete independence of Lebanon from *any* foreign power. General Aoun was the clearest and strongest example of this rejection (although it is worth noting that his position initially enjoyed wide popular appeal in the other communities as well). But Syria's dominant position on the on the ground, combined with war-weariness and an opportunity to end the war compelled the Christian deputies to concede to the Ta'if plan and postpone the question of Syrian withdrawal (Hinnebusch, 1998:149-150). The Maronite militias were anyway unable to continue the war, since they no longer had much foreign support, and the United States tacitly accepted Lebanon as Syria's sphere of influence. Samir Geagea, leader of "The Lebanese Forces",[57] therefore turned against Aoun and decided to co-operate with the new government (Winslow, 1996:276-279).

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[55] "Damas impose une coalition Amal-Hezbollah au Sud et dans la Bekaa", *L'Orient Le Jour*, 5 September 1996.

[56] There are no official figures concerning the demographic size of the Maronite and the other communities due to the very politically sensitive issue concerning the division of power along confessional lines. But in the 1990s, the Shi'ite community was probably the largest, with the Maronite and Sunni communities close behind. Any estimate is controversial.

[57] There were several Christian militias during the civil war, many of them almost personal militias of clan leaders. There was the "Phalanges" of Pierre Gemayel; the 'Tigres' of Dany Chamoun; "The Liberation Army of Zhorta" of President Suleiman

In return for giving up their weapons and supporting the Ta'if Agreement the militia leaders were given seats in the new "Government of National Unity". However, they were soon disillusioned about their influence in the government and adopted opposition. The Maronite community decried the appointment of MPs by the government in 1991 as a means of filling the Assembly with pro-Syrian MPs that would cement Syrian influence over Lebanon and deprive the Maronites their traditional privileges. This fear became even stronger prior to the 1992 parliamentary elections (Harik and Khashan, 1993:42-43). The Christians therefore boycotted the elections, headed by Patriarch Sfayr and the leaders of the main Christian parties.

The main weakness of the Maronite opposition after the war was its internal divisions and lack of a strong unifying leadership. Their wartime leaders were either dead (assassinated like former President Bashir Gemayel, and militia leader Dany Chamoun[58]), were in exile (like General Michel Aoun, Raymond Eddé, a liberal politician, and former President Amin Gemayel), or were caught up in internal squabbles. One of the main Maronite parties, the Kata'ib (Phalangist party), was weakened when its leader Amin Gemayel left for exile. The new leadership adopted an accommodational approach, which fuelled internal divisions. The Lebanese Forces, probably the most important Maronite mouthpiece, was disbanded and outlawed after the war. Its leader and staunch critic of the Syrian-dominated political system, Samir Geagea, was sentenced to life in prison in 1995, convicted for the murder of militia-leader Dany Chamoun. Amnesty International labeled the trial as "seriously flawed".[59] Amin Gemayel returned to Lebanon in 2000, but was forced to adopt a moderate discourse. The only leading figure who managed to rally criticism against the government and to serve as a unifying mark was the Maronite Patriarch, Nasrallah Butros Sfayr. However, this only underscored the sectarian manifestation of the opposition, strengthening Syria's argument concerning Lebanon's precarious sectarian stability and, hence, the importance of the Syrian military presence.

The government also constantly cracked down on Maronite movements and demonstrations. The occasional assault on Syrian guest workers in Lebanon alerted the authorities of potentially dangerous undercurrents in the Maronite community. Peaceful demonstrations, especially by pro-Aoun student movements, were met with equally repressive measures. There were also reports that more than 200 Lebanese were being detained in Syrian prisons without charge or trial, some of them since the end of the war (Amnesty International, 1997:17; Sherry, 1997:31-33).

However, Syria was concerned about the increasing Christian emigration from Lebanon to the West during the 1990s.[60] Syria did not want to totally alienate the Christian communities.

Franjieh; and several other smaller militias. Many of the Christian militias united their forces under the banner of "The Lebanese Forces", but there were constant rivalries for leadership and disagreements between the different militia-leaders.

[58] Their assassinations have been widely linked to Syria, but there has been no evidence.

[59] See Amnesty International Report 1996.

[60] An estimated 100,000 Lebanese emigrated from Lebanon every year during the 1990s; the majority of these were Christians. Source: Kari Karamé at the Norwegian Institute og International Affairs, 27 February 2002.

They, especially the Maronites, had an important role in the sectarian balance of power in Lebanon. The appointment of President Lahoud was especially welcomed in the Maronite community since Lahoud was considered a "heavyweight" and widely respected.[61] Some Beirut newspapers speculated in a deliberate Syrian policy that started in the municipal elections earlier that year, to re-integrate the Maronite community into the political system.[62] Syria's concern for the Maronites also probably explains why the Maronite Patriarch was allowed to voice Maronite frustrations and openly criticize the Syrian domination without retribution. These measures did not reduce Christian opposition to the Syrian dominated political order in Lebanon. But the "opposition" remained divided, fragmented and cowed into silence, and was unable to voice any opposition unless there came a shift in the national and regional situation.

3.3.3.2 The media

There has been some criticism of Syria's domination in the Lebanese printed press, although Hariri's large shares in many of the papers constrained their ability to criticize the government while he was still in power (Salem, 1998:23). The editor of renowned Beirut-daily *al-Nahar*, Gibran Tueini, questioned on several occasions the Syrian military presence, going against the conventional wisdom of avoiding sensitive issues. He eventually sparked a heated political debate over the Syrian presence, when he in March 2000 addressed Bashar al-Asad, son and heir-apparent to the ailing Syrian president, in an open letter in *Al-Nahar*.[63] Although Tueini and the rest of the media have remained within defined limits of permissible discourse, it appears that Lebanese authorities allowed some criticism to occasionally seep through, to vent out frustrations in the population.

The Hariri government imposed restrictions on broadcasting in September 1996, which affected independent opposition networks, allowing only five television-stations to operate.[64] State officials owned four of these. The fifth was Hizbullah's television station, *al-Manar* (Norton, 1997:9).

3.4 Summary

Given the precariousness of Lebanese polity in the 1970s and 1980s, the concerns for Syria's own stability and the security of the Asad-regime dictated a firm Syrian control over Lebanon. The shift in the global and regional environment, along with the exhaustion of the Lebanese factions enabled Syria to establish its sphere of influence in Lebanon and dominate its political system at the beginning of the 1990s.

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[61] Reinoud Leenders "Time for a strong President", *Middle East International*, 16 October 1998; "Assad s choice", *The Economist*, 10 October 1998

[62] Reinoud Leenders "Christians back to the fold?", *Middle East International*, 3 July 1998.

[63] Gibran Tueni "[Open Letter to Bashar Assad]", *Al-Nahar*, 23 March 2000. Translated and republished in *The Middle East Intelligence Bulletin,* April 2000: http://www.meib.org/articles/0004_doc1.htm

[64] Lebanon previously had 52 television stations and over 120 radio stations! Most of them were set up during the civil war, when state authority was virtually non-existent. See report by Human Rights Watch (1997).

In the first order of priorities lay the containment of political security threats from Lebanon itself or from foreign powers operating in Lebanon. Syria's political alliances with Lebanese factions, which grew dependent on Syria, its strong military presence and the tacit support from the great powers enabled Syria to consolidate its position in Lebanon. Syria's mix of legitimacy discourse and the constant threat of coercion eventually cemented Syria's domination over Lebanon, apparently even in the very minds of the Lebanese. Syria never felt secure however, and remained reluctant to loosen its grip. The Christian communities who were marginalized from the new political system grew increasingly disgruntled by Syria's divide-and-rule policies and the constant interference in Lebanese affairs. They were therefore a constant threat to Syria's self-acclaimed "protective" role in Lebanon. But the Christian opposition was divided, fragmented and coerced into silence, and was unable to voice opposition unless there came a shift in the national and regional situation.

Syria's domination over Lebanon also served Syrian security concerns in the others sectors. For one thing, Syria was able to maintain large military forces in the Beqaa-valley, thus blocking a strategic Israeli assault through Lebanon. Its domination also enabled it to harness the Lebanese state and resistance movements and use the low-intensity war in South-Lebanon as leverage against Israel. Finally, Syria could use its position and alliances in Lebanon to sustain its "allocative" domestic policy. Thus, consolidating Syrian power in the Lebanese post-war political system became a prerequisite for pursuing Syrian security in other sectors, and ultimately securing the Asad-regime.

4 SYRIA'S MILITARY SECURITY

4.1 Introduction

What role did Lebanon play in Syria's military security, mainly in its confrontation with Israel? Hafiz al-Asad's coup in Syria in 1970 marked a shift in Syrian foreign policy, turning from a policy of ideologically motivated radicalism and adventurism, which in Asad's eyes had led to the loss of Golan, to a pragmatic Realist orientation and a mainly *reactive* foreign policy. Asad focused on Syrian national interests, consolidating the regime and containing Israel, which also implied getting the Golan back. Golan was a matter of strategic importance as well as of national pride.

Asad's foreign policy was characterized by autonomy of action, the pursuit of a limited set of consistent goals, carefully weighing costs and benefits, matching ends with means, and adopting strategic flexibility (Hinnebusch, 1996:43). At the same time, to bolster regime legitimacy, Syrian foreign policy continued to be influenced by Syrian nationalism and Pan-Arabism. Besides, Asad never relinquished his ideological roots and his dedication to the Arab/Palestinian cause. However, security considerations always took priority over Pan-Arab considerations, as evidenced in Syria's crushing of the PLO-alliance in Lebanon in 1976.

Syria had several motives for intervening in Lebanon. Chief among them, however, was the need to contain Israel, Syria's main regional rival. Although Syria was threatened militarily from other states in the region as well, such as Turkey and Iraq, I have defined "Syrian military security" as being mainly Syria's conflict with Israel over the Golan and against the perceived Israeli expansionist ambitions. It was mainly in this context that Lebanon played a role. During the 1990s Lebanon served as a physical buffer against an Israeli assault on Syria around the Golan heights, as well as an arena for Syria's war-by-proxy warfare against Israel. Lebanon thus came to hold a central role in Syria's ambitions for a strategic balance of power with Israel.

Syrian military security was also defined along a political dimension. It involved reaching a settlement that would remove the Israeli threat, but that would also restore Arab dignity, as Syria saw it. This meant, among other things, finding a solution to the Palestinian problem. But more importantly, it meant returning occupied Golan to Syrian sovereignty without humiliating compromises with Israel. As the Islamist uprisings in the 1970s had shown, a weak regime legitimacy or other signs of weakness on the part of the regime was liable to entice opposition movements to rebel against the regime (Al-Sayyid, 1998:51). Although the Asad-regime was far stronger now than in the 1970s, the threat of internal instability remained real. Thus, as Lebanon was drawn into Syria's political orbit, Syria used it as leverage in the series of on-and-off peace negotiations from 1991 to 2000. It also prevented Lebanon from seeking a separate peace with Israel that would undercut Syria's plans to get the Golan back (Seale, 1988; Abukhalil, 1994a; Hinnebusch, 1998).

4.1.1 The Syrian-Israeli Conflict (1948-1990)

Initially a part of the Arab-Israeli conflict over Palestine that started in 1948, the Syrian-Israeli conflict gained its own weight and dynamic over the years (Muslih, 1993:611). With its proximity to Israel and its strong Pan-Arab ideological commitment, Syria, along with Egypt, was in the forefront in the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948 and 1967. The Israeli occupation of Golan in the 1967 war became a major issue of contention between the two states and led Syria, in alliance with Egypt, to initiate the 1973 war against Israel in an unsuccessful attempt to recapture it. With the strategic importance of the Golan heights, overlooking the whole of the Syrian heartland, including its capital Damascus, which was in striking distance of the Israeli Golan forces, the Israeli occupation remained a major military threat to Syria (Muslih, 1993:627).

The Syrian-Israeli conflict can be seen as a conflict between diametrically opposed geopolitical security ambitions; ambitions of "Greater-Syria" against "Greater-Israel" (Seale, 1988:349-350, 366). To the Syrian regime, Israel represented an alien entity that had been implanted and sustained by colonial and imperialist powers to the detriment of the Palestinian people living there, as well as to the ambitions of Arab unity (Hinnebusch, 1991:374-375). Also, the Syrian regime was convinced Israel harbored a "Greater Israel" ambition, an ambition to expand beyond its 1948 borders;. The mass expulsion of the Palestinians in 1948, the occupation of Arab land in 1967, the subsequent annexation of Jerusalem in 1967 and

Golan in 1981, and Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 were strong evidence of this. Moreover, Israel's unprovoked attack on Syrian forces in Lebanon in 1982 suggested that Israel was bent on either destroying, or at least weakening, the Syrian regime. Syria feared that Israel sought to dominate the entire Levant (Seale, 1988:366-368; 2000:71).

Similarly, Israel saw itself surrounded by hostile states determined to bring about its destruction. Syria's Pan-Arabic and anti-Zionist rhetoric (often mistaken for anti-Semitism), combined with what Israel perceived as "Greater-Syria" ambitions underscored Israel's mistrust and fear of Syria (Ma'oz, 1995:141-143).

While it is possible to argue that these mutual fears were not totally unfounded in the years leading up to the 1973 war, both sides failed to reassess each other's intentions, especially after Asad came to power in 1970. These mutual deep-seated feelings of mistrust and fear based on misinterpretations of each other's security needs, were the result of what Wendt calls a "mirroring" process (1992: 404-405). The actions of a significant "other" are met with similar actions. This interaction creates expectations on both sides about each other's future behavior, which if repeated long enough create relatively stable concepts of the "self" and "other", and of the issue at stake.

Although it was not entirely void of ideological components, the Syrian-Israeli conflict was (is) mainly a question of military security in a hostile anarchical regional environment. Both states believed they had to control their neighboring states in order to create a buffer zone against the other's aggressive ambitions. There were mutual feelings of acute insecurity emanating from the hostile political positions and the military capabilities of the other . Syria's participation in the last three wars against Israel and its subsequent support of Palestinian guerrillas and terrorist groups, as well as its chemical weapons arsenal, represented a significant security threat to Israel. Similarly, Israel's qualitatively superior military capabilities furnished by the United States, as well as its undeclared possession of nuclear capabilities, made Israel a formidable military threat.

This geopolitical rivalry highlighted the element of a zero-sum game. The Syrian-Israeli conflict was largely defined in Realist terms on both sides, in which a balance of power became the cornerstone of their respective military strategies and the constant security dilemma sustained a level of fear and alert.

This chapter shows Lebanon's role in Syria's military security strategies, both as an element of the balance of power and as leverage in the peace negotiations with Israel.

4.2 Syria's Two-Track Confrontation Strategy

The Syrian confrontation with Israel since Asad came to power can be described as a two-dimensional approach, one political and one military. These two approaches have worked in parallel, sometimes one backing the other, or sometimes separately as two distinct options, but always with the same objective: "comprehensive peace"; a political settlement that included

the return of all occupied Arab territories, including Golan, and a solution to the Palestinian problem. This would not only remove or reduce the threat of war. A settlement in which Syria played a leading role would enhance Syria's regional stature and influence, with positive effects on the Syrian regime's domestic legitimacy and stability (Hinnebusch, 1996).

