

BETWEEN CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT AND OVERT
CONFRONTATION: U.S. FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS SYRIA
IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA (1989-2009)

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POST-COLD WAR ERA (1989-2009)**

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ABSTRACT

BETWEEN CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT AND OVERT CONFRONTATION: U.S. FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS SYRIA IN THE POST- COLD WAR ERA (1989-2009)

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This dissertation seeks to analyze U.S. foreign policy towards Syria in the post-Cold War era by deploying role theory. By covering the period from 1989 to 2009, the dissertation aims to shed light on special dynamics, peculiarities, and events in U.S. foreign policy towards Syria under the presidencies of George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush. The study contends that focusing on each administration's policy towards Syria rather than tracing continuity of themes such as international terrorism charges, rogue state accusations, and the WMD issue offers a better picture of the U.S.-Syrian relations in the post-Cold War era. The dissertation also puts forward that role theory enables us to make sense of conflict and cooperation between the two countries in the post-Cold War era. The dissertation argues that U.S. foreign policy towards Syria is shaped by its national role conceptions (NRCs) and their performance. The study also argues that Syria's compliance or non-compliance with the NRCs of the United States shaped contours of bilateral relations between 1989 to 2009.

Keywords: The U.S., Syria, U.S. Foreign Policy, Role Theory, Post-Cold War Era

ÖZ

YAPICI ANGAJMAN VE AÇIK ÇATIŞMA ARASINDA: SOĞUK SAVAŞ SONRASI DÖNEMDE ABD'NİN SURIYE'YE YÖNELİK DIŞ POLİTİKASI (1989-2009)

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Bu tez, Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasını rol teorisini kullanarak analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Tez, 1989'dan 2009'a kadar olan dönemi ele alarak, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton ve George W. Bush'un başkanlıkları döneminde ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasının özel dinamiklerine, hususiyetlerine ve olaylarına ışık tutmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, uluslararası terörizm suçlamaları, haydut devlet suçlamaları ve kitle imha silahları sorunu gibi konuların sürekliliğini izlemek yerine her bir yönetimin Suriye politikasına odaklanmanın Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde ABD-Suriye ilişkilerinin daha iyi bir resmini sunduğunu ileri sürmektedir. Tez ayrıca rol teorisinin Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde iki ülke arasındaki çatışma ve iş birliğini anlamlandırmamızı sağladığını ileri sürmektedir. Tez, ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasının ulusal rol tasavvurları (URT'ler) ve bunların icrası tarafından şekillendirildiğini iddia etmektedir. Çalışma ayrıca, Suriye'nin ABD'nin URT'lerine uymasının veya uymamasının 1989 ile 2009 arasında ikili ilişkilerin gidişatını şekillendirdiğini savunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: ABD, Suriye, ABD Dış Politikası Rol Teorisi, Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Dönem

To My Beloved Friend Maşallah NAR who passed away at 37 due to leukemia...

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Owing to checkered history of the U.S.-Syrian relations during the Cold War years, the trajectory of U.S. foreign policy towards Syria was unclear at the onset of the post-Cold War era. Syria's alliance with the Soviet Union, its animosity against Israel, its sponsorship of international terrorism, its spoiler role in the Middle East peace process, and its military presence in Lebanon were contentious issues between Washington and Damascus for a long time. Nevertheless, the U.S.-Syrian relations normalized and improved considerably under the George H. W. Bush administration because the United States and Syria reached a *modus vivendi* in the Gulf crisis, in the Madrid peace process and in the Lebanese arena. The U.S.-Syrian cooperation continued apace under the Clinton administration since Washington assumed responsibility to achieve a genuine peace between Syria and Israel. Thanks to Syria's key position in the Middle East, both the Bush and the Clinton administrations pursued policy of "constructive engagement" and preferred to understate the problematic issues between the two countries, especially Syria's connection with international terrorism. This attitude contributed to mutual understanding and cooperation between Washington and Damascus from 1989 to 2001.

On the other hand, the U.S.-Syrian thaw disappeared with the coming of the George W. Bush administration owing to divergences of opinion between the two countries on numerous issues such as the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Syria's linkage to the militant Palestinian groups and Hezbollah, its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) capability and its ongoing hegemony over Lebanon. Despite Syria's intelligence cooperation against al-Qaeda immediately after 9/11, the Bush administration sought to isolate and punish Syria due to its defiant attitude during the invasion of Iraq by imposing economic sanctions and ejecting it from Lebanon. Furthermore, unlike the previous post-Cold War administrations, the Bush administration refused to get involved in the Syrian-Israeli peace talks as a mediator. Hence, the U.S.-Syrian relations were marked by "overt confrontation" and discord under the Bush administration between 2001 and 2009.

In hindsight, it is a fact that the U.S.-Syrian relationship has never reached a level of alliance and has oscillated between cooperation and conflict in the post-Cold War era. Given the ambivalent nature of the U.S.-Syrian relations in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, this study aims to answer the research question: “*What explains cooperation and conflict in the U.S.-Syrian relations in the post-Cold War era?*” The study examines the U.S.-Syrian relations from the angle of Washington because the United States as the world’s sole hegemon was unquestionably stronger than Syria considering its position as a small state in the post-Cold War international system. In this context, this dissertation seeks to analyze U.S. foreign policy towards Syria during presidencies of George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush from 1989 to 2009. Drawing on the theoretical insights of role theory, the study aims to elucidate to what extent U.S. foreign policy towards Syria was shaped by its national role conceptions (NRCs) and their performance in the post-Cold War era. The study also aims to expose whether Syria’s compliance or non-compliance with the NRCs of the United States impacted cooperation and conflict in bilateral relations between 1989 to 2009.

In addition to the main research question, the study seeks to answer the following sub-questions: Why the U.S.-Syrian relations evolved from cooperation to conflict in the post-Cold War era? To what extent the post-Cold War NRCs of the United States and their performance shaped its foreign policy towards Syria from 1989 to 2009? Did Syria’s compliance or non-compliance with the NRCs of the United States affect post-Cold War American administrations’ policy towards Syria? Was there any convergence/divergence in role conceptions of the United States and Syria? If yes, did this convergence or divergence affect conflict and cooperation between the two countries during the period examined in the dissertation?

When we look at the academic literature on the U.S.-Syrian relations, most of the studies have examined bilateral relations in the post-Cold War era from realist perspective. In the literature, it has been argued that conflict and cooperation between Washington and Damascus are closely associated with their national and security interests. Scholars have contended that Syria’s cooperation with the United States during the Gulf crisis, its participation in the Madrid Peace Conference and ensuing bilateral peace talks with Israel as well as its support for the United States in the early phases of the global war on terror can be explained by the pragmatic concerns of Syria. According to these scholars, instances of cooperation indicate that Syria sided with the United States as the world’s sole superpower to preserve its national interests and to avoid isolation and punishment by Washington in the post-Cold War era.

Regarding the conflictual aspect of bilateral relations, scholars have mostly interpreted conflict between Washington and Damascus through the same realist perspective. For example, Syria's opposition to the United States during the invasion of Iraq in 2003, its support for the insurgency in Iraq in the aftermath of the invasion and its alliance with Iran and Hezbollah (or the so-called axis of resistance) against the United States have been explained as an extension of Syria's balancing strategy. Apart from the realist interpretations, there have been a few attempts at analyzing bilateral relations from constructivist perspective by focusing on the role of ideology or from an eclectic perspective by taking ideology and interest into consideration together.

Some of the scholars studying the U.S.-Syrian relations are Erik L. Knudsen, Stephen Zunes, David Lesch, Flynt Leverett, Eyal Zisser, Ibraheem Saeed al-Baidhani, Robert G. Rabil, Neil Quillam, Itamar Rabinovich, Ahmad Soltani Nejad, Raymond Hinnebusch, and Jasmine K. Gani. When we look at their studies, some of them have provided us with descriptive account of the U.S.-Syrian relations in the post-Cold War era by focusing on certain themes such as the Gulf War and the Madrid peace process, while the others have sought to explain bilateral relations from a theoretical perspective. To illustrate, Meredith Reid Sarkees and Stephen Zunes¹, Erik L. Knudsen² and Eyal Zisser³ explain the improvement in the U.S.-Syrian relations at the onset of the post-Cold War era in descriptive way by analyzing the impact of the Gulf War and the Middle East peace process on bilateral relations.

David Lesch is another scholar studying Syrian foreign policy and the U.S.-Syrian relations under Bashar al-Assad in his famous book entitled *The New Lion of Damascus: Bashar al-Asad and Modern Syria*. Although Lesch gives in-depth analysis of the U.S.-Syrian relations in the first half of 2000s, he does not examine bilateral relations with a theoretical approach.⁴ Similarly, Flynt Leverett⁵ and Eyal Zisser⁶ elaborate on several contentious issues in the U.S.-

¹ Meredith Reid Sarkees and Stephen Zunes, "Disenchantment with the 'New World Order': Syria's Relations with the United States," *International Journal* 49, No. 2 (Spring, 1994): 355-377.

² Erik L. Knudsen, "United States-Syrian Diplomatic Relations: The Downward Spiral of Mutual Hostility (1970-1994)," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 19, No. 4 (1996): 213-234.

³ Eyal Zisser, "Syria and the Gulf Crisis – Stepping on a New Path," *Orient* 34, No. 3 (1993): 563-579.

⁴ David W. Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus: Bashar al-Assad and Modern Syria* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

⁵ Flynt Leverett, *Inheriting Syria: Bashar's Trial by Fire* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2005).

⁶ Eyal Zisser, *Commanding Syria: Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2007).

Syrian relations comprehensively in the 2000s without using a theoretical framework. Another scholar who analyzes the U.S.-Syrian relations in the post-Cold War era is Ibraheem Saeed al-Baidhani. Baidhani, who is a professor of history from Iraq, explains the U.S.-Syrian relations from 1989 to 2014 in a descriptive manner.⁷

There are theoretically sensitive studies on the U.S.-Syrian relations as well. For example, Neil Quillam seeks to make sense of Syria's decision to engage with the U.S.-led new world order in the post-Cold War era from a theoretical perspective. Quillam focuses on change in Syria's attitude towards the United States at the onset of the post-Cold War era by utilizing a revised version of Steven David's omni-balancing theory as an analytical framework. Despite his attempt at formulating a comprehensive framework encapsulating domestic and external variables, Quillam explains Syrian foreign policy in the new world order by depending on realist premises such as Syria's national security concerns in the anarchical international system. What's more, the scope of Quillam's book was limited to the 1990s covering only the Gulf War and the Madrid peace process.⁸

Robert Rabil elucidates the U.S.-Syrian relations in the post-Cold War era in his book entitled *Syria, the United States, and the War on Terror in the Middle East*. In the book, Rabil accounts for the evolution of the U.S.-Syrian relations and says that bilateral relations have been shaped by "apprehensions, misconceptions and misunderstandings" between the two sides. Rabil contends that the reason for discord between the United States and Syria in the post-Cold War era was their clashing national security interest and more clearly regime security interests.⁹

Raymond Hinnebusch also analyzes conflict in the U.S.-Syria relations under Bashar al-Assad and argues that Syria's defiance of Washington during the invasion of Iraq and its aftermath was an outcome of its lack of dependency on the United States, which was the product of its nationalist policy. In addition, Hinnebusch argues that Syria's interests were shaped by its Arab nationalist identity.¹⁰

⁷ Ibraheem Saeed al-Baidhani, *The United States and Syria, 1989-2014* (Bloomington, Indiana: Xlibris, 2015).

⁸ Neill Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1999).

⁹ Robert G. Rabil, *Syria, the United States, and the War on Terror in the Middle East* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2006).

¹⁰ Raymond Hinnebusch, "Defying the Hegemon: Syria and the Iraq War," *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 2, No. 3 (2008): 375-389.

It is important to note that the issue of the Middle East peace process dominated the U.S.-Syrian relations in the post-Cold War era. That's why, there are plenty of books and articles in the academic literature focusing on the role of the United States in the Syrian-Israeli peace track in this period. For example, Ahmad Soltani Nejad focuses on the ineffective role of the United States in the Syrian-Israeli track during the 1990s. Nejad claims that Syria and Israel could not reach an agreement owing to the United States' unwillingness to pressure Israel into giving up Syria's territories and its failure to assure Israel that Syria would meet its security needs.¹¹

In another study, Robert Rabil aims to uncover the dynamics behind the United States' involvement in the Syrian-Israeli relations from early 1990s to early 2000s. He maintains that Washington pursued an ambivalent foreign policy towards Syria within the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Rabil states that while American administrations were close to Syria's position in resolving the Arab-Israeli conundrum, the Congress was supportive of Israel.¹²

Pressman seeks to explicate the failure of the United States as a partial mediator in the Syrian-Israeli talks between 1991 and 2000 within the framework of mediation and negotiations literature.¹³ Itamar Rabinovich also descriptively elaborates on the problematic issues between the United States and Syria such as the U.S. invasion of Iraq and Syria's hegemony over Lebanon as well as the Bush administration's perception of the Syrian-Israeli peace track in the 2000s.¹⁴

The most comprehensive book focusing on the U.S.-Syrian relations has been written by Jasmine K. Gani. In her book entitled *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations: Conflict and Cooperation*, Gani combines historical analysis, constructivism, and foreign policy analysis and emphasizes the role of identity/ideology in Syria's foreign policy towards the United States. She primarily examines bilateral relations from Syria's angle and does not elaborate on U.S. foreign policy towards Syria in detail. In the book, Gani uses constructivism

¹¹ Ahmad Soltani Nejad, "The Ineffective Role of the United States in the Syrian-Israeli Peace Process," *J. Humanities* 13, No. 1 (2006): 45-70.

¹² Robert Rabil, "The Ineffective Role of the US in the US-Israeli-Syrian Relationship," *Middle East Journal* 55, No. 3 (2001): 415-438.

¹³ Jeremy Pressman, "Mediation, Domestic Politics, and the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations, 1991-2000," *Security Studies* 16, No. 3 (2007): 350-381.

¹⁴ Itamar Rabinovich, "The Bush Administration, Israel and Syria, 2001-2008," in *The View From Damascus: State, Political Community and Foreign Relations in the Twentieth-Century Syria* (London, Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008), 341-354.

as a supplement to realism rather than challenging dominant realist perspective to make sense of the U.S.-Syrian relations. According to her, there are four arenas of the Syrian-American contention: the Arab-Israeli conflict, Lebanon, Iraq and the conflict within Syria itself. Gani contends that the Arab-Israeli arena is the most important and formative aspect of the U.S.-Syrian hostility, affecting other issues in bilateral relations. Gani claims that many of the conclusions drawn from the Arab-Israeli arena can be applied to other issues in the U.S.-Syrian relations, but she solely focuses on the Arab-Israeli conflict and ignores other issues throughout her book. Even though Gani's book is the latest and the best utilizing theories of International Relations, she does not cover the U.S.-Syrian relations under George W. Bush.¹⁵

Even though these studies have provided us with insights into main themes, issues, and dynamics in the U.S.-Syrian relations during one or two post-Cold War American administrations, there has been no detailed study covering U.S. foreign policy towards Syria during the successive administrations of George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush. Most of the studies concentrate on a single event or a chain of events in the U.S.-Syrian relations in the post-Cold War era such as the Gulf War, the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the Madrid peace process or the continuity of certain themes or issues such as Syria's connection with international terrorism, its WMD capabilities and rogue state accusations of the United States. In this context, this study posits that focusing on continuity of themes in the U.S.-Syrian relations would be misleading because some of these themes lost their importance to influence bilateral relations at specific historical junctures in the post-Cold War era. To illustrate, the George H. W. Bush administration adopted a posture on the terrorism issue like that of Syria or the Bill Clinton administration did not consider Syria as a rogue state thanks to its constructive role in the Middle East peace process. On the other hand, the George W. Bush administration categorized Syria as a rogue state, even de facto member of axis of evil and put the terrorism issue at the center of its foreign policy towards Syria. For this reason, this study seeks to account for U.S. foreign policy towards Syria by concentrating on special dynamics, peculiarities, and events during the presidencies of George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush.

The study contends that focusing on each administration's policy towards Syria rather than tracing continuity of themes such as international terrorism charges, rogue state accusations, and the WMD issue offers a better picture of the U.S.-Syrian relations in the post-Cold War period. Thus, this study contributes to the academic literature by providing an in-dept analysis

¹⁵ Jasmine Gani, *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations: Conflict and Accommodation* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).

of U.S. foreign policy towards Syria during the successive post-Cold War administrations between 1989 and 2009 and by examining the background of the U.S.-Syrian relations prior to the outbreak of the Arab Spring.

The study also claims that theoretical attempts at explaining the U.S.-Syrian relations have remained scarce so far. Although Gani's book is an exception in the literature, she explains Syrian foreign policy towards the United States, not vice versa. As rightly argued by Brian Schmidt, "*the task of explaining American foreign policy is infinitely complex*" owing to so many diverging internal and external factors complicating the scene to account for a foreign policy decision.¹⁶ This study argues that role theory renders an appropriate and comprehensive framework encapsulating both domestic and external factors and the interplay between them to explain U.S. foreign policy in the post-Cold War era. Besides, role theory can also be applied to the case of U.S. foreign policy towards Syria in this period. Hence, given the dominance of realism in the literature, the study contributes to the existing literature on the U.S.-Syrian relations by deploying a role theory based foreign policy analysis model drawing on Kalevi J. Holsti's, Lisbeth Aggestam's and Marijke Breuning's approaches to role theory. The study has chosen role theory because as a holistic theoretical framework it enables scholars to focus on actors, processes, and various domestic and international determinants. What's more, role theory opens the black box of the state by focusing on perceptions of state elites/foreign policymakers in shaping their states' NRCs and their performance as foreign policy actions and conducts. Role theory also enables scholars to trace change and/or continuity in foreign policies of states and to overcome dichotomies of inside-outside, agency-structure and identity-interest through its holistic analytical framework.

In role theory based foreign policy analysis model, state elites or foreign policymakers constitute the NRCs of their own state. Decision makers are located at the intersection of domestic and external determinants, and they are influenced by them while forming the NRCs and performing them in the international system. Idiosyncratic traits of leaders, their perceptions and world views also matter in the creation of the NRCs. In this model, the nature of the international system, multinational institutions, international treaties, expectations of external actors and world public opinion influence foreign policymakers at the international level. Ideational (identity of state, society's culture, and public opinion) and material (legal-political system of state, its military, economic and technological capabilities) factors shape the domestic environment. Even though the model accentuates agential power of state elites

¹⁶ Brian Schmidt, "Theories of US Foreign Policy," in *US Foreign Policy*, ed. Michael Cox and Doug Stokes, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5-6.

to create the NRCs, it also acknowledges the impact of domestic and international determinants on the formation of the NRCs indirectly. The NRCs guide a state's foreign policy behaviors and conducts towards other actors, in other words, their national role performance.

