Syrian/United States Relations: Explaining the Failure of the Relationship and Suggestions on How to Repair It

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“Syrian/United States Relations: Explaining the Failure of the Relationship and Suggestions on How to Repair It”

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Introduction

"Syrian-American relations have deteriorated markedly in recent years."
~ Syrian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Bushra Kanafani

Hezbollah. Hamas. The Islamic Jihad. Rogue nation. The axis of evil. These are features commonly used by the United States government, Western media outlets, and the American people to describe the Republic of Syria. Syria is a major player in geopolitics and relevant to the stability of the Middle East. Its relationship with the United States, therefore, is of central importance in reaching the United States goal of peace in this war-ravaged region of the world. The erosion of normal diplomatic relations with Syria since the middle of the twentieth century led to serious setbacks for peace and stability in the Middle East. Only with a clear and focused look at the history of the relationship between the United States and Syria can one understand when and why things went awry. Why did the relationship between Syria and the United States fail? Looking back through the key events of the relationship between the United States and Syria can provide an explanation for how the relationship devolved and, by knowing these factors, suggestions can be made for how to re-establish proper diplomatic relations. Once the decay of the relationship is understood, then Americans can better attempt to move forward with a new policy designed for cooperation with Syria. In the course of their relationship, the United States and Syria have become increasingly hostile and this hostility eventually led to the cancellation of formal diplomatic relations. The deteriorating relationship between the United States and Syria can be attributed to specific historical moments that set up the basis of their relationship. Why has the relationship never improved over all these years? Questions such as this will be answered in the course of the paper.
Many Americans, the media, and, most importantly, our policymakers in government see Syria as an authoritarian, repressive, and religiously volatile nation on the border of Israel. It is consequently seen as a major threat to the United States. By viewing Syria as a viable option for partnership in the Middle East and more than an antagonistic member of the “axis of evil,” the United States can open a path to real and sustained peace between Israel and Palestine. Syria gives shelter and aid to anti-Israel terrorist groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and Islamic Jihad. Syria is one of the major countries in the Middle East preventing peace in Israel and, thus, improving United States-Syrian relations and Israel-Syrian relations will have a measurable impact on political stability in that region. Also, Syria is Iran’s biggest ally in the Middle East, and, it is a source of support and a funnel for Iranian soldiers to invade Lebanon and attack the Israeli borders.\(^1\) Improved relations with Syria will decrease the necessity for Syria to have a strong alliance with Iran and thereby decrease the prospects of regional dominance by the regime in Tehran. The third reason United States policy with Syria needs a new direction is that Syria allows insurgents into Iraq, where they wreak havoc on United States and Coalition soldiers. Quite simply, improved relations between the United States and Syria will save lives in Iraq and throughout the region. A friendly relationship forces Syria to secure its Iraqi border and prevent insurgents from entering Iraq because Syria no longer has the incentive to support Iran and thwart United States efforts in Iraq. America cannot afford to continue the past policies and must forge ahead with a concerted effort to create a lasting tie with Syria. Syria must also make efforts to change its diplomatic patterns as well. They must cease hostilities with Israel, crack down on

\(^{1}\) Syria formed an alliance with Iran during the Lebanese Civil War, when Syria called upon Iranian help to succeed in keeping power in Lebanese politics.
anti-Israel terrorists and halt providing a passage for insurgents into Iraq in order for
good progress to be made. Both nations must provide good faith initiatives to show a serious
attempt at reconciliation for change to occur.

To explore the origins of the hostility between the United States and Syria and to
gain insight into how history shapes the present, I used a variety of sources of
information. Much of the research is based on monographs. I started broadly with
Middle Eastern history and culture, and then focused on Syrian history and the current
status of the United States/Syrian relationship. I used the texts of established scholars in
the fields of Middle Eastern history and politics, Israeli-Palestinian history, and United
States/Syrian relations. I utilized the availability of government sources, including
documents maintained by the Central Intelligence Agency, the United States Department
of State, the United Nations, and online sources tracing Syrian history and culture. As the
hostility between the two countries continues, I also utilized contemporary news sources,
including daily newspapers and monthly periodicals, to gain insight into the continued
issues facing the relations between the United States and Syria. I ended my research by
conducting interviews with Syrian experts Professor Joshua Landis of Oklahoma
University and Professor Gregory Orfalea of Georgetown University.

A description of modern Syrian history, leading up to its initial contacts with the
United States, will serve as background to the main thesis of the paper. In it I will detail
the beginnings of United States/Syrian relations, the major influences on them over the
course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries such as: the birth of Israel and the
Israeli-Arab conflicts, the 1990’s peace negotiations, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. I will
conclude with a list of options for the administration of Barack Obama to act on in order to improve our relations and hopes of achieving our goals in the Middle East.

Methodology

My analysis of the history of the relationship between America and Syria rests on the theory of Historical Institutionalism. B. Guy Peters, Jon Pierre, and Desmond King describe Historical Institutionalism’s arguments as,

“Historical Institutionalist arguments stem from two major intellectual developments in the 1970’s and 1980’s: First, the renewed scholarly interest among comparative political sociologists in the state as an analytic concept (Evans, Rueschmeyer, and Skocpol 1985); and second, the analytical significance ascribed to institutional arrangements, both formal and informal, in western democracies for explaining behaviors and policy choice (Hall 1986).

The new institutionalists’ principle claim was that once formal and informal arrangements were institutionalized in a modern polity, they assumed a certain rigidity – that is, were difficult to alter – and furthermore, provided an explanatory framework for subsequent policy outcomes.”

My use of the theory consists of analyzing how institutions within the American/Syrian relationship created a rigid framework for each country’s behavior and policy. The concept argues that institutions such as politics, economics and society follow patterns and create a script of available behavior over time. Barrington Moore, a chief exemplar of Historical Institutionalism, expresses it as a belief of “...certain philosophers, historians, and philosophically inclined political scientists who assign to ideas an outstanding role in the development of economic, political, and social institutions.” Ideas and perceptions, along with ideology, concrete data and cultural

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3 Moore, Jr., Barrington. "Foreign Government and Politics: The Influence of Ideas on Policies as Shown in the Collectivization of Agriculture in Russia." The American
norms, all combine to factor into decisions. Moore posits that to neglect these ideas and perceptions can lead to a dangerously shallow understanding of a situation.

Historical Institutionalism argues a correlation between contributing factors and the present state of affairs; it is a study of how $A+B+C \rightarrow \text{Event}$. $A$, $B$, and $C$ are the independent variables/threads that throughout the course of the Syrian/American relationship led to the dependent variable/present situation. Historical institutionalism is a means by which prior events and institutions that shape human behavior are explored in order to reveal how contemporary political action arises. It shows the correlation between these institutions or threads that were created over time and how they led to the present status of the relationship, which is derivative of the script the threads formed. Thus, it is a way to find how the present came to be shaped by previous actors and events.

The use of Historical Institutionalism lends itself to history and political science because it uses the institutions of politics such as governments, agencies, and militaries to seek the impact of their actions on the present.

The actors in the relationship are impacted by history, are history, and shape the future of the relations by what they do in the present. History shapes the behavior, or it shapes people who in turn take political action. An important factor for determining how these actors and events shaped the relationship and its path is their timing. The political environment of any day and age has long term implications through its molding of human perception and behavior. Thus, the day’s events are correlated with future results. The timing of the confluence of actions and actors impacts these events. Historical Institutionalism argues that the history of the United States/Syrian relationship created

tendencies that shaped the relations and the way out of the present quagmire is to recognize how history led to the present situation.

I read Theda Skocpol’s *States and Social Revolutions* as an example of a well-known work that uses Historical Institutionalism. Skocpol describes the theory “...in which the overriding intent is to develop, test, and refine causal, explanatory hypotheses about events or structures integral to macro-units such as nation-states,” and “Basically one tries to establish valid associations of potential causes with the given phenomenon one is trying to explain.”

Skocpol’s work compared revolutions in Russia, France, and China. Her study comprised of “France, Russia, and China will serve as three positive cases of successful social revolution, and I shall argue that these cases reveal similar causal patterns despite their many other differences. In addition, I shall invoke negative cases for the purpose of validating various particular parts of the causal argument.” Her intent with the book is that “It offers a frame of reference for analyzing social-revolutionary transformations in modern history. And it uses comparative history to work out an explanation of the causes and outcomes of the French Revolution of 1787-1800, the Russian Revolution of 1917-1921, and the Chinese Revolution of 1911-1949.”

While Skocpol conducted a multi-country comparative study, her work remains relevant to my research. Skocpol’s study exposes the importance of identifying and connecting causal factors. Skocpol’s work is a comparative study, but I adopt it to my historical

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5 Skocpol, Theda. *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of the France, Russia, and China*. Pg. 37.
6 Ibid. Pg. xi.
analysis of one case, the Syrian/American relationship, due to its emphasis on the causation within institutions.

Here I seek to test my theory that recurrent themes wrote a script that led to the present status of American/Syrian relations. For my purposes, I have found that the associations in the Syrian/American relationship revolve around these pieces: military conflict with Israel, United States military intervention in the Middle East and peace negotiations between Syria and Israel. These will be the independent variables from which the deteriorating relationship developed. Syrian military conflicts with Israel act as the primary factor hurting the Syrian/American relationship. Syria’s continued state of war with Israel, the several traditional military confrontations and Syria’s support of violent resistance groups serve to constantly strain America’s relations with Syria. American military intervention in the Middle East also impacts the relationship. The War in Iraq is on Syria’s doorstep, and the meagerly protected Syrian/Iraqi border allows insurgents in to attack American troops. American military presence impacted the most recent phase of the American/Syrian relationship. The United States -brokered peace negotiations present the most direct interaction between America and Syria. It has the ability to redirect the dynamic of the relationship and is a driving factor in the desire to improve the relationship. Top officials and leaders of Syria and America continue discussions of this process and the importance they allot to the peace process reveals how important is the Syrian/American relationship. These three events, reoccurring over time, present the thread that defines the American/Syrian relationship. The current state of the American/Syrian relationship is the dependent variable. The three independent variables led to the current relationship.
Also, the actions made by Syria and America were done without a grand, all knowing plan that spans the entire length of the relationship and was consistent throughout all the various actors. Over time, the decisions were forced into a narrow mindset due to the dynamics of the relationship. This occurred due to perception of the present due to the past. As Barrington Moore concluded, the train of thought established is difficult to vary from. There is a drive within humans to follow the path laid before them. Leaders stay within the preordained framework and view the present through this narrowed lens, leading to an incomplete vision. An example is the actions of the George W. Bush administration toward Syria. Bush and his officials used previous events to solidify their perception of the present Syria they were dealing with. Bush’s continuation of prior policy and narrowed his perception of the modern Syria he was confronted with. The three independent variables will support the argument that the relationship’s course was not predetermined, but rather influenced by prior decisions to create a framework of perception in the present.