4.2.1 Background

As early as 1971, and then again in 1972, Asad signaled Syria's readiness to come to terms with Israel's existence and to engage in a peaceful political resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 (Perthes, 1993:23; Agha and Khalidi, 1995:47). In 1974, a year after the attempt to recapture the Golan militarily, Syria responded positively to US efforts to mediate in the Middle East. The US-brokered disengagement treaty on the Golan indicated Asad's readiness to enter into practical arrangements on the ground, which Syria scrupulously adhered to ever since (ibid.). It further indicated Syria's willingness to engage in political negotiations with Israel under the auspices of the Unites States despite political differences. Asad continued to seek US mediation and recognition for its position as a key actor for regional peace all through the 1970s and 1980s. There was some initial optimism in the wake of Nixon's visit to Damascus in 1974. However, the United States' close relationship with Israel and Cold War considerations, both highlighted under the Reagan-administration, shattered any prospect of a Syrian-American understanding.

Syria believed in the need to engage Israel in peace negotiations from a position of strength. The 1973 war aimed at re-conquering the Golan, not only to return lost territory but also to gain a stronger position from which to negotiate peace with Israel. After Egypt "defected" from the Arab camp in 1978 when it signed the Camp David agreement with Israel, Syria sought to redress the balance of power with Israel through a doctrine of "strategic parity", and contain Israeli power (Agha and Khalidi, 1995:45-46; Cobban, 1991:33). Besides, given its geo-strategic position as the major remaining Arab front-line power, Syria would almost certainly have to bear the brunt of any future Arab-Israeli military confrontation. Syria sought to improve its military capabilities through a quantitative and qualitative arms build-up with Soviet help. The close relationship with the Soviet Union, formalized in 1980, also provided Syria with a deterrent against an Israeli all-out attack (Seale, 1988:398), although the Soviet Union remained rather cautious for fear of being dragged into a major conflict (Cobban, 1991:119). "Parity" further involved widening Syria's alliances against Israel to substitute the loss of Egypt (Agha and Khalidi, 1995:45-46). Syria thus entered a strategic alliance with Iran in 1980, which also served to pin down Iraq and reduce the threat on Syria's eastern border. Syria further sought to put Jordan and Lebanon within its political orbit, to preserve an Arab bloc with itself in the lead, as well as enable Syria to control the various militant movements operating from these states. Syria would use them as leverage against Israel according to its own interests. Once "parity" with Israel had been achieved, the United States would have to recognize Syria as a key power to peace in the region and Syria's right to negotiate with Israel on equal terms.

But Syria had to scale down its ambitions by the end of the 1980s. In terms of military equipment, it became clear that Soviet assistance could never match the American aid to Israel, in neither quantitative nor qualitative terms. Nor was there sufficient will in Moscow to sustain this costly arms race.[65] The decline in foreign (Gulf) financial aid also undermined the ambition for "parity".[66] The Syrian economy was in trouble, and could hardly sustain larger defense spendings beyond the level of around 16% of Syria's GDP.[67] However, according to Israeli military analysts, Syria was still able to muster "a considerable military capability" through a re-organization of the armed forces and the purchase of modern MiG-29 warplanes, (Levran and Eytan, 1988:199-206). Syria's arsenal of *Scud* missiles and chemical weapons also represented an important deterrence capability, threatening to make a strategic attack on Syria costly.[68]

Politically, Syria became increasingly isolated throughout the 1980s. Syria cut its relations with Egypt after the Camp David Accords. The PLO and Jordan slipped out of Asad's clutches due to policy differences. In fact, the Syrian sponsored Abu Musa revolt against Arafat in 1983 failed to wrestle the PLO out of Arafat's hands. The PLO under Arafat sought instead support and improved relations with Egypt and Iraq. Syria's strategic alliance with Iran alienated it from the Gulf monarchies, which rallied to support Iraq against Khomeini's revolutionary regime and cut their economic aid to Syria. Syria still remained in a position to intimidate Jordan and the PLO, however, and thwart any American peace initiative that sought to leave out Syria (Rusonik, 1991). But this rejectionist position, combined with Syria's apparent links to terrorism, further isolated Syria internationally.[69] Finally, the Soviet Union signaled in 1985 that it no longer would support Syria's hostile position against Israel, or its ambitious military build-up (Shad et al., 1995:85). This situation, together with the failure to achieve parity with Israel, led Asad to make the "strategic decision" to moderate Syria's preconditions and seek a negotiated settlement (Ma'oz, 1995:196-197). Israel under the Shamir-government remained reluctant, but the new international and regional situation emerging at the beginning of the 1990s eventually provided the right conditions for peace negotiations.

A positive development, in Syrian eyes, was the increasing Syrian control on the ground in Lebanon towards the end of the 1980s. And then, the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait presented

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[65] It is estimated that Syria received arms deliveries valued at an average of $2,9 billion annually in the period of 1980-1984, before declining somewhat to an average of $1,3 billion annually 1985-1989 (Cobban, 1991:119). This roughly amounted to more than two thirds of Syria's total defense expenditures (Shad et al., 1995:84).

[66] The major part of Syria's arms imports were paid for by its Arab allies (mainly the Gulf monarchies and Libya, and by the Soviet Union on a concessionary-loan basis (Perthes, 1995:32)

[67] Syria's estimated defense expenditures increased after Egypt "defected", from $2,39 billion in 1981 when its GDP was $16,04 billion, to $3,95 billion in 1987 when GDP was $29,70 billion. Both defense expenditures and GDP the fell to $1,51billion and $16,21, respectively, in 1989. Defense expenditures stabilized around $2,2 billion in the 1990s, while Syria's GDP fluctuated around $15-20 billion. These are merely estimates and vary some in the different sources. (Sources: IISS (1988 to 1999); World Bank (1997 and 2001); IMF (2001); Eurostat/European Commission (2001).

[68] Anthony Cordesman's (1996) analysis of the Syrian-Israeli military balance gives another picture, however. It underlines the very poor quality of the Syrian armed forces and its equipment, including the arsenal of *Scud*-missiles. These missiles represented a threat only insofar as they could carry chemical warheads, which Syria had in its arsenal. The considerable and growing qualitative gap to Israel, was amply demonstrated in the previous wars and in the military confrontations in Lebanon 1982 in which Syria lost almost all of its air force.

[69] Syria hosted, among others, the notorious Palestinian terrorist, Abu Nidal. In 1986, Syrian intelligence was behind the attempt to blow up an El Al-flight from London, the so-called "Hindawi affair". Syria has since figured on the US State Department's list over countries that support terrorism.

Syria with an opportunity to break out of its isolation. Syria's participation in the Gulf War coalition earned it considerable good will from both the United States and the Gulf monarchies, while at the same time checking Iraq (Armanazi, 1993). More importantly, the United States gave Syria a "green light" to extend its sphere of influence over its Lebanon (Lia, 1997:16).

Lebanon became the cornerstone of Syria's two-track confrontation against Israel. The Syrian influence over the Lebanese arena made Lebanon an ally and gave Syria political leverage in the peace negotiations that started in Madrid in 1991. Meanwhile, by harnessing the resistance-movements in South-Lebanon, Syria could continue to exert military pressure on Israel and its Lebanese proxy, the SLA. Lebanon thus became the main arena for the continued Syrian-Israeli conflict.

4.2.2 The Political Track

Syria's political track sought to negotiate a peace treaty with Israel that would end the state of belligerence, but not establish "normal" relations. Asad still hoped to contain Israel within its 1967-borders. "For Asad, the essence of any settlement is not recovery of this or that piece of occupied territory, but the "containment" of Israel, just as his notion of a comprehensive peace is not about normalization but, on the contrary, about holding the line against Israel" (Seale, 1996b:36).

Actually, Asad's two-track strategy "mirrored" the Israeli negotiation strategy. Israel would move slowly and use the different tracks, the Palestinian, Jordanian and Syrian tracks, as leverage against each other, consistently giving attention to the one track that offered most progress. For instance, when the Palestinian track achieved a breakthrough in 1993, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin devoted his full attention to it, and left the Syrians waiting. Syria's foreign minister, Faruq al-Shara, explained in an interview in 1998: "[The Israelis] want each Arab party to feel that it is in a waiting room, and it needs to make further concessions if it wants to get a chance to see the doctor." (quoted in Cobban, 1999:76). But Asad increased tensions in Lebanon whenever there was a pause in negotiations. The deaths of Israeli soldiers in South-Lebanon were meant to remind Israel of the costs of leaving Syria waiting.

4.2.2.1 The Syrian-Israeli negotiations (1991-2000)

When the American Bush-administration invited Israel and the Arab states to a peace conference in Madrid in 1991, Syria was the first to welcome the initiative and take up the invitation. The Gulf War had demonstrated that the United States was the leading foreign power in the Middle East. The Bush-administration had also early on advocated a comprehensive settlement in the region as part of its "New World Order" and seemed sincere in its efforts to find a settlement that would meet at least some Arab demands (Ma'oz, 1995:207-208). Rejecting the American offer would certainly mean the loss of any potential positive dividend of Syria's Gulf War-participation. Besides, Asad had always considered US mediation a prerequisite to a political settlement with Israel, although he favored a conference under UN auspices (Seale, 1988). Asad accepted the Madrid deal when the Soviet Union co-

sponsored the conference with the United States and with a UN-observer present. The quick positive reply also gave Syria a positive PR-edge on the reluctant Israeli government of Shamir.

This was not a reorientation of Syrian foreign policy but adopting Syria's pragmatic (Realist) policy to the changing international environment after the Cold War (Abukhalil, 1994a:133; Muslih, 1998:67). Syria's foreign policy objectives remained constant. Asad viewed the Madrid conference as a golden opportunity to start negotiations with Israel. Syria expected to play a leading role in the negotiations since it largely controlled Lebanon and held some influence over Jordan and the PLO. By supporting Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the PLO and Jordan had discredited themselves internationally and it was assumed that they would have to fall in line behind Syria. Finally, the Bush-administration seemed ready to pressure Israel into negotiating a settlement.[70] From such a strong position, Syria would be able to secure a settlement that would contain Israel within its 1967 borders and secure Syria's leading position in the region.

The Madrid conference was premised on two conditions. First, that negotiations be based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338; and second, that all negotiations were bilateral. The first condition had always been a Syrian and Arab demand. One of the consequences of the Camp David agreement was that it set a precedent for the "land-for-peace" formula. Syria insisted on the complete return of the Golan in return for peace. The second condition, however, was an Israeli demand and contrasted sharply with Syria's position. Syria's policy towards peace negotiations centered on maintaining a concerted Arab position that would enable Syria and the other Arab states to negotiate a "comprehensive peace" from a position of strength. Therefore, negotiations could not be held separately. The Camp David agreement in 1978, the foiled 1982 Reagan Plan, and the 1983 Israeli-Lebanese May 17th Agreement, all demonstrated an ominous US acquiescence to Israel's strategy: to isolate and weaken the Arabs, forcing them to concede to a settlement on Israel's terms (Seale, 1988). But although Syria rejected the very notion of bilateral settlements, it acknowledged that the present negotiations could be conducted bilaterally, before reaching a final comprehensive settlement (Cobban, 1999:19). After the parties had presented their initial opening statements, negotiations were conducted separately and directly between the Israelis and each of the Syrian, Lebanese and the joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegations.

The Syrian-Israeli talks centered on the issue of an Israeli withdrawal from Golan, security arrangements, especially the controversial early warning stations, and the quality of the peace and normalization that Israel would get in return. In the following decade, from the Madrid conference in 1991 to the Shepherdstown-negotiations in January 2000, Syria attempted to pressure the consecutive Israeli governments to withdraw from the Golan, back to the borders of 4 June 1967, the eve of the Six-Day War. While the Israeli Likud-led government of Shamir rejected the notion of "land-for-peace", negotiations made considerable progress, albeit slowly,

[70] For one thing, the Bush-administration withheld a $10 billion loan guarantee to Israel in 1991 to pressure the Shamir-governemnt into attending the Madrid conference.

under the Labour-governments between 1992 to 1996. Rabin and his successor, Shimon Peres, gradually committed Israel to a withdrawal from the Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967.[71] Syria on its hand gradually recognized Israel's need for "total peace for total withdrawal", although it remained guarded concerning the range of "normal relations". Thinking in terms of zero-sum was gradually replaced with the notion that both parties could actually gain from peace (Hinnebusch, 1996:51; Cobban, 1999:102).

Syria and Israel reportedly came very close to a treaty in 1996, but were unable to take the last crucial steps. The mutual deep-seated feelings of mistrust remained too strong (Cobban, 1999:139-150). Negotiations were suspended unilaterally by Israel in March 1996 and were put on hold by the new Likud-government, headed by Binyamin Netanyahu, until a new Labour-government took over power in Israel in September 1999. Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Barak then launched a new round of negotiations, picking up where they had left off in 1996. However, despite considerable progress in the negotiations and great concessions by both parties, Israel could not bring itself to withdraw to the border of 4 June 1967 giving Syria access to Lake Tiberias, one of Israel's most important water resources. Nor could Syria give in to Israel's security conditions and demands for a "warm" peace after more than forty years of state of war with Israel (Moualem, 1997:86).[72] In May 2000, the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations were suspended indefinitely. (For detailed accounts of the Syrian-Israeli negotiations, see Ma'oz, 1995; Rabinovich, 1998; and Cobban, 1999. See also Moualem, 1997; and Savir, 1998). [73]

4.2.2.2 The Syrian position

The Asad-regime's own nationalist rhetoric had made the issue of a full return of the Golan a matter of national pride. As Asad explained:

> No one in Syria can relinquish an inch of the land; he who relinquishes a part of his land or sells out any part of his homeland is a betrayer of the people. This is an axiom believed by each Syrian citizen. When the people judges that one is betrayer, then one's fate is known. I have this conviction. Therefore I say that compromise on land issue is out of question and not on our agenda. If you wander throughout Syria, from one end to the other, you will never find a Syrian who accepts a peace that leaves a part of the Golan in the hands of Israel. (Interview in *TIME Magazine*, 11 November 1992)

This rhetoric had played such a central role in the Syrian regime's discourse over thirty years. The return of the Golan represented the very foundation of the struggle with Israel. Syria could thus only conclude a settlement that legitimized its enormous investments and losses, including

[71] What the parties actually agreed upon in 1995 and 1996, especially Israel's "commitment" to withdraw from the Golan, became a matter of controversy before negotiations were picked up again in 2000 (Donald Neff "Syria and Israel – back to the table" *Middle East International*, 24 December 1999; Seale, 2000).
[72] Michael Jansen "The peace process flounders in Geneva", *Middle East International*, 7 April 2000.
[73] Itamar Rabinovich headed the Israeli negotiating team for the Rabin-government. Uri Savir took over when Peres succeeded Rabin in 1995. Walid al-Moualem was Syria's Washington-Ambassador and was central in the Syrian negotiation team.

the continued state of emergency ordinary Syrians had experienced since 1963 in the name of national unity and security. Asad had to come out portrayed as restoring Arab dignity and land (Hinnebusch, 1995:74).