The study will benefit from Philippe Le Prestre's role list, composed of eleven NRCs of the United States in the post-Cold War era, to shed light on U.S. foreign policy towards Syria from 1989 to 2009. As U.S. foreign policy towards Syria oscillated between constructive engagement and overt confrontation in this period, the study posits that it can be properly understood by paying attention to the NRCs of the United States and their formulation and enactment by American foreign policymaking elites (the National Security Council-the NSC). Thus, throughout the study it is put forward that the NRCs of the United States and Syria's compliance and non-compliance with them in critical occasions shaped the contours of the U.S.-Syrian relations from 1989 to 2009. In this respect, the dissertation makes a theoretical contribution to the U.S.-Syrian literature by using theoretical toolkit of role theory.

This dissertation is a case study focusing on U.S. foreign policy towards Syria by utilizing role theory. It puts forward that the theoretical framework of the dissertation can be applied to other cases in analyzing U.S. foreign policy towards small states in different parts of the world. This dissertation is also based on qualitative type of analysis. In the study, wide range of primary and secondary sources have been critically assessed to uncover the NRCs of the United States and their impacts on U.S. foreign policy towards Syria in the post-Cold War era. The study has extensively utilized archival and official documents containing statements, speeches, press conferences, memorandum of meetings and telephone conversations of senior American foreign policymakers in the George H. W. Bush, the Bill Clinton, and the George W. Bush administrations. In this context, lots of documents have been obtained from digital archives such as *the White House Archive*, *the State Department Archive*, *George Bush Presidential Library Archive* and *William J. Clinton Presidential Library Archive*. In addition to the archival sources, the study has intensively used numerous *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* containing official remarks of American presidents from 1989 to 2009. Using primary sources on the U.S.-Syrian relations is empirical contribution of the dissertation to the academic literature.

The study has also benefited from newspapers and media resources to shed light on the dynamics of the U.S.-Syrian relations in the post-Cold War era. CIA's *Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS)* documents have been used while examining U.S. foreign policy towards Syria in the 1990s. Several American and British newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Times*, *The Guardian*,

The Wall Street Journal, *The Times*, and *New York Daily News* have been utilized throughout the study. Besides, news portals such as *CNN*, *BBC*, *Arab News*, *Haaretz*, *al Jazeera*, and *CBS News* have been other sources of the study. Thanks to newspapers and news portals, it has become possible to contextualize U.S. foreign policy towards Syria and grasp peculiarities of each period examined in the dissertation.

To make sense of U.S. foreign policy towards Syria in the post-Cold War era, the study has also used memoirs of senior American foreign policymakers including George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, James A. Baker, Warren Christopher, Madeleine Albright, Condoleezza Rice, Dick Cheney, and Donald Rumsfeld. The memoirs are quite significant to understand the U.S.-Syrian relations because they are giving first-hand account of American officials' perception of Syria in the post-Cold War era. In addition to the memoirs, the study depends on extensive use of secondary sources, namely books, articles, periodicals, and reports of governmental institutions such as the Congressional Research Service to account for U.S. foreign policy towards Syria from 1989 to 2009.

The study is composed of six chapters. After the introduction, the second chapter outlines theoretical and analytical framework of the study. The chapter begins with the emergence of role theory in the field of sociology and its entrance to the field of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) in the 1970s. After giving different scholars' definitions of national role conceptions, the chapter discusses major issues in role theory such as agency-structure debate, internal-external axis, continuity-change in foreign policy and discourse-practice by examining numerous books and articles of role theory scholars. The chapter also elucidates role theory's contribution to the field of FPA. Finally, the chapter builds up a role theory based foreign policy analysis model to analyze U.S. foreign policy towards Syria from 1989 to 2009.

The third chapter focuses of U.S. foreign policy under the George H. W. Bush administration and its foreign policy towards Syria from 1989 to 1993. The chapter begins with exploring main objectives of U.S. foreign policy at the onset of the post-Cold War era and how the NRCs of the Bush administration guided U.S. foreign policy while the world was witnessing a historic transformation from bipolarity to unipolarity. Drawing on official statements and remarks of the senior Bush administration officials, the chapter demonstrates that the concept of "new world order" became the bedrock of NRCs of the United States in the international system and the Middle East sub-system under the Bush administration. The chapter argues that U.S. foreign policy towards Syria is characterized by constructive engagement from 1989 to 1993. It also puts forward that Syria's changing role in the post-Cold War era to socialize in the U.S.-led new world order and Syrian President Hafez al-Assad's acknowledgment of

the NRCs of the United States led to cooperation between the two countries. In the chapter, the U.S.-Syrian cooperation will be examined through their converging roles by focusing on three main issues under the Bush administration: the Gulf War, the Madrid peace process and Lebanon.

The fourth chapter examines U.S. foreign policy towards Syria under the Bill Clinton administration from 1993 to 2001. The chapter starts with focusing on the NRCs of the Bill Clinton administration in the international system and the Middle East sub-system. In the chapter, it is argued that the Clinton administration maintained the Bush administration's constructive engagement policy towards Syria. In this period, the main theme in the U.S.-Syrian relations was the U.S.-sponsored Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations. In this context, the chapter provides in-depth analysis of various stages of the Syrian-Israeli peace talks under the aegis of the Clinton administration. The chapter posits that the Clinton administration performed a full partnership and honest broker role in the Syrian-Israeli peace talks and Syria's acknowledgment of the United States' role prepared the ground for accommodation and cooperation between Washington and Damascus. It is also underlined that despite the ultimate failure of the peace talks, the Clinton administration downplayed Syria's linkage to international terrorism and its hegemony over Lebanon thanks to Syria's central role in the Middle East peace process.

The fifth chapter of the study is dedicated to explaining the George W. Bush administration's foreign policy towards Syria. This chapter again begins with pinpointing the NRCs of the Bush administration in the international system and in the Middle East sub-system. In the chapter, it is argued that contrary to previous administrations, the Bush administration's foreign policy towards Syria was marked by overt confrontation from 2001 to 2009. Although the United States and Syria cooperated against al-Qaeda in early phase of the war on terror, bilateral relations promptly deteriorated owing to the rise of neocons in the Bush administration. The Bush administration's performance of the NRCs unilaterally and forcefully in the post-9/11 international order shaped its policy towards Syria. The U.S. invasion of Iraq, Syria's support for Iraqi insurgency, its sponsorship of the militant Palestinian groups and Hezbollah, its WMD capability, and its hegemony over Lebanon put Washington and Damascus on a collision course. Bashar al-Assad's uncompromising pan-Arab posture and his non-compliance with the NRCs of the Bush administration further strained bilateral relations. Given controversial issues between the two sides, the Bush administration did not play a role in the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations. The chapter discusses overt confrontation between the United States and Syria around three main issues: the invasion of Iraq, the Lebanese arena,

and the Middle East peace process. In the conclusion chapter, the main findings and arguments of the dissertation is summarized.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ROLE THEORY AND FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS

The study of foreign policy has been increasingly dominating the agenda of International Relations (IR) over the past decade since the architecture of world politics has been substantially transformed by external conducts of states as well as non-state actors across the globe. NATO's intervention in Libya to topple the Qaddafi regime during the Arab Spring, China's Belt and Road Initiative to expand its sphere of influence in Eurasia, the rise and demise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham's (ISIS) territorial expansion to dismantle the Sykes-Picot order in the Middle East, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine can be given as some examples of these conducts, which have not only enhanced uncertainties in world politics but also have impacted lives of millions of civilian people tremendously. This shows us that the study of foreign policy is an essential and integral part of the discipline of IR, and it simply cannot be ignored if we aspire to make sense of the world around us.

As mentioned in the introduction part, the primary goal of the dissertation is to shed light on the dynamics behind conflict and cooperation in the U.S.-Syria relations in the post-Cold War era. In this study, U.S. foreign policy towards Syria will be scrutinized under the Bush Sr., Clinton, and Bush Jr. administrations to account for the moments of conflict and cooperation in bilateral relations. It is quite reasonable to examine the U.S.-Syrian relations in the post-Soviet international order from American perception because the United States as the world's sole superpower was disproportionately powerful vis-à-vis Syria as a small state. Unlike realism-dominated literature on the U.S.-Syrian relations, this dissertation puts forward that role theory and its conceptual toolkit could offer us a useful and highly explanatory analytical framework to make sense of relations between Washington and Damascus from 1989 to 2009. Because role theory's comprehensive framework encapsulates both material and ideational factors as well as domestic and international determinants and the interplay between them in the making of national role conceptions (NRCs) and their subsequent performance in foreign policy. The study will demonstrate that there is an inseparable relationship between the national role conceptions of American decision makers and their foreign policy actions and behaviors in the post-Cold War era. In this context, it will be argued that NRCs of the United

States shaped its foreign policy towards Syria between 1989 and 2009. As the literature on the U.S.-Syrian relations remained relatively undertheorized, the present study contends that role theory has a great theoretical insight to enrich our understanding of the U.S.-Syrian relations in the post-Cold War era.

In this chapter, theoretical framework of the dissertation will be elucidated. The origins and theoretical underpinnings of role theory will be given in detail and then its contributions to Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) will be outlined. Role theory, whose origins go back to the late 1920s and early 1930s, basically seeks to account for the patterns of human behaviors, roles of individuals with regard to identities, expectations and social positions as well as the relationship between social structure and individual behaviors.¹⁷ By emphasizing the interactive nature of roles, Bruce J. Biddle defines role theory as “*a science concerned with the study of behaviors that are characteristic of persons within contexts and with various processes that presumably produce, explain, or are affected by those behaviors.*”¹⁸ In role theory, role is conceptualized as an appropriate behavior or action suitable for a certain individual. In the process of role formation, there are four major factors: *position* (posture of an individual within a wider social structure), *ego's role conceptions* (perception of an individual as to what its role should be in that position), *alter's role prescriptions* (expectations of society from an individual) and role performance (*real actions of an individual*).¹⁹ This indicates that roles as categories of behavior emerge as a result of the amalgamation of three major determinants: the actor's subjective perception of its appropriate behavior, demands of its society and the context within which the actor enacts its role.²⁰

Role theory contends that roles render actors a solid identity, facilitate order in their life, enable them to simplify the complex world to deal with it better. Individuals without roles are not capable of regulating their lives and interact in social world in a constructive way. The absence of roles may end up with psychological collapse of individuals. Since its emergence as a field

¹⁷ Richard Adigbuo, “Beyond IR Theories: The Case for National Role Conceptions,” *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies* 34, No. 1 (2007): 88; K. J. Holsti, “National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy,” *International Studies Quarterly* 14, No. 3 (September 1970): 237-239.

¹⁸ Bruce J. Biddle, *Role Theory: Expectations, Identities and Behaviours* (New York: Academic Press, 1979), 4.

¹⁹ Sebastian Harnisch, “Role theory: Operationalization of key concepts,” in *Role theory in International Relations: Approaches and Analyses*, ed. Sebastian Harnisch, Cornelia Frank and Hanns W. Maull (New York: Routledge, 2015), 8-9; Holsti, “National Role Conceptions,” 240.

²⁰ Glenn Chafetz, Hillel Abramson and Suzette Grillo, “Role Theory and Foreign Policy: Belarusian and Ukrainian Compliance with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime,” *Political Psychology* 17, No.4 (1996): 733.

of study, role theory has been utilized in various branches of social sciences such as sociology, anthropology, social psychology, and political science. Scholars who deploy theoretical insights of role theory in these fields have sought to bridge the functioning of the social order and behaviors/traits of the individuals who compose that social structure.²¹ Role theory, whose theoretical assumptions are sensitive to both human agency and social structure as well as the mutual relationship between them, has been widely appreciated and used as a highly explanatory analytical framework by a number of scholars from various disciplines across the world.

Role theory began to attract attention in Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) literature after the publication of Kalevi J. Holsti's famous article "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy" in 1970. In his seminal article, Holsti argues that role theory offers new avenues to explain and enhance our understanding of foreign policy behaviors of states by drawing an analogy between the social system and the international system as well as between the individual and the state. Holsti replaces role perceptions of individuals with state elites' national role conceptions (NRCs), which refer to a variety of beliefs and images of these elites as to the position and identity of their states in the international system. In Holsti's approach to foreign policy NRCs occupy a central place, which he defines as follows:

"the policy makers' own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules, and actions suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in the subordinate regional systems. It is their 'image' of the appropriate orientations or functions of their state toward, or in, the external environment."²²

Similar to Holsti, Hymans describes NRCs as "*an individual's understanding of the nation's identity – his or her sense of what the nation naturally stands for and of how high it naturally stands, in comparison to others in the international arena.*"²³ Krotz also defines the concept in line with Holsti and Hymans. He says that "*NRCs are domestically shared views and understanding regarding the proper role and purpose of one's own state as a social collectivity in the international arena. They are products of history, memory and socialization. They may be contested, but often endure.*"²⁴ So, we can argue that NRCs give us valuable insights to

²¹ Adigbuo, "Beyond IR Theories," 88-89.

²² Holsti, "National Role Conceptions," 245-246.

²³ Jacques E. C. Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation: Identity, Emotions, and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 18.

²⁴ Ulrich Krotz, *National Role Conceptions and Foreign Policies: France and Germany Compared*, CES Germany & Europe Working Paper 02.1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University: Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies, 2002), 6, <http://aei.pitt.edu/9291/1/Krotz.pdf>.

make sense of foreign policy elites' perception of their state, its standing and behaviors vis-à-vis other actors in the international system.

While integrating role theory to foreign policy analysis, Holsti has carried out content analysis of the speeches, press conferences, official statements, radio broadcasts and parliamentary debates of 71 governments from January 1965 to December 1967. Holsti has found out that these states assume 17 national role conceptions in the international system during this short period, such as regional protector, liberation supporter, mediator-integrator, regional-subsystem collaborator, anti-imperialist agent, regional leader, defender of the faith, faithful ally etc.²⁵ Then, Holsti has argued that positions of the actors in international politics can be analyzed by taking these roles into the center of analysis and specifying these roles enables political scientists to make predictions about the future foreign policy behaviors of specific states.²⁶

According to Holsti, NRCs are essential parts of foreign policy making process. He puts forward that NRCs precisely affect and mold how states act and interact with other actors in the international system as they are the bases of their foreign policy behaviors. For him, NRCs generally reflect a country's main foreign policy orientation and its responses to events transpiring at the international level. Thus, they can be taken as the utmost determinant of foreign policy behavior of states.²⁷

Holsti's contribution to foreign policy analysis is remarkable as his inductive approach has showed that roles do not solely stem from the distribution of power in the international system, but they depend on perceptions and definitions of practitioners of foreign policy. This tells us that there can be different and multiple sources of roles in opposition to neo-realism's prescribed general roles with regard to international distribution of power.²⁸ Thus, role theory offers a novel, systematic and methodologically rich account of foreign policy in comparison

²⁵ Heike Hermanns, "National Role Conceptions in the 'Global Korea' Foreign Policy Strategy," *The Korean Journal of International Studies* 11, No. 1 (June 2013): 59; Cameron Thies, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy," International Studies Association Compendium Project, Foreign Policy Analysis Section, 2009, 5, <https://myweb.uiowa.edu/bhlai/workshop/role.pdf>.

²⁶ Adigbuo, "Beyond IR Theories," 90-91.

²⁷ Özgür Özdamar, B. Toygar Halistoprak and İ. Erkam Sula, "From Good Neighbor to Model: Turkey's Changing Roles in the Middle East in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring," *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 11, No.42 (Summer 2014): 95-96.

²⁸ Lisbeth Aggestam, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy: A Framework of Analysis," in *The European Union's Roles in International Politics*, ed. Ole Elgström and Michael Smith (London, New York: Routledge, 2006), 13.

to the traditional realist approaches, which tend to explain foreign policy behaviors of states depending solely on the concepts of national security and national interest. In opposition to realist emphasis on security and interest in foreign policy analysis, role theory claims that roles have capacity to define national interests of states and separate them from power relations.²⁹

In role theory, enactment of roles in foreign affairs is as much important as NRCs. Holsti has conceptualized governments' decisions and conducts towards other actors to execute assumed roles as *national role performance*.³⁰ Within FPA literature, national role performance can be understood as foreign policy behaviors and actions of states in the international system. According to Holsti, there is an outright correlation between the actors' NRCs and foreign policy behaviors of their states. Foreign policy conducts of states can only be properly explained through role conceptions of foreign policy decision-makers.³¹ Naomi Bailin Wish explores Holsti's this argument and states that there is an obvious relationship between role performance of states and role conceptions of foreign policy elites as clearly stated by Holsti. According to Wish, if properly measured, NRCs can be useful tools in explaining variations in foreign policy behaviors.³²

Since its advent in the field of FPA, role theory scholars have argued that political elites, who are at the center of decision-making mechanisms, execute foreign affairs of their states in line with NRCs, which come into being in a milieu shaped by the interplay of various factors emanating from domestic and international politics.³³ As role is not solely bound to actor's self-perception but also to dynamics of external environment, it is situated at the intersection of domestic and international spheres. Hence, role theory offers a holistic framework of analysis to comprehend and explicate the interaction between agency and structure.³⁴ In other words, role theory encapsulates systemic factors constraining the actors in the international

²⁹ Philippe G. Le Prestre, "Author! Author! Defining Foreign Policy Roles after the Cold War," in *Role Quests in the Post-Cold War Era: Foreign Policies in Transition*, ed. Philippe G. Le Prestre (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 5.

³⁰ Holsti, "National Role Conceptions," 245.

³¹ Aggestam, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy," 20.

³² Naomi Bailin Wish, "Foreign Policy Makers and Their National Role Conceptions," *International Studies Quarterly* 24, No. 4 (Dec., 1980): 532-554.

³³ Ole Elgström and Michael Smith, "Introduction," in *The European Union's Roles in International Politics: Concepts and Analysis*, ed. Ole Elgström and Michael Smith (London, New York: Routledge, 2006), 5-6.

³⁴ Cameron Thies and Marijke Breuning, "Integrating Foreign Policy Analysis and International Relations through Role Theory," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 8, No. 1 (2012): 1-4.

system as well as actors' preoccupation with their national interests or pursuit of absolute gains.³⁵ Thus, the centrality of the concept of role in role theory allows FPA scholars to conduct cross-cutting analysis of different levels and to explain the interplay between domestic and international determinants.³⁶ Rosenau underlines this aspect of role as follows:

“The key to a role lies in the expectations that inhere in it as a consequence of its place in the systems of which it is a component. That is, a role is defined by the attitudinal and behavioral expectations that those who relate to its occupant have of the occupant and the expectations that the occupant has of himself or herself in the role. Some of the expectations are formally defined in the system's rules and laws, while others develop informally and operate as implicit norms and procedures.”³⁷

Regarding the internal-external axis, there are two dimensions of NRCs, namely *the ego part* and *the alter ego part*. The ego part can be defined as the role holders' self-expectations and the self-conceptualizations of state goals. The alter ego part is related to expectations of external actors or international institutions from the role holder. Thus, it can be argued that NRCs of states are products of both material and structural dynamics as well as ideational factors. Foreign policy elites' conception of their states' material capability as well as the position of their state in the international system have direct impact on NRCs.³⁸

NRCs are instrumental in foreign policy processes as they can curb policy options *per se* available to state elites. Hence, it can be claimed that role conceptions guide the type of behavior expected or implemented as appropriate by determining foreign policy elites' perceptions of their states.³⁹ Holsti underlines this aspect of roles as follows: “*The more these national role conceptions become a more pervasive part of the political culture of a nation,*

³⁵ Özdamar et al., “From Good Neighbor to Model,” 94.