Barrington Moore’s short piece, "Foreign Government and Politics: The Influence of Ideas on Policies as Shown in the Collectivization of Agriculture in Russia," also typifies a Historical Institutionalist approach. Moore wrote the piece in an effort to “make a modest contribution toward a more exact understanding of the relationship between ideas and political and economic changes and stimulate further discussion of the topic through a careful analysis of one important case: the development of the goal of
collectivized agriculture in the Soviet Union.”

He wrote the piece in 1947 with the specific purpose of applying it to American policy. Its purpose was,

“If the United States government is to achieve a successful adjustment in world of rapid economic and political change, the country’s leaders will need an accurate understanding of the factors behind these changes, and the probable directions of such change. Such understanding cannot be obtained without knowledge of the major factors involved, such as material conditions and abstract ideas, and the relative importance to be attached to each one...there is no general agreement concerning the procedures to be followed in evaluating symbolic and ideological data, such as statements by important foreign leaders, programs of political parties, and the like, as opposed to more concrete data such as information on natural resources, economic trends, and similar matters.”

His research produced a conclusion that gave five propositions for how the relationships of actors play out to reach an eventual goal. Moore’s importance lays in these propositions because they outline how to assess and analyze a relationship. Three of propositions are relevant to this paper. They detail the foundation of Historical Institutionalism and its view of relationships over time. The first of which is that

“out of this awareness of various tensions, there develops, by both logical and non-logical processes, a series of goals or objectives. These goals are proposed ways of dealing with the tensions as they are felt and interpreted. The goals, together with the analyses and interpretation of the tensions, constitute the chief elements in political programs, or any given economic or political ideology.”

This proposition establishes the driving forces behind Historical Institutionalism. Without the established goals, governments do not have a direction. By outlining a goal or objective, it follows that there must be a path to achieve it. Thus, the ideology or

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8 Moore, Jr., Barrington. "Foreign Government and Politics: The Influence of Ideas on Policies as Shown in the Collectivization of Agriculture in Russia.” Pg. 733.

9 Ibid. Pg. 734.
policy is created and with it the first step in narrowing the perceptions of possible actions. Identifying a potential problem, recognizing the desired goal, and crafting a means to achieve the goal constitute the formulation of a policy. This policy then becomes the force behind views and actions of the interactions between the nations. This plays out in the Syrian/American relationship as Moore proposed. The tensions of Syrian conflict with Israel created an image of Syria in America. The conflicts also served to create the American objective of protecting Israel and the goal of reaching a peace between Arabs and Israelis. Our means to the end became supporting Israel in its pursuit of security.

The next proposition is,

"If the given political or social group under consideration has an opportunity to put some of its objectives into practice, new problems and tensions may result from these actions. The effort to adapt to these tensions is likely to result in a partial modification of the original set of goals and analyses. In this adaptive process new goals may be developed and old ones discarded or retained..."¹⁰

This reveals the constantly changing nature of any situation or relationship.

Attempts to solve the problem can lead to new problems of their own. It marks a fundamental point of emphasis in the theory – nothing is permanent. Indeed, the situation is always in flux. After the peace negotiations of 1999-2000, both Syria and America departed from their previous policy. Syria departed from American influence and augmented its relationships with Iran, Hamas, and Hezbollah. Similarly, the George W. Bush Doctrine departed from Clinton’s policy of engaging Syria. Instead, Bush chose to isolate and condemn Syria. The result of these policies was the complete malfunctioning of a working bilateral relationship between the two. An attempt to solve the problems of the relationship in turn changed the dynamic of the relationship and worsened it.

¹⁰ Ibid. Pg. 734.
The third relevant proposition states,

"At the same time, within a given group a certain stability in goals, analyses, and actual political behavior is maintained... it appears that there is no complete reversal of the earlier ideology. In this way the variety of possible adaptations of any given political group seems to be rather limited."\(^{11}\)

Within the state of an ever-changing situation, a time-tested stability exists. The first proposition that created an objective and policy toward achieving that objective forms the unchanging mindset of how to reach it. This sets up the main argument of Historical Institutionalism, that the institutions within a situation make it difficult to expand the perception of that situation. It restricts options due to the precedents set and provides a framework to explain the outcome of the policy. The American policy to support Israel exemplifies this because, no matter what, America will not separate itself from Israel. Also, the Syrian goal has been to reclaim the Golan Heights. Syria has adapted to current political conditions over time, switching between violence and peace to reacquire the Golan, but it remains Syria's primary goal. The Americans and Syrians might change tactics, but the goal remains the same as before. It is by seeing the continued use of these original policies that analyzing the present is possible.

Why are positive relations between America and Syria the goal you might ask? The mere aspiration for good relations among the United States and Syria means there was a breakdown in thinking and action. Historical Institutionalism reveals the forced perceptions that occur due to prior events between American and Syria, which allows one to pinpoint why the path of the relationship was non-sustainable. This non-sustainable path is where the contemporary status of the relationship exists and why there is a need to redirect the approach America takes to our Syrian relationship. It is simple enough to say

\(^{11}\) Ibid. Pg. 734-5.
that there are factors that negatively influenced the American/Syrian relationship, but Historical Institutionalism unveils how these influences force changes in perception and thus create a path of action.

The United States should desire amicable relations with Syria because of the potential positives that relationship creates in the Middle East. Syria as an ally can lead to peace and stability in the region. This new relationship also deprives Iran of its chief ally. The approach of Historical Institutionalism reveals the frame the Syrian/American relationship has developed in and a systematic investigation reveals how this dynamic between the two countries is irrational. Each nation used faulty logic when appraising situations, and this led to a shrinking framework of decisions and eventually to the current poor relations.

The concept of Historical Institutionalism does not imply that history is preordained nor does it suggest that events cannot deviate from a path. That is more of what Path Dependency subscribes to. Margaret Levi defines Path Dependency as thus “once a country or region has started down a track, the costs of reversal are very high. There will be other choice points, but the entrenchments of certain institutional arrangements obstruct an easy reversal of the initial choice.”12 Path Dependency asserts that actions get locked into place because the precedents set create an environment insurmountable to break away from. Historical Institutionalism and Path Dependency are strongly related because both attribute history with forcing the present and both discuss paths that are created by precedent. Yet, Path Dependency is more deterministic in its approach to analyzing history than Historical Institutionalism. Paul Pierson, whose

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works use Path Dependency and explore its definition, positives, and limits, describes Path Dependency as, “The process of Path Dependence, in which a preceding steps in a particular direction induce further movement in the same direction,... To put it a different way, the cost of exit – of switching to some previously plausible alternative – rise.”

Path Dependency finds how events are locked into place because they must follow the precedent set before them. What Historical Institutionalism means is that the history creates a foundation for the contemporary political setting, wherein contingency also plays an important role in deciding the impact of an event, as do its actors and timing.

Each decision is not independent from the previous ones; rather, it builds on them. In this specific scenario, due to the history of the United States and Syria’s relationship, certain actions and decisions were made because leaders felt they must be. The actions of the 1960’s are relevant to the decisions being made today. They helped to create the frame in which the decisions are being made. Decision-makers were hamstrung within a much narrower framework than originally existed due the patterns which were constructed.

The behaviors of each leader followed the precedent set by prior decisions and continued shaping the pattern the relationship fell into. Over the course of the twentieth century and early twenty-first, the frame of the decisions grew smaller and smaller, forcing certain decisions to be made. The existence of contingency and radical changes in policy was still present and could have occurred over the course of this relationship by both nations.

But my focus will stay on trying to explain what impacted the relationship to drive it into this narrow frame I described above. This paper will detail the threads that impacted the

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American/Syrian relationship and how those threads forced a perspective upon the leaders throughout time. I explain why Syria and the United States could not implement their full arsenal of policy and treaty options when attempting to resolve their issues, common problems and ideological differences. The explanation discusses the way the leaders’ perspectives of the situations were skewed due to the history between America and Syria, and it accentuates these as points of change in the relationship.

Throughout this piece I focus on these essential features that drive the relationship. The military conflict with Israel, American military intervention in the Middle East and peace negotiations between Israel and Syria will serve as the events driving the decisions of the primary actors to follow the path suggested by history. That path led these two nations away from amicable relations. By the end I pinpoint certain ways to counter this history and use it in a way to strengthen the relationship of the two nations.

Background

Syria has a proud and rich cultural history than dates back to some of the earliest civilizations in recorded history, such as the Phoenicians around 3000 BC to the 5th century BC. According to the United States Department of State, “Syria was occupied successively by Canaanites, Phoenicians, Hebrews, Arameans, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Nabataeans, Byzantines, and, in part, Crusaders before finally coming under the control of the Ottoman Turks.” Syria is a small nation in the heart of the Levant, the area traditionally known to be the countries of Israel, Syria, Lebanon,

Jordan, the Palestinian Territories, and parts of Iraq. It is no surprise then that Syria’s neighbors are Iraq, Israel, Lebanon and Jordan. Syria is a strict secularist nation, similar to Turkey in this societal respect. Its population of 21.7 million people (excluding the roughly 40,000 people living in the Israeli occupied Golan Heights) consists of 74% Muslim, 16% Christian, and 10% Jewish, giving it the second highest Christian population in the region after Lebanon. Damascus is the capital city and center of culture, and it was settled around 2500 BC. It is believed to be one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, which is a marker of Syria’s historic culture. Damascus was the capital of the Umayyad Islamic Empire formed around 660 A.D. and was influenced by great Greek Stoic and Neo-Platonist thinkers. Another proud aspect of Syrian history is that Syrians are attributed with the invention of the first alphabet, known as the Phoenician alphabet, which was modified by the Greeks around 8th century B.C. Syria holds importance for the Christian religion because it was the scene of the Crusades, a series of military campaigns by Christian Europeans to reclaim the Holy Land circa 1100-1300 AD. Syria was either a target or travel route for the Christian armies during much of this time. Syria also holds a special historical relationship to Christianity, “Syria is significant in the history of Christianity; Paul was converted on the road to Damascus and established the first organized Christian Church at Antioch in

17 Ibid.
ancient Syria, from which he left on many of his missionary journeys.\textsuperscript{19} The Syria known today is a product of colonialism and the carving up of lands by European powers. The land known as Greater Syria, or Syria before Western colonialism included Jordan, Israel, parts of Turkey and Lebanon.\textsuperscript{20} Its ancient size directly influences Syria’s desire to influence Lebanon today. Syria’s location offered it an opportunity to create trade along travel routes with the West and also within the Middle East.\textsuperscript{21} Syrians have always been in the middle of politics in their region and now is no different. It holds economic and military prospects as a crossroads for travelers, armies, and trade. Its central location also has political qualities. Its position in the region makes it prime for any power wishing to control the Middle East. This is one reason Syria was often under the rule of empires and regional powers. But, at the opening of the twentieth century, Syria was far from having any impact on its neighbors due to the control of the Ottoman Empire.