Syria believed it could exert influence over the Jordanian and Palestinian tracks, to veto any settlement that did not meet its demands for "a just and comprehensive settlement". Syria therefore consistently refused to de-couple a Syrian-Israeli peace settlement from a solution on the Palestinian track. But the PLO and Jordan quickly recovered from their Gulf War political blunders, mainly because the United States wanted to include the PLO in the bilateral negotiations. Despite assurances from Arafat and King Hussein that they would coordinate their positions with Syria, considerable mistrust on all sides led the PLO and Jordan to undertake secret negotiations with Israel. Syria manifested harder positions than Arafat and continued to support militant Palestinian organizations that rejected the peace process (Ma'oz, 1995:239; Strindberg, 2000). Thus, the announcement of the Oslo Accord on 31 August 1993, following secret Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, should not have surprised Syria, but it did. The PLO was denounced for reaching a partial solution, but Syria announced at the same time that it would not interfere or undermine the agreement (Ma'oz, 1995:327; Cobban, 1999:126). Then, in July 1994, the announcement of a Jordanian-Israeli agreement finally brushed aside any Syrian hope of using the Palestinians and Jordan as leverage in its negotiations with Israel.

The disclosure of the Palestinian and Jordanian agreements with Israel undercut Syria's negotiating strategy. Again, Israel appeared to want to isolate Syria in order to extract concessions. But Asad refused to be pressured. Firstly, while carefully preserving the peace process, Syria continued to voice its opposition to the Oslo accords and hosted the Alliance of Palestinian Forces (AFP), an alliance of ten Palestinian movements that opposed Arafat and the Oslo accords. The AFP included the most important anti-Oslo Palestinian movements like the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)[74], the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), Hamas and Islamic Jihad (Strindberg, 2000). Syria's patronage of the AFP was purely political and served mainly to give Syria's claim of championship and representation of the Palestinians in the peace process some credence. It also gave Syria some influence over the activities of those movements operating in South Lebanon (ibid.: 63). Secondly, since the PLO had decided to proceed on its own, Syria could focus much more on its own national interests, mainly getting the Golan back and cosolidating its sphere of influence in Lebanon. As the PLO and Jordan now were "lost", Syria now had to focus much more on its last "card": Lebanon (Bahout, 1998:58; Khashan and Haddad, 2000:207).

4.2.2.3 The Lebanese position

Lebanon's position in the peace process differed from the other Arab delegations since it in 1967 had not been occupied by Israel and therefore was not affected by UN Resolutions 242 and 338. Thus, Lebanon rejected the principle of "peace-for-land" and insisted instead on an

[74] The PFLP and DFLP gradually "defected" from the AFP and a number of their leaders were allowed back into the Palestinian National Authority-ruled territories.

unconditional Israeli withdrawal from South-Lebanon as called for in UN Resolution 425[75] before negotiating any peace settlement. Furthermore, it refused to be dragged into a multilateral settlement, and to be the subject of a bargain with Israel.[76] However, the Lebanese position failed to take into account the escalating tensions in South-Lebanon and that this almost certainly would be linked to an Israeli withdrawal, within a Syrian-Israeli settlement (Bahout, 1998:59). This was clearly the Israeli position, which wanted security guarantees along its northern border before pulling out. Lebanon attended the conference, however, under pressure from the United States and after receiving reassurances that the Lebanese-Israeli talks would be based on UN Resolution 425. Syria also apparently convinced the Lebanese to attend. In October Lebanese President Hrawi visited Damascus where he reached an agreement with Asad on a common stand.[77] Lebanon later followed Syria's example and refused to attend the multilateral conference in Moscow in January 1992.

But from the outset of the Madrid conference, Lebanon negotiated separately with Israel and with its proper 425-agenda. Although Israel considered a settlement with Lebanon an integral part of a peace-treaty with Syria, Syria evaded the issue altogether and referred to the Lebanese delegation (Ben-Aharon[78], 2000:9). This changed by 1994 when the Palestinian and Jordanian agreements with Israel required Syria to revert to its Lebanese "card". After Lebanese-Israeli negotiations were suspended following the twelfth round in 1993, mainly because of Israel's frustration over the lack of progress on the Lebanese track, the question of South-Lebanon was included in the Syrian-Israeli negotiations (Bahout, 1998:59). In October 1993, the Syrian and Lebanese positions were officially joined. Since Syria handled all negotiations with Israel, Lebanon had to patiently sit on the side and await the outcome.

Lebanese diplomacy was essentially limited to a set of "red lines" drawn up by Syria. After the Ta'if Agreement in 1989, South-Lebanon became "out of bounds" for the Lebanese government. The Lebanese Army was in no position to challenge the IDF and would almost certainly drag Syria into an unwanted confrontation. Beirut was further prevented from interfering with the fighting in any way. The Islamic Resistance, Hizbullah's military wing, operated independently of the Lebanese Army, and at the discretion of Syrian (and Iranian) interests.

These restrictions were not very popular with the Lebanese government since they hampered its efforts to re-establish state authority over all of Lebanon after the civil war. Moreover, the continued fighting in the South led to Israeli reprisals against civilian infrastructure. It made government efforts to redress the economy and attract foreign investors and Lebanese émigrés back to the country, one of Prime Minister Hariri's main priorities, very difficult. Tensions between Hariri and the Hizbullah soon became apparent (Bahout, 1998:65). That Hariri was uncomfortable with the whole situation was also apparent when he in February 1993

[75] UN Security Council's Resolution 425 was unusually clear, which probably had to do with the skeptical attitude the Carter-administration at that time had towards Israel's regional policies (Kavli, 1997:580).
[76] Fida Nasrallah "Why the peace conference spells danger for Lebanon", *Middle East International*, 11 October 1991.
[77] Gerald Butt "Asad the coordinator", *Middle East International*, 25 October 1991.
[78] Yossi Ben-Aharon was Israel's chief negotiator for the Shamir-government.

announced Lebanon's readiness to assume control over the South, indicating that Lebanon would guarantee the security along Israel's border if Israel withdrew its troops. He further made it clear that Lebanon in its negotiations with Israel would not accept any linkages with Resolutions 242 and 338, and that it would not await any progress on the other tracks.[79] This contrasted the earlier position which stated that any security arrangements would be discussed only *after* a withdrawal. Hariri's plan to deploy the army in the South in July 1993 to police the area was made without prior co-ordination with Syria, and prompted a swift Syrian intervention. Hariri was slapped on the wrist for "succumbing to Israeli demands".[80] The Lebanese position did not survive the summer, and by October, Hariri declared a policy of "total coordination" with Syria (Norton, 1997:10).

Rather than resolving the tensions between Beirut and the Hizbullah, Syria used its influence to mediate an understanding that delineated each party's role, kept them apart, and put them in line with the Syrian two-track strategy (ibid.). The Lebanese government was increasingly relegated to the role of handling the reconstruction and economic programs and the wave of refugees fleeing Israeli reprisals in the South. Security issues were left to the Lebanese President and the military and security establishments, all closely associated with Damascus. Similarly, Lebanese diplomacy was restricted to reiterating the demand for an unconditional Israeli withdrawal and the resettling of Lebanon's 300,000 Palestinian refugees. Later, Lebanon added more conditions for a peace settlement, namely the return of the disputed Shab'a farms and Israeli compensation for the material and human losses which Lebanon has suffered since 1982 (Khashan and Haddad, 2000:209). Under the Presidency of Lahoud and the government of Hoss, Lebanon further consolidated the Syrian-Lebanese unity of "tracks". In 1999, Syria and Lebanon pledged to support each other in "all circumstances" and signed a collection of accords for co-operation in a wide field of issues, among other in the economic sphere.[81]

4.2.3 The military track – the South-Lebanon "card"

Pending a negotiated settlement, Syria kept up the military pressure on Israel. As far as the Syrians were concerned, or so they wanted Israel to believe, Syria could continue on living with a situation of "no war- no peace" rather than compromise over Golan (Savir, 1998:271). Thus, throughout the 1990s Syria sought to preserve a balance of power with Israel, based on a Syrian deterrence capability, and on a war of attrition through proxies. Syria continued to stock up ballistic missiles, mainly *Scuds*, with increasing range and with the potential to carry chemical and biological warheads. The experience from the Gulf war, notably the great trauma which the low-tech Iraqi *Scud* attacks on Israeli populated areas created in Israel, highlighted the effectiveness of *Scuds* as weapons of terror and fear, despite their dubious military quality. This weapon remained the backbone of Syria's deterrence capability, while Syria kept up the pressure on Israel in South Lebanon. The Syrian military track was designed to reiterate the message that Syria could not be compelled into entering a peace settlement with Israel that did

[79] Fida Nasrallah "How can the talks proceed?", *Middle East International*, 14 April 1993
[80] Fida Nasrallah "Lebanon should make peace on its own", *Middle East International*, 26 August 1994.
[81] Michael Jansen "Time running out", *Middle East International*, 29 October 1999.

not satisfy Syrian (Arab) demands, and that peace was impossible without a comprehensive political solution.

4.2.3.1 Syria's war-by-proxy

The war-by-proxy strategy allowed Syria to indirectly wage a war of attrition against Israel without committing its own forces against a vastly superior Israel. Israel on its hand was equally anxious not to spark a new major conflict with Syria. The 1974 Armistice Agreement marked the end of direct confrontation between Syria and Israel and further conflict was avoided through the 1976 "red-line" agreement. Except for the period 1981-1985, and again in 2000 when Israeli planes bombed Syrian positions in the Beqaa, these "rules" were adhered to by both parties.

Syria had a long history of using proxies in its military confrontation with Israel. Syria supported Palestinian guerrilla-attacks on Israel in the 1960s from Jordan, Lebanon and the Golan. However, following Jordan's bloody expulsion of the PLO in 1970, and the Syrian-Israeli armistice agreement in 1974, further guerrilla-attacks on Israel could only continue from Lebanon. The Syrian-brokered Cairo Agreement in 1969 between the PLO and Lebanon had already established South-Lebanon as "Fatah-land", giving the PLO virtual autonomy from Lebanese state interference (Rabinovich, 1984:41-44). When the PLO was routed from South-Lebanon by the Israeli invasion in 1982, they were replaced by Lebanese Shi'ite militants. Thus, when the implementation of the Ta'if Agreement started in 1991, South-Lebanon had remained effectively out of Beirut's control for over twenty years.

4.2.3.2 The Hizbullah /Islamic Resistance

The Hizbullah began its activities in 1983, but emerged publicly only in 1985 (Jaber, 1997:47-54). The party's military wing, the Islamic Resistance (*al-moqawama al-islamiyya*), consisted of fighters formerly associated with smaller radical resistance movements such as Islamic Amal (*amal islami*), an offshoot from Amal; Islamic Jihad (*jihad al-islami*); and the Lebanese National Resistance. These movements emerged partly as a result of the growing frustration with the Israeli occupation of the South since 1982 and partly as a projection of the Iranian Islamic revolution (Agha, 1996; Norton, 1987). Khomeini's regime was intent on exporting the revolution and found fertile soil in the politically mobilized and radicalized Lebanese Shi'ite population.

Iran and Syria had a common objective in Lebanon, although for different reasons, namely to drive out the Israeli forces. In the period following the Israeli invasion, Syria felt an acute sense of vulnerability and insecurity and put its strategic alliance with Iran to use in countering the political gains of Israel's invasion in Lebanon (Agha and Khalidi, 1995:19-21). Syria and Iran launched a counter-offensive, in which the Iranian-inspired radical Shi'ite movements made up the main military component and carried out a series of suicide bomb-attacks on the Israeli forces and the French and US contingents of the Multinational Forces (MNF) stationed

in Beirut.[82] These devastating attacks eventually led the MNF to withdraw in 1984, and the Israeli forces to withdraw to their self-declared "security zone" in the South in 1985.

The last Palestinian groups were disarmed of their heavy weapons in 1991, which puzzled those who expected Syria to use the Palestinian presence as leverage against Israel.[83] However, Asad's strained relationship with Arafat may well have made him decide to root out the last remnants of Palestinian fighters in Lebanon. Instead, Syria could rely on the Hizbullah and its military wing. The fact that Iranian funds and material were channeled through Damascus gave Syria some control over the guerrilla's supply lines and over Iran's influence in Lebanon. On a tactical level, the Resistance operated freely, deciding where and when to strike at the IDF and the SLA. On a strategic level, however, the movement remained constrained by Syria's overall political concerns, to prevent a dangerous escalation and avoid undermining the peace negotiations. Syria wanted a constant low-intensity conflict that produced a slow, but steady stream of Israeli casualties and exacted an undeniable price from Israel for its occupation.

4.2.3.3 South-Lebanon as leverage

Whenever negotiations were slow or were halted by the Israelis, Syria encouraged increased activity in the South. For instance, during Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's period in power (1996-1999), fighting increased in intensity in response to his government's refusal to take up negotiations with Syria where they had left off with Rabin and Peres. Similarly, there was a marked escalation in the fighting after Peres suspended the talks in 1996 (Rabinovich, 1998; Cobban, 1999), and again after Barak did the same in January 2000. Conversely, fighting abated whenever Syria anticipated a positive development in the peace process. In the almost quiet weeks before the Asad-Clinton summit in Geneva in January 1994, and in the period following Barak's election in May 1999, Asad demonstrated his ability to curb the Resistance.[84]

But Syria remained ambiguous concerning the extent of its influence over the Islamic Resistance. While Syria's influence over Lebanon was evident to all, and a cessation of all Resistance activities against Israel was part of a potential Syrian-Israeli peace agreement (Cobban, 1999:83), Syria consistently denied responsibility or any direct involvement in the guerrilla attacks in the occupied zone. It referred to the Resistance as the Lebanese people's legitimate right to resist an occupation. Syria did have considerable influence over the Hizbullah and its armed wing, but sometimes the situation in South-Lebanon seemed to follow its own course. Escalations were easily sparked by both sides on the ground. Both claimed the other side started it. There was an almost constant spiral of violence in which the Resistance sent volleys of *Katyusha* rockets in retaliation for civilian casualties, while Israel responded by retaliating with more artillery and air-bombardment, often killing civilians. Thus, while Syrian

[82] The US troops and the MNF were reluctantly dragged into the civil conflict by President Gemayel's Maronite faction, making them "legitimate" targets for the Syrian-backed anti-Gemayel coalition. On 23 October 1983, two suicide truck-bomb attacks against the American and French contingents in Beirut killed 241 and 56 soldiers, respectively,. The IDF staff headquarters in Tyre was similarly blown up, killing 67.
[83] Jim Muir "The Palestinians lose their Lebanese foothold", *Middle East International*, 12 July 1991
[84] Gerald Butt "Asad gains maximum benefits for minimum concessions", *Middle East International*, 21 January 1994; Michael Jansen "Suspicions surface", *Middle East International*, 30 July 1999.

and Lebanese authorities tried to calm things down, they were not always successful (Cobban, 1999:114). For instance, during the delicate negotiations at Wye Plantation in the United States from December 1995 to February 1996, fighting escalated in South-Lebanon, apparently beyond Syria's immediate control (ibid.: 139). The Israeli Labour-governments on their hand, continued "to negotiate with Syria as if there was no fighting in Lebanon, and to fight in Lebanon as if there were no negotiations with Syria" (Ben-Aharon, 2000:9). This mutual deniability during negotiations concerning Lebanese events meant that Israel refused to acknowledge Syria's political leverage, thus giving it an advantage, while Syria sought to avoid a dangerous military escalation.