³⁶ Adigbuo, “Beyond IR Theories,” 89-90.

³⁷ James N. Rosenau, *Turbulence in World Politics: A Theory of Change and Continuity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 212.

³⁸ Marijke Breuning, “Role Theory Research in International Relations: State of the Art and Blind Spots,” in *Role Theory in International Relations: Approaches and Analyses*, ed. Sebastian Harnisch, Cornelia Frank, Hanns W. Maull (London: Routledge, 2011), 26; Hermanns, “National Role Conceptions in the ‘Global Korea’ Foreign Policy Strategy,” 61-62. For a good discussion ideational and material factors in the formation of NRCs and subsequent foreign policy behavior of states see Yasemin Akbaba and Özgür Özdamar, *Role Theory in the Middle East and North Africa: Politics, Economics and Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 2019), 10-32.

³⁹ Michael Grossman, “Role Theory and Foreign Policy Change: The Transformation of Russian Foreign Policy in the 1990s,” *International Politics* 42, No. 3 (2005): 337.

they are more likely to set limits on perceived or politically feasible policy alternatives and less likely to allow idiosyncratic variables to play a crucial part in the decision-making.”⁴⁰

As mentioned above, what makes role theory convenient for foreign policy analysis is that it is located at the intersection of individual, societal and international levels. It can reconcile different levels of analysis, which render scholars various means to evaluate the interplay between domestic and external dynamics.⁴¹ Breuning says that “*role theory is eminently suited to providing the framework for empirical evaluations of propositions about the relative significance of agent and structure.*”⁴² Rüländ also underlines the holistic nature of role theory by stating that it links structural dimension of international politics with agency-centric foreign policy analysis. He appreciates the co-constitutive nature of role theory as follows:

“Foreign-policy role conceptions are shaped by long-term patterns of attitudes and behaviour which reflect the structure of the international system and a state’s geographic circumstances, socioeconomic characteristics, political system, capabilities, ideologies, and historical experiences as interpreted by its foreign-policy elites.”⁴³

At the individual level, role theory entails idiosyncratic variables that possibly impact foreign policy of a nation. To illustrate, the role of foreign policy makers in shaping NRCs incorporates numerous psychological factors that can affect choices of individuals and their perceptions. Moreover, state elites’ interpretation of their nation’s role in the international system contains their conception of domestic parameters such as wealth, territory, national capabilities, and international influences.⁴⁴

As roles cannot be interpreted merely at the individual level of analysis, the societal level must be taken into consideration. It is assumed that NRCs are the constructions of a nation’s collective identity and memory, and this signifies collective aspect of roles. As mentioned above, Krotz underscores this aspect by saying that NRCs are intersubjective outcomes of

⁴⁰ Holsti, “National Role Conceptions,” 298.

⁴¹ Le Prestre, “Author! Author! Defining Foreign Policy Roles after the Cold War,” 6; Thies, “Role Theory and Foreign Policy,” 3.

⁴² Breuning, “Role Theory Research in International Relations,” 20.

⁴³ Jürgen Rüländ, “Democratizing Foreign-Policy Making in Indonesia and the Democratization of ASEAN: A Role Theory Analysis,” *TRANS: Trans –Regional and –National Studies of Southeast Asia* 5, No. 1 (January 2017): 51.

⁴⁴ Grossman, “Role Theory and Foreign Policy Change,” 337. See also, Stephen G. Walker, “Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis: An Evaluation,” in *Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis*, ed. Stephen G. Walker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987), 241-259.

history, memory, and socialization.⁴⁵ They are widely shared and internalized by the society. Hence, roles should be understood as parts of state's national identity which are formed within their cultural and social context.⁴⁶ Roles manifest themselves in a nation's self-assertion in the international system. Therefore, recognition of roles by international actors is one of the primary goals of states.⁴⁷ It is highly likely that foreign policy elites are inspired by cultural traits, norms and entrenched identity of their nation and society while forming NRCs of their states.⁴⁸ In this context, Breuning argues that culture and institutional structure can shape role conceptions and the options of the decision makers.⁴⁹ In sum, role theory is theoretically open to identity-based explanations in analyzing foreign policy behaviors of states. It can bridge identity construction and foreign policy by focusing on role conceptions, which provide standards and directions that shape preferences in foreign policy decision-making.⁵⁰

Similar to the impact of the structure of society on the role conceptions of individuals, NRCs of states can be shaped by the expectations and prescriptions by external actors. This implies the inter-behavioral aspect of roles as role expectations conceptually link individual and social structure.⁵¹ Walker underlines this aspect of role conceptions and indicates that they are not determined solely by state elites' self-perceptions but also by these elites' relations and interactions with the external world.⁵² In some cases, this is called *altercasting*, which is defined as a method of socialization of new/weak states in the international arena. Some strong states, capable of shaping the international politics, ascribe roles for novice states and show the ways of appropriate behavior to them.⁵³ However, according to Holsti, the impact and enforcement of the international system is not as strong as that of domestic sources in the

⁴⁵ Krotz, "National Role Conceptions and Foreign Policies," 9.

⁴⁶ Hermanns, "National Role Conceptions in the 'Global Korea' Foreign Policy Strategy," 60; Krotz, "National Role Conceptions and Foreign Policies," 6; Rüländ, "Democratizing Foreign-Policy Making in Indonesia," 52.

⁴⁷ Le Prestre, "Author! Author! Defining Foreign Policy Roles after the Cold War," 5.

⁴⁸ Aggestam, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy," 21-22.

⁴⁹ Le Prestre, "Author! Author! Defining Foreign Policy Roles after the Cold War," 8-9.

⁵⁰ Hermanns, "National Role Conceptions in the 'Global Korea' Foreign Policy Strategy," 59-60.

⁵¹ Thies, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy," 9.

⁵² Stephen Walker, *Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

⁵³ Thies, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy," 8-9; Harnisch, "Role theory: Operationalization of key concepts," 13.

making of NRCs because the international environment is more heterogonous than domestic society. For this reason, despite significance of external influences, he underscores the domestic sources of NRCs, specifically the primacy of individual decision makers.⁵⁴ He underlines the domestic aspect of role performance as follows: “*role performance (decisions and actions) of governments may be explained primarily by reference to the policymakers’ own conceptions of their nation’s role in the region or in the international system as a whole.*”⁵⁵

Similar to Holsti, Krotz posits that despite its societal and collective dimension, NRCs should primarily be studied by focusing on political elites, their advisors and professional observers close to political authority. According to him, a strong consensus among the political elites is more determinant than a wider societal consensus in shaping a nation’s NRCs, because these elites have power to continue or change them.⁵⁶ Aggestam tries to resolve agency-structure debate among the scholars of role theory by covering both individual and structural aspect of behavior through Anthony Giddens’ theory of structuration.⁵⁷ In this context, she emphasizes role theory’s capability of combining structural determinants with agential power of state. Therefore, the linkage between agency and structure in role theory is considered one the vital contribution of role theory to foreign policy analysis.⁵⁸

Another contribution of role theory to the study of foreign policy is that studying NRCs enables foreign policy scholars to trace change and continuity in a state’s foreign policy over time.⁵⁹ However, there is a debate among the role theory scholars on the causes of change in NRCs, which shape foreign policy behaviors of states. Some scholars emphasize the impact of external factors on role change whilst some of them point to domestic determinants. For instance, Breuning explains that NRCs as socially and historically shared concepts can change because of the interpretations of political leadership. So, the driving factor behind the change of NRCs is the conceptions of state elites and their interpretation of the ability and opportunity

⁵⁴ Breuning, “Role Theory Research in International Relations,” 23.

⁵⁵ Holsti, “National Role Conceptions,” 240.

⁵⁶ Krotz, “National Role Conceptions and Foreign Policies,” 6.

⁵⁷ Aggestam, “Role Theory and Foreign Policy,” 13.

⁵⁸ Hermanns, “National Role Conceptions in the ‘Global Korea’ Foreign Policy Strategy,” 61-62; Aggestam, “Role Theory and Foreign Policy,” 13.

⁵⁹ Adigbuo, “Beyond IR Theories,” 90.

of their state to operate in the international system.⁶⁰ On the other hand, Holsti argues that national role conception is directly affected by the society's character, which is an artefact of the nation's socialization process. According to him, changes in society's character may cause differences national behavior of states.⁶¹

In the role theory literature, foreign policy change is explained through role conflicts as the theory precisely underlines that states do not assume single role but multiple roles in the international system.⁶² According to Holsti, states may play more than one role, which possibly leads to inter-role conflict.⁶³ Cantir and Kaarbo underscore the same point and claim that national role conceptions do not necessarily reflect consensus, they may be a matter of dispute between political elites as well as between the public and these elites.⁶⁴ Aggestam emphasizes this aspect of roles and states that foreign policy change might occur when an actor encounters role conflict.⁶⁵ Nilsson also argues that role conflicts can be another source of foreign policy change. According to Nilsson, role conflict can emerge as a result of incompatibility between the actors' role-set (intra-role conflict) or the difference between the role expectations of external actors and the actors' national role conceptions. Intra- or inter-role conflicts potentially trigger a variety of changes in foreign policy from make-up of existing role conceptions to total transformation of the actors' self-perception.⁶⁶ To illustrate, Michael Barnett analyses the role conflict with a special focus on the Middle East. He explains that conflict in the Middle East subsystem before 1967 arose as a result of the conflictual relationship between the two major roles: state sovereignty and pan-Arabism.⁶⁷ Similarly,

⁶⁰ Breuning, "Role Theory Research in International Relations," 30-31.

⁶¹ Valerie M. Hudson, "The History and Evolution of Foreign Policy Analysis," in *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*, ed. Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield and Tim Dunne, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 25.

⁶² Breuning, "Role Theory Research in International Relations," 32.

⁶³ Holsti, "National Role Conceptions," 276-277.

⁶⁴ Cristian Cantir and Juliet Kaarbo, "Contested Roles and Domestic Politics: Reflections on Role Theory in Foreign Policy Analysis and IR Theory," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 8, No. 1 (2012): 5-24. For a good account of contested selection of NRCs in the case of the Federal Republic of Germany (FDR) after the WWII see Klaus Brummer and Cameron G. Thies, "The Contested Selection of National Role Conceptions," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 11, No. 3 (2015): 273-293.

⁶⁵ Aggestam, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy," 23.

⁶⁶ Niklas Nilsson, "Role conceptions, crises, and Georgia's foreign policy," *Cooperation and Conflict* 54, No. 1 (2018): 3-4.

⁶⁷ Michael Barnett, "Institutions, Roles, and Disorder: The Case of the Arab States System," *International Studies Quarterly* 37, No. 3 (1993): 271-296.

Henning Tewes analyzes Germany's role conflict between deepening the integration among the EU member states and enlarging EU membership.⁶⁸

Nilsson opposes these ideas and says that even though it is probable to make sense of changes in foreign policy via role theory, primary expectation from the theory is stability and continuity in foreign policy behaviors as role conceptions are entrenched in domestically and internationally driven social relations. Thus, they render stability to foreign policy behaviors of states. It is highly likely that foreign policy elites consider deviation from the behavior dictated by role conceptions burdensome and inappropriate despite its clash with other interests over time.⁶⁹ On the other hand, Holsti does not consider national role conception as a fixed attitudinal attribute of governments that always cause same type of behaviors.⁷⁰

In addition to the issue of change, role theory enables foreign policy scholars to explain anomalies in a state's foreign policy conducts. With the theoretical insights of role theory, it would become easy and meaningful to make sense of foreign policy actions contradictory to national interests such as Britain's and France's support to Finland in 1939-1940 and the widening of American involvement in Vietnam in the Cold War. Therefore, it can be stated that roles potentially enforce obligations on states and mold their national interests.⁷¹

In the process of foreign policy making, NRCs are mostly considered intervening or independent variables. To illustrate, Grossman takes NRCs as intervening variables which *"once established, mediate the impact of traditional background factors, such as capabilities, political system, socio-economic system, the international balance of power and the idiosyncratic characteristics of the policy-makers, to name just a few, by structuring the foreign policy debate."*⁷² Chafetz, Abramson and Grillot also consider national role conception independent and mediating variable in explaining compliance and noncompliance with the nuclear nonproliferation regime.⁷³ According to Krotz, NRCs are nominal independent variables, which come into being as a result of domestically shared factors.⁷⁴ However, Holsti

⁶⁸ Henning Tewes, "Between Deepening and Widening: Role Conflict in Germany's Enlargement Policy," *West European Politics* 21, No. 2 (1998): 117-133.

⁶⁹ Nilsson, "Role conceptions, crises," 2-3.

⁷⁰ Holsti, "National Role Conceptions," 254.

⁷¹ Le Prestre, "Author! Author! Defining Foreign Policy Roles after the Cold War," 5-6.

⁷² Grossman, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy Change," 337.

⁷³ Chafetz et al., "Role Theory and Foreign Policy," 752.

⁷⁴ Krotz, "National Role Conceptions and Foreign Policies," 6.

does not take NRCs as independent variable. For him, NRCs are dependent variable in foreign policy analysis because most foreign policy decisions are consistent with NRCs. So, foreign policy analysis should account for origins, presence, and sources of NRCs instead of single foreign policy decisions.⁷⁵

While analyzing foreign policies of states, NRCs can be found out in two ways: discourses and/or actions of the foreign policy elites. Thies contends that NRCs can be examined by digging into the speeches of state leaders, but they can also be discerned by studying foreign policy actions of states as well.⁷⁶ Özdamar et al. also argue that despite the widespread tendency in the literature of role theory to uncover roles by examining speeches of political elites, it is legitimate to extract roles by analyzing foreign policy behaviors.⁷⁷ Holsti calls on scholars to be careful about the gap between NRCs and the foreign policy conducts of states in some cases. According to Holsti, not all NRC utterances of foreign policy elites crystallize into foreign policy actions. He underlines this point as follows:

“A major assumption of this analysis has been that foreign policy attitudes, decisions, and actions will be congruent with policymakers’ national role conceptions. If this assumption is valid, we could predict with reasonable accuracy typical foreign policy decisions and actions on the basis of our knowledge of the pattern of role conceptions for a particular country (...) There are, however, some circumstances where knowledge of national role conceptions would not allow the investigator to predict typical or modal types of foreign policy decisions and actions, that is, where there would be no true role performance.”⁷⁸

According to Sula, Holsti’s point is quite significant and role theory researchers should focus on uncovering the performance of NRCs in a state’s real foreign practices rather than mere role utterances.⁷⁹

Holsti has opened a huge avenue for scholars to explore the impact of roles on the foreign policies of states. His role typologies and his methodology are still being used by scholars of foreign policy analysis today. Depending on role theory, while some scholars have dealt with all national role conceptions, some others have preferred focusing on certain range of roles.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Holsti, “National Role Conceptions,” 304-307.

⁷⁶ Thies, “Role Theory and Foreign Policy,” 14-15.

⁷⁷ Özdamar et al., “From Good Neighbor to Model,” 96.

⁷⁸ Holsti, “National Role Conceptions,” 298.

⁷⁹ İsmail Erkam Sula, “Regional Directions of National Role Conceptions: Turkey’s Foreign Policy in Its Neighborhood” (PhD diss., Ihsan Doğramacı Bilkent University, 2017), 20.

⁸⁰ Ekrem T. Başer, “Shift-of-axis in Turkish Foreign Policy: Turkish National Role Conceptions Before and During AKP Rule,” *Turkish Studies* 16, No. 3 (2015): 5.

To illustrate, Kara and Sözen applied role theory to the case of Turkey.⁸¹ Sula also analyzed Turkey's foreign policy under Justice and Development Party (JDP) around national role conceptions.⁸² Thies utilized role theory to make sense of the socialization process of Israel after its independence.⁸³ Catalinac analyzed variations in Japan's foreign policy towards the Gulf War in 1991 and the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 by taking NRCs into the center of her analysis.⁸⁴ Adigbuo deployed role theory to analyze Nigeria's foreign policy in the Cold War Era.⁸⁵ Breuning benefited from role theory in explaining foreign assistance policies of the Netherlands, Belgium and the United Kingdom.⁸⁶ Xiong Han employed role theory to understand how changes in Malaysia's national role conceptions from Mahathir to Abdullah Badawi and Najib Razak shaped Malaysia's foreign policy towards Singapore.⁸⁷ Kostas Ifantis et al. explained Greek elites' perception towards Turkey through role theory.⁸⁸ Opperman utilized role theory to explain Germany's changing foreign policy during the European financial crisis and NATO's intervention in Libya.⁸⁹ Thies explored Venezuela's role location

⁸¹ Mehtap Kara and Ahmet Sözen, "Change and Continuity in Turkish Foreign Policy: Evaluating Pre-AKP and AKP Periods' National Role Conceptions," *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 13, No. 52 (2016): 47-66.

⁸² İsmail Erkam Sula, "An Eclectic Methodological Approach in Analyzing Foreign Policy: Turkey's Foreign Policy Roles and Events Dataset (TFPRED)," *All Azimuth* 8, No. 2 (2019): 255-283.

⁸³ Cameron G. Thies, "International Socialization Processes vs. Israeli National Role Conceptions: Can Role Theory Integrate IR Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis?," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 8, No. 1 (2012): 25-46; see also Cameron G. Thies, *The United States, Israel, and the Search for International Order: Socializing States* (New York: Routledge: 2013).

⁸⁴ Amy L. Catalinac, "Identity Theory and Foreign Policy: Explaining Japan's Responses to the 1991 Gulf War and the 2003 U.S. War in Iraq," *Politics & Policy* 35, No. 1 (2007): 59-100.

⁸⁵ Adigbuo, "Beyond IR Theories," 83-97.

⁸⁶ Marijke Breuning, "Words and Deeds: Foreign Assistance Rhetoric and Policy Behavior in the Netherlands, Belgium and the United Kingdom," *International Studies Quarterly* 39, No. 2 (1995): 235-254.

⁸⁷ David Guo Xiong Han, "Malaysian Foreign Policy Toward Singapore from Mahathir to Badawi and Najib: A Role Theory Assessment," *Asian Politics & Policy* 9, No. 2 (2017): 289-309.