At the turn of the twentieth century the Turkish Ottoman Empire was in its waning years of dominion over Syria. The Ottomans came to Syria 1517 and remained there for the next four hundred years.\textsuperscript{22} Ottoman Syria existed as Greater Syria and included Syria, Lebanon, Israel, the Palestinian Territories, Jordan, and parts of Turkey and Iraq. The Ottoman rule was harsh on Syria and World War I brought upon Syria the venting of Ottoman frustration with the course of the war. New technology and superior soldiers of the Europeans overpowered the Ottoman army. It feared for its survival on the


\textsuperscript{21} Hitti, Philip Khuri. \textit{Syria, a Short History; Being a Condensation of the Authors "History of Syria, Including Lebanon and Palestine}. New York: Macmillan, 1959. Pg. 3.

\textsuperscript{22} "Syria." United States State Department. United States State Department, Feb. 2010. Web. 11 Mar. 2010. \url{http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3580.htm#}. 
world stage. So the Ottomans cracked down on Syria, hoping to maintain control of this land. This was done through increased oppression of the Syrian people. With the defeat of the Ottomans, the French created a Mandate over the land that is now modern day Syria and Lebanon. The United States Department of State cites on its Syrian history page,

"In 1920, an independent Arab Kingdom of Syria was established under King Faysal of the Hashemite family, who later became King of Iraq. However, his rule over Syria ended after only a few months, following the clash between his Syrian Arab forces and regular French forces at the battle of Maysalun. French troops occupied Syria later that year after the League of Nations put Syria under French mandate."

The French established control of the government in Syria, but since the Ottomans ruled Syria they did not have many modern institutions of their own set up. At this time, Syria possessed antiquated political, social, and economic institutions. The French brought Syria into the twentieth century, starting with its political institutions, modernizing them and creating a working government. The French did not care for Syrian independence. They created spheres of power as public officials and behind closed doors by controlling local Syrian officials. Phillip Hitti, author of *Syria: A Short History*, explained the mood of Syrians during French rule as, "The Syrian people felt the French rule was worse than Ottoman domination." At this time, these were a people who yearned for freedom. French rule was corrupt, conducted by favoritism and

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The French Mandate left a deep scar on the Syrian people and laid the foundation for decades of harsh, military rule. Syria gained its independence when a reluctant France recalled its troops and officials on April 17, 1946. From 1948 to 1970 an upstart Syrian nation was plagued by instability in government. The leadership in Syria was a revolving door with coup d’états being the most frequent form of political action. Many of the early leaders were military men and so they used their support in the army to take over the capital and replace the existing government. Such turmoil was exemplified by the three coups during the year of 1949 alone. Surprisingly these coups were notably bloodless. The Syrian government found one thing it could agree on in 1948. The newly created Syria found an immediate nemesis with the creation of the Jewish nation of Israel in 1948. These two countries fought several times over the course of the twentieth century and each time Israel was victorious. In 1958 a struggling Syria joined regional power Egypt to form a socialist pact known as the United Arab Republic. By forming this union, Syria hoped to open the door to other Arab nations to join as well. The Syrians were fierce supporters of Pan-Arabism, the belief that Arabs should act as one and create a broad Arab union. At the time, Syria was plagued by political instability, which led to apathy towards government by the Syrian people. It was still feeling the impact of the turbulent shakeup from so many coups in a relatively short period of time. So they turned to Egypt the largest regional power at the time in a hope to start a coalition that would come to include the rest of the Arab states. The State Department gives three main reasons for Syria joining

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Egypt, "Syria's political instability during the years after the 1954 coup, the parallelism of Syrian and Egyptian policies, and the appeal of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's leadership in the wake of the 1956 Suez crisis created support in Syria for union with Egypt." This union lasted from 1958-1961. It failed when the Syrian people and government rejected Egypt's president Gamal Abdel Nasser's overreaching, socialist rule and overthrew the government in Damascus.

In 1967, Syria and Egypt battled Israel after a string for border clashes raised tensions to a breaking point. Israel preemptively acted and Israeli troops pushed Syrian forces back from the Golan Heights. This war brought Israel in control of the Golan Heights. The occupation of this area by Israeli forces has become the major dispute between the two countries ever since then. Much Syria says and does is geared at reclaiming the Golan Heights. It is also significant to note that after this military campaign Syria cut off all diplomatic ties with the United States and since then they have never returned to a truly proper state of affairs.

In 1970 the last coup in Syria occurred. The Ba'th party came to power in Syria under leaders Salah Jadid as President and Hafez al Assad as Defense Minister. The Ba'th Party in Syria stresses socialism, secular Arabism, and seeks to form Pan-Arab allegiances. Assad slowly disagreed more and more with Jadid over military matters and international affairs. In November 1970, Assad collected his supporters within the

military and government to arrest Jadid along with his followers and complete a
bloodless transition of power. On March 12, 1971 Hafez al Assad was elected the
President of Syria by 99.2% of the electorate. This figure speaks to the style of Syrian
government. The authoritarian rule forced people to vote for Assad and if they did not it
was rigged so he won anyway. Assad ruled until his death in 2000 and was succeeded by
his son, Bashar al Assad, the current president.

The thirty years of Hafez al Assad's rule brought Syria an unprecedented
powerful, centralized regime, domestic stability and regional influence. His rule created
the Syria many see today. Assad's reign created five new features central to the
operations of contemporary Syria:
One, a Constitution emphasizing the power of the Executive Branch;
Two, an informal network of top civilian and military leaders used to maintain control;
Three, the expansion of the state's security apparatus to ten agencies designed to secure
political hegemony;
Four, the establishment of the Ba'ath Party as a major political force;
Five, a reliance of charismatic leadership to control Syrian society.32

Today Syria is a run by Bashar al Assad who replaced his father as the undisputed
leader of Syria. He has expressed a desire to negotiate for peace between Syria and Israel
pending the return of the Golan Heights. He has also offered an outstretched hand to
cooperate with the United States and restore a proper relationship. However, Syria still
houses Hamas and Hezbollah and filters insurgents into Iraq. It also remains a strong ally

31 Ma'oz, Moshe. "Damascus vs. Washington: Between the 'Axis of Evil' and 'Pax
Americana.'" Pg. 175-177.
32 Ibid. Pg. 177, 8.
of Iran. These are the issues that must be challenged if a functioning relationship is to be created. Syria offers a contradictory nature. It claims to desire peace with Israel, yet supports terrorists designed to destroy Israel. It also claims to want peace in the region but helps groups determined to undermine Lebanon and Iraq. The crossroads Syria is at, with its potential to increase peace or play spoiler in the region, is why restoring the United States/Syrian link is a ripe issue in today’s political world.

Part 1: Israel

The first script that limited United States/Syrian relations is the foundation of the state of Israel. The birth of Israel in 1948 out of the British Palestinian Mandate created an instant state of conflict in the Middle East. Syria took up the torch for Pan-Arabism against the Jewish “intruders”. The United States support for Israel is the largest contributing factor over the decades to the breakdown in United States-Syrian relations. Israel is the first reason and will be the last dividing America and Syria. Israel’s ties with America, its direct opposition of a Greater Syria and Cold War politics are all foremost in explaining the deterioration of the relationship.

Before Israel existed, Syrian relations with America can be characterized as very good. Before Lebanon separated from Syria, Americans established the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut. In fact, after World War I there was a terrible drought in Lebanon and Syria. The United States sent Herbert Hoover to provide aid and money. This created a great image of America in Syrian eyes and that image remained until the creation of Israel.33

Starting with the birth of Israel and America’s instant support and recognition of it, Syria felt directly slighted. They could not believe America was supporting the existence of this “intruder nation”. There were riots in the streets when Syrians heard of Israel’s independence. Syria immediately put troops on alert and led the attack along with Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq. America’s immediate acceptance of Israel showed a direct forging of an alliance with the new nation, and was seen as turning its back on Syria. It was a harsh reality to Syrians who hoped for a return of Greater Syria. The United States now supported an Israeli nation in the heart of the holy land that Syrians viewed not only as rightfully their land, but rightfully Arab and Islamic too. To many Syrians, Israel was a western, non-Islamic creation that directly countered their dream of a restored Great Syrian Republic. Israel was why Syria could not trust America. It was an extension of America’s attempt to gain control in areas of the world.

At the outset, it does not seem that the United States needed to back Israel so stoutly. When seeing such a massive outcry by Arab people and governments, is it possible the United States could have done more to assuage the fear and anger in the region? It seems not. John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, authors of *The Israel Lobby and United States Foreign Policy*, offer the explanation that Jewish lobbyists were a powerful force behind President Harry Truman’s bid for reelection in 1948, and so beyond Truman’s moral and humanitarian sympathies, large donations helped stay his hand in deciding to back Israel’s birth. Truman sympathized deeply with the European Jewry after knowledge of the Holocaust spread, this was another reason Truman

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supported the creation of Israel and backed it so strongly. Truman’s instant acknowledgement and defense of Israel’s right to exist was fresh in the minds of Syrians and left a sour taste in their mouths during a pivotal time at the beginning of the Cold War. The presence of Israel in the Middle East and America’s alliance with it rose as the first tension between the United States and Syria. This tension, as Barrington Moore explained, led to America’s goal in the region and the policy enacted to meet that goal. Syria was a threat to Israeli security and thus America created a policy to protect Israel and therefore, countered Syrian ambitions to eliminate Israel.

Another large contributor to the waning of the nascent relationship was Syria’s military conflicts with Israel. These were the major reasons for hostility between the two nations and thus made the United States cautious when dealing with Syria. Israel was and is a strong ally to America; if Israel is at odds with Syria, then America must defend its ally. It began with the 1948 Arab/Israeli War. When Israel rebuffed what the Arab nations threw at them militarily, Syria was beside itself with anger after the defeat. An example of Syria’s reaction was the public outrage and political fallout for the current leadership. The loss was a major reason for the 1949 coup led by Col. Husni al Za’im to replace the administration held responsible for the embarrassment. Over the years Syria and Israel had three military conflicts. They were the 1948 War, the 1967 War and the 1973 War. With each conflict the United States played a bigger role in assisting Israel, either with military or other aid. By the time the 1973 war occurred the United States was a vital player in ending the conflict and preventing it from growing out of control.

36 Rather than using the term Six Day War and Yom Kippur War, I feel describing the war simply by its year prevents any bias or offense.
The 1967 War occurred when Israel preemptively attacked Egypt. Increasing tensions between Israel, Egypt and Syria culminated in the events of June 1967. On June 5, 1967 Israel sent its air force to destroy Egyptian planes and later to attack Syrian and Jordanian airfields. Syria went on to lose the Golan Heights during an Israeli offensive on June 9. Again, the loss of the Golan Heights proved to become the major reason for future hostilities between Israel and Syria. Syria seeks to reacquire the Golan in any way possible. The fighting ended June 10 as all parties involved agreed on a ceasefire. The end of the 1967 war also saw the severing of Syrian/United States diplomatic relations.\(^{37}\) The peace hopes seemed dead and the Soviet Union was supporting Syria with what it needed. American support for Israel proved absolute and the United States saw no benefit in Syrian affairs.