The effectiveness and lethality of the Islamic Resistance improved considerably during the 1990s (Jaber, 1997:37-46). It adopted a bolder strategy that no longer restricted its activities to roadside bombs and suicide-attacks. In addition, the Resistance launched attacks on IDF and SLA strongholds and positions deep inside the "security zone" while cutting down its own losses to a minimum through improved field reconnaissance and intelligence, a professional military organization, and more and more sophisticated equipment and weaponry from Iran.[85] Throughout the 1990s, the Resistance turned the "security zone" in South-Lebanon into what the Israelis increasingly termed a "quagmire" that took a heavy toll on the IDF and the SLA. The number of attacks on Israeli and SLA positions each year increased from 172 for the whole of 1992 to 386 for the second half of 1998 only (Gazit and Eytan, 1994; Hirst, 1999:10).[86] The casualty-ratio between the Islamic Resistance and the IDF/SLA also evened out. In 1997 the number of Israeli casualties even exceeded those of the Resistance for the first time.[87] In 1999, the IDF reduced the number of patrols and gave the SLA more responsibility.[88] Since their positions were less fortified than those of the IDF, the SLA normally took twice as many casualties (Hirst, 1999). As the idea concerning an Israeli unilateral withdrawal surfaced in political circles in Jerusalem, the SLA began fearing they would be left behind and morale dropped. More and more of its soldiers, mostly Shi'ite conscripts, defected to the Resistance or acted as informants. In January 2000, a Resistance-"hit squad" assassinated the SLA's second-in-command in a bomb blast. When Israel withdrew in May 2000, the SLA completely disintegrated and many of its members, mostly officers, fled to Israel.

The success of the Islamic Resistance and the Hizbullah must also be accredited its use of the media in a propaganda war. The Hizbullah was strengthened politically due to the growing cross-sectarian popularity of the Resistance in Lebanon. Pictures of Lebanese civilian casualties were constantly shown on numerous TV-stations. Videotapes of successful attacks, filmed by resistance fighters in the field, were broadcast from Hizbullah's own television

[85] Ironically, the Resistance was able to improve its lethality and reduce IDF maneuverability thanks to the use of American TOW anti-tank weapons, sold to Iran from Israel in the so-called "Iran-Contras affair".
[86] There were no more recent figures available, but the level of Resistance activity probably remained constant or even increased until the Israeli withdrawal in May 2000.
[87] The IDF had 112 casualties, although 79 of these were killed in a helicopter-accident during a night-mission in the occupied zone. It sparked an intense debate in Israel over its occupation of South Lebanon. The Islamic Resistance reportedly had 60 casualties. The number of SLA-casualties is unknown, but was probably around twice the number of IDF's "regular" casualties (Michael Jansen "Israel's offer", *Middle East International*, 16 January 1998.
[88] Michael Jansen "Deadlock persists", *Middle East International*, 15 October 1999.

station, *al-Manar*, and sometimes even on Israeli television.[89] The film clips showed professional guerrilla soldiers, contrary to the image of a group of fanatics, and underscored the image of the Resistance fighting for the liberation of Lebanon against a vastly superior army (Ranstorp, 1998:110). Pictures of Israeli casualties also undermined Israel's determination to maintain its occupation.

Syria's support for the Islamic Resistance earned it a political edge on Israel, inflicting casualties and causing fear in the northern Israeli settlements. As the Resistance became increasingly viewed as a legitimate movement internationally, Syria also got a PR-edge, portraying its role as legitimate and just.

4.3 Attempts to De-Couple Syria and Lebanon

Lebanon's centrality to Syria's two-track strategy, and the degree of its success, is best evaluated through analyzing the responses it drew from Israel, both at the negotiating table and on the ground in South-Lebanon. The reactions from Syria, Lebanon and the Hizbullah to Israel's military offensives, as well as Israel's plans for a unilateral withdrawal, were revealing of the roles they played, and continue to play, in the Syrian-Israeli confrontation.

4.3.1 Military Offensives

Israel had since it withdrew to its "security zone" in 1985 mainly limited its military operations in Lebanon to retaliations against resistance positions in the South. However, in 1993 and 1996, Israel decided to punish Lebanon for allowing resistance movements to attack the Israeli forces and send rockets over the border. By punishing Lebanon, Israel hoped to drive a wedge between Beirut and Damascus, the main power behind the Hizbullah and the Islamic Resistance.

4.3.1.1 Operations "Accountability" and "Grapes of Wrath"

In July 1993, Israel's Prime Minister Rabin launched a major military offensive into Lebanon, called "Operation Accountability", to avenge the killing of five Israeli soldiers. Three years later, Prime Minister Peres was under pressure to bolster his security image in the ongoing election campaign and launched another military offensive, "Operation Grapes of Wrath". Both operations came after a period of increased tension and Israeli casualties. They both had the same objectives: to target suspected Islamic Resistance-bases, but principally to target civilian areas and create a wave of refugees northwards from the occupied zone. This, Israel hoped, would pressure Beirut, and in turn Syria, into curbing the Resistance (Seale, 1996a; Rabinovich, 1998:103, 231). Both operations failed. They failed partly because Syria successfully managed the tensions between the Lebanese government and the Hizbullah, separating their spheres of action and preventing the massive Israeli military offensives from creating a split between them (Harik, 1997). The humanitarian consequences of the fighting,

[89] The assassination of the SLA-commander was captured on video-tape and immediately aired on *al-Manar* television.

especially the massacre in Quana in 1996, which was a tremendous blow to Israeli prestige, forced the United States to intervene and mediate a cease-fire. [90]

4.3.1.2 The effects of the offensives

Israel's military reprisals against Lebanon only served to strengthen the popularity of the Islamic Resistance. In 1991, at a time when the Lebanese were tired of war, Syria and Lebanon were negotiating peace with Israel, and Hizbullah was considering participating in the upcoming Lebanese parliamentary elections, it had seemed likely that the Islamic Resistance would have to cool down its *jihad* against Israel (Jaber, 1997:44). But then, Hizbullah's secretary general, Sayyid Abbas Musawi, was killed along with his wife and infant son by Israeli helicopter gunships in February 1992. The killing triggered a massive cross-sectarian national surge of sympathy. Similarly, the attacks on Lebanese civilians in the military offensives in 1993 and 1996, especially the Qana-massacre, cemented the Resistance's legitimacy and popularity in the Lebanese population (Sayigh, 1996; Cobban, 1999:161). Even Christians, if only temporarily, rallied behind the Resistance after Israeli planes bombed a Christian area of Beirut in 1996. The Resistance was increasingly recognized as a *national* resistance. The increasing positive exposure for the Resistance and the Hizbullah in Western academia and media contributed too to their growing international legitimization. It also gave Syria some relief from accusations that it was supporting terrorists, although it remained on the US list of states supporting terrorism.

The Islamic Resistance and Hizbullah also gained a *de facto* recognition from Israel and the United States as the legitimate Lebanese resistance movement. International efforts to mediate a cease-fire in 1993 resulted in an understanding with the Resistance that defined mutual rules for future engagements. It restricted the fighting to the occupied zone and prohibited the use of civilians as cover or target for military operations. These rules impeded the IDF's room of maneuver against the guerrilla since it no longer could attack resistance positions outside the zone nor target villages where its fighters were believed to hide. In April 1996 the understanding was put in print and a five-member monitoring committee was established, including, the United States, France, Israel, Syria and Lebanon.

The Lebanese government too made political gains from Israel's operations. Prime Minister Hariri refused to be pressured by Israel into curbing the Resistance. In 1996 Hariri stated: "If the Israelis with their war machine can't do it, how do you expect us to?" (quoted in Harik, 1997:257), thereby implying that the Resistance was beyond anyone's control, or at least that of the Lebanese state. Instead, Hariri focused on diplomatic efforts to stop the conflict. He and President Hrawi shuttled between the UN and European capitals to present Lebanon's case. The government also focused on assisting the refugees that had fled the fighting (ibid.: 255). They were especially successful in 1996, and together with the broad media coverage of the conflict, it made the Lebanese sense that *all* Lebanon was resisting. Government popularity

[90] The 1993 offensive resulted in 118 civilian casualties, injuring many more. In 1996, the number of casualties was 165 killed, with 401 wounded. On 18 April the IDF shelled a UNIFIL compound in Qana with artillery, killing 98 and wounding 101 civilians who had sought refuge there. Israel then halted its offensive.

boosted (Sayigh, 1996:45). Lebanon's participation in the monitoring committee was also seen as a breakthrough for Lebanon, which gained international credibility (Harik, 1997:261). Lebanon's representative, however, had lower rank than his Syrian counterpart.

Syria's allies had come out stronger than before. Even Syria came out politically strengthened. US diplomacy had focused on cooperating with Syria to end the fighting both in 1993 and 1996. Syria's influence with Iran, the Hizbullah and the government in Beirut made it central in negotiating a cease-fire. This was demonstrated by the high level of diplomatic activity in Damascus, all while Syria kept the Lebanese and Iranians out of the process (Harik, 1997:261). As one Israeli official put it in 1993: "[US Secretary of State, Warren] Christopher had to make only one call – to Damascus" (quoted in Cobban, 1999:52). Syria had also successfully handled the pressure and the tensions between the Lebanese government and the Resistance, strengthening Syria's two-track strategy.

In fact, the 1993 and 1996 offensives clearly demonstrated to Israel that there was no military solution in Lebanon, and that regional peace hinged on Syria. In November 1995, while coming under pressure to take action against the Islamic Resistance, Rabin told an Israeli television reporter:

> People must know that in the absence of a political solution with Syria, we will have to pay a bloody toll in Lebanon…. [W]ithout a political solution with Syria, there will be no solution to the terror from Lebanon (quoted in Cobban, 1999:115-116).

Although Israel did not put aside its military option, it started entertaining another option: the "Lebanon First"-initiative.

4.3.2 The "Lebanon First"-initiative

Operation Grapes of Wrath' demonstrated the ineffectiveness of military operations to wrest the South-Lebanon "card" from Syria. Netanyahu inherited a situation that was getting out of control when he became Prime Minister in June 1996. South-Lebanon was increasingly becoming a burden. The hostile attitude from the new Likud-led government towards Syria only made matters worse (Chartouni-Dubarry, 1998:13). Netanyahu quickly dismissed the idea of returning the Golan to Syria, considering it to be vital to Israeli security. With that, he put the Syrian-Israeli peace process back to square one, completely ignored Syria and attempted instead to unilaterally disentangle the question of South-Lebanon from the question of Golan.

4.3.2.1 The Israeli initiative

In July 1996, Prime Minister Netanyahu declared that Israel was ready to withdraw its troops from South-Lebanon. He anticipated negotiating with Syria the terms for the withdrawal, provided it would not be linked to the future of the Golan (Chartouni-Dubarry, 1998:11).[91] In addition, Lebanon would have to agree to disarm the Islamic Resistance, deploy the Lebanese

[91] See also Fida Nasrallah "Peace process initiatives from south Lebanon" *Middle East International*, 21 March 1997.

Army along the border to prevent further attacks on Israel, and integrate the SLA in its entirety into the Lebanese Army (Kavli, 1997:583). If taken at face value, the "Lebanon First"-initiative seemed like an attempt to reach a bilateral agreement with Lebanon, with the help from Syria(!). Netanyahu's initiative was more of a tactical maneuver, however. It was designed to "test" Syria, to display to the Israeli public that the government was looking for a way out of South-Lebanon, and to generate good-will from the international community that remained skeptical towards the new Likud-government's sincerity for peace (Chartouni-Dubarry, 1998:11; Kavli, 1997:585). In any event, both Lebanon and Syria flatly rejected the initiative. The United States was also skeptical (Lia, 1997:49).

However, the idea of a unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon, without first concluding a peace treaty with Syria, became widely debated in Israel in the following years. It was a controversial issue that cut across party lines. Those who favored a withdrawal based their arguments on two different views of the South-Lebanon conflict. The "hawkish" faction, led by Minister of Infrastructure Ariel Sharon (the architect of the 1982 invasion of Lebanon) argued that a unilateral withdrawal without any pre-agreement with Syria would effectively rob Syria of its best "card" and disassociate the Syrian and Lebanese tracks.[92] The "peace" faction, mainly within the Labour-party and supported by different peace movements, was led by Yossi Beilin and pointed to the unbearable and increasing number of casualties in the so-called "security zone".[93] Security, they argued, would be best maintained by the IDF from positions within the Israeli borders. Even within the military establishment the commanding officers were beginning to doubt the effectiveness of maintaining troops in Lebanon for the security of Israel, while the IDF was taking heavy casualties (Chartouni-Dubarry, 1998:28-30). The April understanding of 1996 with the Islamic Resistance was tying Israel's hands. Some were even beginning to acknowledge the fact that rocket-attacks on Israel had been mainly *retaliations* for IDF killings of civilians (Cobban, 1999:83). Besides, Hizbullah's political agenda in Lebanon precluded a continued war against Israel once all Lebanese territory had been liberated. Continued activity against Israel would then be "by other means".[94]

But Israel was not ready to bet on this without some prior arrangement with Syria. To the majority of the military leaders, casualties in South-Lebanon were a lesser evil than allowing the Islamic Resistance to deploy along the Israeli border and allowing them to potentially infiltrate into Israel. Besides, a unilateral (i.e. unconditional) withdrawal would probably signal to the Palestinians that Israel could be "defeated" by force. Thus, during Netanyahu's period in power, the debate went on, but the IDF stayed put in Lebanon. Following the bloody year of 1997, the IDF confined itself to its fortified positions to cut its losses, while the Israeli government seemingly was in a state of disarray concerning the best way to deal with South-Lebanon.

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[92] Editorial "The road out of Lebanon", *Middle East International* 12 March 1999.
[93] Michael Jansen "Israel's forward strategy", *Middle East International* 19 December1997; Editorial "The road …", *Middle East International* 12 March 1999.
[94] Joseph Matar "Hizballah's choice" *The Jerusalem Report*, 8 February 1996. See also interview with Hizbullah's spiritual leader, Shaykh Muhammad Hussain Fadlallah (1995).

The new Labour-led government in June 1999, headed by Prime Minister Barak, re-initiated negotiations with Syria. Barak had promised to withdraw the IDF from South-Lebanon within a year of taking office. Thus, when the Syrian-Israeli negotiations were resumed it was with the objective to secure a deal with Syria before pulling out. Syria was widely considered among Israeli politicians and in the military establishment (as well as in the US administration) as the only power able to enforce stability and peace along the Israeli-Lebanese border. But when the negotiations broke off in February 2000 and were finally suspended three months later, Barak's government put all efforts into pulling out the Israeli forces. On 24 May 2000, somewhat precipitated by the collapse of the SLA, Israel withdrew its forces from South-Lebanon in a matter of days, ending 22 years of occupation.

4.3.2.2 The Syrian Response

Although Syria remained skeptical to Netanyahu's government, there was still some hope for a settlement. After all, Menachim Begin's Likud-government had gradually returned Sinai to Egypt between 1978 and 1982, and Likud was less ideologically and politically committed to the Golan than the Labour party.[95] However, Netanyahu's "Lebanon First"-initiative, including the idea for an Israeli unilateral withdrawal, were dismissed as an attempt to de-couple the Syrian-Lebanese position. It would have weakened Syria's leverage against Israel. Syria refused to be pressured into concessions and responded to Israel's initiative with its usual strategy: the two-track strategy.

On the political front, Syria's reaction remained somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon would conform to UN Resolution 425, a basic Syrian-Lebanese demand. "We would applaud", said Syrian ambassador Moualem in an interview in 1997. On the other hand, a unilateral withdrawal outside the context of a comprehensive agreement, including the return of Golan to Syria, would seriously undercut Syrian negotiating strategy, taking away Syria's Lebanon-"card". Syria clearly wanted an agreement with Israel before it withdrew from Lebanon. Foreign Minister Shara even warned that a unilateral move would be "suicide", and that Israel would have to bear the consequences.[96] Syria, and as a consequence Lebanon, therefore rejected Israel's initiative.