⁸⁸ Kostas Ifantis et al., *National Role and Foreign Policy: An Exploratory Study of Greek Elites' Perceptions towards Turkey*, GreeSE Paper No.94, Hellenic Observatory Papers on Greece and Southeast Europe (London: London School of Economics, 2015), 1-40, http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/63265/1/lse.ac.uk_storage_LIBRARY_Secondary_libfile_shared_repository_Content_Hellenic%20Observatory%20%28inc.%20GreeSE%20Papers%29_GreeSE%20Papers_GreeseSE-No94.pdf.

⁸⁹ Kai Opperman, "National Role Conceptions, Domestic Constrains and the New 'Normalcy' in German Foreign Policy: The Eurozone Crisis, Libya and Beyond," *German Politics* 21, No. 4 (2012): 502-519.

process under Hugo Chavez within the context of Latin American foreign policies.⁹⁰ Shih tried to unravel the sources of the national role conceptions of China and related foreign policy behaviors.⁹¹

There are many other applications of role theory to states and international institutions in different parts of the world. Some scholars also applied role theory to U.S. foreign policy. For example, Cronin has focused on the U.S. role conflict in the United Nations as a hegemon and great power.⁹² Chotard has explained role conceptions of the United States in the international arena during the transition periods between 1916-1919 and 1943-1947.⁹³ There are applications of role theory to explain contemporary U.S. foreign policy as well. Maull has dealt with the continuity of the role conception in U.S. foreign policy under the Clinton, Bush and Obama administrations and has explained hegemonic position of the United States in its relations with NATO and Japan.⁹⁴ Wolf has analyzed the change in the U.S. foreign policy behavior after 9/11 terrorist attacks through role conceptions of the Bush administration.⁹⁵ Krotz and Sperling have focused on the bilateral relations between the United States and France by taking their NRCs into the center of their analysis.⁹⁶ Although these studies have enriched our understanding of U.S. foreign relations, it is obvious that the literature using role theory to account for U.S. foreign policy is scarce. Therefore, the present study will contribute to the literature by focusing on the NRCs of the post-Cold War American administrations and their impact on the U.S. foreign policy towards Syria. So, the U.S.-Syrian relations from 1989

⁹⁰ Cameron G. Thies, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis in Latin America," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 13, No. 3 (2017): 662-681.

⁹¹ Chih-yu Shih, "National Role Conception as Foreign Policy Motivation: The Psychocultural Bases of Chinese Diplomacy," *Political Psychology* 9, No. 4 (1988): 599-631.

⁹² Bruce Cronin, "The Paradox of Hegemony: America's Ambiguous Relationship with the United Nations," *European Journal of International Relations* 7, No. 1 (2001): 103-130.

⁹³ J. Chotard, "Articulating the New International Role of the United States during Previous Transitions, 1916-1919, 1943-1947," in *Role Quests in the Post-Cold War Era: Foreign Policies in Transition*, ed. Philippe G. Le Prestre (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 40-64.

⁹⁴ Hanns W. Maull, "Hegemony Reconstructed? America's Role Conception and its "leadership" within its Core Allies," in *Role Theory in International Relations: Approaches and Analyses*, ed. Sebastian Harnisch, Cornelia Frank, Hanns W. Maull (London: Routledge, 2011), 167-193.

⁹⁵ Raimund Wolf, "Terrorized America? 9/11 and its Impact on US Foreign Policy," in *Role Theory in International Relations: Approaches and Analyses*, ed. Sebastian Harnisch, Cornelia Frank, Hanns W. Maull (London: Routledge, 2011), 194-212.

⁹⁶ Ulrich Krotz and James Sperling, "Discord and Collaboration in Franco-American Relations: What Can Role Theory Tell Us?," in *Role Theory in International Relations: Approaches and Analyses*, ed. Sebastian Harnisch, Cornelia Frank, Hanns W. Maull (London: Routledge, 2011), 213-233.

to 2009 will be elucidated out of realist school, which has been dominating the academic literature on the U.S-Syrian relations.

Finally, I would like to summarize role theory's contributions to the field of FPA. First, role theory can be considered within the broad constructivist school, which does not share ontological and epistemological claims of the positivist theories of IR, which seek to produce law-like generalizations in explaining foreign policy behaviors of states. Role theory emphasizes the cognitive aspect of foreign policy making by taking intersubjective understandings of decision makers into the center of its analyses. It focuses on political elites' conception of their own nations' position and status in world politics via their utterances. Second, actor-centric orientation of role theory has contributed much to the field of FPA as it does not adopt the notion of state as a black box in realist theory. Its focus in foreign policy processes is on political elites or decision makers who oversee these processes. As I have explained above, role theory's primary unit of analysis is not state but real actors who have agential power to formulate, shape and change foreign policies of their states. Even though the agency-structure debate is still a matter of discussion among the scholars of role theory and not resolved yet; for me, state elites are capable of producing, adjusting and changing NRCs of their own states. Perceptions of these elites (ego part) are the ultimate source of NRCs rather than the expectations of external actors (alter ego part). Nevertheless, I do not claim that domestic and international impacts and expectations should be disregarded totally in the making of NRCs. They potentially affect actors' perceptions as politicians are not out of or fully isolated from the social world. Actors filter through these factors and formulate NRCs of their states and then perform these roles accordingly. Therefore, my position is close to that of Holsti in agency-structure debate. Third, role theory enables foreign policy scholars to trace change and/or continuity in foreign policy. With the help of the conceptual toolbox of role theory, it will be quite easy to account for changing national role perceptions of decision makers in executing foreign policy. Finally, the theoretical assumptions of role theory enable foreign policy scholars to overcome inside-outside dichotomy of realism. As mentioned above, role theory offers a cross-cutting foreign policy analysis at multiple levels (domestic and international). Contrary to classical realism's strict distinction between inside and outside, role theory seeks to overcome this distinction by exploring domestic and external sources of foreign policy.

After mentioning these points, I would like to clarify the foreign policy analysis model based on role theory. I draw this model (Figure 1.1.) by benefiting from Holsti's⁹⁷, Aggestam's⁹⁸ and Breuning's⁹⁹ approach to role theory. In this model, I consider foreign policy elites, who produce NRCs of their nation, as situated actors at the intersection of domestic and external environments. Their idiosyncratic characteristics, perceptions, and world views matter in the formulation of NRCs. They filter through a set of factors emanating from domestic and international environments while constituting their state's NRCs. At the international level, structure of the international system, international institutions, treaty commitments, expectations of other actors and world opinion could influence decision makers while forming NRCs. At the domestic level, there are two main parameters: ideational and material factors. Ideational factors can be counted as identity of state, cultural heritage of society and domestic audience or public opinion. Material factors are legal-political system of the country as well as military, economic and technological capabilities of the state. Although this model primarily emphasizes agential power of foreign policy elites in the making of NRCs, it does not ignore indirect influences of domestic and international environments on NRCs (showed with dashed lines). After their formation, NRCs lead to role performance or foreign policy decisions and actions of state.

In hindsight, we know that U.S.-Syrian relations in the post-Cold War era oscillated between conflict and cooperation. On the other hand, the academic literature on the U.S.-Syrian relations has remained relatively under-theorized and most of the scholars have explained cooperative and conflictual moments in bilateral relations through realist lenses. Even though U.S.-Syrian relations encapsulate role perceptions, critical assessment of these perceptions has been surprisingly missed. For this reason, this dissertation primarily seeks to expose the nature of the U.S.-Syrian relations in the post-Cold War era by using theoretical assumptions of role theory.

Throughout the study, it will be pinpointed that how the post-Cold War national role conceptions guided U.S. foreign policy under the George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush administrations and to what extent Syria's compliance or non-compliance of the United States' role performance at the international and regional levels shaped conflict and cooperation between the two countries. Needless to say, this attempt is an outright divergence

⁹⁷ Holsti, "National Role Conceptions," 245.

⁹⁸ Aggestam, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy," 26.

⁹⁹ Breuning, "Role Theory Research in International Relations," 26.

from the realism-dominated academic literature on the U.S.-Syrian relations. Throughout the dissertation, I will benefit from Le Prestre's work that focused on the NRCs of the United States in the post-Cold War era. By drawing on Holsti's role-set as well as other scholars and intellectuals who pondered the role of the United States in the international system, Le Prestre elucidates eleven national role conceptions for the United States in the post-Cold War period (Table 1). By doing content analysis, Prestre derives these NRCs from general foreign policy speeches of the principal decision makers in the Bush and Clinton administrations. We can argue that these NRCs can be applied to the George W. Bush administration considering the durability of the role conceptions of the United States in the post-Cold War period. Thus, throughout the dissertation it will be put forward that U.S. foreign policy towards Syria in the post-Cold War era can be properly understood by paying attention to the NRCs of the United States and their enactment by the American policymakers. These roles and Syria's responses to them in critical occasions shaped the contours of the U.S.-Syrian relations from 1989 to 2009.

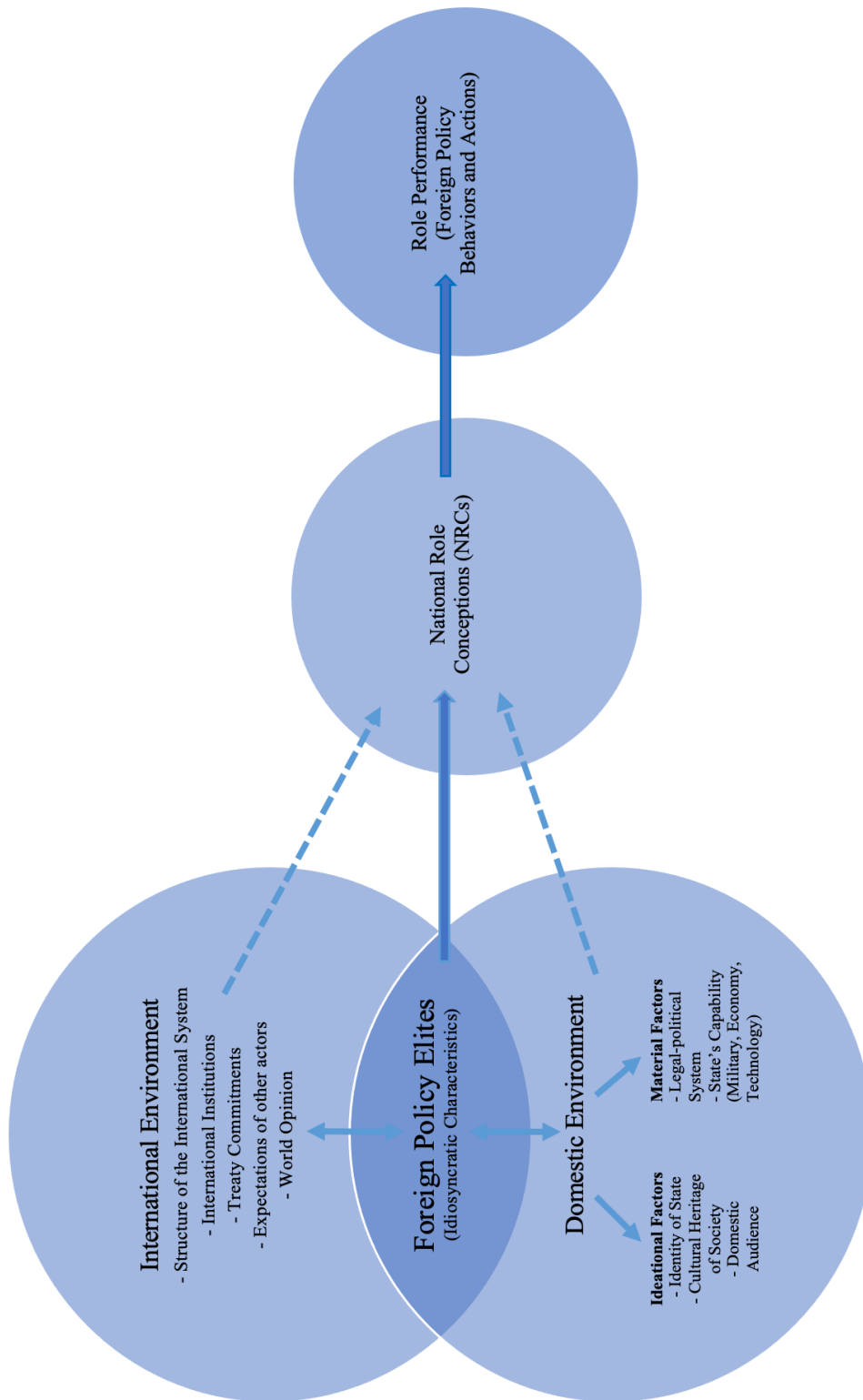


Figure 1: Role Theory Based Foreign Policy Analysis Model

Table 1: The U.S. Prescriptive Role-Set from 1989 to 1993

National Role Conception	Definition
Hegemon	world policeman; unilateral leadership guarantor of the peace, of the existing security regimes
Balancer	maintain a global balance and regional balances support “benign” spheres of influence
Defender of the Pacific Union	defender of the free world help our friends in their own self-defense
Tribune and Agent of American Values	promote democracy and freedom rather than seek equilibrium promote human rights, American values and ideals
Catalyst/Integrator	catalyst for cooperation; integrate Eastern Europe strengthen multilateral institutions and regimes promote cooperation in solving transnational issues
Regional Leader	duties and responsibilities towards other states in the region
Regional Stabilizer	active role in settling regional conflicts
Developer	economic aid to developing countries
(Pragmatic) Guardian of National Interests (or Limited Isolationist)	case-by-case (pragmatic) approach on issues not vital to the national interest; selective engagement consolidate national power rather than shape the international environment.
Internal Developer	responsible for domestic welfare
Isolate	retrenchment; abjure extended deterrence protection of core values, not milieu goals avoid interventions, alliances, and defence commitments set a good example through the development of a us model

Source: Philipp G. Le Prestre, “The United States: An Elusive Role Quest after the Cold War,” in *Role Quests in the Post-Cold War Era: Foreign Policies in Transition*, ed. Philippe G. Le Prestre (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 69.

Throughout the dissertation, each chapter will begin with the analysis of U.S. foreign policy and U.S. policy towards the Middle East via role theory. In these parts, I will try to explain the NRCs of American foreign policymaking elites or the members of the National Security Council (the NSC) in world politics in general and in the Middle East sub-system in particular. I will also try to uncover internal and external determinants of NRCs of different administrations. In this context, it will be possible to grasp the factors that cause change and/or continuity in the NRCs of the United States under George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush administrations and how these NRCs shaped foreign policy behaviors of the United States towards Syria. At this point, I would like to underline that my purpose is not to find out all NRCs of the United States, but specific NRCs pertaining to its relationship with Syria in the post-Cold War era. NRCs will be selected carefully and their implementation in the bilateral relations will be considered as well. Unrealized NRCs will be out of my analysis. While depicting NRCs, I will mainly focus on American presidents, vice-presidents, secretaries of state, secretaries of defense and national security advisors - the NSC members - as foreign policymaking elites of the United States. While doing this, I will extensively benefit from archival documents such as official publications, speeches, statements, memoirs, newspaper articles as well as secondary sources.

Drawing on role theory, subsequent chapters will be devoted to explaining U.S. foreign policy towards Syria under George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush administrations.

CHAPTER 3

U.S. FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS SYRIA UNDER GEORGE H.W. BUSH (1989-1993): THE NEW WORLD ORDER AND BEYOND

“As the only remaining superpower, it is our responsibility – it is our opportunity – to lead...”

George H. W. Bush

3.1. Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact in 1991 marked the end of the bipolar structure of the Cold War international system and the emergence of the United States as the world’s sole superpower. This was a truly historic moment in world history because the international system was taking its new unipolar shape with the end of decades-long superpower rivalry. The Cold War had rendered American policymakers a sense of predictability and status quo, which enabled them to pursue clear-cut policies in different parts of the world. Yet, the implosion of the Soviet Union and the ultimate defeat of the international communism were not only a declaration of victory but also an opening of a new age of uncertainty for the United States. Against this backdrop, the primary objective of the Bush administration was to reassess the role of the United States in the post-Cold War era to deal with challenges emanating from the new international order. The Bush administration introduced the concept of “new world order” to assert American hegemony and to shape the post-Soviet international system in the image of the United States.

In this chapter, U.S. foreign policy towards Syria under the George H. W. Bush administration from 1989 to 1993 will be analyzed. The chapter will begin with exploring the NRCs of the United States under the Bush administration in the post-Cold War era. Besides, internal and external sources of the NRCs and how the Bush administration produced and performed them will be elucidated. Secondly, the NRCs of the United States in the Middle East sub-system will be evaluated. While explaining the NRCs of the United States in the international system and in the Middle East sub-system, official speeches and statements of the top foreign policy decisionmakers, namely President George H. W. Bush, Secretary of State James Baker, Secretary of State Lawrence S. Eagleburger, National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft,

Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney and Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell, will be utilized. In the last part, U.S. foreign policy towards Syria will be explained through NRCs of the United States under the Bush administration. This section will focus on three major events/issues in the U.S.-Syrian relations in this period: the Gulf crisis, the Madrid peace process and Lebanon. It will be indicated that Syria's acceptance of the NRCs of the United States and its role prescription in the post-Cold War era and the convergence of the two countries' roles in the Middle East resulted in normalization and cooperation in the U.S.-Syrian relations.

3.2. The Unipolar Moment: U.S. Foreign Policy under the Bush Administration

Prominent conservative scholar Charles Krauthammer conceptualizes the post-Cold War era as “the unipolar moment”, in which the United States possesses an exceptional and unique role in world politics. In the unipolar moment, no country including Japan, Germany, France, and the Soviet Union can qualify as an equal player with the United States in political, military, economic and diplomatic domains in the post-Cold War international system. Krauthammer underlines this point by stating that “*American preeminence is based on the fact that it is the only country with the military, diplomatic and economic assets to be a decisive player in any conflict in whatever part of the world it chooses to involve itself.*”¹⁰⁰ Thus, the unipolar moment is the manifestation of the hegemon role conception of the United States, without which the world would succumb to chaos and instability. In that regard, if security and safety are to be provided and sustained in the new international order, the responsibility totally falls the shoulders of the United States.