The next and final direct military conflict between Israel and Syria was the 1973 War in October 1973. On Yom Kippur in 1973 Syria and Egypt launched simultaneous offensives across ceasefire borders in the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights. The initial success on the Syrian front surprised the Syrian soldiers and they settled for the gains they made. Israel quickly countered and pushed the Syrian forces back further than the original borders.\(^{38}\) Both the United States and Soviet Union actively watched the fighting play out and supplied their respective sides. It came to a point where each power almost joined. The United States and Soviet Union worked with the United Nations to quickly agree upon a ceasefire that ended the fighting remaining in Syria. The resulting armistice ended any formal military conflicts between Syria and Israel, but Syria remains


in a state of war with Israel today. It established a United Nations peacekeeping force to stay in the Golan and oversee the buffer zone between the two countries. The disengagement revived the United States/Syrian diplomatic relationship on account of America taking a lead role in mediating renewed peace talks between the countries.

Every time they met in battle, Israel’s technology outmatched the Syrian army, thanks in great part to America. Over time the United States enhanced its support of Israel and its right to exist in the region. As a result, the United States was either supportive of Israeli military operations to protect itself or, at the very least, the United States did not debate Israel’s right to protect its land and people. The military conflicts between Syria and Israel polarized the American relationship with both nations. America moved closer to Israel with each military campaign. While the United States backing of Israel is unflappable, why did the United States not help Syria? This is explained with one simple phrase: the Cold War.

Cold War politics were another major setback to United States/Syrian relations. From the outset of the tension between the Soviet Union and America, the Middle East was a land caught in the middle between the wooing communist and capitalist powers. The Cold War mindset dominated many of the decisions made by both Syria and the United States over the course of the forty-five yearlong ideological struggle. Syria was a freshly independent nation in 1946 and so a prime candidate to be influenced by the American cause of democracy. Being an infant nation, Syria also sought to establish international friends and allies. Unfortunately, from the outset Syrians were frustrated by

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Truman’s pro-Israel leanings.\textsuperscript{41} This was an immediate setback to establishing a productive relationship between America and the young Syrian nation. Since many Syrians viewed Israel as an American enterprise in the Middle East, some Syrians were attracted to the Soviet Union from the beginning. But for the most part, Syrians and Syrian government remained true to the ideals of Pan-Arabism during its early years. Its goal was to create a broad coalition among the Arab nations.

Dwight Eisenhower succeeded Truman as President of the United States in 1953 and served until 1961. Eisenhower saw the Cold War move into a very tense and polarizing era. The United States increasingly sought to contain communism. Eisenhower also realized the potential of the Middle East as either an ally or a large conflict zone. He established the Eisenhower Doctrine specifically for nations in the Middle East where communist influence was starting to spread, such as in Egypt and Syria.\textsuperscript{42} It stated that any nation could receive United States economic assistance or military aid if it was being threatened with armed aggression by another nation.\textsuperscript{43} Eisenhower saw that with Great Britain and France no longer present in the Middle East, a power vacuum existed and the Eisenhower Doctrine meant for the United States to fill the space rather than the Soviet Union or Egypt.\textsuperscript{44} Egypt and the Soviets saw the void and sought to establish a strong base of support in the area. Syrians vehemently denied the


offer of friendship by Eisenhower. Syria was a nation determined to follow a path of Pan-Arabism. It also viewed the Eisenhower Doctrine as an attempt by the United States to be the guardian of the Middle East.\textsuperscript{45} Remembering their lives under the rule of the French Mandate and being so resolute towards Pan-Arabism, the Syrian government and people were leery of any offer from America. This rejection of what the United States saw as a “no brainer” decision when it came to support and protection greatly turned Washington against Damascus. It served to push Syria closer to Egypt and Moscow instead of Washington.

The United States and Syria did not build the best rapport with each other over the first years of their formal relations. But beyond these public announcements and policies there was a secret association between the CIA and the Syrian government. Amidst the political turmoil after the loss of the 1948 war with Israel, the CIA attempted to push America’s agenda in Syria. With CIA backing, Col. Husni Za’im completed a coup in 1949. Za’im was a close ally of the CIA while in power and America seemed to have a friend in the Syrian government under his rule. However, this did not last long. Za’im was promptly replaced by Colonel Sammi al-Hinnawi later in 1949 during the year that saw three coups. It was around this time that the CIA began to plan another coup d’etat. The CIA supported Colonel Adib Shishakli who led the third successful coup in 1949. Yet, he was ousted in 1954 and the CIA’s efforts were foiled again. One message between CIA officials said this of Shishakli: “Adib Shishakli falls clearly short of the type of a leader we should like Syria to have, but he might be better than some other potential candidates...consequently we should bide our time and await developments

before taking any positive position relative to his possible return to power.\textsuperscript{46} It appeared that the CIA hoped to get a proxy in the Middle East thru Shishakli’s rule. Syrians accused the United States of attempting to enact a coup and expelled the United States Embassy officials. The CIA’s involvement in Syria seems to suggest that the United States saw the importance of the small nation. It historically was key to many conquering armies and empires as a travel route and crossroads for supplies and trade. The presence of the CIA indicates that America desired Syria’s friendship or at least compliance. Syria could have been the pathway for American influence to spread in the Middle East. And the shadow operations of the CIA offer insight that the United States wanted to influence the events in Syria’s political culture, but make it look like genuine democracy in action. After these events, Syria was hard pressed to find a reason to trust or to ally itself with the United States.

Given the status of United States actions in Syria through 1957, it is little wonder why Syria joined with Egypt in creating the United Arab Republic in 1958. Joining Egypt under its president Gamal Abdel Nasser, a socialist, Pan-Arab, anti-West leaning, leader of the Middle East’s biggest regional power, Syria paired itself with another Arab state at war with Israel and who refused to buy into the Eisenhower Doctrine. This decision taken by Syria had damaging effects on the relationship with the United States. It scoffed at American aid offers through the Eisenhower Doctrine and consistently viewed any American intervention as a step toward American domination in the region. Syria forged this new republic with Egypt in direct rebuttal of the Eisenhower Doctrine.

Syria followed suit with its own Cold War politics when in 1954 it became the first Arab nation to sign an arms agreement with the Soviet Union’s satellite, Czechoslovakia.\textsuperscript{47} By 1956 Syria established itself as an ally of the Soviet Union and accepted military support from it. This friendship with the Soviet Union was in direct opposition to America’s ideology and position in the world. Syria allied itself with the other superpower, America’s new enemy. Syria now became a threat to American safety and goals in the world. The Soviet Union gave crucial arms and supplies for Syria’s wars with Israel.\textsuperscript{48} America seemed to have little choice in how to view Syria. The United States could not offer Syria any military aid because Syria had already become friendly with Soviet satellite nations and any military aid to Syria was a direct threat to Israel.\textsuperscript{49} We see here how the Cold War handcuffed American and Syrian leaders and legislators when dealing with each other. On the principles of ideology and national interest, America could not support or maintain overly affable relations with Syria. Syria fell under Soviet influence and others near it could have been next. America saw no option but to treat Syria as hostile to American safety. The United States would continue to work with Syria on the Israel issue, but due to Syria’s pro-Soviet leanings, America could not offer economic relief.

These Cold War decisions seem to be cruelly cyclical. The United States could not arm Syria because it would be a potential threat to Israeli safety. In turn, Syria turned to the Soviet Union for support. This angered America and so President John Kennedy

\textsuperscript{47} Ma'oz, Moshe. "Damascus vs. Washington: Between the 'Axis of Evil' and 'Pax Americana.'" Pg. 164.
increased American support to Israel.\textsuperscript{50} This only embittered the Syrians and they entrenched themselves with Soviet support. All the while these decisions were being driven by the judgments of previous leaders. The spectrum of options narrowed with each decision, constricting the decision-maker's mind into believing that following the Cold War precedent was the only way to proceed. The back and forth actions dug Syria deeper in the Soviet arms and away from any American deal. The Cold War strained hopes to recover normal diplomatic relations by the United States with Syria.

Through it all, Israel was center to these events and decisions. The American support of Israel began with its formation in 1948. Over the years Israel and Syria had several military encounters in 1948, 1967, and 1973 with each strengthening the United States/Israeli bond. The initial 1948 conflict between Israel and Syria was the first in a series of tensions that proved to disable American/Syrian relations. Also, the geopolitics of the Cold War forced Syria and America to choose their allies. This was yet another tension that served to force a perception that a policy must be enacted to disarm the potential threat to Israel and now American security. Syria chose the Soviet Union and America chose Israel; this became an irreconcilable divide between the two during this period. The American support of Israel created such a strong alliance over the years that they now have one of the strongest friendships between any two countries. This impacted future peace negotiations over the Golan Heights because the United States did not pressure Israel to give up the land to Syria. Israel had no pressure so Syria got no progress out of the discussions. Syria's military conflicts with Israel created the major object to the present day peace deals. Syria lost the Golan Heights and wishes nothing.

\textsuperscript{50} Mearsheimer, John, and Stephen Walt. \textit{The Israel Lobby and United States Foreign Policy}. Pg. 51.
more than to get it back. As mediator, the United States seeks to find a common ground for agreement, but we support Israel in its assertion that the Golan is theirs. The divide between America and Syria over Israel during the Cold War made Syria a hostile nation in the American government, media, and citizen’s eyes. Syria was at war with our biggest ally in the region and now supports the groups who attack it. This view of Syria persists today and is how we approach Syria when dealing with it. Our unwavering support for Israel and clash against communism created a large divide with Syria, which was not easily fixed. After the end of the Cold War in 1991 there was hope about peace negotiations between Israel and Syria. As we will see, the post-Cold War Middle East was in prime condition for a rejuvenated peace process.

Part 2: 1990’s Peace Negotiations

"Syria is the key to the achievement of an enduring and comprehensive peace.”

~ President Bill Clinton

The peace process between Israel and Syria was and remains a fundamental link for the United States and Syria. Long ago America took up the torch of attempting to bring peace to the people of the Levant. America believed it could take its friendship and leverage on Israel, coupled with its superpower status to facilitate and mediate a peace. In a sense, America was using one major institution, its alliance with Israel, as a stepping-stone to create another thread towards the goal of protecting Israel. That new thread became the American brokered peace negotiations between Israel and Syria. It was an adaptation on the relationship that became a powerful thread for writing its own script in the relationship between the United States and Syria. President Jimmy Carter started the first substantive push between the two nations. The end of the Cold War and increasing Syrian cooperation led President George H. W. Bush to reengage Syria. President Bill
Clinton was the next and most recent president to put a great deal of effort into the Syrian track of Israeli/Arab peace negotiations.