Asad sought to bolster the Syrian-Lebanese rejection by attempting to close Arab ranks against Israel. In July 1996, the Arab League announced its support for the "Lebanese-Syrian solidarity". Asad also received support, although more reluctantly, from Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat and Jordan's King Hussein. Both had been denounced by Asad for reaching separate peace agreements with Israel behind Syria's back, but now they apparently felt compelled by domestic pressure to join the Arab mobilization against Netanyahu's "peace-for-peace" policy.[97] Moreover, in an attempt to counter the threatening Israeli-Turkey axis of 1996[98], Syria sought to bridge differences between Iran and the Arab states in order to create a regional bloc. These efforts even saw a rapprochement between Syria and Iraq and, to a certain

[95] Labour had in fact encouraged settlements on the Golan for thirty years (Cobban, 1999:71)
[96] Michael Jansen "Countdown to a Lebanon pull-out", *Middle East International*, 10 March 2000.
[97] Michael Jansen "Syria takes gold" *Middle East International*, 2 August 1996
[98] Israel and Turkey concluded a bilateral military agreement in February 1996.

extent, between Iran and Iraq. This would secure Syria's eastern flank and give it added leverage against Israel and Turkey, as well as against US efforts to isolate Syria. Although the Clinton administration remained lukewarm towards Netanyahu's government, Asad had been very disappointed by the degree of American support for the Israeli offensive in Lebanon in 1996 until the Quana-massacre, and by its reluctance to put pressure on Israel in the peace process (Seale, 1996b:28-30). Therefore, Syria had welcomed the French diplomatic initiative during "Operation Grapes of Wrath" since it challenged US hegemony in the region. France on its hand continued to court Syria in an attempt to re-impose its influence in the region. During a visit in Lebanon in May 1998, French President Chirac gave the Lebanese-Syrian rejection of Israel's "Lebanon First"-initiative his full support, stressing that a separate Israeli-Lebanese accord without settling the question of the Golan was impossible.[99] However, while Asad appreciated an enhanced French, or European, role in the region, he continued to view the United States as the main broker in the peace process and as the only power able to exert pressure on Israel.

Meanwhile, Syria continued to build up its deterrence force. It received new surface-to-air missiles from Iran and long range *Scud* missiles from North Korea that could hit major Israeli cities. Syria was even able to acquire new weapons from Russia despite poor liquidity and an enormous debt of $12bn. The arms purchases and Syria's continued support for guerrilla activities in South Lebanon sustained its military track, hoping to pressure Israel back to the negotiating tables.

4.3.2.3 The Lebanese response

Lebanon sided with the Syrian position. Prime Minister Hariri continued to shuttle around the world, explain his country's position and gather political support. He reiterated that Israel should withdraw unconditionally according to UN resolution 425. This, he said, was non-negotiable.[100] In a show of unity, Syria and Lebanon signed several co-operation accords in October 1999, pledging each other support in "all circumstances".[101] Thus, when the Syrian-Israeli negotiations were taken up again in January 2000, Lebanese Prime Minister Hoss tried to induce Israeli Prime Minister Barak to recommit to the 4 June 1967 line on the Golan as a prelude to opening talks with Lebanon. He announced that Lebanon would be ready to maintain security along the border as part of a full peace treaty with Israel, thus departing from Lebanon's initial refusal to give prior guarantees.[102] Even the Hizbullah offered to try to find one of Israel's missing airmen, Ron Arad, who was shot down over Lebanon in 1986. But none of this helped, and after this last round of negotiations had failed, Syria and Lebanon made a last desperate attempt to prevent Israel from disengaging the Lebanon from the question of Golan.

As the deadline for the Israeli withdrawal neared, Lebanese and Syrian officials warned against the consequences of a unilateral withdrawal. Lebanese Prime Minister Hoss warned

[99] Michael Jansen "Syria and France back Beirut", *Middle East International*, 5 June 1998.
[100] Michael Jansen "Not a serious offer" *Middle East International* 10 April 1998.
[101] Michael Jansen "Time running out" *Middle East International* 29 October 1999.
[102] Michael Jansen "Another impasse" *Middle East International* 28 January 2000.

that a peace deal with Israel, which would include the deployment of the Lebanese Army along the border, hinged on three conditions: a full withdrawal from Lebanon, the total evacuation from the Golan, and a return for the close to 300.000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon to their homes. In an effort to demonstrate Lebanon's determination not to yield to Israel's demands for a deployment of the Lebanese Army, Lebanese President Lahoud deployed only a handful of security agents in the Jezzine area, an SLA outpost north of the occupied zone, evacuated in July 1999. In March 2000, Lahoud reiterated that Israel should not expect the Lebanese Army to fill the vacuum in the South. He even suggested that Lebanon would not prevent Palestinian incursions into Israel.[103] Neither Lebanon, nor Syria, would guarantee the security along the Lebanese-Israeli border should Israel withdraw unilaterally.

These statements, together with Syria's warnings, apparently sought to deter Israel from withdrawing unilaterally, contrary to what Lebanon had demanded for the last twenty-two years. Israel had always refused to withdraw outside the context of a peace agreement with Lebanon and Syria that would guarantee the security of its borders. Lebanon's demand for an unconditional withdrawal was sincere, but from a Syrian point of view, it had simply been leverage in the negotiations. Syria did not want a unilateral Israeli withdrawal, since it would weaken its Lebanese "card". Thus, Syria's official call for an Israeli unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon seemed to suddenly backfire when Israel announced that it would, regardless of Syria. But to minimize Israel's political benefits, Syria backed Lebanese President Lahoud's refusal to deploy the Lebanese Army to the border and reinstate complete state authority. Thus, as long as the question of Golan remained unsettled, the South-Lebanon "file" would remain open. The IDF would no longer be exposed to attacks by the Islamic Resistance in the occupied zone, but in the absence of a formal peace treaty with Lebanon and Syria, Israel's northern territories would continue to remain exposed.

Israel took great care to withdraw all of its troops, not just behind the 1948 armistice line, but even behind the 1923 Sykes-Picot line in order to deny the Islamic Resistance a pretext to continue fighting. The UN was then called on to verify. However, Lebanon claimed that the Shab'a-farms, a small piece of land straddling the borders of Israel, Syria and Lebanon, and still under Israeli occupation, were Lebanese territory. It claimed the area was ceded to Lebanon in 1951 by Syria, and then seized by Israel in 1967 when it occupied the Golan. Lebanon, thus, considered the Israeli withdrawal incomplete. Both Israel and the UN rejected this claim, but it gave the Islamic Resistance a pretext to continue its resistance. Although Syria's South-Lebanon "card" lost value, the "file" remained open as a source of insecurity for Israel, albeit much reduced compared to the pre-deployment level, and as leverage for Syria to try to force Israel back to the negotiation table.

From 1996 to the Israeli withdrawal in May 2000, the Islamic Resistance continued its attacks in the occupied zone, encouraged by Syria. The Resistance was determined to extract the highest price possible for the occupation and imbue any form of Israeli withdrawal with the image of a military debacle. Routing one of the world's strongest armies would have great

[103] Michael Jansen "Ministerial messages", *Middle East International*, 24 March 2000.

political gains for the Hizbullah on the domestic arena. Shortly before the Israeli withdrawal, Hizbullah vowed to continue its struggle until "every inch" of Lebanese territory had been liberated, all Israeli violations of Lebanese air space and waters had ceased, and the Lebanese hostages held in prison in Israel had been released. Israel continued to hold two prominent Resistance leaders, 'Abd al-Karim 'Ubayd and Mustafa Dirani as hostages, hoping to exchange them for missing soldiers in Lebanon. After May 2000, the hostages and the continued occupation of the Shab'a-farms represented a *casus belli* for the Hizbullah.

4.4 Summary

Although surrounded by hostile or non-friendly states, Israel was probably the most threatening element to Syrian security. Its military superiority, the almost unconditional US political support, as well as its apparent regional ambitions made it particularly dangerous and therefore paramount to contain. The Asad-regime's domestic legitimacy and regional stature also very much hinged on its ability to confront Israel and insist on a comprehensive peace agreement that included the return of Golan. To achieve these ends, Asad sought a relative balance of power, one which would force Israel and the United States to take Syrian (Arab) concerns and demands seriously.

The new regional situation after the Gulf War allowed for a central Syrian role. Although Syria could never achieve real parity with Israel, it at least broke out of a decade of isolation and emerged as a key regional player, recognized as such by the United States. Syria even believed it was in a position to dictate the terms of a united Arab position. But instead, Syria found itself isolated again, with only Lebanon to cling to.

Lebanon came to play a central role in Syria's two-track strategy of confrontation against Israel. The joint Syrian-Lebanese position, sustained by Syria's domination over Lebanon, made any solution in South-Lebanon hinge on a solution to the question of Golan. However, this strategy in turn hinged on Israel's reluctance to withdraw outside a context of a Syrian-Israeli peace agreement. Meanwhile, Syria used its influence over the Hizbullah's armed resistance in South Lebanon to pressure Israel into making concessions.

Although Syria had hoped for a political outcome with Israel, it seemed that by the end of May, Syria's political option had been exhausted. The Syrian-Israeli conflict was back again to *status quo*. In May, Israel reverted to the Palestinian track, and on 10 June, Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad died.

5 ECONOMIC SECURITY

5.1 Introduction

Did the Syrian regime exploit Lebanese economic and water resources in order to sustain and maintain its power in Syria? Economic factors have been raised as a cause among others to the

Syrian intervention in Lebanon in 1976. Lawson (1996) and Robinson (1996) argue that the Syrian economic crisis threatened the cohesion of the regime coalition and Syria's domestic stability. The intervention thus reopened an "economic pipeline" between Syria and Lebanon, which had been cut by the outbreak of fighting in 1975, and sustained the Syrian regime's allocation of wealth to its constituencies. Hinnebusch (1998) on the other hand, rejects this argument, pointing to the high economic costs of military intervention and the relatively strong Syrian economy in the mid-1970s. What was more, the prospects of harnessing the Lebanese economy were dim. Most importantly, however, President Hafiz al-Asad's actions in the 1970s and 1980s indicated that economic benefits were sacrificed for strategic goals (Hinnebusch, 1998:141-142).

Rather than going into the debate around the motives for Syria's military intervention in Lebanon in 1976, I will instead raise the following questions: do economic interests, as well as Syria's water situation, help to explain Syria's *continued* presence and domination in Lebanon in the 1990s, and if so, were they linked to the regime's security concerns? I have defined *economic security* as Syria's ability to gain access to resources, finance and markets to sustain an acceptable level of welfare and state power (Buzan, 1991:19).

This chapter examines the economic benefits that have come as a consequence of Syria's strategic relationship with Lebanon in a Syrian economic security context. More and more observers point to such a link (Perthes, 1997; Hinnebusch, 1998; Kassir, 2000). I will also briefly look at whether the question of access to water resources has shaped Syrian policy in Lebanon in any way.

5.1.1 Background

The Syrian economy, like any other part of the public sphere in Syria, has been state dominated. After taking power in 1963, the Ba'thist regime immediately set out to centralize and strengthen the state. The nationalization of industry, oil production and commerce were meant to ensure control over Syria's economic evolution (Tinaoui, 1994:97). The Ba'thist regime effectively shut out the old land-owning and urban merchant Sunni elite. However, while the Asad-regime after coming to power in 1970 continued to use the nationalization of the economy and the oppression of political parties as a means to remove a vehicle of power from the former dominant upper (Sunni) class, it incorporated a wing of the Damascene bourgeoisie, which became state-dependent (Hinnebusch, 1993:246). The regime needed their participation in its efforts for economic expansion. The lower strata of society were harnessed through mass political organizations, and an elevated standard of living. Broadly speaking, the Syrian regime established order and stability based on its control over the means of coercion and on its control over the economy. State income was "allocated" to the regime constituencies in a wide patronage system that sought to ensure obedience and loyalty (Luciani, 1990).

Asad initiated a policy of *infitah*, allowing a limited private sphere of economic activity and thus departing from the former regime's strict adherence to socialist policies. Syria initiated an economic policy that sought rapid growth and modernization, with the help of foreign finances

and an economic opening to the West and local private bourgeoisie (Perthes, 1992:53-54). In addition, Syria sought to catch up with Israel, to achieve "parity" on an economic level as well as on a military-strategic level (ibid.: 38). However, this "rentierist"[104] economic strategy tended to give priority to the production of low priced consumer goods over the development of heavy industry. The private sector was weakened while the public sector expanded and became increasingly ineffective due to bureaucratization and politicization (Hinnebusch, 1997:251). Expanding the public sector was itself a means of allocation, since it provided a large proportion of the population a salaried job and widened the regime's client network. Also, this economic policy neglected the agricultural sector and made Syria dependent on importing foodstuffs. Finally, the new industries' output was disappointing and grew increasingly dependent on importing spare parts, expertise and capital.

Despite these economic structural weaknesses, Syria managed to put off important economic reforms. In fact, Syria was able to sustain a huge program of public investment throughout the 1970s thanks to substantial rent, partly from Syria's oil production, but mainly in the form of financial aid from the Gulf monarchies. Syria's position as a "front-line state", especially after Egypt "defected" in 1978, earned it considerable financial aid. Its alliance with the Soviet Union and the Eastern European bloc provided Syria with subsidies and military hardware on favorable terms (Shad et al., 1995:84; Lawson, 1994). But Syria experienced an economic crisis in the mid-1980s after oil prices dropped, and Syria's alliance with Iran against Iraq alienated the Gulf monarchies (Perthes, 1992).Official aid flows from the Gulf monarchies decreased from $1,6 billion annually in the 1979-1981 period, to an average of $670 million the following years, until it dropped to around zero in 1988 and 1989 (Perthes, 1995:34). As Syria's sources of rent diminished, the domestic structural deficits became apparent (Perthes, 1992:56-57). Asad initiated Syria's second *infitah* to try to bolster the economy and maintain regime cohesion. But the effects of the reforms remained limited due to the regime's reluctance to give up its control over the economic sphere. Also, Iranian financial aid covered for some of the losses from the Gulf (Agha and Khalidi, 1995; Perthes, 1995:34).[105] So did Syria's ties with the Eastern European bloc (Lawson, 1994:49). But, these were hardly long-term solutions. In 1989, Syria's foreign debt was $4.95 billion (not counting the $14-15 billion Syria still owed the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc countries). Syria's debt service now actually exceeded incoming payments (Perthes, 1995:34). All sources of income had diminished.

The question of economic reform and liberalization was a very difficult one for the Asad-regime. Its power and stability derived largely from the high degree of cohesion between the constituent elements of the state elite (Robinson, 1998). Since Asad's take-over, and especially in the 1980s, regime cohesion was characterized by a "military-merchant" alliance. This alliance was liable to suffer from wide-reaching economic reforms. The Alawi military officers who controlled political power through their domination of the various security apparatuses stood to lose from such reforms since they would likely undercut their economic privileges and

[104] Definition of rentierism
[105] Syria received $300-800 million annually in the period 1982-1986, before decreasing to less than $50 million in 1990

interests. They were therefore liable to oppose them. Conversely, economic liberalization would probably give the bourgeoisie more power and threaten regime cohesion and political stability (Robinson, 1998:164). Members of the state bureaucracy also feared for their privileges and power if reforms to make bureaucracy more efficient, i.e. a downsize, were undertaken. Asad had to consider the need to reform the economy and reduce dependency on external economic and political fluctuations. He had to consider the regime's popular constituency, the product of the regime's populist movement against the bourgeoisie and who were beginning to feel the effects of the recession. Finally, he had to consider the interests of the military officers who supported his regime, but had great economic and political interests vested in a *status quo*.