Like Krauthammer, Bristol and Kagan conceptualize the role of the United States as a benevolent global hegemon after the defeat of the so-called evil empire. Neither Russia nor China can play this role because the United States enjoys ideological and strategic predominance in world politics in the post-Cold War era. The United States bears the responsibility of enhancing its security, protecting its interests, supporting the friends of America and promoting American values and principles across the world. The United States is wielding such a tremendous sway over the world that even some hostile figures like Slobodan Milosevic acknowledged in the past that even satellites of the United States were in a better position than its non-satellite states. Besides, most of the major powers such as Japan

¹⁰⁰ Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment,” *Foreign Affairs* 70, No. 1 (1990/1991): 23-33.

and European countries welcomed the United States' involvement in global affairs and endorsed its global leadership role in the post-Cold War international system.¹⁰¹

George H. W. Bush became the first post-Cold War American president who enjoyed this unique moment in American history. President Bush, who presided over the historic transition from the Cold War to post-Cold War international order, took the oath of office on 20 January 1989. Bush, who was born into a wealthy and famous family in Milton, Massachusetts on 12 June 1924, joined the U.S. navy in 1942 and graduated from Yale University with a bachelor's degree in economics in 1948. After fulfilling his military service as a pilot during the Second World War, Bush began to run oil business in Texas. He was familiar with politics since his childhood as he was the son of a powerful Connecticut Senator Prescott Bush. After starting out his political career in the Republican Party in the 1960s, Bush held several significant positions in American politics. He represented Houston's Seventh District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1966 to 1970. He was appointed as the U.S. ambassador to the UN in 1971 by President Richard Nixon. Then, he served as the chairman of the Republican National Committee, de facto ambassador to China from (1974-1976), Director of Central Intelligence Agency (1976) and finally vice president during the Reagan administration (1981-1989).¹⁰²

President Bush, who was politically moderate conservative, had a cautious and pragmatic personality. Despite his enormous experience in state affairs, he was lacking "the vision thing" or a strategic outlook in foreign policy. He was known to be a doer or a practical man rather than a big thinker or ideologue. Bush's political career did not suggest anything about his vision for transforming international system in a radical way.¹⁰³ He defined himself as "*I am a practical man... I like what's real. I'm not much for the airy and the abstract. I like what works. I am not a mystic, and I do not yearn to lead crusades.*"¹⁰⁴ Due to his humble personality, many scholars and intellectuals were skeptical about the Bush administration's

¹⁰¹ William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 75, No. 4 (July/August 1996): 21-22.

¹⁰² Timothy J. Lynch, *In the Shadow of the Cold War: American Foreign Policy from George Bush Sr. to Donald Trump* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 22; Ronald E. Powaski, *Ideals, Interests, and U.S. Foreign Policy from George H. W. Bush to Donald Trump* (Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019), 14-15.

¹⁰³ George C. Herring, *The American Century & Beyond: U.S. Foreign Relations, 1893-2005* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 601; William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and The Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967*, 3rd ed. (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution Press, 2005), 291.

¹⁰⁴ Powaski, *Ideals, Interests, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 16.

acumen to chart a grand strategy for the United States in the post-Cold War international order.¹⁰⁵

Despite his inexperience in foreign policy, Bush's core foreign policy team was strong and promising. There were experienced and talented names in Bush's foreign policy team such as Secretary of State James A. Baker (Ronald Reagan's former chief of staff and secretary of treasury), Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney (former congressman and White House chief of staff), National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft (Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs in the Nixon and Ford administrations), and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell (former NSA to Ronald Reagan). The second and third tier cadres of the Bush administration were also filled with exceptionally talented names such as Lawrence Eagleburger, Robert Zoellick, Dennis Ross at the State Department, Robert Blackwill and Richard Haass at the National Security Council, and Paul Wolfowitz at the Pentagon. Throughout the Bush administration, decision-making processes functioned effectively and smoothly as the foreign policy team worked in a harmonious and coherent manner. Brent Scowcroft, who played a broker role by reducing policy differences among various branches of the government before going to the presidential decision, was specifically at the center of the foreign policy decision making mechanism at the White House.¹⁰⁶

After entering the White House, Bush ordered the NSC to prepare a 90-day systemic report of U.S. foreign and defense policy. When the strategic review of foreign affairs was completed in mid-1989, President Bush declared goals and priorities of his administration in six points: promoting democracy and free market economy across the world, supporting glasnost and perestroika in the Soviet Union, preventing nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, restricting the ambitions of rogue states, improving the capabilities of America's allies to protect themselves, and promoting greater stability in the developing world. Bush promoted this agenda as a new direction for U.S. foreign policy beyond the old-fashioned containment strategy of the Cold War.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Richard A. Melanson, *Reconstructing Consensus: American Foreign Policy since the Vietnam War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 205-206.

¹⁰⁶ Hal Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Rise of the Post-Cold War Order* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2016), 276-277.

¹⁰⁷ Trevor B. McCrisken, *American Exceptionalism and the Legacy of Vietnam* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 135.

Nevertheless, moving beyond the Cold War habits and formulating a new grand strategy for the United States was not an easy task during the transition period. President Bush and his team were concerned about uncertainty and mayhem that might surface while the world was transforming into the post-Cold War international order.¹⁰⁸ Thus, the Bush administration was caught between its goal to sustain global order and to establish global dominance on numerous occasions. In that regard, the Bush administration's foreign policy decisions and implementations oscillated between idealism and pragmatism in all major crises at the onset of the post-Cold War era.

The first dilemma between global dominance and global order that challenged President Bush surfaced during the crises that rocked the international communism during 1989-1990. While the world was witnessing a wave of sweeping and unprecedented events in China, the Soviet Union and its communist Eastern European satellites, the Bush administration perceived the wave of change as a chance to shape a new international order in the image of the United States. According to Bush and Baker, the United States was on the brink of an ultimate success against its arch enemy -the Soviet Union- as democracy and market economy were making a global breakthrough across the globe.¹⁰⁹ They believed that the United States had a moral responsibility to fulfill its role in the new international system to protect and promote democratic movements. For instance, President Bush interpreted upheavals in the Eastern European countries and China as an opportunity to realize America's long dream of a free and democratic world. He uttered his ideas in a commencement address at the Coast Guard Academy on 24 May 1989 as follows:

“We live in a time when we are witnessing the end of an idea: the final chapter of the Communist experiment... But the eclipse of communism is only one-half of the story of our time. The other is the ascendancy of the democratic idea. Never before has the idea of freedom so captured the imagination of men and women the world over... Everywhere those voices are speaking the language of democracy and freedom, and we hear them, and the world hears them. And America will do all it can to encourage them...”

There's an opportunity before us to shape the world. What is it we want to see? It is a growing community of democracies anchoring international peace and stability, and a dynamic free-market system generating prosperity and progress on a global scale...Our country, America, was founded on these values, and they gave us the confidence that flows from strength.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Hal Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad: America's Search for Purpose in the Post-Cold War World* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University of Kentucky Press, 2008), 76-77.

¹⁰⁹ Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, 278.

¹¹⁰ “Excerpts From President's Address,” *New York Times*, May 25, 1989, 8.

When mass demonstrations demanding democracy, freedom, and transparency from the Chinese government broke out in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in the spring of 1989, President Bush initially believed that the United States had a moral responsibility at that critical juncture to espouse the historic breakthrough towards freedom in China. While the Chinese communist government was brutally quashing demonstrators in the Tiananmen Square in early June 1989, President Bush abhorred China's brutal crackdown on peaceful pro-democracy protesters. He also implemented light sanctions such as suspension of weapon sales, high-level exchanges, and multilateral development bank loans to China. On the other hand, President Bush immediately changed his policy and shied away from overreacting to China by imposing trade sanctions in order not to damage Sino-American relations. He claimed that harsh measures such as suspension of trade relations between the two countries might prevent China's domestic reform process.¹¹¹

President Bush's compromising attitude towards China was reprimanded by both the House of Representatives and the Senate as violation of American values. When the Congress passed a bill granting permanent residency to Chinese students studying in the United States, who supported pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square, President Bush vetoed the bill. He also resisted pressures from the Congress to impose additional sanctions on China. President Bush even sent Scowcroft and Eagleburger to Beijing in July 1989 secretly to mend fences between the two countries. He also extended China's most favored nation status in May 1990 despite its ongoing gross human rights violations. In short, President Bush chose to pursue a prudent policy towards China in the transition period despite his discursive emphasis on a new world characterized by democracy, freedom and market economy in the communist countries.¹¹²

Similar to China, President Bush followed a cautious and wait-and-see foreign policy, which was defined as "status quo plus", towards the Soviet Union while its economic power and political influence was crumbling in its satellites during 1989.¹¹³ President Bush avoided aggressive response to the tectonic shifts shaking the communist order in Eastern European countries such as Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania and East Germany. When the

¹¹¹ Powaski, *Ideals, Interests, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 21-22; Lynch, *In the Shadow of the Cold War*, 28.

¹¹² Stephen E. Ambrose and Douglas G. Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy since 1938*, 9th rev. ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 355-356; Melanson, *Reconstructing Consensus*, 212.

¹¹³ Alan P. Dobson and Steve Marsh, *US Foreign Policy since 1945* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 41.

Berlin Wall came down in November 1989, which ushered in the end of communism in Eastern Europe, President Bush maintained his balanced policy and sought to preserve the equilibrium between freedom and order in Washington's relations with Moscow.¹¹⁴

President Bush handled the events shaking the Soviet order prudently because his main motivation was to move beyond the containment policy and integrate the Soviet Union into the U.S.-led international community. That's why, he chose to accommodate President Gorbachev as a partner in the newly emerging international system during the transition period.¹¹⁵ In May 1989, Bush had already disclosed basic tenets of the beyond containment strategy during a commencement address at the Texas A&M University by saying that:

“...In sum, the United States now has as its goal much more than simply containing Soviet expansionism. We seek the integration of the Soviet Union into the community of nations. And as the Soviet Union itself moves toward greater openness and democratization, as they meet the challenge of responsible international behavior, we will match their steps with steps of our own. Ultimately, our objective is to welcome the Soviet Union back into the world order.”¹¹⁶

During the Malta Summit on 2-3 December 1989, Bush and Gorbachev agreed to develop bilateral relations as well. In the meeting, President Bush offered normalizing the U.S.-Soviet trade by giving the Soviet Union credits, most favored nation and observer status in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in order to articulate the Soviet Union into global economic system. Gorbachev pledged that the Soviet Union would cooperate with the United States in solving the crises in the Third World in exchange.¹¹⁷

Due to his cautious attitude towards the Soviet Union, President Bush even turned blind eye to repressive policies of the Gorbachev regime. To illustrate, when the Lithuanian parliament declared the country's independence in March 1990, Gorbachev responded by imposing heavy economic blockade on Lithuania, sent troops to its capital Vilnius, and threatened to rule the country via presidential decrees.¹¹⁸ This was unacceptable for President Bush who was quite sensitive about the idea of national self-determination. However, Bush did not resort to strict

¹¹⁴ Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 606-608.

¹¹⁵ Robert D. Schulzinger, *U.S. Diplomacy Since 1900*, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 354.

¹¹⁶ Jeremi Suri, “American Grand Strategy from the Cold War's End to 9/11,” *Orbis* 53, No. 4 (2009): 617.

¹¹⁷ Powaski, *Ideals, Interests, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 21.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

measures to protect Lithuania's independence and even went further by signing a trade agreement with Gorbachev at the Washington Summit in June 1990. Bush's pragmatic move was another surprise for the Congress, which did not anticipate such a gesture while the Lithuania crisis was going on. This attitude led to severe criticisms against the Bush administration as its mollifying policies were regarded as an outright violation of American values.¹¹⁹

In sum, despite its ambitious rhetoric and belief in the American hegemony, the Bush administration sought to achieve the transition in a smooth way at the onset of the post-Cold War era. President Bush's primary concern was to ward off outbreak of crises that might create disorder and chaos while the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact were collapsing. In Bush's mind, new international order should work so harmoniously that Western political and economic system would be established in the former pro-Soviet countries and global prosperity and stability would be attained successfully.¹²⁰

The Gulf crisis of 1990-1991 was a turning point in asserting the NRCs of the United States (especially the NRC of hegemon) in the post-Cold War era. The Bush administration performed the NRC of hegemon, which was couched in the concept of "new world order", during the Gulf crisis. President Bush and NSA Scowcroft developed the concept of new world order during their philosophical discussions about the future of the international order while they were fishing in Kennebunkport, Maine in late August 1990.¹²¹ While contemplating the Gulf crisis, Bush and Scowcroft deemed that the new unipolar international environment was offering the United States a huge opportunity to shape a new world in its image and enforce its rules. Thus, they thought that the United States' intervention in the Gulf crisis as the world's sole superpower would guarantee world peace and pave the way for a U.S.-dominated post-Cold War international order.¹²²

According to Bush and Scowcroft, the new world order should depend on multilateralism. They contended that the United States could stabilize the post-Cold War international system by leading and mobilizing the United Nations to contain aggressive states and to manage humanitarian crises and ethnic strives in different parts of the world. Despite its multilateralist

¹¹⁹ Melanson, *Reconstructing Consensus*, 212.

¹²⁰ Steven W. Hook and John Spainer, *American Foreign Policy Since World War II*, 18th ed. (Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 2010), 158.

¹²¹ Powaski, *Ideals, Interests, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 31.

¹²² Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad*, 80.

tone, the concept of new world order was introduced to accentuate the primacy and the supremacy of the United States to guarantee the smooth functioning of the newly emerging international system while the Cold War paradigm was crumbling. So, the idea of new world order became the bedrock of the hegemonic role conception of the United States in the post-Cold War era.¹²³ Secretary of State Baker underlined this point by stating that the Bush administration valued multilateralism in international relations, but it was cautious about the role of multilateral institutions to preserve American interests. Baker said that “*We can hardly entrust the future of democracy or American interests exclusively to multilateral institutions.*”¹²⁴

President Bush publicly refused the idea that the United States should play the role of world policeman and seek Pax-Americana in the post-Cold War era. He emphasized that the United Nations was the only platform for the development and maintenance of the new world order, in which rule of law, cooperative settlement of disputes, human rights, and the rights of the weak were respected. Nevertheless, President Bush was aware that such an order could be built and maintained by the United States. In his State of the Union address on 1 January 1991, he announced that the United States would define and dominate the new world order. According to President Bush, American leadership was indispensable in the post-Soviet international order. Bush clarified exceptional role of the United States as a special nation by stating that:

“[We] know why the hopes of humanity turn to us. We are Americans; we have a unique responsibility to do the hard work of freedom. And when we do, freedom works. As Americans, we know that there are times when we must step forward and accept our responsibility to lead the world away from the dark chaos of dictators, toward the brighter promise of a better day.”¹²⁵

In the same speech, Bush also emphasized the unique position of the United States in the post-Cold War era as follows: “*Among the nations of the world, only the United States of America has both the moral standing and the means to back it [the New World Order] up.*”¹²⁶ President

¹²³ John Dumbrell, “America in the 1990s: Searching for Purpose,” in *US Foreign Policy*, ed. Michael Cox and Doug Stokes, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 85-86.

¹²⁴ Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, 331.

¹²⁵ McCrisken, *American Exceptionalism*, 156.

¹²⁶ Joan Hoff, *A Faustian Foreign Policy from Woodrow Wilson to George W. Bush: Dreams of Perfectibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 134.

Bush's belief in American leadership was so firm that he wrote in the last paragraph of his memoirs that "*If the United States does not lead, there will be no leadership.*"¹²⁷

Like President Bush, Secretary of State James Baker stressed the importance of the United States' NRC of hegemon in the post-Cold War international order. In 1990, he said that "*It is a reconstruction of international relations the likes of which we haven't seen since the late 1940s...the basic contours of world order were apt for reshaping.*" According to him, the United States had "*a once-in-a-century opportunity to advance American interests and values throughout the world*" and the primary objective was to "*help shape this new era and to define it for generations to come.*"¹²⁸

NSA Scowcroft also contended that American leadership was needed for a stable international order in the post-Cold War era. He said that "*Whether we like it or not, the U.S. alone can provide that leadership*" because other nations or international institutions were not in a position to substitute American leadership. For him, the United States constituted "*the indispensable ingredient in fashioning a stable world order.*"¹²⁹ Lawrence Eagleburger, who was Secretary of State in the second Bush administration, emphasized the leadership role of the United States in the post-Cold War international order as "*for better or worse, people and governments still look to us to make sense of the changes swirling around them and show some initiative and purpose. No one else can do this.*"¹³⁰

The NRC of hegemon can be observed in the post-Cold War official documents as well. In 1992, Paul Wolfowitz's Office of Undersecretary for Defense Policy prepared a draft document entitled the Defense Planning Guidance (DPG). Two prominent conservatives Paul Wolfowitz and his deputy Lewis "Scooter" Libby were principal authors of the DPG. The document was a blueprint for charting a grand strategy to transform the United States' Cold War dominance over the anti-Soviet alliance into an infinite global hegemony. The document emphasized the need for unilateral action to protect of the United States' hegemonic position in the new post-Cold War international order by thwarting rising threats and counter-

¹²⁷ George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 566.

¹²⁸ Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, 322-323.

¹²⁹ Andrew J. Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002), 51.

¹³⁰ Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier, *America between the Wars from 11/9 to 9/11: The Misunderstood Years between the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Start of the War on Terror* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), 50.

hegemonic projections. It was stressed that there must be “*the sense that the world order is ultimately backed by the U.S. ... the United States should be postured to act independently when collective action cannot be orchestrated*” or when there was a need for quick response.¹³¹ In the document, it was stated that “*this is a dominant consideration... [and] requires that we endeavor to prevent any hostile power from dominating a region whose resources would, under consolidated control, be sufficient to generate global power.*”¹³² In the document, the ways of achieving the global hegemony was elucidated: defense spending of the United States must be increased, nations seeking development of WMDs or threatening United States’ access to natural resources must be prevented and the United States should act unilaterally whenever possible even it was a signatory to treaties.¹³³

To sustain global hegemony of the United States, three major strategies were mentioned in the document. First, the United States must show its leadership to create and protect a new world order so that potential hegemons should be assured that they need not aspire to seek a greater role or aggressive attitude to preserve their legitimate interests. Second, the United States must be sensitive to interests of industrialized nations in non-defense areas to dissuade them from challenging the leadership of the United States. Third, potential hegemons aspiring excessive regional or global role must be deterred via appropriate mechanisms. When the Pentagon document was leaked to the New York Times, it caused an outrage as the document was designed to achieve permanent subordination of China and industrialized nations to the United States. Even though the Bush administration publicly distanced itself from the document, leaders of the Republican and the Democratic parties concurred with the idea that hegemony of the United States over the anti-Soviet alliance must be converted to unrestricted global hegemony.¹³⁴

Due to its hegemonic position in the post-Cold War era, the United States was pushed and was expected to get involved in the conflictual areas by the world opinion. In this context, humanitarian crises in different parts of the world dominated American policymakers’ agenda in this period. They sought to find an answer to this question: how the United States as the world’s leading power should respond to these crises in other parts of the world? Some of the

¹³¹ Joel S. Migdal, *Shifting Sands: The United States in the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 215-216; Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, 329.

¹³² Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad*, 97.

¹³³ Hoff, *A Faustian Foreign Policy*, 138.

¹³⁴ Michael Lind, *The American Way of Strategy: U.S. Foreign Policy and the American Way of Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 127-128.