Before getting into the politics and history of the peace negotiation’s impact on United States/Syrian relations, an explanation of what exactly the Syrian peace talks are is needed. There are two main peace dialogues with Israel: one is with Syria and the other is with the Palestinian Territories. The Syrian peace process revolves around the Golan Heights. The Golan Heights is an area of land on the border of Syria and Israel that was taken by Israel during the 1967 War. It is widely viewed by organizations such as the United Nations, the European Union, Amnesty International and the nations of the United State and the United Kingdom to be Syrian land occupied by Israel. It is a breach of international law that Israel holds and claims ownership of the Golan. United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 states that Israel must leave the occupied Syrian land. It says, “Withdrawal of Israel armed forces from all territories occupied in the recent conflict...For guaranteeing the territorial inviolability and political sovereignty of every State in the area.” Syria wants the land back; that is the first and largest item of contest between Syria and Israel. According to Jimmy Carter, the terms for a Syrian/Israeli Golan Heights peace accord were as follows:

A) A multinational peace force for border protection;

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51 The Palestinian track peace negotiations involve the Palestinian Territories of the Gaza Strip and West Bank. The major obstructions that must be overcome in this peace track are: affirming and recognizing land as Palestinian; what to do with the Palestinian refugees spread all over the region and massed in refugee camps; whether Jerusalem will be Israeli, Palestinian, neither or both; and the security of borders. These factors are very intensely debated and contested by both Israelis and Palestinians.
52 Landis, Joshua. Telephone interview. 7 Mar. 2010.
B) Israel has a right to the East of the Sea of Galilee for North – South travel;

C) Surveillance and early warning systems in place;

D) A peace that is equal to Egypt and Jordan’s peace with Israel.\(^{54}\)

These are the basic premises that must be agreed upon and met for a lasting peace.

The problem is getting mutual trust and good faith to translate into substantive actions.

The terms for peace are not very disputed in this situation unlike the Israeli/Palestinian peace track. Yet, just like the Palestinian track, the Syrian peace track has its history of progress and setbacks.

The peace process began as an offshoot of the 1973 War cessation process. With the conclusion of the 1973 War, the United States took on a larger and more active role in Syrian/Israeli Peace.\(^{55}\) Syria, under its still new leader, Hafez al Assad, along with Egypt, launched a surprise attack on Israeli occupied lands in the Sinai and Golan Heights. Israel repelled the Syrian army and eventually attained more land on the Golan than it previously held. The Israeli offensive was called off after the United States stepped in to cease hostilities. Assad, seeing the amount of sway the United States held over the Israeli government, realized that to get the Golan Heights back he needed American help.\(^{56}\) From that point forward, the United States has been instrumental in attempting a peace between the two. Of course, there are others who can broker a peace, but Hafez Assad felt only America could help Syria regain the Golan Heights. His

\(^{54}\) The general format of which is recognition of Israel’s existence, an end to the state of war between the two nations and a relinquishing of occupied lands.


thinking was molded by the previous experiences of American intervention in Israeli military affairs, which demonstrated the significant impact Washington had on Israel.

Hafez felt it was his duty to return the Golan to Syria, mostly because he was the Defense Minister in 1967 when it was initially taken by Israel.\textsuperscript{57} It was personal for him and all the more meaningful if he could reclaim it for Syria. His first attempt to reacquire the Golan with force failed. Assad quickly understood his military could not overpower Israel's military forces nor could Syria accomplish his goal without international help. Following the cease-fire representatives of the Geneva Conference set a goal of peace between Arab nations and Israel. However, Assad was frustrated that President Carter would not be attending so Syria's chairs at Geneva were empty.\textsuperscript{58} Assad felt that only the chief executors of the nations would suffice in a discussion. His narrow window of operating forced Syria to boycott the Conference. One positive that came from the war was that Syria resumed diplomatic relations with the United States.\textsuperscript{59} Assad did this in the hope of coaxing the American officials to begin peace negotiations. Again his perception of the situation was influenced by the power of the United States in Israel.

Later in the decade, Carter hosted Egypt and Israel at Camp David. These peace talks in 1978 led to the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty of 1979.\textsuperscript{60} Just as in the past when the United States did not show preference to Syria, so Assad turned to Moscow in 1980 for

\begin{footnotes}
\item[59] Ma'oz, Moshe. "Damascus vs. Washington: Between the 'Axis of Evil' and 'Pax Americana.'" Pg. 191.
\item[60] Ibid. Pg. 192-3.
\end{footnotes}
aid.61 Due to the Carter Administration’s lack of attention to the Syrian track, Assad felt his only course of action was to stick with the Soviets. According to Joshua Landis, “Syria wanted America’s help in getting a peace with Israel. Syria offered the same thing as Egypt for the Golan Heights.”62 But the Carter administration focused on Egypt because it was the large Arab power rather than little Syria. As it was, Assad saw the situation and believed his only recourse was turning to the Soviets and finding other ways to win back the Golan Heights.

In 1976 Syria sent troops into Lebanon; reportedly, “President Hafiz al-Asad intervened in the Lebanese civil war on behalf of Maronite Christians.”63 Assad wanted to increase Syria’s influence in Lebanon in an attempt to raise Syria’s clout in the region. Also, Assad was motivated because of Lebanon’s historic importance to Syria and its economy. In fact, Stephen Glain believes Lebanon is more important to the Syrian economy than the Golan Heights.64 According to Robert Baer, Syria interferes in Lebanon because “it is crucial to Syrian economy and image.”65 (Also, Syria and Lebanon were one before the French partition.) This dropped American interest in peace and continued to be a cause for concern for the United States until Syria withdrew in

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61 Ibid. Pg. 192-3.
Syria’s domination of Lebanon and its affairs was a historical concern that began in 1976. In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon after years of border conflicts. Syria held the torch for Arab unity and resistance to Israel, so Syrian forces battled Israeli troops to protect Arab land. But Syria was not strong enough and needed Iran’s help in defeating Israel. This began the forging of a strong alliance between Syria and Iran, which now threatens Israeli safety and American interests in the Middle East. This further drove peace out of the minds of Americans involved in Syrian relations. Increased violence against Israel coupled with a growing relationship with Iran did not project a desire for a peaceful solution to the Israeli conflict.

In 1989, Syria and the United States consulted to help Syria agree on the Taif Agreement. The Taif Agreement ended the civil war in Lebanon and called for staged withdrawal by Syria and Israel. Benny Morris viewed the Syrian influence in Lebanon as a “puppet master of its government.” Syria’s control in Lebanon was one point the United States government disapproved of and eventually led to the Syrian Accountability

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and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act. This sanctioned Syria and led to their departure from Lebanon.70

Towards the end of the 1980's Hafez Assad felt he had a reason to be optimistic for American/Syrian relations. The election of George H.W. Bush came without the support of the Jewish community. To Assad, this was great news and he quickly thought it could be a turning point in relations. As proof of his willingness to reach out to America, Assad and Syria supported the United States against Iraq in Kuwait.71 Syria and the United States also worked closely on the Taif Agreement, which ended the decades long Lebanese civil war, restored Lebanese rule to the southern area that Israel took over, and legitimized the Syrian presence in Lebanon. The work between America and Syria on the Taif Agreement was a small step in a series of actions leading to the 1990's peace negotiations. Soon after the war Assad got his opportunity to sit down and talk with a United States president and negotiate peace with Israel. In 1991, Assad accepted George H.W. Bush's invitation to attend a Middle East peace conference and engage in bilateral discussions with Israel afterward.72 These meetings started a decade of cooperation and improved relations with Syria made possible by the collapse of the Soviet Union. The post -Cold War world brought a thawing of relations between the United States and Syria and the medium used to better relations were peace talks. Just as Barrington Moore concluded, there are efforts to adapt policy and goals in the course of the relationship.

Syria began opening to the idea of a peace agreement, but kept within the realm Moore suggested. This realm was reclaiming land from Israel. Syria began its hostility toward Israel because it felt Israel stole land from it and other Arab peoples; now it is slightly adapted to focusing on the Golan Heights. But as we will soon see, these improvements did not last nor did they result in the desired goals for Syria.

In 1992 Bill Clinton was elected president and with him came vigor for the Syrian track peace talks. Assad was always a captivating man and drew the attention of American presidents due to not only his character but also his position in Middle East politics. Clinton became quite fond of Assad and the two grew close over the eight years they shared as chief executives. Assad truly liked Clinton; he saw him as a person really interested in a peace. Clinton adapted the traditional policy towards Syria of campaigning with them to drop their arms and attempt peace. Clinton brought Syrians and Israelis together to discuss land and security issues. The decade of the 1990’s saw the greatest advance in Syrian/Israeli peace negotiation and, with it, Syrian/American relations. Assad’s preference for Clinton made him receptive to peace talks more than Carter or any other president before. Assad’s decision about Clinton meant that peace was getting a real chance and at the same time the relations with the United States were improving. Clinton put the Syrian track to the front of national policy. Clinton seems to have noticed Assad’s attitude towards him and saw an opening. But it was not the easiest task. Negotiating with Assad was a test of one’s will, nerves and intellect.

Dennis Ross was the special Middle East coordinator under the Clinton Administration. He met with Assad and other top Syrian officials often while in that position. Ross described Assad as a “very detailed negotiator” and that Assad wanted a peace deal to look like a Syrian victory. According to Aaron David Miller, a Middle East analyst and negotiator who worked in the State Department for over twenty years, Assad’s negotiating style was “minimalist” in effort and he expected 100% of the profit in the accord. He saw what other peace agreements were with Israel and wanted to get more and give less than any other. Given these traits, his attention to detail, stubborn demands and emphasis on public opinion, it is clear why it was difficult for any negotiations to produce a conclusive agreement.

Over the course of 1999-2000, Bill Clinton had Assad and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak at the brink of an agreement. Both sides wanted peace and worked hard to get far into the negotiations. Barak offered to withdraw the Israeli presence in the Golan Heights in exchange for Syria’s willingness to recognize Israel and provide security arrangements. Yet, in the final stages there was a dispute over a sticking point in the Golan. Israel offered it but could not let go. According to Professor Joshua Landis, “America hasn’t had the political resolve to push Israel the last step.” This proves what Barrington Moore projected about such relationships: objectives might be adapted, but they will never deviate fully from the original policy goal. In this instance, Clinton

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75 Ross, Dennis. The Missing Peace: The Inside Story for the Fight for Middle East Peace. Pg. 142.
77 Miller, Aaron David. The Much Too Promised Land: America's Elusive Search for Arab-Israeli Peace. Pg. 255.
78 Landis, Joshua. Telephone interview. 7 Mar. 2010.
pushed peace talks to the forefront, yet he could not stop America’s firm support of Israel and push Barak enough to close the deal. The discussions stalled, and in 2001 Ariel Sharon replaced Barak as Prime Minister. George W. Bush replaced Clinton as president in 2000. Hafez Assad died in 2000 and was replaced by his son, Bashar Assad. The three top actors in the peace talks were no longer sitting at the table and the peace slipped out of reach. Since then discussions have not been brokered by the United States. The transitioning of leadership brought new perspectives on the peace talks and history of the relationship between the countries. Syria became vengeful, Israel remained determined to keep its land, and America renewed its position of antagonism against Syria.