Unlike the political and military dimensions of Syrian security policy, economic policy was considered "low politics", and was therefore less subject to interference or control by Asad and his closest circle. Instead, economic decision-making came closer to a "bureaucratic-politics" model, a tug-of-war between different sectors, a high number and large spectrum of institutional and individual participants, and with the Prime Minister and his cabinet at the center of the process (Perthes, 1995:207). Asad's role was peripheral. He intervened only when economic policy involved aspects of "high politics", or whenever a government deadlock required mediation. This situation was "mirrored" in Lebanon. While Asad kept a keen eye on the political and military situation in Lebanon, Lebanese economic policies were mostly left to the discretion of the Lebanese government. Asad intervened only when economic issues obtained an element of "high politics".

Integrating the two states' economies was to a large extent politically and strategically motivated, underlining Syrian-Lebanese unity against Israel. But while I emphasize the strategic role of Lebanon in Syria's foreign and security policy, I argue that its economic involvement in Lebanon also had important domestic consequences for the stability and cohesion of the Syrian regime. Syria benefited economically from its military presence in Lebanon. For one thing, Lebanon represented an important source of income to the Syrian rentierist economy and an important patronage network to the Syrian military elite. What was more, economic integration and cooperation could help the Syrian economic transition process and hopefully create a competitive Arab economic bloc, with Syria at the center and able to face up to Israel's economic power in a "New Middle East".[106]

5.2 The Economic Benefits of the Syrian Domination

The Syrian military presence and political domination in Lebanon were mainly defined by strategic considerations. However, there were considerable economic benefits too. The 1991 Treaty of Brotherhood, institutionalizing economic co-operation at "the highest level" in a general sense, was complemented by four specifically economic treaties in 1993: the Social

[106] The 'New Middle East' was the vision of Shimon Peres. He envisaged a region in peace, following a comprehensive peace agreement, where all states in the Middle East would trade and cooperate rather than fight each other. It would be a region in which Israel would be included, not excluded like today. However, for many Arab regimes, notably the Syrian, this vision meant replacing Israeli military power and domination with economic and cultural domination, which in fact would be more difficult to combat.

and Economic Cooperation Agreement; the Agreement Regulating the Movement of Individuals and Goods; the Health Agreement; and the Agricultural Cooperation and Coordination Agreement. Besides their politico-strategic importance, the treaties opened for extensive economic cooperation and mutual benefits. But Syria insisted on a gradual implementation to allow the Syrian economy to catch up with the largely unregulated and liberal Lebanese economy. The Syrian-Lebanese economic co-operation suffered from a lack of reciprocity, tending to favor Syrian interests.

5.2.1 Imbalance in trade

The unequal application of the treaties created some barriers for the Lebanese while it opened up opportunities for the Syrians. For instance, the free circulation of goods was curbed by Syria's insistence that goods be accompanied by certificates of origin granted by Syrian authorities (Tinaoui, 1994:106). Syria had also for long insisted on collecting dues on transit goods imported through Beirut's port and airport and destined for the Arab hinterland, arguing that these goods constituted a threat to its domestic production (ibid.). Moreover, the Syrian state continued to control the production, import and distribution of agricultural products. Lebanese farmers therefore had little chance of entering the Syrian market. Conversely, cheap Syrian agricultural products flooded the Lebanese market. Finally, owners of Lebanese vehicles entering Syria had to pay taxes. Lebanese efforts to redress these imbalances in 1997, which by that time were reflected in a trade deficit with Syria of more than $165 million, were unsuccessful. Syria was reluctant to open its market.[107]

In 1998, however, Syria and Lebanon signed a treaty that aimed to reduce tariffs between the two states by 25% each year until 2002, at which point a common market would be introduced. This step offered Lebanese businesses and industry opportunities too and went a long way in redressing the imbalances. For instance, Lebanon had a much more professional and competitive industry, and much better financial conditions. On the other hand, the much lower labor costs in Syria continued to out-bid Lebanese products. In the long-term, it was expected that the 2002 free trade zone eventually would present advantages to both economies.

But according to a report released by the Syrian-Lebanese Higher Council, Syria's exports to Lebanon during the first six months in 2001 totaled $159 million, while Lebanese exports to Syria amounted to only $16 million.[108] Barriers to the entry of Lebanese goods into Syria remained a serious problem for Lebanese businesses. Goods destined for Syria continued to be blocked at the border for up to six months.

5.2.2 Free movement of labor

The most striking imbalance in the Syrian-Lebanese economic relationship, and which caused the most resentment against Syrians among Lebanese, concerned the large presence of Syrian guest workers. The agreement on social and economic cooperation included among other

[107] "Accord libano-syrien sur l'Oronte et (partiellement) sur le transport. Le problème des échanges commerciaux, industriels et agricoles demeure entier", *L'Orient Le Jour*, 13 January 1997.
[108] "Lebanon: Intelligence Briefs", *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, December 2001:

things the free circulation of individuals, labor, goods and capital, and freedom of employment and residence by citizens of one state in the territory of the other. Lebanon's huge reconstruction program, as well as its much higher wage-level, attracted many Syrian unskilled workers. They required about half the salary demanded by Lebanese workers, and were willing to work without the social insurance, which the law required employers to provide its employees. Given these conditions, Lebanese construction companies had great incentives towards choosing Syrians.[109] However, Lebanese unskilled workers were not similarly going to Syria to find work. Instead, they faced tough competition for work, with a large portion of them ending up unemployed. The presence of the Syrian workers became an issue in Lebanon in the mid-1990s when the Lebanese economic recession hit society and unemployment began to rise. Violent attacks on Syrian workers, some of them fatal, became frequent.

The Lebanese labor ministry, headed at the time by a prominent pro-Syrian minister, stated in 1994 that only between 16,000 and 50,000 Syrian workers were in Lebanon, while some 10,000 Lebanese families lived in Syria. However, *al-Nahar*, the Lebanese independent daily, could shortly afterwards reveal that more than 900,000 Syrian workers were in Lebanon, referring to lists of the Lebanese *Suretée Générale* (the interior security service) (Tinaoui, 1994:108). Still, this figure remained highly controversial throughout the 1990s. The Christian opposition sometimes claimed the number was close to 1,5 million, while others claimed it was much lower. In June 2001, the Syrian state-controlled *Al-Thawra* newspaper announced that there were probably 1 million Syrian workers in Lebanon.[110] At the same time, the official number of Syrian workers with valid working papers was 530.[111]

The free movement of labor enabled Syria to use Lebanon as a labor market for its large surplus workforce. Conservative estimates in 1994 predicted that due to a high annual population growth (around 2,6%), some 150,000 job seekers would enter the Syrian labor market every year in the following decade (Perthes, 1994:90). Thus, the guest workers alleviated some of the pressure on the Syrian labor market. In addition, workers remittances from Lebanon represented a considerable income to the Syrian economy. An estimated average of $5 million in hard currency was transferred from Lebanon to Syria every day, amounting to $1,8 billion each year.[112] Professor Michel Nehme at the American University of Beirut, however, suggests a figure of $4-5 billion a year.[113] At any rate, an estimated income of $1,8 billion a year already amounted to around 11% of Syria's GDP[114], a substantial income for the Syrian economy.

Obviously, the 1 million Syrian guest workers in Lebanon did not shut out an equal number of Lebanese workers from the Lebanese labor market, considering that Lebanon had a population

[109] "Storm gathers over "1 million" Syrian workers", *Daily Star*, 15 June 2001; see also Gary C. Gambill "Syrian Workers in Lebanon: The Other Occupation", *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol.3, No.2 (February), 2001.
[110] "Storm gathers…", *Daily Star*, 15 June 2001
[111] The Lebanese Central Administration for Statistics: http://www.cas.gov.lb/bulleten.htm
[112] These estimates are based on the assumption that the average Syrian worker earned an average of $10 per day, spent half of it in Lebanon on food and shelter (Syrian workers mostly lived in shabby houses and buildings, sometimes even on the construction sites), and sent the rest to his family in Syria.
[113] Interview in Beirut 26 September, 2000.
[114] Syria's estimated GDP in 1995 and 1999 were $16,83 billion and $15,02 billion, respectively. (World Bank Group, 2001)

of around 4 million, with a labor force of around 1,25 million.[115] Besides, the Palestinian refugees, who worked illegally because Lebanese law forbade them to take part in society, were probably affected the most. But the large presence of Syrian guest workers did put a heavy pressure on the lower strata of Lebanese society, mainly the Shi'ite population of the rural South and in the Beirut suburbs. They were not the only ones affected, however, as poverty increased in all of Lebanon's sects. Estimates in 1996 indicated that 35% of Lebanon's population lived underneath the UNDP's "Unsatisfied Basic Needs Index".[116] Towards the end of the 1990s, Syrian skilled workers, such as hospital technicians and construction foremen also began making their inroads into the Lebanese labor market.

5.2.3 Smuggling

Syrian state restrictions and control over the economy caused numerous shortages on the local market, which was compensated for by contraband from Lebanon.[117] The legal importation of cigarettes into Syria was banned in 1981, providing smugglers with a very lucrative business. Smuggling from Lebanon's free market across the mountainous border regions was an old enterprise and impossible to control because of the long permeable border (Seale, 1988:455). Smuggling was to a large extent in the hands of the military and was "enormously facilitated by the presence of the Syrian army in Lebanon" from 1976 (Perthes, 1995:149-150). Syrian military controlled the road traffic, ports like Tripoli and practically absorbed the Beqaa valley. For the military, regardless of rank, a posting to Lebanon was a chance to make a fortune (Seale, 1988:455).

Syrian officers extracted protection money from, and sponsored and participated in the smuggling of cigarettes, luxury items and consumer goods. Also, Syrian military made considerable money from the cultivation of hashish in the Syrian-controlled Beqaa valley (Hinnebusch, 1998:154). By allowing these activities, or turning a blind eye to them, the Asad-regime secured the loyalty of some of the key military commanders stationed in Lebanon (Robinson, 1998:172). They also provided the Syrian economy with a considerable income. Drug trade alone returned an estimated $2 billion per year in the late 1980s and early 1990s.[118]

In 1993, however, the importation of foreign cigarettes was allowed through a public-sector agency. It was a move against the vested interests of some high-ranking officers, in an apparent effort to trim their powers and reduce their autonomy (Perthes, 1995:153). The efforts of the Lebanese government in the same year to reduce the cultivation of hashish must be seen in a similar context (ibid.). The United States also pressed Syria to crack down on the cultivation of drugs in return for its tacit acceptance of Syria's sphere of influence in Lebanon.[119] But the military officers continued to find other items to smuggle, such as antiquities and spare parts for autos and household machines.

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[115] The Lebanese Central Administration for Statistics: http://www.cas.gov.lb/bulleten.htm
[116] UNDP: http://www.undp.org.lb/publicinfo/statistics/statistics.htm; see also Reinoud Leenders "Disturbing statistics", *Middle East International*, 24 April 1998.
[117] Of course, data on illicit activities do not exist, so references are largely anecdotal (Perthes, 1995).
[118] Godfrey Jansen "Syria: Keeping the lid on", *Middle East International*, 11 October 1991.
[119] Ziad Abdelnour "The Revival of Lebanon's Drug Trade", *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol.3, No.6, June 2001.

5.2.3.1 Patronage networks

With the Syrian military presence in Lebanon came also patronage networks, much like the Syrian "military-merchant complex". Syrian military and political leaders offered their patronage to Lebanese businessmen and merchants who sought to evade regulations and obtain privileges and lucrative contracts. Corruption was never a new phenomenon in Lebanon. But now Syrian military and political leaders wanted a piece of the economic activities as well. "Co-chairing" major Lebanese businesses and companies by the sons and relatives of Syrian officials became frequent. Indeed, most major Lebanese transactions became joint Syrian-Lebanese. The level of direct Syrian involvement varied, and was most of the time low-profile. Their major contribution was their role as "middle-men". Syrian elites thus made fortunes on the side in Lebanon, largely crippling Lebanese industry by taking 20% of all major licenses and contracts.

For instance, Lebanon's two major cellular phone companies, *Libancell* and *Cellis*, which monopolized the wireless market in Lebanon from 1994, had large Syrian shares.[120] Syria's powerful vice-president, Khaddam, as well as Syria's Military Chief of Staff, Shihabi owned some of these shares. There were also reportedly large Syrian shares in, among other, the cement industry in Chekka, in the North.

In sum, Syria's "allocative" economy extracted important sums of money from Lebanon. Lebanon was an important release valve for Syria's large surplus work force and provided the Syrian economy with a considerable income. Smuggling and patronage networks in Lebanon satisfied the interests of the Syrian military and political elite, which contributed to the cohesion and stability of the Syrian regime.

5.3 Lebanon's Role in Syria's Liberalization-Process

When the weaknesses of the Syrian economy became apparent and threatened the state's "allocative" capabilities in the mid-1980s, Asad initiated a process to liberalize the economy that continued into the 1990s. The ongoing peace process further underscored the importance of making the Syrian economy competitive and capable of facing Israeli economic power in a post-peace regional competition. Lebanon had an important role in this process.

5.3.1 Syria's liberalization-process in the 1990s

Despite economic difficulties and obvious signs of structural deficits, Syria experienced economic growth from 1990 to 1993. Syria's participation in the Gulf War-coalition re-opened the flow of financial aid from the Gulf states. In 1990, Syria received aid worth more than $6 billion, although it dropped to $2,7 billion in the following year (Perthes, 1994:84). Syria also began to gradually dismantle its huge public sector. In May 1991, Law No.10 for the Encouragement of Investment offered a range of incentives to invest in Syria and led to private investments gradually overtaking public investments (Hinnebusch, 1997:261). The agricultural

[120] "Intelligence Briefs: Lebanon", *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol.3, No.7, July/August 2001.

sector boomed and was gradually privatized. Syria's oil-production and exports increased and brought in around $2 billion.[121]

But financial aid from the Gulf monarchies receded after a military pact between Syria, Egypt and the Gulf monarchies (the Damascus Declaration) in 1991 failed and the Gulf monarchies instead chose to rely on US protection. Falling oil prices and rising world prices on key imports slowed the economy (Melhem, 1997:3). Efforts to liberalize the economy remained half-hearted. One of the main problems was the regime's reluctance to follow up on Law No.10 with far-reaching reforms. Private investments were mainly short-term and primarily in the service sector, instead of in the labor-intensive industry. It was largely a result of state restrictions on the banking sector, as well as of the lack of any clear government policy on private capital investments (Tinaoui, 1994:99). Foreign investors and ex-patriates were reluctant to get involved in a state where the infrastructure was weak, where government restrictions remained unpredictable and corruption widespread. In 1994, the Syrian economy was again experiencing difficulties.