Bush administration officials such as Scowcroft believed that the United States could not turn blind eye to such crises, but it was beyond the capability of the United States to cope with all of them. According to him, the best way to handle such humanitarian crises was selective engagement and promoting the idea of multilateral response.¹³⁵

The Bush administration got involved in the humanitarian crises to accentuate its leadership role in different parts of the world. For instance, the United States' humanitarian assistance in the Somali crisis was justified through the leadership role of the United States. Although there was no national security threat to the United States, President Bush conceived of the Somali crisis in terms of the new world order. He believed that it was the responsibility of the United States to protect peace, stability, and order in the new era.¹³⁶ President Bush elaborated on the role of the United States during the Somali crisis by stating that:

“In taking this action, I want to emphasize that I understand the United States alone cannot right the world’s wrongs. But we also know that some crises in the world cannot be resolved without American involvement, that American action is often necessary as a catalyst for broader involvement of the community of nations. Only the United States has the global reach to place a large security force on the ground in such a distant place quickly and efficiently and thus save thousands of innocents from death.”¹³⁷

In addition to the NRC of hegemon, there were other NRCs that guided U.S. foreign policy under the Bush administration in the post-Cold War period, namely stabilizer, catalyst/integrator, tribune and agent of American values and guardian of national interests.¹³⁸

Baker underlined multiple roles of the United States in the post-Soviet international order by saying that it had a “*unique role*” and was “*simultaneously a tribune for democracy, a catalyst for international cooperation and the guardian of America’s national interest.*”¹³⁹

The NRC of tribune and agent of American values was as significant as the NRC of hegemon in shaping U.S. foreign policy. After assuming presidency, Bush immediately declared that one the primary goal of his administration was to widen the zone of the democratic peace as

¹³⁵ Powaski, *Ideals, Interests, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 17; Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 625.

¹³⁶ Dumbrell, “America in the 1990s,” 88.

¹³⁷ McCrisken, *American Exceptionalism*, 153.

¹³⁸ Le Prestre, “The United States: An Elusive Role Quest after the Cold War,” 75.

¹³⁹ Siobhán McEvoy-Levy, *American Exceptionalism and US Foreign Policy: Public Diplomacy at the End of the Cold War* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 61; Le Prestre, “The United States: An Elusive Role Quest after the Cold War,” 72.

an American ideal.¹⁴⁰ Spread of the American values after the fall of the Soviet Union strengthened Bush's belief in unique and exceptional position of the United States in world history. Bush particularly underlined the America's responsibility to advance freedom ideal by saying that it was the duty of the United States under all circumstances to "*help others attain the freedom that we cherish.*"¹⁴¹ In a speech delivered in Montgomery, Alabama on 13 April 1991, President Bush elaborated on the NRC of tribune and agent of American values and how it was closely associated with the new world order as follows:

"The new world order really is a tool for addressing a new world of possibilities. This order gains its mission and shape not just from shared interests but from shared ideals. And the ideals that have spawned new freedoms throughout the world have received their boldest and clearest expression in our great country, the United States. Never before has the world looked more to the American example. Never before have so many millions drawn hope from the American idea... What makes us America is not our ties to a piece of territory or bonds of blood; what makes us American is our allegiance to an idea that all people everywhere must be free. This idea is as old and enduring as this nation itself, as deeply rooted, and what we are as a promise implicit to all the world in the words of our own Declaration of Independence. The new world facing us, and I wish I were your age, it's a wonderful world of discovery, a world devoted to unlocking the promise of freedom."¹⁴²

It must be noted here that the Bush administration's commitment to democratic idealism was a kind of liberal internationalism that was sensitive to the limits of American power.¹⁴³ It was obviously balanced with the role of the guardian of national interests. President Bush and NSA Scowcroft posited that U.S. foreign policy should focus on the national interest, geopolitics, and the balance of power rather than forcefully spreading American values such as democracy and political freedom to other parts of the world. According to them, the United States should not go after every evil to catch and destroy. Although America was against human rights' violations in different parts of the world, diplomacy must be prioritized to prod the offending governments into respecting for human dignity. They also strongly believed that if military action was to be taken, it must be in collaboration with the allies and friendly governments.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Richard A. Melanson, "Post-Cold War Policy," in *Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy*, Volume 3, ed. Alexander DeConde et al., 2nd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Son, 2002), 158.

¹⁴¹ McEvoy-Levy, *American Exceptionalism and US Foreign Policy*, 43.

¹⁴² Janet Podell & Steven Anzovin ed., *Speeches of the American Presidents*, 2nd ed. (New York, The H. W. Wilson Company, 2001), 950-951.

¹⁴³ Dumbrell, "America in the 1990s," 86.

¹⁴⁴ Powaski, *Ideals, Interests, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 49.

In sum, the dissolution of the Soviet Union marked the end of the Cold War and heralded a new international order, in which the United States showed up as the sole superpower. In the absence of its erstwhile ideological foe, the primary NRC of the United States was hegemon in the unipolar international system. President Bush himself conceptualized leadership role of the United States as “benevolent hegemon” which had an outright responsibility of shielding zone of democratic peace against terrorists, aggressive states, and nuclear proliferators. To achieve these goals, President Bush adopted a multilateralist approach and worked with other countries in a good spirit of collaboration as mentioned above.¹⁴⁵

What can be said about the sources of the NRCs of the United States in the post-Cold War era? It can be argued that the Bush administration filtered through multiple internal and external dynamics and then formulated the NRCs of the United States. The Bush administration’s foreign policymaking elites considered both internal and external factors and the interplay between them while pinpointing the position and the roles of the United States. To illustrate, Secretary of State Baker indicated in April 1992 that both internal and external sources shaped the role of the United States as follows: “*The nature of the problem, the interests and values we have at stake, the capacity of our friends to act, and the relevance of available multilateral mechanisms will shape our role.*”¹⁴⁶

At the systemic level, the NRCs of the United States was shaped by the implosion of the Soviet Union and the formation of the unipolar system under the leadership of the United States. The United States became the sole superpower of the world with its enormous material (economic and military) capabilities as well as ideological posture (triumphant political ideology). To illustrate, the United States was representing the only viable political system (liberal democracy) in the world, which made it an example for other nations, after the decisive defeat of international communism. The United States enjoyed a preponderance of power in the post-Cold War era unmatched in world history. American economy was 40 percent bigger than that of the second-ranked nation. Post-Cold War GDP of the United States was exceeding total GDPs of Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom. The United States was also the engine of the overseas growth as the American exports amounted to \$506 billion in 1991. American firms and companies produced \$5.6 trillion in goods and services. The United States’ military preponderance was even greater than its economic might. The United States was the only state capable of deploying its military forces from Europe to East Asia. Military

¹⁴⁵ Melanson, “Post-Cold War Policy,” 154.

¹⁴⁶ Le Prestre, “The United States: An Elusive Role Quest after the Cold War,” 67.

spending of the United States was \$280 billion in 1991, which was 27 percent of worldwide total and it was much bigger sum than military budgets of the potential adversaries of the United States and was equal to the combination of the next six countries in the list.¹⁴⁷

The Bush administration was aware of the enormous material capabilities and unique position of the United States in world politics. Hence it formulated and executed U.S. foreign policy in the post-Cold War era in accordance with this fact. NSA Scowcroft underlined unique position of the United States after the demise of the Soviet Union as follows: “*we were suddenly in a unique position... without experience, without precedent, and standing alone at the height of power.*”¹⁴⁸ Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin Powell also stressed the special position of the United States in early 1992 in the Congress as follows: “*Seldom in our history have we been in a stronger position to any challengers we might face. This is a position we should not abandon.*”¹⁴⁹

Domestic variables were also influential in shaping the NRCs of the United States under the Bush administration. Especially, the idea of American exceptionalism which stemmed from the socio-political culture of America was the guiding principle that explain role conceptions of the United States in world politics after the Cold War.¹⁵⁰ The idea of American exceptionalism was deeply entrenched in American culture, in which the United States was deemed a special and chosen country by God to play certain roles in the world. American policymakers were conceiving their state of divinely ordained entity in world politics with an eternal mission to lead others and spread liberal values such as democracy and free market economy. President Bush underscored the leading role of the United States “*as the only remaining superpower, it is our responsibility – it is our opportunity – to lead.*”¹⁵¹ Bush also uttered his belief in the American way of life as follows: “*Never before in this century have our values of freedom, democracy, and economic opportunity been such a powerful and intellectual force around the globe.*”¹⁵² In his memoirs, Bush wrote exceptional role of the American nation as follows:

¹⁴⁷ Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 622; Hook and Spainer, *American Foreign Policy*, 184-185.

¹⁴⁸ Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, 321.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 330.

¹⁵⁰ McEvoy-Levy, *American Exceptionalism and US Foreign Policy*, 23.

¹⁵¹ Fraser Cameron, *US Foreign Policy after the Cold War: Global Hegemon or Reluctant Sheriff*, 2nd ed. (Abington, Oxon: Routledge, 2005), 16.

¹⁵² McCrisken, *American Exceptionalism*, 133.

“As I look to the future, I feel strongly about the role the United States should play in the new world before us. We have the political and economic influence and strength to pursue our own goals, but as the leading democracy and beacon of liberty, and given our blessings of freedom, of resources, and of geography, we have a disproportionate responsibility to use that power in pursuit of a common good. We also have an obligation to lead. Yet our leadership does not rest solely on the economic strength and military muscle of a superpower: much of the world trusts and asks for our involvement. The United States is mostly perceived as benign, without territorial ambitions, uncomfortable with exercising our considerable power.”¹⁵³

In addition to President Bush, NSA Scowcroft conceived of the United States as an exceptional nation with a strong military, wealth, stable government and universally shared values such as democracy, human rights, individual freedom, rule of law and transparent international economic relations.¹⁵⁴ He conceptualized the role of the United States as an enlightened leadership by saying that “*We’re the only ones who can be guiding light.*”¹⁵⁵ Powell also emphasized the leadership role of the United States from moral standing. He said that:

“The point is, that history and destiny have made America the leader of the world that would be free. And the world that would be free is looking to us for inspiration... We must play that role in whatever form it presents itself... We cannot step back away from this position of leadership. If we can make a difference, we must make that difference.”¹⁵⁶

In sum, the most evident NRCs of the Bush administration was hegemon and tribune and agent of American values in the post-Cold War era. In addition to them, the Bush administration assumed responsibility to protect the free world (NRC of defender of the pacific union), promoted cooperation in solving transnational issues (NRC of catalyst/integrator), supported benign sphere of influence in the post-Cold War era (NRC of balancer) etc. The NRC of hegemon encapsulated the idea of preserving and sustaining American leadership as well as world peace in a multilateral fashion. Senior Bush administration officials underlined on many occasions that the United States prioritize multilateralism rather than imposing American will on other states in resolving crises as in the case of the Gulf crisis. The Bush administration performed NRC of tribune and agent of American values in the post-Cold War era to spread American ideals such as democracy, freedom, and free market economy across the world.

¹⁵³ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 565-566.

¹⁵⁴ Powaski, *Ideals, Interests, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 17.

¹⁵⁵ Zbigniew Brzezinski and Brent Scowcroft (moderated by David Ignatius), *America and the World: Conversations on the Future of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 35.

¹⁵⁶ Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 235.

The NRCs of the United States produced by the Bush administration in a milieu shaped the interplay of domestic (enormous military and economic might of the U.S., the idea of American exceptionalism and American public opinion) as well as international (the unipolar international system and expectations of other actors) factors. More importantly, the changing nature of the international system from bipolarity to unipolarity primarily influenced the NRCs of the United States under the Bush administration because it totally changed the United States' position and status in the world. President Bush and his foreign policy team had to respond to this tectonic change by producing post-Cold War NRCs of the United States.

3.3. The NRCs of the United States in the Middle East: Hegemon and Regional Stabilizer

The Middle East sub-system was one of the fields in which contenting NRCs of the United States and the Soviet Union were heavily performed during the Cold War. The clashing roles of the two superpowers shaped regional dynamics and fault lines, which had enormous impacts on relations among Middle Eastern states resonating the bipolar international system. That's why, the end of superpower standoff substantially remolded the regional equilibrium in the Middle East sub-system. As the Soviet Union was no longer able to interfere in the regional affairs effectively by supporting its allies, the United States emerged as the sole superpower, which held enormous sway over the region.

In the post-Cold War era, the United States had certain objectives in the Middle East such as protecting moderate Arab states against radical ones, supporting Israel's security and wellbeing, maintaining flow of oil, and promoting trade relations. What's more, the United States sought to stave off the proliferation of WMDs, state-sponsored terrorism as well as radical movements in the Middle East. The Bush administration endeavored to contain threats emanating from Iran and Iraq by forging relations with moderate Arab states and assumed the sponsorship of Middle East peace process.¹⁵⁷ In the National Security Directive 54, prepared in January 1991, it was firmly stated that the United States would resort to military force against hostile states threatening vital American interests in the Middle East such as the its access to Persian Gulf oil and the security of key friendly states (implying Israel).¹⁵⁸

Drawing on Prestre's role-set, it can be argued that there were two main NRCs of the United States in the Middle East in the post-Cold War era, i.e., hegemon and regional stabilizer. The

¹⁵⁷ Dobson, *US Foreign Policy since 1945*, 115.

¹⁵⁸ Marianna Charountaki, "U.S. Foreign Policy in Theory and Practice: From Soviet-Era Containment to the Era of the Arab Uprising(s)," *American Foreign Policy Interests: The Journal of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy* 36, No. 4 (2014): 259.

Bush administration performed these NRCs during the Gulf crisis and the Madrid peace process. As mentioned above, the Gulf crisis turned out to be a “defining moment” for the Bush administration to chart a new foreign policy for the United States. When Iraq invaded its oil-rich neighbor Kuwait in August 1990, President Bush perceived this move as a challenge to American hegemony and decided to salvage and maintain the U.S.-led new world order in the Middle East. He also thought that it was the responsibility of the United States as the world’s sole superpower to settle the Gulf crisis by resorting to use of force since it could potentially destabilize the new world order by threatening world peace.¹⁵⁹

In this context, President Bush declared that the formation of a broad multinational coalition to counter Saddam Hussein’s aggression and to eject Iraq from Kuwait was huge step to keep the prospect of the U.S.-led new world order intact.¹⁶⁰ According to him, the new world order, in which a millennial era of peace and international fraternity, would begin in the Middle East after the defeat of Saddam Hussein. During the Gulf War, he uttered his belief in the new world order by stating that “*We can see a new world coming into view, a world in which freedom and respect for human rights find a home among all nations.*”¹⁶¹

Michael Lind argues that similar to the Korean War after the Second World War, the Gulf War put an end to the great debate about the grand strategy of the United States after the Cold War. Global hegemony overran other strategies and became the guiding principle of American engagement with the world not only under Bush Sr. administration, but also under the Clinton and Bush Jr. administrations.¹⁶² Similar to Lind, Joel Migdal describes the role of United States in the Middle East in the post-Cold War era as “imperial” because no country in the world was in the position to challenge its dominant or hegemonic role in the region. This imperial role was well performed during the First Gulf War in 1990-1991.¹⁶³

After the Gulf War, achieving a comprehensive peace in the Middle East became the cornerstone of the Bush administration’s foreign policy in the region. President Bush believed that regional and international contexts were befitting for the parties of the Arab-Israeli conflict to overcome their disagreements because victory in the Gulf War aroused hopes for

¹⁵⁹ Ambrose and Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism*, 377-378.

¹⁶⁰ McCrisken, *American Exceptionalism*, 155.

¹⁶¹ Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East 1776 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton&Company, 2007), 569.

¹⁶² Lind, *The American Way of Strategy*, 126.

¹⁶³ Migdal, *Shifting Sands*, 135.

peaceful coexistence of the regional states. In the post-war regional environment, Arab states also demonstrated their willingness to recognize Israel's right to exist in exchange for comprehensive peace. Especially Syria's rapprochement with the United States during the Gulf crisis and its eagerness to strike a peace deal with Israel under the aegis of the United States stimulated the Bush administration into undertaking the responsibility to resolve the Arab-Israeli conundrum through diplomatic means.¹⁶⁴

In this milieu, the Madrid Peace Conference was convened in October 1991. Representatives of Israel and the Arab states sat down around a table face-to-face for the first time in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. They were expected to thrash out a comprehensive agreement to end their decades-long hostility. The Madrid Peace Conference created a suitable environment for bilateral and multilateral negotiations on between the Arab states and Israel. Syria's participation in the Madrid Peace Conference was interpreted as a huge step towards the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Following the conference, bilateral negotiations were moved from Madrid to Washington. Yet, negotiations stalled due to the gap between Israel and the Arab states, and the sponsorship of the peace process was assumed by the Bill Clinton, who defeated incumbent Bush in the 1992 presidential elections.¹⁶⁵

The Bush administration performed the NRC of regional stabilizer or peace catalyst during the Madrid Peace process. Senior Bush administration officials underlined the central role of the United States to achieve a genuine peace in the Middle East during the Madrid Peace process. For instance, Secretary of State Baker defined the peace catalyst role of the United States in March 1991 as follows: "*The US is not able to impose a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, not able to impose peace in the Middle East, but we should be able to serve as a catalyst to bring that along.*"¹⁶⁶

In another speech, Baker elaborated on the catalyst role of the United States in the Middle East peace process by saying that:

"The U.S. is and can be the most influential player. But it is important that we not permit the perception to develop that we can deliver peace, that we can deliver Israeli concessions. If there is going to be lasting peace, it will be the result of direct negotiations between the parties, not something mandated or delivered by anybody

¹⁶⁴ Burton I. Kaufman, *The Arab Middle East and the United States: Inter-Arab Rivalry and Superpower Diplomacy* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 168.

¹⁶⁵ Migdal, *Shifting Sands*, 150-151.

¹⁶⁶ Martin Walker, "Baker Plans US Role as 'Peace Catalyst'," *Guardian*, March 18, 1991, 10.

from the outside, including the U.S. We must do whatever we can to enhance the prospect of the parties negotiating the problem out among themselves.”¹⁶⁷

By balancing Saddam Hussein’s aggression against Kuwait and achieving a comprehensive peace through the Madrid peace process, the Bush administration sought to establish a stable regional order in the Middle East in the post-Cold War era. In so doing, the Bush administration wanted to strengthen moderate Arab states vis-à-vis the radical ones and to preserve vital interests of the United States in the Middle East.¹⁶⁸

In sum, there were two major events that dominated the Bush administration’s agenda in the Middle East: The Gulf crisis and the Madrid peace process. The Bush administration performed the NRCs of hegemon and regional stabilizer successfully in these events. As rightly argued by Hudson, the Bush administration wanted to build global hegemony of the United States by capitalizing on its success in the Gulf War and in the Madrid peace process.¹⁶⁹

3.4. Converging Roles: Making Sense of the U.S.-Syrian Cooperation in the Post-Cold War Era

3.4.1. The United States and Syria Prior to the Gulf Crisis: A Paradoxical Relationship (1989-1990)

To make sense of the U.S.-Syrian cooperation during the Gulf crisis, the changing nature of the U.S.-Syrian relations from President Bush’s ascent to power in January 1989 to the outbreak of the Gulf crisis in August 1990 should be scrutinized. Focusing on this brief period would enable us to understand why Syria sought a *modus vivendi* with the United States in the newly emerging unipolar international system and how the Bush administration decided to accommodate Syria despite the existence of contentious issues between the two countries.