The concept of peace negotiations for Syria and Israel brought America close to Syrian officials and politics in a time when Syria no longer had the Soviet Union for support. It created a reason for America to care about a country we could have easily been written off as a former Soviet ally and that would be the end of things. The peace negotiations gave something for the United States to invest in Syrian affairs and the result was the best relations between the United States and Syria and the closest to peace the Syrian track has ever seen. The actions and decisions of Assad, Carter, the elder Bush and Clinton influenced one another over time. Assad desired Carter’s attention but got nothing significant out of the most peace-oriented president for the region. Assad receded back to the Soviets until Bush and Clinton became president. Assad’s good “vibes” with Clinton helped him believe that peace was attainable and that the Clinton and the United States could deliver. Yet, this peace was elusive and lost at the eleventh hour. The failure of the peace process in indicative of just how difficult it is to shake the precedents of this relationship. No matter how close the United States and Syria grew
during this time, the history of the relationship proved too much to overcome. Trust could not last because America would not push Israel, and so Syria saw we were not ready to give up our unwise (in this case) support of Israel. America’s alliance with Israel would not be reoriented to push Israel the last step in finishing the peace. The result became the end of negotiations and the complete collapse of United States and Syrian relations.

The fallout of the failed 2000 peace agreement set the tone for the policy and relations of the George W. Bush era. Syria was left empty handed after what they viewed as ten years of good actions and open negotiations. Barrington Moore’s proposition that new avenues to reaching a goal can produce new tensions themselves is evident here. The unsuccessful peace created a renewed hostility between Syria, Israel, and America. The result in Syria was a firm determination to never be tricked by Israel and America again. They increased their relations with Hamas and Hezbollah in the resistance against Israel. Syria also keyed in on Iran as their closest ally to fight Israel. If there was no peace, then there was war and this company was the kind of people Syria associated with. Syria began playing the political game. In order to get their land back and a peace, they needed to give Israel an incentive to make the peace. This incentive was and remains resistance fighter and the threat of a nuclear Iran. This was what Syria saw and still sees as the only way to gain leverage on Israel in the peace negotiations. The collapse of the peace negotiations entrenched Syria’s connections with these hostile actors and institutions of resistance. On the opposite side of the equation, the failure of the peace talks exemplified America’s historic dedication to supporting Israel. It also

79 Landis, Joshua. Telephone interview. 7 Mar. 2010.
80 Ibid.
continued America's institutional policy of skewing the balance of power in the Middle East towards Israel's favor. We will see soon that the new Bush policy was aimed at hurting Syria and alienating it on the world stage, beginning the new institution of containment for challenging Israel.

Part 3: Bush Era

"Syria is a key factor in any overall regional peace, but President Bush has refused to support Syria's peace talks with Israel on the Golan Heights or even engage Syria on a bilateral basis."

~President Jimmy Carter

The presidency of George W. Bush was the single most destructive time for American/Syrian relations. The events, actions and attitudes of the Bush Doctrine set any hope of reconciling America and Syria far adrift. A confluence of international events and military endeavors put Bush in a position to either move forward with Syria or retreat from the progress made during the past decade. Bush's neoconservative approach to Syria departed from the script the Clinton administration laid before him and instead of continuing to work with Syria for peace, we disengaged. The events of September 11, 2001, our military operations in Iraq and our recent policy towards Syria all contributed to getting the American/Syrian relationship to where it is now.

The tragedy of 9/11/2001 reverberated across the globe. Scores of nations came to America's side with support. Syria was no exception. The young Syrian president Bashar al Assad responded clearly to Washington. Syria offered the CIA and United States intelligence information they gathered on Al-Qaeda operatives and leaders. Syria

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81 Landis, Joshua. Telephone interview. 6 Mar. 2010.
helped the CIA hunt down Al-Qaeda terrorists because they were a shared enemy between the two countries.\textsuperscript{82}

Syria also stood by the Bush administration's decision to go to war in Iraq, which is not a surprise since Syria disliked Saddam Hussein. According to the United Nations voting summary, Syria was a member of the United Nations Security Council that voted in favor of the American and British coalition's invasion of Iraq.\textsuperscript{83} However, there are many sources claiming Syria felt threatened and did not like the American invasion of Iraq. The American State Department's view believes Syria opposed the war in Iraq.\textsuperscript{84} Moshe Ma'oz describes the Syrian opposition to the Iraq War as a modern source of tension between the two countries. He, however, does cite that Syria's yes vote was a positive gesture towards America.\textsuperscript{85} Yet, Syria remained leery of American interests in Iraq. The suspicions were not unjustified. There have been incidents of Syrian soldiers and civilians being killed during American missions that went over the Syrian border. The United States even disconnected the Syrian-Iraqi oil pipeline.\textsuperscript{86} With such actions,


\textsuperscript{86} Ma'oz, Moshe. "Damascus vs. Washington: Between the 'Axis of Evil' and 'Pax Americana.'" Pg. 157, 160.
the Syrian people and government felt the only way to view the Bush administration was hostile.

In early 2002, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld announced that Syria was also a member of the "axis of evil" that included Iran, Iraq and North Korea. The basis for including Syria was their continued support for terrorism in Israel. The Bush administration saw how Syria housed Hamas, the Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah, and the Iranian Red Guards, the main fighters in the resistance against Israel. In their minds to publicly denounce Syria and force the world to shun them was a proper tactic. Syria was now considered a rogue nation that sponsored terrorism. Here is why the Bush tactic was a curious position to take. Syria and its state sponsored terrorism was not a direct threat to America; antagonizing Syria only hurt the United States position within the Middle East and Syria is comprised of mostly Sunni and non-Sunni secularists, not Sunni fundamentalists that comprise Al-Qaeda. But to understand the Bush policy, one need only look back to 2000. The precedent was set by the peace negotiations that supported Israel unflinchingly. The policy, according to Prof. Landis, is to "Reward those who are at peace with Israel and hurt those who aren't, like Syria." So we saw an increase in hostility towards Syria, an attempt to contain them, alienate them, and keep Israel more powerful.

89 Landis, Joshua. Telephone interview. 7 Mar. 2010.
The State Department acknowledged that the 2003 intervention in Iraq was a large setback for the two countries and that since then relations have "cooled".\textsuperscript{90} The following years saw the implementation of economic sanctions in 2004 and in 2005 in the light of the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri (the United States State Department believes Syria carried out the plot) and the United States recalled its ambassador.\textsuperscript{91}

The House of Representatives passed The Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act by a vote of 398-4 on October 2003.\textsuperscript{92} In 2004, President Bush signed the act into action. The consequences of American and Syrian actions from 2001-2005 brought the halt of any relations and an atmosphere of hostility. Amidst the flurry of the anti-Arab scare and belief that almost all Middle East nations were our enemy, our electorate and our government turned 180 degrees from its prior policy towards Syria. The Syria Accountability Act imposed the following sanctions: a freeze on Syrian assets in the United States; a halt to United States business investment in Syria; a ban on exports to Syria (except food and medicine); a decrease in diplomatic contacts in Syria; a restriction on Syrian diplomats in the United States; and a prohibition on using American airports.\textsuperscript{93} The American government felt that this was the best way to decrease Syrian support for terrorism, attempts to create weapons of mass destruction and


\textsuperscript{93} Ma'oz, Moshe. "Damascus vs. Washington: Between the 'Axis of Evil' and 'Pax Americana.'" Pg. 160.
influence in Lebanon. Congress and the Bush administration thought that, due to Syria’s history of sponsoring terrorism and its regional influence, the best hope to curb their clout was isolating them.

In 2005, Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri was assassinated. The American response was to formally recall the American ambassador to Syria. After that point the Bush administration felt no need to attempt any reconciliation or bilateral discussions with Syria. They viewed Syria as hostile and working against American goals in Iraq and Israel. The American policy remained hostile despite Syrian president Bashar Assad wanting and knowing he needed improved relations with America. Assad desires to change Syria’s image internationally; he no longer wants to be viewed as a spoiler to Middle East peace. Another factor is that Assad understands the importance of American aid and support. Yet, the way the United States and Syria acted led each other to believe neither was capable of being friendly or engaging.

The actions led to vicious posturing by both sides. Ari Fleischer, former White House Press Secretary under Bush, labeled Syria as a “rogue nation.” Another Bush Administration official said that Syria was “behaving badly.” Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shura said the Bush administration was “the most violent and wicked.” Each side was publicly attacking other for their faults. The relationship entered a new low. Both sides accused the other. America accused Syria of bad actions in Iraq by not

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96 Ma'oz, Moshe. "Damascus vs. Washington: Between the 'Axis of Evil' and 'Pax Americana.'" Pg. 157.
protecting its borders and allowing insurgents across the border. The United States labeled Syria as a rogue nation and in the axis of evil. Syria likewise accused America of harming Arabs and Syrians. Syria stated that their relations with the United States have diminished because the Americans killed Syrian civilians and soldiers. Syria then labeled the Bush administration violent and stupid. Both nations felt that they must be hostile and unflinching in order to achieve their policy goals.

The first decade of the twenty-first century saw the drastic decline in the American and Syrian relationship. The American invasion of Iraq and America's newest policies towards Syria were met with frustration, anger and defiance by Syria. Syria felt threatened by the American invasion of Iraq and held a tangible fear of being invaded by American forces too. This fear came from the hostility out of Washington; Syria thought it might be next to be attacked in accordance with the United States policy of spreading democracy. In response to the proximity of the war and its frustration with the Bush administration, Syria allowed insurgents to filter into Iraq through Syria. It also bolstered its relationships with Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran in an effort to fight Israel. These actions in turn made the United States step up its attempts to control Syria's regional influence. The United States established more sanctions and ceased any diplomatic contact. Not only have there been no American sponsored peace talks with Israel; the United States does not even support a peace between Syria and Israel anymore. The American political institution of supporting Israel was elevated into supporting Israel's right to the Golan Heights, a piece of land illegally held by Israel according to the United Nations. This mindset was established by Syria's support of violence against

97 Landis, Joshua. Telephone interview. 6 Mar. 2010.
Israel. Hostility by both sides fed off the most recent remarks or action taken by the other.

Part 4: How the Present Came to Be

"If the past eight years taught us anything, it is that we gained no leverage by trying to ignore Syria and instead ended up isolating the United States"

~ Senator John Kerry

The script that began in 1948 when a young Syria first opposed the creation of Israel created the first thread that served to drive American/Syrian relations apart. This thread was intensified during the course of the Cold War and several military conflicts between Israel and Syria. Toward the end of the twentieth century, the United States created another thread by making itself responsible for creating a peace between Israelis and Arabs. The peace process changed attitudes and opened relations between the United States and Syria. It served to continue the goal of protecting Israel by making a peace and served to help Syrian/American relations at first. Yet after ten years of “progress” the end result was continued hostility and tension. Syria moved into Iran’s influence and America changed its policy in attempts to isolate and deter Syria from threatening Israel. The next thread, created by the Bush administration, moved to an unseen level of support for Israel while demonizing Syria. These threads weave together to make the script that exists now, which is the poor status of relations with Syria.