The Syrian regime acknowledged the need to reinforce the economic liberalization process of the previous decades, but at the same time it was determined to maintain full control over the development to insure political stability. "Regime elites agree that a Soviet-type collapse of the statist system before a domestic market is fully in place must be avoided by gradual transition." (Hinnebusch, 1997:254). Asad's main preoccupation was to maintain regime cohesion. Asad therefore found a *modus vivendi* with the bourgeoisie through limited economic liberalization and co-optation. The regime's gradual and *ad-hoc* reforms did little to correct the structural weaknesses in the Syrian economy (Melhem, 1997:3).

But pressure to reform became stronger in the mid-1990s. Syria's oil resources were limited and were thought to run out in the foreseeable future.[122] The Syrian regime would then likely have to adopt more market reforms. Asad rejected any foreign interference. Jordan's adoption of IMF's program of structural adjustment in 1989 had led to public discontent and eventually forced Jordan to initiate political reforms. But he could not escape foreign pressure when Syria decided to participate in the "Euro-Mediterranean Partnership" in 1995, an EU-program for regional co-operation. The prospect of peace with Israel, leading to regional peace and normal ties with Israel, including economic competition, was another important impetus for reform. Finally, the Syrian business community, which the regime's plans for economic development were heavily dependent of, pushed for more market liberalization (Robinson, 1998:167).

Thus, while the benefits of its military presence in Lebanon gave the Syrian regime some relief, it was also clear that reforms would any way have to be initiated. Syria hoped its close co-operation with Lebanon would facilitate the liberalization process and allow a gradual development.

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[121] "Syria: politics, the economy and the succession", *Middle East International*, 16 April, 1993.

[122] Syria's crude-oil reserves are estimated to last another decade (as of 1998), maybe less. Moreover, the IMF estimated that by 1999, oil would account for less than half of Syria's export earnings (dropping from a third) and decline in absolute value (Robinson, 1998:166).

5.3.2 Integrating the Syrian and Lebanese economies

Syria's economic ties with Lebanon have been both close and strained since their independence. In 1945, they agreed on the free movement of individuals and goods between the two states (Tinaoui, 1994:100). But disagreements over monetary issues led to a rupture in 1948 and relations remained somewhat strained until Asad came to power in 1970. Syria's desire to liberalize its economy led to discussions of economic cooperation, but these were put on hold when war broke out in Lebanon in 1975. The issue of economic cooperation did not resurface until the late 1980s.

The 1991 Treaty of Brotherhood, and the many subsequent treaties and agreements, tied the two states economically together. The Syrian and Lebanese economies, fundamentally different in organization,[123] were largely complementary (Perthes, 1997:18). Therefore, Syria saw a successful reconstruction of Lebanon as being in its own interest. A strong Lebanese economy would not only benefit the stability of Lebanon, but would also likely have positive spill-over effects for the Syrian economy, such as creating a large labor market for Syrian workers as well as offering business opportunities to the Syrian bourgeoisie. There was an often-made reference to Lebanon as Syria's "Hong Kong". This reflected the fact that Lebanon to a certain extent represented a "window" for Syria to the open world economy. Beirut functioned as a financial center where capital to and from Syria could be channeled and where Syrian businesses could operate free of domestic restrictions. Actually, having an open capitalist economy next door somewhat reduced the pressure on the regime to liberalize. In a sense, the Lebanese market represented a release valve for pressures against the regime to reform. The bourgeoisie could always invest in Lebanon if they found Syria's economy too restrictive (Robinson, 1998:172).

Beirut and other Lebanese ports were important transit areas for imported goods bound for Damascus. Conversely, Syria was a major market for Lebanese businesses and a channel to the Arab hinterland. With the plans for creating a Syrian-Lebanese free-trade zone by 2002, thereby tying the two economies even closer, Syria hoped to draw on Lebanese help and expertise to bolster its own economic performance and make a successful gradual economic transition. [124] Lebanon's expertise in international banking and trade, its human resources, and its traditions in education and access to information were considered to be of great importance in making the Syrian economy more competitive and more attractive to foreign investments (Melhem, 1997:5). Even the personal wealth and network of Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri (1992-1998) were to some extent considered valuable to the Lebanese economy, and in turn, to the Syrian economy (Bahout, 1998:63). After his election in 1992, he quickly demonstrated his abilities by attracting Saudi investments worth close to $550 million to his ambitious reconstruction program.[125] As it turned out, however, the Hariri government was unable to fundamentally redress the Lebanese economy. Despite reducing inflation from 131% to

[123] Contrary to Syria's socialist-inspired statist economy and regulated society, the Lebanese economy was characterized by a minimum of state interference and the prevalence of private economic and social systems.
[124] "Damascus players have mixed feelings for free trade agreement", *The Daily Star*, 6 July 1998.
[125] Jim Muir "The bandwagon rolls on", *Middle East International*, 18 December 1992.

15-20%, and initiating an economic growth that was 8,4% in 1994[126], the Lebanese economy plummeted the following years. By borrowing heavily abroad to finance the reconstruction program, Lebanon sunk into deep foreign debt, which by 2000 had amounted to $24 billion. This had political repercussions since many Lebanese began blaming Syria's domination for their country's economic and social ills.[127]

5.3.3 The strategic containment of Israel

As noted above, pressure to reform the Syrian economy also came from strategic considerations. The prospects of a lasting peace with Israel raised concerns that Syria would lose much of its strategic position in the regional balance of power and allow Israel regional hegemony (Perthes, 1994:87; Seale, 2000:71). However, this scenario, or even the potential effects of a regional peace for the Syrian economy, were hardly studied in Syria until the mid-1990s when Syria and Israel seemed closer than ever to signing a peace agreement (Perthes, 1995:238). Syria's "no war, no peace" position had given it considerable political weight in the region. Its strategic position and military credibility, without actually having to engage Israel militarily, also bolstered the Syrian regime's nationalist credentials and gave it legitimacy both at home and in the Arab world, with considerable political and financial benefits. In a situation of regional peace, however, this was likely to change.

While Syria probably would benefit from increased tourism and investments, it feared that the integration of a highly effective and competitive Israeli economy into the Middle Eastern market, from which it had hitherto been barred, would shift the regional balance of power (Perthes, 1994:89). Israel could become the new economic center of the Middle East or at least in the Levant, dominating the Jordanian and the Palestinian markets. This fear was reinforced by a World Bank study in which reconstruction of the Beirut airport and the Beirut-Damascus highway was considered low-priority (ibid.). The same study predicted that Israel would become the main point of communications between the Middle East and the West. In order to counter the prospect of a potential Israeli-Jordanian-Palestinian economic bloc, dominated by Israel, Syria depended on integrating its own economy with Lebanon's, preferably with other ones as well. The plan for a common market in 2002 was a first step towards countering Israeli regional power and influence. Even in a situation of regional peace, Syria was bent on containing Israeli power.

In 1995 conciliatory words and gestures between Syria and Iraq eventually led to turning a leaf in the traditionally hostile relationship between the two Ba'thist-regimes. Syria, like much of the Arab world, abided reluctantly by the UN sanctions on Iraq after the Gulf War. Truckloads of goods were spotted entering Iraq from Lebanon via Syria as early as in 1991, crossing the Syrian border twice (Karamé, 1997:571). In June 1997 Syria and Iraq discussed measures to increase trade.[128] Besides the economic considerations, Syria also sought to secure its eastern flank at a time when the Israeli-Turkish axis was threatening Syria. The rapprochement has so

[126] Godfrey Jansen "Looking up", *Middle East International*, 3 March 1995.
[127] "Bkerké- La crise économique est largement due à la situation de dépendence politique affirme le message pascal du patriarch maronite", *L'Orient Le Jour*, 14 April 2001.
[128] Peter Feuilherade "Mending fences?", *Middle East International*, 13 June 1997.

far led to a bilateral trade agreement and Iraqi oil exports via Syria, returning huge profits for the Syrians.

5.4 "Water Security"

A state's survival is dependent on, among other things, providing its citizens with basic resources, such as clean drinking water (Morris, 1998:2). In the Middle East, where the volume of fresh water is diminishing and the states' needs increase in order to cultivate more land and supply an increasing population[129], access to water resources have become national security issues. Some analysts predict that the question of water will become "the likeliest cause of conflict in the Middle East" (Bulloch and Darwish, 1993; Darwish, 1994), but water itself has thus far not been a main driving force behind states' security and foreign policies (Libiszewski, 1995; Allan, 1998; Morris, 1998). However, water, as with economic factors may prove to be an important secondary factor in explaining Syria's imposition of its dominance in Lebanon and its reluctance to withdraw.[130]

Syria depended on upstream states for around 80% of its renewable water resources (Morris, 1998:5). Water therefore became a major point of contention in the Syrian-Israeli negotiations over the return of the Golan, since the Golan plateau was especially rich in water (Ma'oz, 1995; Rabinovich, 1998; Cobban, 1999). Syria also sought access to the water resources of Lebanon. Water as a security issue was highlighted in the 1990s by the acute threat from Turkey to divert the waters of the Euphrate River, Syria's principal source of water in the North.

The Euphrate River has its origin in the Turkish mountains, where Turkey since the 1960s was engaged in a great project to dam the river, in particular through the *GAP*-program (the Southeast Anatolia Development Project). It built the Atatürk Dam in 1989. Turkey's dam program aimed to divert huge volumes of water for irrigation of agriculture. But according to Syrian officials, the Atatürk Dam threatened Syria's water supplies, and hampered Syria's own plans to increase irrigation (from 14% to 22%), as well as develop the agricultural sector in order to improve self-reliance and create more jobs for an increasing population.[131]

The dam project was also used for political purposes. In 1991, apparently in a demonstration of power to compel Syria to stop its support to the Kurdish separatist-guerrilla, the PKK, Turkey interrupted the flow of the Euphrate River into Syria for three weeks (Darwish, 1994:7). In the following years, Syria continued to accuse Turkey of siphoning off water from its main water resource and polluting the water flowing into Syria.[132] The intransigent Turkish position, which maintained that Turkey had the exclusive right to control the waters that originated from

[129] Syria for instance had an average annual population growth of 2,6%, while Lebanon and Israel had an average annual growth of 1,4% and 2,5% respectively. By 2025, Syria's population will according to these estimates reach 36,529 million (compared to 13,463 in 1992) (Morris, 1998:8).
[130] As suggested by Professor J.P. Harik, at the American University of Beirut, in an interview in Beirut 5 October 2000.
[131] "L'eau, un enjeu majeur pour la Syrie", *L'Orient Le Jour*, 19 November 1993.
[132] "Syria wants Arab backing on dispute with Turkey", *Reuters Information Service*, 5 February 1996: http://archive.nandotimes.com/newsroom/ntn/world/020596/; Patrick Seale "Turkey and Syria: the war over water", *Middle East International*, 4 June 1999.

its territory, turned the question of water into an acute security issue in Syria. Iraq too, lying at the end of the Euphrate River, was affected by Turkey's water restrictions. In fact, this common threat helped the Syrian-Iraqi rapprochement in 1997.

The acute threat of water shortage made Syria look for alternative sources. For instance, Syria acquired interest in the water of Lake Tiberias at the foot of Golan.[133] In 1991, Syria also began probing the Lebanese government for a sharing formula concerning the Lebanese rivers *Oronte* (*Assi*), which crosses North-Western Syria, and *Nahr al-Kébir*, close to the Syrian border in the North.[134] The question of sharing water had been suspended since a dispute in the 1950s. Lebanon wanted to exploit about 40% of the water (Tinaoui, 1994:109) and were skeptical of Syria's demands for a bigger share. In September 1994, however, following a direct intervention of Asad, the Syrian and Lebanese governments agreed on a formula, which allowed Lebanon to exploit a mere 22%. Lebanon's grievances were brushed away as "minor details" by the Syrian President, emphasizing that "what is good for Lebanon is also good for Syria".[135]

5.5 Summary

The Syrian military intervention and domination in Lebanon were primarily dictated by strategic security concerns. However, as a consequence of Syria's domination, Lebanon became an important asset to Syrian security in the economic sector. Lebanon was an important source of income for the Syrian allocative economy and a window to the global economy. At the same time, the economic integration had important political ramifications for Syria's future regional position.

Syria used its position to extract vast sums of money from Lebanon. Most important were probably the remittances from the many Syrian guest workers in Lebanon. But also smuggling, illicit trade and patronage networks generated important revenues. These revenues to the Syrian state were re-allocated to the regime's constituencies. Domestic allocation also meant providing on the one hand, ordinary Syrians with work and on the other hand, the state elite with patronage networks and privileges. Finally, the Lebanese market served as a release valve for Syria's surplus labor-force, and for the Syrian bourgeoisie who were allowed to escape domestic restrictions and invest in the open market.

Preserving and extending the privileges of the elite served to cement regime cohesion and domestic stability but contradicted the more long-term need to reform the Syrian economy. The economy suffered from structural deficiencies and had to be reformed to meet the challenges of regional peace and the end of Syria's oil resources. Peace with Israel not only represented an economic challenge but also a political one. Syria would in the future be forced to contain Israeli economic and cultural power, not military power. Integrating the Syrian and

[133] In fact, in the negotiations at Wye Plantation in 1995, Syria was ready to give up on the claims to the water of Lake Tiberias "if the United States and Israel would help Syria resolve her water problems with Turkey" (Rabinovich, 1998:219).
[134] "Coordination hydraulique Libano-Syrienne", *L'Orient Le Jour*, 29 July 1991.
[135] Emile Khoury "Le Liban exploitera 22% des eaux de l'Oronte", *L'Orient Le Jour*, 21 September 1991.

Lebanese economies, and possibly the Iraqi too, was a first step in countering an expected future Israeli-Jordanian-Palestinian economic bloc. Finally, Lebanese expertise in finance and trade would hopefully contribute to making the Syrian economic transition successful.

6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

I shall first present the findings and conclusions I made from this case study. Then, I will present a brief epilogue describing the latest events.

6.1 Empirical findings

I have attempted to analyze Syria's involvement in Lebanon in the 1990s from a *regime-security* perspective. I have maintained that Syria's involvement in Lebanon was determined by security concerns. The notion of "Greater-Syria" had some saliency in certain layers of the Syrian regime, and Asad harbored ambitions to wield considerable influence in the region. But first and foremost, Asad continuously sought security and stability for his regime, arguably bordering on security paranoia. Given the state of protracted social conflict in Syria, and the hostile regional environment, the Asad-regime felt indeed threatened from both within and from without. The Asad-regime countered these threats along what I have defined as mainly three security dimensions. Lebanon had a central role in all three of them:

- *political security*, which, firstly, included the control and domination over Lebanon to contain foreign powers and hostile movements; and secondly, secured Lebanese compliance with Syrian regional strategies.
- *military security*, where Lebanon acted as leverage in the peace negotiations with Israel for the return of the Golan.
- *economic security*, in which Lebanon acted as an important release valve and source of income for the allocative Syrian economy.

I have demonstrated that Syria used its war-time alliances, based on Syria's economic and political powers to secure a sphere of influence in Lebanon. Syria institutionalized its domination over Lebanon by using its powerful position on the ground at the end of the war to secure a central mediating role in the post-war political system. Syrian influence over Lebanon's policies were further cemented through a collection of bilateral treaties. This legal frame, along with a legitimacy-discourse, was sustained by a mostly discrete coercion and a policy of divide-and-rule, whereby any opposition to its domination was muzzled and Lebanon's ruling political elite was made dependent on Syria. However, there was a degree of receptivity to Syria's involvement in parts of the Lebanese political elite. Syria's power not-withstanding, the domination over Lebanon was greatly facilitated by internal Lebanese divisions and opportunism.