Throughout the 1980s, Syria had been on collision course with the United States due to Syria’s sponsorship of terrorism, its destabilizing activities and military presence in Lebanon and Washington’s broker role in the signing of the Camp David Accords of 1978 and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty of 1979. Especially after Egypt’s withdrawal from the Arab-Israeli conflict, Syria found itself in isolation and in an unequal balance of power with Israel. President Hafez al-Assad blamed the United States for dividing and weakening the united Arab front against Israel and adopted the role of tactical rejectionism against any U.S.-sponsored peace initiative

¹⁶⁷ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 292.

¹⁶⁸ Powaski, *Ideals, Interests, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 37; Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, 563.

¹⁶⁹ Michael C. Hudson, “To Play the Hegemon: Fifty Years of US Policy toward the Middle East,” *Middle East Journal* 50, No. 3 (1996): 337.

between Israel and the Arab states. That's why, Syria resorted to all legal and illegal means to prevent conclusion of peace agreements in the 1980s in order to prove itself as an indispensable actor in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Moreover, President Assad adopted the policy of strategic parity to match Israel's military might thanks to the Soviet Union's economic and military support for Syria's strategic objectives in the Middle East.¹⁷⁰ So, Syria's was the leading member of anti-American camp in the 1980s and challenged the United States' strategic objectives by playing a disruptive role in the Middle East.

In late 1980s and early 1990s, President Assad decided to reassess Syrian foreign policy and to readjust Syria to the U.S.-led world order due to rapidly changing regional and international dynamics. Easing the tension between the United States and the Soviet Union over the Middle Eastern affairs, growing Soviet-Israeli relations after the reestablishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries, and finally Moscow's decision to reduce economic, military, and diplomatic aids to Damascus convinced President Assad of the necessity of recalibrating Syrian foreign policy towards the United States. Assad faced the bitter reality in November 1989, when Soviet Ambassador to Syria Alexander Zotov signaled that Moscow's military aid to Syria would be reduced due to the Soviet Union's economic difficulties and military cuts as well as Syria's inability to pay its debts.¹⁷¹

The Soviet Union also changed its Middle East policy by emphasizing the peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev told President Assad that military solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict was no longer acceptable to the Soviet Union. Zotov also warned President Assad that it must forgo its strategy parity doctrine vis-à-vis Israel and reconstruct its military based on the principle of "reasonable defense sufficiency". This meant that the Soviet Union could not provide Syria with limitless military support to deter Israeli attacks. Accordingly, Moscow's military shipments to Damascus decreased more than 50 percent during Gorbachev's tenure. Hence, Assad thought that while the Soviet Union was crumbling, its aids could not be sufficient to establish strategic parity with Israel as it was receiving huge military and economic aids from Washington.¹⁷² Thus, Assad feared that Syria would be targeted by Israel or even by the United States in the absence of the Soviet Union,

¹⁷⁰ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 182.

¹⁷¹ Jeremy Pressman, "From Madrid and Oslo to Camp David," in *The Middle East and the United States: History Politics*, ed. David W. Lesch and Mark L. Haas, 5th ed. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2014), 246.

¹⁷² John P. Hannah, "Moscow Hits the Brakes on Syria," *New York Times*, November 28, 1989, 25; Alan Cowell, "Egypt and Syria Reopen Air Links," *New York Times*, December 12, 1989, 11.

which would threaten the stability of the Baath regime and even its very existence. Assad thought that the United States might attack Syria as the Reagan administration did in Libya in 1986 with the pretext of Syria's support for international terrorism.¹⁷³

In addition to changing contours of global politics, Syria witnessed a series of regional difficulties that pushed Assad to reformulate its foreign policy towards the United States. First, Assad's support for Iran during the Iran-Iraq War badly deteriorated Syria-Iraq relations during the 1980s. After the war, the Saddam regime began to send threatening messages to Syria due to its standing against Iraq. Second, Syria faced serious hurdles in Lebanon owing to its confrontation with Israel and the United States in the 1980s. Third, Syria was concerned about peace negotiations between Israel, Jordan and Palestinians under the auspices of the United States, which would exacerbate Syria's regional isolation and put Assad's strategy of recovering the Golan Heights at risk.¹⁷⁴

In this milieu, Syria began to seek a compromise with the Bush administration in the newly emerging U.S.-led international system despite risk of significant concessions in bilateral issues, especially in the Middle East peace process. President Assad's determination to establish dialogue with the United States paved the way for an early engagement between Washington and Damascus prior to the Gulf crisis. Why Assad decided to take the path of compromise? First of all, Assad wanted to make sure that the United States as the world's sole hegemon would not threaten security and stability of Syria in the absence of its post-Cold War patron. By easing tension with Washington, he also aimed to obtain political and economic gains from the dialog with the Bush administration, namely establishing full Syrian sovereignty over the Golan Heights and receiving generous economic and financial aids from the United States. Second, Syria sought to improve its relations with the pro-U.S. Gulf states (mainly Saudi Arabia) and Egypt to strengthen its bargaining position vis-à-vis Washington and to curb possible Iraqi threat against Syria. Third, Syria made some gestures to Western European countries and encouraged them to play an active political and economic role in Middle Eastern affairs.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Eyal Zisser, "Syrian Foreign Policy: The Reverse Side of the Same Coin," *JIME Review* 10, No. 36 (1997): 80; Sami Eker, *Soğuk Savaş ve Arap-İsrail Çatışmalarının Gölgesinde Suriye-ABD İlişkileri: 1970-1991* (İstanbul: IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, 2017), 138.

¹⁷⁴ Zisser, "Syrian Foreign Policy," 81.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

On the other hand, terrorism issue was the major obstacle in front of the normalization of the U.S.-Syrian diplomatic relations as Syria has been listed in the State Department's countries supporting international terrorism since 1979. Rapid progress on the U.S.-Syrian relations could not be achieved owing to Syria's alleged involvement in the acts of international terrorism in the 1980s.¹⁷⁶ What's more, the United States had imposed economic sanctions on Syria for the involvement of Syrian diplomats in an airport bomb plot in 1986 (the Hindawi affair) and had criticized Syria's human rights violations in all categories as well as its illegal actions in Lebanon such as drug trafficking and subversion.¹⁷⁷

By early 1989, the Bush administration asked Syria to curb activities of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine General Command (PFLP-GC), led by a former Syrian army captain Ahmad Jibril based in Damascus, owing to its involvement in terrorism. U.S. Ambassador to Syria Edward P. Djerejian had delivered private messages to Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa and other officials after the terrorist bombing of a Pan American World Airways jumbo jet over Lockerbie, Scotland on 21 December 1988. The United States suspected that the PFLP-GC was the perpetrator of the terrorist attack. The United States underlined that if the PFLP-GC's involvement in the Pan-Am bombing was proven, it would be forced to act against the organization. This was a direct message to Syria as a recent report published by the State Department's counterterrorism bureau claimed that Ahmad Jibril was supported by Syria and probably received order from Syrian officials. Senior Bush administration officials commented on Syria's alleged linkage with the PFLP-GC by stating that:

“We asked the Syrians to control the P.F.L.P.-G.C. and to terminate its terrorist activities. We have also asked them to investigate the Pan Am bombing and have said that if the P.F.L.P.-G.C. is implicated, the United States would expect President Assad to live up to his commitments by punishing any terrorists and taking appropriate steps against the organization.”¹⁷⁸

The Bush administration also offered carrot to Syria by indicating that it could be a responsible actor in the Arab-Israeli peace process only if it firmly reined the radical groups like the PFLP-GC. A senior Bush administration official told Syria that “*You tell us you want to be players and involved in the peace process but hosting a group like the P.F.L.P.-G.C. is not consistent with that.*”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Knudsen, “United States-Syrian Diplomatic Relations,” 69-71.

¹⁷⁷ Sarkees and Zunes, “Disenchantment with the ‘New World Order’,” 358.

¹⁷⁸ Elaine Sciolino, “U.S. Asks Syria to Curb Group Tied to Terrorism,” *New York Times*, April 2, 1989, 18.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

Despite Washington's pressures on Syria owing to terrorism issue, articles praising the new role of the Bush administration as a credible actor in the Middle East appeared in the state-affiliated Syrian media outlets in early 1989.¹⁸⁰ These articles were reflecting President Assad's new foreign policy strategy seeking accommodation with the United States. The Bush administration welcomed Syria's new orientation and seemed ready to embrace Damascus in the new Middle East peace efforts. In the summer of 1989, it was reported that Washington would initiate a high-level dialog with the Assad regime despite its criticisms about its involvement in terrorism. Western diplomats also said that Syria gave some assurances to the Bush administration as a part of new dialog between Syria and the United States. Syrian Information Minister Muhammad Salman confirmed the dialog with the United States at the highest level and hailed the Bush administration's Middle East policy. Salman indicated that a compromise could be reached between Washington and Damascus as the Bush administration acknowledged Syria's principal role in the Middle East. Ambassador Djerejian reciprocated these remarks by saying that the United States did not want to exclude Syria from the Middle East peace process as follows: "*Our dialog with the Syrians is frank, direct, comprehensive. We are not pulling any punches. It is a serious dialogue.*"¹⁸¹

The first high-level diplomatic contact between the United States and Syria took place on 29 September 1989. Foreign Minister Sharaa and Secretary of State James Baker met in New York, where they discussed the U.S.-Syrian relations, the Arab-Israeli conflict and Lebanon. The Baker-Sharaa meeting was interpreted as turning of a new page in the U.S.-Syrian relations.¹⁸² In the meeting, Baker underlined that the United States would not isolate Syria or exclude it from any Middle East peace process. Baker also reiterated the position of the United States that a genuine settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict must encapsulate a solution to the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. It was later reported that Baker demonstrated Washington's willingness to improve bilateral ties with Syria during the meeting. But Baker stressed that relations could be improved only if Syria dealt with the PFLP-GC problem seriously as Damascus was accused of sponsoring international terrorism by Washington. Sharaa welcomed American position and underscored Syria's desire to develop bilateral relations with

¹⁸⁰ "Policies of Bush Administration Viewed," *Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS)*, Damascus Domestic Service in Arabic, January 22, 1989; "Paper Cited on Hopes for U.S. 'Balanced Policy'," *FBIS*, Damascus Domestic Service in Arabic, February 1, 1989.

¹⁸¹ Alan Cowell, "Syria and U.S. Seek A Wider Dialogue," *New York Times*, July 16, 1989, 9; Alan Cowell, "Even When He Compromises, Assad Takes a Hard Line," *New York Times*, July 23, 1989, 3.

¹⁸² "Talks with Baker," *FBIS*, Damascus Domestic Service in Arabic, September 30, 1989.

Washington. He also said that Syria was ready to examine any evidence proving suspects got involved in the Pan-Am airliner bombing. In the meeting, Sharaa asked Baker for removal of economic sanctions imposed on Syria after the Hindawi affair, but Baker intimated that it could be done after expulsion or arrest of PFLP-GC's leader Ahmad Jibril by the Syrian authorities.¹⁸³

Syria demonstrated its willingness to normalize its relations with the United States when it decided to revive its diplomatic ties with Egypt on 27 December 1989. Syria had broken ties with Egypt and blamed it for selling out the Palestinian cause by allying with Israel. Then Syria had adopted leadership role in the Arab world against Israel as a frontline state.¹⁸⁴ According to Quillam, this move was the end of Syria's tactical rejectionist role in the Middle East after the Camp David Agreement and the acceptance of the U.S. hegemony in the newly emerging international system. As Syria understood the impossibility of maintaining its rejectionist role by achieving strategic parity with Israel after seeing *perestroika* and its results in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, its opening to Egypt was a candid gesture to the United States to normalize the bilateral relations. Given the transformation of the international context, Assad recognized the fact that Syria's fate was at the hands of Washington because it was a small and weak state, whose role was elusive in the regional and international arenas, vis-à-vis the United States.¹⁸⁵

In this milieu, former American President Jimmy Carter and then a group of senators traveled to Damascus and met with President Assad in March 1990. In the meeting, Assad said that he was willing to develop relations with the United States and could negotiate peace with Israel if Tel Aviv was ready to return the Golan Heights to Syria. In the meeting, Carter expressed his belief that Syria could play a significant role in securing the release of American hostages in Lebanon.¹⁸⁶

After Carter's visit, the hostage issue became a stimulus to improvement of the U.S.-Syrian relations. On 19 April 1990, Ambassador Djerejian held a meeting with Foreign Minister Sharaa to discuss the hostage issue. In the meeting, Sharaa told him that Syria was doing

¹⁸³ "Article Assesses Prospects for Resumed U.S. Ties," *FBIS*, Kuwait Al-Qabas in Arabic, January 8, 1990.

¹⁸⁴ Youssef M. Ibrahim, "Egypt-Syria Rift Reported Near End," *New York Times*, December 24, 1989, 3; "Egypt and Syria Agree to Revive Ties," *New York Times*, December 28, 1989, 3.

¹⁸⁵ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 159.

¹⁸⁶ Ihsan A. Hijazi, "Carter Says Syria Aids on Hostages," *New York Times*, March 17, 1990, 5.

everything with the Iranians to secure the release of American hostages immediately.¹⁸⁷ Syria's efforts bore fruit and two American hostages in Lebanon (Robert Polhill and Frank Reed) were released in April 1990. President Bush called President Assad and thanked him for the release of Polhill on 23 April 1990. In the conversation, Bush explained his belief in the possibility of better U.S.-Syrian relations.¹⁸⁸ Baker and Bush publicly expressed their gratitude to President Assad for saving the lives of the hostages. Baker said that Syria played a key role in the hostage crisis and this role could have positive impact on relations between the two countries.¹⁸⁹ On 30 April 1990, Bush hailed Syria's role in the hostage crisis as well by stating that "*I do want to take this opportunity to thank Syria for its role in not only bringing Mr. Polhill home but its role in the Reed release.*"¹⁹⁰ Syria's help to the United States in the hostage issue proved that President Assad was sincere to initiate a new dialog with the United States at the onset of the post-Cold War era.¹⁹¹

In addition to Bush and Baker, Assistant Secretary of State for Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs John H. Kelly also appreciated the role of Syria in saving the lives of hostages in Lebanon in his testimony to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. So, the Bush administration made it publicly known that Syria played a role in assisting the United States in the hostage issue. This was an outright dilemma because while the United States was officially categorizing Syria as a state sponsor of terrorism, it sought Syria's assistance to cope with terrorist activities against American citizens in the Middle East.¹⁹²

In this period, another factor that contributed to warming of the U.S.-Syrian relations was the tension between the Likud government of Yitzhak Shamir and the Bush administration. The United States was critical of the Shamir government's settlement policy and human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territories. Washington was also frustrated by Israel's reluctance to take part in peace negotiations with the Arab states on the basis of land-for-peace

¹⁸⁷ "Syria Expects a Short Delay," *New York Times*, April 20, 1990, 2.

¹⁸⁸ "Memorandum of Telephone Conversation," *George Bush Presidential Library*, April 23, 1990, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1990-04-23--Assad.pdf>.

¹⁸⁹ "Bush, Baker Statements Cited," *FBIS*, Damascus Domestic Service in Arabic, April 23, 1990; "Baker's Thanks Reported," *FBIS*, Damascus Television Service in Arabic, April 30, 1990.

¹⁹⁰ George Bush, "Remarks and an Exchange with Reporters Prior to a Meeting with Former Hostage Robert Polhill, April 30, 1990," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George Bush, Book I-January 1 to June 30, 1990* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1991), 592.

¹⁹¹ Zisser, "Syria and the Gulf Crisis," 566; Joel Brinkley, "Syria Is Willing to Talk to Israel, Carter Says," *New York Times*, March 19, 1990, 5.

¹⁹² Rabil, "The Ineffective Role of the US," 415.

formula espoused in the UN Resolution 242.¹⁹³ Although Bush and Baker strived to cajole Israel into entering direct talks with the PLO, their peace efforts were stubbornly refused by Israeli leaders. Thus, President Bush castigated Israel's declaration about the construction of additional settlements for newly coming immigrants from the Soviet Union. The State Department criticized Israel in its annual report on human rights published in February 1989 owing to substantial increase in human rights violations in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza. Secretary of State Baker even told Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in May 1989 that Israel must relinquish its Greater Israel dream.¹⁹⁴

While the U.S.-Israeli relations were soaring, the Bush administration began to give messages recognizing Syria's pivotal position in achieving a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The Bush administration's posture overlapped with Syria's changing foreign policy as President Assad believed that Syria's internal and external troubles could be alleviated by establishing good relations with the United States. For this reason, Assad began to give positive signals about his willingness to develop relations with the United States and to attend a new peace process. So, the U.S.-Syrian relations, albeit slow, began to normalize.¹⁹⁵

Despite relative improvement thanks to Syria's help in resolving the hostage crisis, the U.S.-Syrian relations remained cool due to Syria's ongoing engagement with terrorist organizations stationed in Syria and the Beqaa Valley, high rank Syrian army officers' involvement of drug production and trafficking in Lebanon, Syria's gross human rights violations, and its overt hostility towards Israel as well as its efforts for military build-up including advanced missile systems.¹⁹⁶ Especially issue of terrorism continued to overshadow the U.S.-Syrian relations. In April 1990, Syria's involvement in terrorist activities was pointed in the State Department's handbook "Patterns of Global Terrorism". In the book, it was stated that "*Both Syria and Syrian-occupied Lebanon remain sanctuaries for a wide variety of international groups that have engaged in terrorism.*"¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ "Key Sections from the Bush-Gorbachev News Conference," *New York Times*, June 4, 1990, 14.

¹⁹⁴ Kaufman, *The Arab Middle East and the United States*, 150; Ambrose and Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism*, 361.

¹⁹⁵ Knudsen, "United States-Syrian Diplomatic Relations," 71-72.

¹⁹⁶ Sarkees and Zunes, "Disenchantment with the 'New World Order'," 368; Zisser, "Syria and the Gulf Crisis," 566.

¹⁹⁷ Thomas L. Friedman, "Baker Will Go to Syria For Help Against Iraqis," *New York Times*, September 11, 1990, 16.