Over the course of the relationship, the events of history created a narrow agenda in the minds of the leaders making the present decisions. The Syrian wars with Israel, the Syrian alliance with Egypt and the Soviet Union, state sponsoring of terrorism and assistance to the Iraqi insurgency made leaders believe they needed to impose sanctions, scale back diplomatic relations and isolate Syria. The American support for Israel, Cold
War policies and the frustration of the failure of peace negotiations made Syrian leaders believe fighting Israel, cooperating with the Soviets, seeking a American brokered peace, supporting terrorists and insurgents was how to best proceed. Despite having a full spectrum of options, these leaders only considered a limited set because they saw the former actions forcing their position. The threads created during the course of the relationship such as American support of Israel, Syria’s determination to force a reason Israel should fear it and return the Golan, and American policy of punishing enemies of Israel all contributed to this squeezing of choices for leaders to make.

Over time, this narrowing of options created the downward path in the relations. All along the possibility for strengthening the ties was present. This was seen during the Clinton administration’s peace talks and bilateral meetings with Syria. But the failure of that decade of discussion to bear any substantive peace agreement with Syria reclaiming the Golan Heights and Israel getting assured its security from Arab resistance groups was fatal. The threads always push perspectives towards mistrust and hostility, even when people recognize that problem of the current situation. During the 1990’s, Syria and America sought to establish better ties and realized that it was by ending the Israeli conflict that this would happen. But the history of the relationship was too much to overcome. America could not push Israel far enough and Syria would not accept a partial agreement. The mistrust accumulated over the decades was too much to overcome. America would not drop its support of Israeli policy and Syria would not deviate from its goal of acquiring the deal it sought. Everyone knew what must be done to break the cycle, but it did not get there. Syria stepped up its efforts to thwart Israeli power and presence by strengthening support and connections with Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran.
Syria vowed never to be tricked in such a way again and is extremely hesitant to enter any peace talks. The United States remained firm in its support for Israel and began its policy of punishing Syria for opposing Israel. Syria immediately went from a top priority to utter rejection in American policy. The path set at the beginning of the twenty first century was too steep. The decisions were being made in such a constricted setting that relations fell apart completely.

The Bush Doctrine and neoconservative approach to dealing with Syria put America in a hole in the Middle East. The script that the Bush Era wrote not only produced major setbacks to American relations with Syria, it also created new problems. Joshua Landis described the current status of the American/Syrian relationship as thus,

"The American and Syrian relationship is coming out of a really bad patch [of events]. The hope under Bush and the neocons was that Syria would fall under a Domino Theory that was to start with Iraq. Their policy was to isolate and cut Syria off by squeezing it with economic and political sanctions. But this failed and the United States out itself in a corner. The world reached out to Syria and the United States was left isolated. Now we are crawling back trying to get a reward from Syria, but Syria won’t reward us because of our bad behavior."

Here is the direct result of the script that was laid down throughout the years. The Bush administration’s policy of continuing to back Israel 100% and punish those who threaten it produced the sanctions and hostility towards Syria during the 2000’s. The thread of United States policy under Bush caused the disintegration of American/Syrian relations. Syria not only was unfriendly with America, it had allied itself even closer to Iran, who America sees as its biggest threat in the region.

The result of the failed peace and hostility of the past decade is that Syria grew closer to Iran, Hamas, and Hezbollah in an effort to balance its weakness with Israeli

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Professor Landis explains that it is an attempt to gain leverage on Israel and get Israel's attention on peace with Syria. This means Syria supports Iran's attempt to get a nuclear weapon and continues to aid Hamas and Hezbollah in their resistance against Israel. Syria continues to send forth contradictory messages. Syria says and indeed, does want peace with Israel. It also wanted to improve its relations with America. But its actions show the opposite. Supporting violent groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah and working with Iran only present the United States with the belief that Syria does not want peace. As was said earlier and reinforced by Prof. Landis, if a peace can be reached between Syria and Israel, then Syria's support of such violent resistance groups and efforts will cease.

Enter President Barack Obama. He inherited the terrible situation left over from the eight years of neoconservative policy that isolated and demonized Syria. Joshua Landis depicts the situation as

"Barack Obama is trying to knit back together the relationship dissembled by the Bush administration. This is difficult because we won't get a big deal, meaning the Golan Heights won't get resolved. So, working within the current restraints, America wants to get leverage and that means sending an ambassador to try to develop the relationship."

Obama has already tried to warm relations in his first year in office. As early as March 2009 Acting Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman, traveled to Damascus to "engage with Syrians on the productive role they can play in the..."
Middle East."\(^{103}\) The State Department records show that this was the first trip by an official of this level since 2005.\(^{104}\) According to the United States State Department, in 2010 alone Special Envoy to the Middle East, George Mitchell, and Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Bill Burns, have traveled to Syria and spoken with President Assad. The State Department’s Office of the Spokesman explained Undersecretary Burns’ trip, “His [Burns] trip to Syria reflects our continued interest in furthering dialogue with the Syrian government on all aspects of our bilateral relationship.”\(^{105}\) Obama is mending the broken relationship one official at a time, trying to rebuild trust.

Why does Obama decide that now is the time to change course with Syria?

Reengagement with Syria appears to be one piece of President Obama’s Middle East policy. The Obama administration decided to confront issues in the Middle East with dialogue and diplomacy. In his June, 2009 speech in Cairo, Egypt, President Obama said,

“I've come here to Cairo to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and mutual respect, and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive and need not be in competition... But I am convinced that in order to move forward, we must say openly to each other the things we hold in our hearts and that too often are said only behind closed doors. There must be a sustained effort to listen to each other; to learn from each other; to respect one another; and to seek common ground."\(^{106}\)


\(^{105}\) Ibid.

A renewed relationship with Syria follows the guiding principle of diplomacy Obama has adopted. Pursuing Syria fits into the overall plans to complete a peace in the Middle East, one of Obama's chief priorities, as well as to play into America's policy of isolating Iran. The Obama Administration is using Syria as an example of re-engaging in dialogue, seeking mutual benefits, and progressing American interests with Middle East nations. Obama is not abandoning Israel; in fact, he told the Arab world in his Cairo address, "America's strong bonds with Israel are well known. This bond is unbreakable. It is based upon cultural and historical ties, and the recognition that the aspiration for a Jewish homeland is rooted in a tragic history that cannot be denied." Obama is remaining within the guidelines of America's original policy to protect Israel, but he is also seeking to forge alliance with Israel's neighbors. He is maintaining the objective to keep Israel and America safe, but rather than by hostility and military force, as the Bush administration preferred, the Obama administration is pursuing positive gains through direct diplomacy.

Obama is reversing course in the American approach to the Middle East, Syria is a great example of this departure from the Bush administration's policy. White House Press Secretary, Robert Gibbs responded to a question on re-engaging Syria with this, "I think you know that we have had a series of meetings with administration officials and Syrian leadership. I think this strongly reflects the administration's recognition of the role Syria plays and the hope of the role that the Syrian


government can play constructively to promote peace and stability in the region. And it continues the President's call to be more fully engaged in the region.\textsuperscript{109}

President Obama understands Syria's role in the Middle East. He sees that Syria is connected to peace and stability with Israel and Iraq. George W. Bush knew this too, but his administration's tactic was to force Syria into a peace by rendering it helpless without any international support or connections. This however, failed as is seen by Syria's strong relationship with Iran. President Obama is taking the opposite approach and trying to bring America and Syria closer in order to accomplish both nations' goals.

Trying to restore direct relations with Syria is important, but another key ingredient to the United States' relationship with Syria is our relationship with Israel. Obama has been distant toward Israel thus far. He told Israel to stop developing settlements in Palestinian land and still has not visited there yet. But despite Obama perceptibly loosening America's support of Israeli action and policy, Congress would never allow a change to take effect. As stated by Prof. Landis, "The United States and Congress have no interest in putting pressure on Israel. They are content with how things are."\textsuperscript{110} Just like before, the United States is not willing to push Israel to give up the Golan and will not punish them for refusing to return it to Syria.

Professor Greg Orfalea of Georgetown University holds a more optimistic view of the Obama administration's message to Israel and Syria. He sees President Obama and his administration as making "all the right moves."\textsuperscript{111} These moves include sending officials, Special Envoy Mitchell, and returning an Ambassador to Syria. It also includes


\textsuperscript{110} Landis, Joshua. Telephone interview. 6 Mar. 2010.

\textsuperscript{111} Orfalea, Greg. Personal interview. 13 Mar. 2010.
the most recent events, which occurred the week of March 8, 2010. Vice President Joe Biden went to Israel to visit and show the Obama administration’s support for Israeli security. While in the midst of his visit, Israel announced plans to build more settlements in East Jerusalem. This comes after Israel supposedly put a moratorium on settlement building and the Obama administration publicly criticized Israel’s settlement policy. Biden publicly denounced the Israeli plans; coming mere days after Special Envoy George Mitchell announced Palestine and Israel agreed to begin indirect negotiations mediated by himself. In the West Bank town of Ramallah, Biden said, “Yesterday the decision by the Israeli government to advance planning for new housing units in East Jerusalem undermines that very trust, the trust that we need right now in order to begin ... profitable negotiations.”

Along with Vice President Biden, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had strong words for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. According to the State Department spokesman, P.J. Crowley, Clinton held a 45 minute long conversation with Netanyahu and rebuked the Israeli decision to begin developing the settlements.

Prof. Orfalea thinks “the Syrians have to like Obama.” He goes on to say that “Obama is the first president since Eisenhower who will speak to Israelis sternly and with principle that will further world peace and give tough love to so it [Israel] doesn’t go over the top [against its Arab neighbors.]” Obama seems to be trying to create his own

adapted version of the script laid out between Syria and America. He is reversing the previous policy of disengagement by engaging Syria and he is reversing the Bush policy of blindly supporting Israel regardless of its consequences with a rational, larger worldview of Israeli actions.

In essence, we see the propositions of Barrington Moore in action throughout the history of American/Syrian relations. There is an initial tension between America and Syria caused by the birth of Israel. This tension produces the American goal of protecting Israel through its policy of steadfast loyalty and support of the Israeli government and military. The enactment of this policy, enhanced by Cold War tension over time, was successful in securing Israel from during several military conflicts. These military conflicts were new tensions in themselves and further forced perception between the two nations. The hostility forced each nation to view the other so negatively that it severed diplomatic ties between the United States and Syria at one point. But, as Moore explained happens when policy was enacted and adapted, new tensions evolved between America and Syria. The adoption of a peace negotiation track for settling the dispute between Israel and Syria officially put America in the middle of the two opposing sides. From then on, America has been the facilitator and mediator of the peace process, enabling America to become much closer to Syria. Yet, as the early 2000’s demonstrated, this adaptation to relieving the tensions between America and Syria over the Israel issue led to worse conditions in the relationship. Syria perceived the situation with America as dead; they returned to violence and allied themselves with Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas. The government under George W. Bush forced its view of Syria as belligerent and a danger to Israeli and American interests.
At this point, the history of the relationship had strained perception on both sides so much to the extent that no trust existed between them. The precedents set by the past established such a narrow vantage point for both American and Syrian leaders that the relationship failed. It failed due to the non-sustainable track it was on, a track surrounded with mistrust, differing objectives, and counter-productive policies. Thus, the public denouncements made by each country and tension over Israeli security were not a healthy and sustainable direction for the relationship to be heading.