Dominating Lebanon in the 1990s was no doubt seen as an important means to control a precarious Lebanese polity and contain the influence of the numerous foreign powers and

movements that had used the liberal Lebanese political system as a sanctuary for their activities. Many of these had also been directed against the security of the Syrian regime. In a geo-strategic context, Lebanon also served as a buffer against an Israeli strategic attack on Syria through the Beqaa-valley. However, once the Asad-regime had largely consolidated its power in both Syria and Lebanon, it went on to pursue its wider regional security concerns, mainly the containment of Israeli influence.

The Gulf War against Iraq enabled Syria to break its isolation, gain international recognition as a key regional actor and engage Israel in peace negotiations from a position of strength. Syria believed it could dictate the terms for a comprehensive peace, which included the return of the Golan, a cornerstone of Syria's domestic nationalist discourse. Syria's confrontation with Israel followed a two-track strategy of political negotiations and military pressure. Syria used its domination over Lebanon and strategic alliance with Iran to harness the Islamic Resistance and use it as leverage against Israel. On the political track, Syria sought to maintain a unified Arab front with itself in the lead. When the PLO and Jordan "defected" in 1993 and 1994, Syria focused on preventing Lebanon from concluding a separate peace with Israel. By harnessing the Resistance and controlling the Lebanese state, Syria used both as leverage in the ongoing Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations.

The domination over Lebanon thus served to contain external political and military threats against the Asad-regime. But Syria's domination also offered to bolster Syria's allocative economy and regime cohesion. Syria's crisis-ridden economy was sustained by important income from Syrian guest workers and smuggling, enabling the Syrian government to pursue reforms gradually and at a slow controllable pace. Elite interests were satisfied by allowing them to establish patronage systems and enrich themselves through different legal and illegal activities in Lebanon. Lebanon was also a release valve for pressure from a fast growing population in need of work, and a bourgeoisie in need of business opportunities free from state regulations. Finally, by the mid-1990s Syria came to view the Syrian-Lebanese economic integration as strategically important to counter the Israeli economic power in a post-peace "New Middle East".

In all, the Syrian domination over Lebanon was central to a broadly defined Syrian regime security.

6.2 Epilogue

Around the summer of 2000, two major developments changed the conditions for the Syrian domination over Lebanon. First, on 24 May, Israel withdrew its forces from South Lebanon, ending 22 years of occupation. The Israeli withdrawal took place without a comprehensive Syrian-Israeli peace agreement and apparently "robbed" Syria of an important leverage. It could no longer use the war of attrition in the occupied zone as a means to pressure Israel, at least not to the same extent. Nor could it use the Israeli occupation as an argument for maintaining a Syrian military presence in the country.

The situation was compounded by the death of Syria's president Hafiz al-Asad on 10 June. With the Israelis gone and the shadow of Asad no longer looming over Lebanon, Lebanese opposition to the Syrian domination increased, as did pressure on the new president, Bashar al-Asad.[136] The reactions from the Syrian regime and its Lebanese allies, mainly President Lahoud and Hizbullah, were quite telling of the Syrian position in Lebanon. Seen in context of the past decade, developments in the year following the Israeli withdrawal and Asad's death clearly summed up Syria's security concerns and strategies in Lebanon. However, I shall first briefly describe the recent developments in both Syria and Lebanon.

6.2.1 The Syrian succession

Bashar al-Asad's succession to the Presidency after the death of his father went swiftly and quietly (Husem, 2001). Concerns for the stability of the regime probably played an important role in rallying the "old guard", the core elite of the Asad-regime, behind Bashar and in facilitating the transition. But while he was being groomed for succession by his father, Bashar had also consolidated his power. He had appointed many of his "own" people to central positions in the security and military establishements, among other his brother Maher Asad. He had also revived the Ba'th party as another power base. His high-profile anti-corruption campaign increased his popularity and enabled him to get rid of some members of the "old guard".[137] He was, however, not in a position to challenge all the "barons" of his father's regime. Bashar let them stay on, thus preserving stability, and waiting for them to retire on their own.[138]

The fact that he was educated in the West and had recently headed Syria's development of telecommunications gave him a modern and reform-oriented outlook, at least in the Western press. There were great expectations concerning political and economic reforms in Syria.[139] But having decided not to challenge the "old guard", Bashar essentially followed in his father's steps, opting for a gradual and cautious liberalization of the economy without loosening the grip on society. He emphasized a policy of "change through continuity" in his speech of investiture.[140] This also characterized Bashar's handling of Syria's security and foreign policy, both in Lebanon and in the wider regional arena.

6.2.2 Lebanon

In Lebanon, the political climate changed dramatically. Lebanese President Lahoud and Prime Minister Hoss, both hand-picked by Bashar in 1998, suffered a humiliating defeat in the parliamentary elections in the summer of 2000. Their lists were completely wiped away by the lists of Rafiq al-Hariri and Walid Jumblatt. Jumblatt this time went to election in *opposition* to the government. Most Lebanese had beforehand predicted another Syrian-manipulated

[136] I shall, for the sake of simplicity, distinguish between the late Hafiz al-Asad and his son Bashar al-Asad by referring to them as "Asad" and "Bashar", respectively, a common way to do it in Syria today.
[137] "Bashar consolidates", *Middle East International*, 1 September 2000.
[138] The majority of the "old guard" is indeed old. They are mostly close to retirement age and are likely to step back if guaranteed to keep some of the lucrative businesses they have acquired over the last thirty years in power.
[139] Paul Marie De La Gorce "Bachar, peut-il réussir?" *Jeune Afrique/ L'Intelligent*, no. 2059, 27 June-3 July, pp. 34-36.
[140] "President Bashar al-Assad's speech focus on internal conditions" *ArabicNews.com*, 18 July 2000.

election. As before, the election law was changed again, this time dividing Beirut into three electorates, designed to deny Hariri a political comeback.[141] But Hariri still won a landslide victory.

Was the blow to the power-duo in Lebanon, President Lahoud and Prime Minister Hoss, similarly a blow to Bashar al-Asad, their main Syrian supporter? Several factors contradicted such speculations. Firstly, Hariri had always enjoyed close and good relations with Syria, although mainly with people associated with the "old guard" with whom Bashar had a strained relationship. At any rate, Hariri's election was not likely to shake up the "special relationship". Hariri's "opposition"-lists were full of pro-Syrian candidates. Secondly, Syria adopted a "hands-off" policy in the elections, except for in the strategically important Beqaa-valley and South Lebanon (Nassif, 2000:19-20). Lahoud was apparently told to sort things out for himself (ibid.: 117). Thus, internal political issues, mainly the crisis-ridden Lebanese economy, not Syrian manipulation, determined the elections. Moreover, by refraining from intervening in support for Lahoud's political allies, including Prime Minister Hoss, it would seem that Syria effectively trimmed the powers of President Lahoud, thus tilting the power-balance back to the Sunni Prime Minister. As Bashar was courting the Syrian Sunni bourgeoisie to win their support for his economic reform-program, re-instating a strong Sunni (businessman) in power in Lebanon must have been a positive gesture. In sum, the elections did little to challenge Syria's political influence in Lebanon.

However, opposition to the Syrian presence increased throughout the summer, raising political tensions to a level not seen since the end of the civil war. Beirut had already been buzzing for some time. In March, *al-Nahar*-editor Gibran Tueinih explicitly called for a Syrian withdrawal in an editorial.[142] In September, the Maronite Patriarch, Cardinal Sfayr, issued a statement demanding a Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. Now, calls for the withdrawal of the Syrian forces were no longer cloaked in ambiguous or vague statements. The Patriarch's statement ignited an intense political debate over the Syrian presence. Christian leaders from all parties rallied around Sfayr, while pro-Syrian parties and politicians, first among them Hizbullah, denounced them and organized mass demonstrations in support of Syria.

Interestingly, Syria's long-time allies were beginning to waver. Walid Jumblatt allied himself with prominent Maronite leaders in the elections, calling for a "national dialogue" and supporting the call for a Syrian withdrawal. For this he was temporarily declared *persona non grata* in Syria. Amal-leader Nabih Berri similarly attempted to enhance his own political role by offering to mediate between the Christian opposition and President Lahoud. Damascus responded with a slap on the wrist, informing him to stay out. Other MPs dared not openly call for a Syrian withdrawal, but were increasingly calling for "national reconciliation", which meant opening a dialogue with the Christian opposition.

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[141] John Kifner "Lebanese surprise: Syria's Man Loses by Landslide", *The New York Times*, 5 September 2000.
[142] "Gibran Tueini: Open letter to Bashar al-Asad", *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol.2, No.4, April 2000: http://www.meib.org/articles

If the Syrian legitimacy-discourse had been "transparently phony" (Wedeen, 1999:6) before[143], it now became largely void of meaning. The dispute with Israel over the Shab'a farms exposed Syria clutching to the South Lebanon front (see below). President Lahoud's handling of the Israeli withdrawal also angered large segments of the Lebanese political establishment for failing to reestablish state authority in the South for the first time in thirty years, for failing to use the situation to redress Lebanon's autonomy, and for falling out with the UN over the Shab'a farms, which was of no real interest to Lebanon. President Lahoud's popularity plummeted, making him even more dependent on Syria. Secondly, the succession of Bashar in Syria probably signaled a change in Syrian policy in Lebanon. During his two years as head of the Syrian Lebanon-portfolio, he had proved himself less prone to use force against the opposition than his predecessor, Syrian vice-president Khaddam. The apparent "hands-off" approach to the Lebanese elections underscored this image. Thirdly, since the peace-process had been indefinitely put on hold, and there was no solution in sight as long as the Palestinian *intifadah* continued, it seemed like the Lebanese were tired of waiting for Syria.

The reactions to the massive upsurge of opposition and criticism were mixed. Syria had already removed some of the Syrian military roadblocks in Lebanon in 1999 and 2000.[144] In June 2001 Bashar ordered the redeployment of some 7,000 Syrian troops from the Beirut area to the Bekaa valley, and removed the controversial positions around the Presidential Palace and the Defense Ministry. Meanwhile, President Lahoud sought to engage the opposition in a dialogue with the apparent objective to co-opt and defuse it. At present (December 2001), the situation in Lebanon remains tense, with Syria and President Lahoud uncertain regarding the way to handle it.

6.2.3 The two-track strategy

The developments following the Israeli withdrawal were especially revealing of Lebanon's role in Syrian security strategies. Israel's unilateral withdrawal, without a comprehensive agreement, seriously undermined Syria's Lebanese "card". Without the conflict in South Lebanon Syria actually had very little to bargain with. Israel seemed perfectly capable of going on living in a non-confrontational state of war with Syria, even though it was not the preferred option. In fact, having pulled out of Lebanon, Israel now proclaimed a legitimate right to retaliate any attack on its territory. What was more, Israel declared it would hold Syria responsible for further attacks by the Islamic Resistance.

The reactions to the withdrawal in May led to some confusion in Syria. Syria apparently contemplated rearming Palestinian movements in Lebanon. There was even mention of opening a new guerrilla front on the Golan. However, the technicalities concerning the Israeli withdrawal and the dispute over the Shab'a farms offered Syria the opening it sought. By

[143] As many Lebanese pointed out, the Syrians had done little to stop or fight back the numerous Israeli incursions into Lebanon in the past decade.
[144] Norway's ambassador to Syria and Lebanon, the former Norwegian Military Chief of Staff, Vigleik Eide, estimates that the number of Syrian troops in Lebanon dropped from around 35.000 in 1989 to 25.000 in 2000. Interview in Damascus 3 October 2000.

keeping open the South Lebanon "file", Syria could still use it as leverage.[145] Thus, in October 2000, three Israeli soldiers were killed in the Shab'a farms area. Shortly after, another three soldiers were kidnapped. A retired Israeli colonel, which the Hizbullah claimed was an Israeli intelligence officer, was abducted in Austria. They are currently held as hostages in exchange for the remaining Lebanese hostages held in Israel, 'Ubayd and Dirani. Israel, however, stated that it considered the three missing soldiers to be dead. These actions revived tensions on the front, although fighting remained on a small scale and hardly produced the kind of leverage Syria wanted. Also, Israel upped the stakes by hitting Syrian positions in Lebanon in April and in July in retaliation for Resistance attacks. These attacks were clearly warnings to Syria by the Israeli government of hard-liner Ariel Sharon. Israel would hold Syria accountable for the actions of the Islamic Resistance. Since the last thing Syria wanted was an escalation into war, it seemed likely that it would have to cool down its military track for a while.

However, the political track proved equally cool. The outbreak of the *intifadah* in the Palestinian occupied territories in October 2000 had effectively ended the Syrian-Israeli peace process, and shifted Israeli and international focus towards the Palestinian track. As Bashar was consolidating his power, and Ariel Sharon came to power in Israel, the fronts between Syria and Israel hardened and the war of words picked up again. Syria continued to strengthen its political position. In January 2001 Syria signed a bilateral trade-agreement with Iraq, including a military alliance in the event Israel would attack Syria. This secured Syria's eastern front and gave it some strategic depth. At the same time, Bashar mended Syria's relations with Palestinian President Yassir Arafat. At an Arab summit meeting in Amman in March 2001, the two vowed mutual support and coordination in their relations with Israel. However, with Sharon in power in Israel and with the Palestinian *intifadah* raging, there seemed to be little hope of reviving the political track.

In Lebanon, continued Resistance-activities again exposed tensions between Prime Minister Hariri and the Hizbullah. The kidnappings of the Israeli soldiers caught Hariri unaware while touring Europe to promote investments in Lebanon. The embarrassment caused a temporary rift between Hariri and Syria, but it was quickly smoothed over. However, Resistance activities do no longer generate popular sympathy and support, or the legitimacy it enjoyed during the Israeli occupation. On the contrary, most people and politicians now seem to view them as serving Syrian interests only, to the detriment of Lebanese interests. This could prove to be a liability for the Hizbullah, which in the wake of the withdrawal earned great respect and admiration for having routed Israel, and not least for the way it handled the political vacuum that ensued (Norton, 2000). It is also a liability to President Lahoud, whose popularity plummeted after what is increasingly seen as total subservience to Damascus. Although Lebanon continues to support Resistance activities and Syria's claim for the Golan, it seems to be half-hearted at best.

A total Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon seems unlikely, especially as the regional situation remains tense. However, should Syria withdraw, even removing its forces from the strategic

[145] Interview with Farid Khazen, Professor at the American University of Beirut, Beirut 25 September 2000.

Bekaa valley, it is unlikely that Syrian influence over Lebanese politics will be dramatically reduced. The Syrian-Lebanese treaties have secured Syria a say in most of Lebanon's affairs. Moreover, the large circle of Lebanese politicians dependent on Syria will continue to allow Syria considerable influence over Lebanon and make Damascus an important center for political decisions. Besides, history has shown that a small state like Lebanon cannot remain unaligned in what is still a hostile environment. The only viable alternative remains a close relationship with Syria. Syria on its hand will continue to see Lebanon as intimately tied to its security concerns. As long as the actual Syrian regime remains in power, it will be on guard for potential threats to its security, whatever its form. Security concerns, not "Greater Syria" ambitions, will continue to define Syria's involvement in Lebanon.

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