Acknowledging the threads impacted the relationship is the first step toward understanding the dynamic of the current American/Syrian relations, knowing why this script is important makes it relevant to today’s situation. Understanding the script written by the history of the American/Syrian relationship and how it forced perceptions among leaders establishes a way to recognize and value the relationship. The look at the relationship taken in this paper reveals what threads wrote the script of action and perception between America and Syria. By knowing what factors impacted the relationship and the perception of each nation, one can scrutinize how and why the relationship took the course it did. This paper dissected those how and why those factors are important to the relationship over time. Understanding the script that developed our current relations with Syria enables United States leaders and policymakers to pinpoint the aspects of the script to change and improve relations toward working for both Syrian and American goals. Knowing how and why the relations became non-sustainable leads to a clearer picture of how to reconcile the relationship and improve relations. Knowing how the illogical perceptions forced the relations into a path that could not succeed for either nation allows those leaders trapped by such irrational thoughts to reconsider their
mindset and break out of the box created by the script. Today, Barack Obama appears to be doing just this. The Obama administration analyzed the relationship and is adapting our policy to forge a new course, all the while remaining within our original policy goals of keeping Israeli and American interests secure.

Part 5: Present Opportunities

"While there remain a number of serious disagreements between the United States and Syria, vigorous diplomatic efforts offer the best way forward and we have much to gain strategically by having this diplomatic channel formally open."

~ Senator John Kerry

That is where America and Syria stand now. Even with everything that occurred in the past ten years, both Syria and the United States desire to improve their relationship and know it is an essential asset for their agendas. Also, regardless of how muddled the relationship is, it is salvageable. Throughout the history of American and Syrian relations, both countries fundamentally stood for goals that complimented each other. The hostility existing between these two countries is the result of perceptions created by particular past events. Upon recognizing the influence of these events on today’s relationship, it becomes apparent that the hostility between the two countries is not merely an antiquated legacy of a past age, but also irrational given the objectives of both countries.

Joshua Landis prescribes two options to America’s current situation with Syria. The first option as he explains it is, “For the United States to continue what it is doing. To support Israel in the Golan Heights and skew the balance of power towards Israel by arming them against Arab powers and keep Israel from paying a price for its actions. To
manage the anger and resentment of Arabs for Israel violating international law."\textsuperscript{115} Professor Landis believes this is the course that will continue in the near future. He states, "The United States won't do it [punish Israel], they have had forty years and haven't done it yet. There is no political support in Congress and the American people want Israel to have the land."\textsuperscript{116} From a historical perspective, this line of thinking follows the script that was generated since 1948. The United States' ultimate objective is the safety of Israel and we will not risk our alliance with them.

The second option is that "Israel obeys international law and the United States punishes them for not giving up Arab land in return for secure borders."\textsuperscript{117} This is what Obama and his administration seem to be hinting at. He can adapt the primary goals of the historic policy of supporting Israel and seeking its security by pressuring a peace deal that will spread security to most of the region. Prof. Orfalea sees the status of American/Syrian relations as, "In the right climate, with an atmosphere of respect. And with any kind of equitable moves on our [United States] part. Such as, what is currently happening with the Israeli settlements, and if we give some aid cut or real penalty to Israel. If we get Syria and Israel to a table, then Syrians will come [to peace]."\textsuperscript{118} This requires a lot of work and trust on all sides of the equation.

If (at the moment this is still a big if) the United States decides to begin to pressure Israel on returning the Golan Heights back to Syria and brings the two countries to sit face to face at a table, then the peace process has a legitimate chance. The working belief if such a situation comes to pass would be that each side must agree not to incite

\textsuperscript{115} Landis, Joshua. Telephone interview. 7 Mar. 2010.
\textsuperscript{116} Landis, Joshua. Telephone interview. 7 Mar. 2010.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{118} Orfalea, Greg. Personal interview. 13 Mar. 2010.
any challenges to the peace process. Just as Vice President Biden said of the current Israeli/Palestinian negotiations, “It is incumbent on both parties to build an atmosphere of support for negotiations and not to complicate them.” This would require Syria to put a hold on Hamas and Hezbollah for any real, sustained discussions to occur. The question of whether Syria has any real control over these groups or merely aids them would be critical. But as Prof. Landis said, “Syria can kill the leadership [of Hamas and Hezbollah], they can kick them out of Syria, stop arming them, or support the CIA to hunt down [leaders].” At the moment, Syria houses the leaders of these two groups, helps them hide, and offers them support in Damascus. If Syria needed to, it could crack down on these resistance groups and show Israel it is serious about securing the borders.

The negotiations would require both Syria and Israel to make concessions and find a common ground, but as long as Syria gets the Golan back, it will do all it can to finish a comprehensive peace agreement. During these peace talks America would witness an improvement in its Syrian relations, just as it did during the 1990’s under Clinton. If the United States can broker a peace deal with Syria and Israel, Syria would have almost no reasons to ally itself with Iran, support the resistance groups it currently houses and be belligerent to American interests in Iraq. Prof. Landis explains, “If there is no war with Israel, Iran would have no role to play [for Syria], there would be no need to arm Hamas and Hezbollah.” Syria would no longer have the incentive to antagonize and resist Israel if it gets the Golan Heights back and secures peace.

120 Landis, Joshua. Telephone interview. 6 Mar. 2010.
121 Landis, Joshua. Telephone interview. 6 Mar. 2010.
The improvement in American/Syrian relations would come during this process and be enhanced by the resulting peace. Either as a carrot to begin discussions with Israel or as an incentive to reach an accord, the United States must offer to lift the current sanctions held on Syria. The end of a war with Israel releases Syria from finding Iran as a necessary ally. According to Joshua Landis, “Syria doesn’t really want Iran in Iraq. But for now it [Syria] helps them [Iran]... Syria wants to see more Sunnis in the Iraqi government but as long as the United States keeps supporting Israel [in the Golan Heights] the more Syria thwarts United States and Saudi Arabia by helping Iran.” Prof. Orfalea also explains the Syrian/Iranian relationship as, “Syrians are not fond of Iranians... Philosophically they don’t fit with Iran. They are just playing power politics.” The strict secular nature of Sunni Syria does not fit with the fundamental Shia regime in Iran. The Israeli peace with Syria would put a wedge in between Syria and Iran, allowing room for the United States to augment its by now good-natured relations with Syria.

A peace with Syria cannot be separated from an Israeli peace with Palestinians. If a Syrian peace comes first, it will serve to help push Israel and Palestine to making peace. If a Palestinian peace happens first, it will secure a peace between Israel and Syria as well. This is because Syria is the lone Arab state to stand by Palestine until it gets land and peace with Israel (Egypt and Jordan made peace). Prof. Orfalea states that Syria stands by Palestine still because “Syria has land taken from it too and it has ties to Palestine – emotional, philosophical, geographical, and it harbors the main Palestinian

resistance groups Hamas and Hezbollah.”\textsuperscript{125} A Syrian peace is connected to Palestinian peace with Israel for those reasons. Prof. Orfalea believes that “Syria will sign a peace agreement [with Israel] the day after Palestine does, not a day before.”\textsuperscript{126} Regardless of which comes first, the Syrian or Palestinian peace, both are aspects of a larger peace. They impact and give momentum to each other’s peace.

The end of hostilities between Palestine, Syria and Israel would serve to stabilize the much-maligned region and decrease a vast amount of violence. This, after all, is the United States’ goal, to protect Israel and create a safe and stable region. By improving relations with Syria and fostering peace with Israel, the violence that plagued the people of Israel and its neighbors would almost cease to exist. This stability carries into Iraq, where America is trying to successfully turn over to the Iraqis. Syria has already shown interest in good future relations with Iraq and this only helps American objectives within Iraq. Syria was the first Arab nation to recognize Iraq and send an ambassador. Joshua Landis believes this, in essence, helped to legitimize the Nouri al-Maliki administration, the current administration in Iraq.\textsuperscript{127} Future relations with Iraq are an incentive for Syria to protect its Iraqi border better. This in turn leads to the United States seeing another positive action by Syria and only serves to better our relations. Also, without a need to aid Iran’s agenda in Iraq, Syria loses its major reason for allowing insurgents to spoil peace efforts in Iraq, thus reducing yet another aspect of Iran’s regional power. Prof. Landis discussed Syria’s importance to Iranian influence. He said, “Iran’s influence

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{127} Landis, Joshua. Telephone interview. 7 Mar. 2010.
would quickly fade without Syria, Hamas and Hezbollah."\(^{128}\) It is already clear that Syria’s alliance with Iran would fade after reaching a peace with Israel, and without that necessity of countering Israeli power Syria does not need to aid Iran’s plans for Iraq.

Iran’s diminishing influence on Syria is exactly what America wants to see as its own relations with Syria take an upswing. This is where the improved relations mean so much to America. The United States would now have Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the new Iraq, and Syria as friends in the region. America could use its influence with these nations to stabilize the region and put added pressure on Iran from its Arab neighbors.\(^{129}\) These are all nations that have or will have reached a peace and mutual recognition with Israel and Syria would be the centerpiece if this arrangement. It would have such an important role because it is Iran’s strongest ally. If Syria shows a willingness to counter Iranian influence, it sends a strong message to the rest of the Arab world.

This sequence of events is difficult to picture and even harder to bring to reality, but it is within the reason of possibility. The crux of it all is the improved relations with Syria and America. America would still seek its original policy of securing Israel, but with the added emphasis on doing so through improved relations with its Arab neighbors rather than belligerence. It would require this adaptation of American policy to construct such a situation, but the benefits to America and its goals are obvious. It is for this reason that there should remain a sense of urgency in fixing American/Syrian relations. If the

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\(^{128}\) Landis, Joshua. Telephone interview. 7 Mar. 2010.

past continues and Syria remains in the dark, the violence will only continue to afflict Israel, Iraq and American troops in the Middle East. It will also enable Iran to continue increasing its sway in the region. History has shown that the peace process is capable of bringing America and Syria closer; if the process is successful, it will open better avenues for our relationship such as security in Iraq and Israel. There is hope and as Prof. Orfalea stated when asked if he believes Obama can produce a peace between Syria and Israel within the next eight years, "I think he can do it in four."\textsuperscript{130}

\textsuperscript{130} Orfalea, Greg. Personal interview. 13 Mar. 2010.
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