In the same month, State Department's spokesperson Margaret Tutwiler elaborated on the obstacles in front of the improvement of the U.S.-Syrian relations in a press conference as follows:

“Most of the sanctions imposed in November 1986 remain in place, including strict export controls, the cancellation of Syrian eligibility for Export-Import Bank credits and concessionary wheat purchases, the termination of our bilateral air transport agreement, the prohibition of the sale of Syrian airline tickets, a travel advisory alerting Americans to the potential for terrorist activity originating in Syria, among others... Our relations with Syria have been difficult for a number of years. Notwithstanding Syrian assistance with the release of Robert Hill, there remain important impediments to improved US-Syrian relations, particularly the continued presence of terrorist groups in Syria and Syrian-controlled areas in Lebanon.”¹⁹⁸

Despite the terrorism issue, Ambassador Djerejian underlined the changing nature of the U.S.-Syrian relations in May 1990. He said that although there were differences of opinion on major issues between the two sides, the U.S.-Syrian relations were characterized by cooperation and trust. Djerejian also said that the Bush administration did not intend to exclude Syria from the Arab-Israeli peace process as it acknowledged Syria's principal role in achieving a comprehensive peace and decided to establish a framework for action and cooperation with Syria. He stated that:

“Syria played an important role – “and not just as mailman” – in securing the release of two U.S. hostages in Lebanon. This had a positive effect on our bilateral ties... President Bush held a 28-minute telephone conversation with President al-Asad. During this conversation, they discussed key issues. We are investigating with Syria whether it would be possible to secure the release of all hostages. There are still some problems preventing the full normalization of our ties and the lifting by the United States of the economic sanctions imposed on Syria. The most important obstacle in this regard concerns the facilities Syria has continued to provide to organizations linked with international terrorism. However, we are optimistic over the commitment made by President al-Asad to the effect that he will punish such organizations if irrefutable evidence is brought against them... We want to move ahead with Syria on a wide range of issues and with a proper understanding of Syria's security interests.”¹⁹⁹

Kuwait's al-Qabas newspaper revealed on 5 June 1990 that President Bush sent a letter to President Assad about recent developments in the Middle East. In the letter, Bush said that the United States had material evidence about the involvement of Ahmad Jibril's PFLP-GC in the bombing of Pan Am airliner and some of the perpetrators of this attack left from Syrian territory. Bush asked Syria's help for catching the terrorists responsible for the attack. Syria

¹⁹⁸ Rabil, *Syria, the United States, and the War on Terror*, 86; Rabil, “The Ineffective Role of the US,” 418.

¹⁹⁹ “Syrian Ministers, Djerejian on Mideast Peace,” *FBIS*, Kuwait Al-Qabas al-Duwali in Arabic, May 24, 1990.

responded these allegations by asserting that Damascus was against all forms of terrorism, especially terrorism against civilian people. Syria also underlined that it distinguished between struggle to regain legitimate rights and international terrorism. Syria assured the United States that if Washington provided involvement of Jibril and his group in the Pan Am bombing, Syria was ready to punish any person or party involved in this terrorist attack.²⁰⁰

In sum, Washington and Damascus had paradoxical relations at the onset of the post- Cold War era. While the Bush administration accused Syria of sponsoring international terrorism, it sought Syria's assistance to rescue American hostages in Lebanon. The Bush administration also recognized Syria's central role in attaining comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The limited rapprochement between the two countries at the onset of the Cold War was the result of President Assad's decision to change Syria's rejectionist role in the Middle East and to readjust Syria to the U.S.-led post-Cold War international order. Despite Syria's readiness to repair relations with Washington, there was no genuine breakthrough in bilateral relations until the outbreak of the Gulf crisis owing to mixed signals emanating from Washington. The Gulf crisis became a watershed in the U.S.-Syrian relations, which triggered a real change in U.S. foreign policy towards Syria under the Bush administration.

3.4.2. Forging Cooperation: The U.S.-Syrian Relations in the Gulf Crisis

3.4.2.1. The Gulf Crisis: Causes, Consequences, Implications

After taking the reins of foreign policy on 20 January 1989, President Bush was so preoccupied with the end of the Cold War, promotion of democracy in Eastern Europe and cultivating friendly relations with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev that he was not able to pay much attention to the Middle East during his first year in power. Regarding Iraq, President Bush initially thought that cordial relations could be established between Washington and Baghdad due to Saddam Hussein's need for Western help to rebuild Iraq's war-torn economy after the Iran-Iraq War as well as the United States' recent military confrontation with Iran. Senior Bush administration officials even believed that Iraq could change its radical behaviors, adopt moderate and status quo policies in the region and obey the rules of international system after the war with Iran.²⁰¹ However, the Bush administration's expectations from Iraq did not materialize. Saddam Hussein's decision to annex Kuwait on 2 August 1990 sparked one of the

²⁰⁰ "Sources Reveal Details of Bush Letter to Al-Asad," *FBIS*, Kuwait Al-Qabas in Arabic, January 5, 1990.

²⁰¹ Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*, 3rd ed. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 253.

grave crises in the post-Cold War era. The United States considered the invasion of Kuwait as dire threat to its global hegemony project -the new world order- and decided to act to counter Iraq's aggression. Before explaining the Gulf crisis in terms of the post-Cold War NRCs of the United States, I will elaborate on the causes, consequences, and implications of the crisis in this section.

Why Iraq decided to invade its tiny southern neighbor? There were several reasons for Saddam Hussein's decision to annex Kuwait that triggered the Gulf crisis. The first was Iraq's historical claims over Kuwait, which had been a province of Iraq until 1961. Baghdad never recognized legitimacy of the border between the two countries because it had been drawn by Great Britain in 1913. Saddam Hussein believed that imperialists allocated more lands to the Kuwaitis in the north than they had traditionally controlled to curb Iraq's access to the Gulf. Hence, Saddam thought that making Kuwait the nineteenth province of Iraq would be a decisive blow to one of the remnants of Western imperialism in the Middle East.²⁰²

Second, the Iran-Iraq War had strained Iraq's economy as its total debts had amassed \$80 billion and annual inflation had risen to 40 percent.²⁰³ Saddam had purchased weapons from the United States during the war and had paid for these weapons by receiving loans from the fellow Arab states. Specifically, Saddam had borrowed \$35 billion from Kuwait during the Iran-Iraq War. When Saddam asked Kuwait to forgive Iraq's wartime debts after the war, his request was firmly rejected by the Kuwaitis. Saddam was frustrated by the attitude of Kuwait because he believed that Iraq sacrificed its blood to protect small Gulf states from revolutionary Iran's aggression.²⁰⁴

Third, oil production was a matter of contention between the two states for a long time. Saddam Hussein had been planning to control the disputed Rumaila oilfield straddling the Iraq-Kuwait border, which would render Iraq huge oil resources and a strategic access to the harbors of the Gulf. Moreover, in Saddam's Arab nationalist perception, oil was the common good of the Arab peoples and the existence of separate petroleum-rich and lightly populated countries like Kuwait was illegitimate.²⁰⁵ Before launching the invasion, Saddam accused

²⁰² William L. Cleveland and Martin Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 4th ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009), 479; Migdal, *Shifting Sands*, 107.

²⁰³ Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad*, 48.

²⁰⁴ Donald E. Schmidt, *The Folly of War: American Foreign Relations 1898-2005* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2005), 296-298; McCrisken, *American Exceptionalism*, 141.

²⁰⁵ Patrick Tyler, *A World of Trouble: The White House and the Middle East – from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009), 356; Migdal, *Shifting Sands*, 107-108.

Kuwait of stealing Iraq's oil, exceeding its OPEC quota and reducing oil prices in the market by selling cheap oil. Saddam demanded that Kuwait reduce oil production, forgive war-time loans to Iraq, and compensate \$2.4 billion, which was stolen by Kuwait from the Rumaila oil field. According to Saddam, Kuwait's hostile acts were planned to undermine Iraq's petroleum-based economy, which was struggling to recover from the long and costly war with Iran. Oil was Iraq's economy's major source of income and oil-related economic problems would be disastrous for Iraq.²⁰⁶

Even though Kuwait accepted overproduction of oil and promised to abide by the OPEC quota in July 1990, Saddam was not satisfied by this move. He declared that Kuwait's oil overproduction, its control over the Rumaila oilfield, and its rejection of cancelling Iraq's were declaration of economic warfare against Iraq. Escalation mounted in the Gulf with Saddam's decision to amass Iraqi troops along the Iraq-Kuwait border in the summer of 1990. Deployment of Iraqi troops along the border, was a clear indication of Saddam's seriousness to annex his neighbor. Nevertheless, Saddam wanted to learn Washington's attitude towards the recent escalation in the Gulf before starting the operation.²⁰⁷ For this reason, he decided to meet with U.S. Ambassador to Iraq April Glaspie on 25 July 1990 (eight days before the attack). In the meeting Saddam asked about the view of Washington about the Iraq-Kuwait crisis. Glaspie responded by assuring him that the border disagreement between Iraq and Kuwait had nothing to do with the United States and its vital interests in the region. She also explained Washington's expectation for an immediate solution to this kind of tensions before spiraling out of control. Saddam erroneously perceived Glaspie's response as a green light letting him to annex Kuwait. He also thought that the end of the Cold War provided Iraq a space for maneuver in the Middle East to fill the power vacuum while the Soviet Union's power was waning.²⁰⁸

Having misunderstood the United States, Saddam Hussein decided to move in early 1990. The Gulf crisis unfolded when Saddam ordered the conquest of Kuwait with 140,000 troops and 1,800 tanks on 2 August 1990. The Kuwaiti army was so small and weak that it could not put up any resistance and Iraqi troops captured the country within a single day. President Bush and his advisers were astounded by Iraq's blitzkrieg as they were expecting a limited incursion

²⁰⁶ Kaufman, *The Arab Middle East and the United States*, 152.

²⁰⁷ Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 480.

²⁰⁸ Lynch, *In the Shadow of the Cold War*, 36; Migdal, *Shifting Sands*, 109-110; Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, 564.

of the Iraqi forces into the disputed border zone. Given the Iraqi army's success, the Bush administration feared that the next target of Saddam would be Saudi Arabia.²⁰⁹

Initially, there was confusion and division among the top echelons of the Bush administration as to how to respond to the Saddam regime. On 3 August 1990, the NSC convened to discuss the crisis and the response of the United States to the Iraqi aggression. Having witnessed the Vietnam catastrophe, Chairman of the JCS Powell proposed economic sanctions to deter Saddam and rejected use of force against Iraq. Because he understated Kuwait for vital interests of the United States in the Middle East.²¹⁰ Unlike Powell, Secretary of Defense Cheney and NSA Scowcroft strongly opposed to Saddam's invasion and pushed for harsh punishment of Iraq during the meeting. Scowcroft said that "*there is too much at stake.*" Cheney warned his colleagues against the grave consequences of Saddam's aggression for oil markets if he attacked Saudi Arabia after Kuwait. He also argued that the occupation and subsequent gains might encourage Saddam to acquire new WMDs including nuclear ones.²¹¹

Lawrence Eagleburger suggested that the United States handle the crisis in collaboration with the United Nations and get the Security Council's authorization before imposing economic sanctions or going to war with Iraq. President Bush agreed and supported the idea that the international community's consent must be received before taking action against Saddam Hussein.²¹² That's why, even though President Bush castigated the invasion of Kuwait, signed an executive order banning the Iraqi assets and all trade relations with the Baghdad, and called for an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the Iraqi troops, he did not clarify what would be the American action against Saddam's bold move.²¹³

Oil became the chief concern of the United States at the beginning. The Bush administration was worried about Saddam's hegemony over the Gulf region, the OPEC and even the Arab world by capturing huge oil resources in Kuwait. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia might be the next target of Saddam Hussein inasmuch as the Riyadh administration could manipulate oil prices by increasing or reducing the production.²¹⁴ President Bush and his foreign policy team

²⁰⁹ Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad*, 49.

²¹⁰ Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 610.

²¹¹ Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad*, 49; Tyler, *A World of Trouble*, 366-367.

²¹² Little, *American Orientalism*, 255.

²¹³ Powaski, *Ideals, Interests, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 32.

²¹⁴ Ambrose and Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism*, 381; Migdal, *Shifting Sands*, 111.

conceived of Saddam's belligerence as a dire threat to American interests in the Middle East because the United States' dependence on the Gulf oil had been increasing since the oil shocks of 1973-1974. The share of Gulf oil in the United States' import had reached 24 percent as of the late 1980s. Saddam's success might put him in a position to manipulate and dictate the market oil production as well as oil prices in the future. This would enhance vulnerability of the United States and its Western allies, undermine their development plans, and ultimately weaken their economies due to their over-dependence on the Gulf oil.²¹⁵ Bush emphasized this point while elaborating on the reasons for the coalition's massive military deployment to the Gulf:

My administration, as has been the case with every president from President Roosevelt to President Reagan, is committed to the security and stability of the Persian Gulf... Our country now imports nearly half the oil it consumes and could face a major threat to its economic independence. Much of the world is even more dependent upon imported oil and is even more vulnerable to Iraqi threats... Let us be clear, the sovereign independence of Saudi Arabia is of vital interest to the United States."²¹⁶

While responding to the Gulf crisis, the Bush administration's vision for the new world order was much more significant than its economic concerns. President Bush equated Saddam Hussein with Adolf Hitler and claimed that appeasement of his belligerency would usher in an era of conflict and turmoil in the world.²¹⁷ That's why, it perceived Saddam's aggression as a threat to the U.S.-led new international order. President Bush and senior administration officials continuously underlined this point in their statements throughout the crisis. To illustrate, in an address at the Aspen Institute in Colorado on 2 August 1990, President Bush announced the beginning of a new era in U.S. foreign policy directly linked to the Gulf crisis and indicated that the world was at a crossroads. The world was now between the Cold War and the new international order. Bush underlined that United States' reaction to Saddam would have decisive impacts on the character of the new era.²¹⁸ For the Bush administration, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was the first challenge to the United States' NRC of hegemon in the post-Cold War era.

Similar to Bush, Scowcroft said that the ramifications of Saddam's aggression on the newly emerging post-Cold War international order would be grave. According to him, if Saddam

²¹⁵ Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, 301.

²¹⁶ McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 236.

²¹⁷ Kaufman, *The Arab Middle East and the United States*, 150.

²¹⁸ McEvoy-Levy, *American Exceptionalism and US Foreign Policy*, 72.

carried out his unlawful act with impunity, this would embolden other repressive dictators like him.²¹⁹ Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger voiced same concerns at the onset of the crisis by stating that “*This is the first test of the post [Cold] war system... If [Hussein] succeeds, others may try the same thing. It would be a bad lesson.*”²²⁰

Secretary of State Baker was also thinking in the same way. Before the House of Foreign Affairs Committee in September 1990, he said that:

“Iraq’s unprovoked aggression is a test of how the post-Cold War world will work. Amidst the revolutions sweeping the globe and the transformation of East-West relations, we stand at a critical juncture in history. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait is one of the defining moments of a new era - an era full of promise but also one replete with new challenges... we must respond to the defining moments of this new era, recognizing the emergent dangers lurking before us. We are entering an era in which ethnic and sectarian identities could easily breed new violence and conflict. It is an era in which hostilities and threats could erupt as misguided leaders are tempted to assert regional dominance before the ground rules of a new order can be accepted.”²²¹

On 5 August 1990, President Bush publicly declared his determination to confront Saddam Hussein by saying that Iraq’s aggression against Kuwait “*is naked invasion*” and “*this will not stand.*”²²² Scowcroft worked the clock around to formulate the American response to the Gulf crisis. His primary purpose was to protect Saudi Arabia from Iraqi attack and build up a coalition by cooperating with the international community to curb Saddam Hussein’s belligerence. Immediately after the invasion, President Bush dispatched Secretary of Defense Cheney and CENTCOM’s Norman Schwarzkopf to Saudi Arabia to convince King Fahd of immediate Iraqi threat to security of Saudi Arabia. King Fahd was persuaded by the photos showing the Iraqi army’s military maneuvers given by Cheney and Schwarzkopf. He acknowledged that Saudi Arabia needed protection against Iraq, and it could be delivered by the United States. After the visit, the Bush administration quickly sent 100,000 soldiers to Saudi Arabia to upon the call of King Fahd on 8 August 1990 to deter Iraq from further aggression against Saudi Arabia. The operation was code-named the Operation Desert Shield.²²³

²¹⁹ Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad*, 49-50.

²²⁰ Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, 301.

²²¹ Gearoid O Tuathail, “The Effacement of Place? US Foreign Policy and the Spatiality of the Gulf Crisis,” *Antipode* 25, No. 1 (1993): 15-16.

²²² Schmidt, *The Folly of War*, 302; Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad*, 51.

²²³ Little, *American Orientalism*, 257; Powaski, *Ideals, Interests, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 32.

Due to efforts of the Bush administration, the international community did not remain silent on such an outright aggression while the new world order was taking shape. Whatever the justifications of Saddam, occupation of a sovereign state was intolerable and unacceptable to the international community. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) held an emergency meeting on 2 August 1990, unanimously passed the Resolution 660, condemning the invasion, urging Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait unconditionally and calling for intensive negotiations for resolution of the conflict.²²⁴ Neither the Soviet Union nor China opposed to the United States at the UN Security Council. The first resolution was followed by 12 resolutions, the last of which was the Resolution 679, issued in November 1990 and mandating the member states to use all necessary means to implement previous resolutions unless Iraq put an end to occupation of Kuwait on or before 15 January 1991.²²⁵

Meanwhile President Bush's and Secretary of State Baker's tireless diplomatic efforts resulted in the formation of an international coalition to counter the Iraqi aggression. Thanks to its multilateralist approach and cooperative diplomacy, the Bush administration was able to forge a coalition of 37 countries over the next four months after the outbreak of the crisis. Finally, a military force of 500,000 soldiers (the number of American troops was 240,000) was formed from different countries to eject Iraq from Kuwait.²²⁶ While Baker was traveling across the globe during the crisis, he strived to convince other states to see the crisis from the angle of Washington. Baker's message was clear: Iraq's annexation was not a local crisis but an attack on the global community of states. Thanks to Baker's successful diplomacy, a number of states from different parts of the world such as Britain, France, Greece, Bangladesh, Niger and Singapore joined the coalition. Surprisingly, majority of the Arab states lined up with the United States including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Morocco and exiled government of Kuwait. Baker also successfully secured financial resources of the war. In addition to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, Germany and Japan pledged \$16 billion for the coalition.²²⁷

By organizing and leading such a broad coalition, the Bush administration demonstrated its determination to perform the NRC of hegemon to prevent the Middle East from descending into chaos and to keep prospect of the new U.S.-led international order safe. The Bush

²²⁴ Gani, *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations*, 157.

²²⁵ McCrisken, *American Exceptionalism*, 141; Lynch, *In the Shadow of the Cold War*, 37.

²²⁶ Schulzinger, *U.S. Diplomacy Since 1900*, 357; Schmidt, *The Folly of War*, 305.

²²⁷ Migdal, *Shifting Sands*, 116.

administration utilized the Gulf crisis as an opportunity to enhance international cooperation and to assert leadership role of the United States in the post-Cold War era.²²⁸

Even though the U.S-led international coalition was ready to evict Iraqi forces from Kuwait, Secretary of State Baker went to Geneva, Switzerland to convince Iraq's Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz of putting an end to the occupation on 9 January 1991. Baker also wanted to show determination of the United States to enforce UN Security Council resolutions in case of Iraq's non-compliance. Baker warned Aziz that "*if Iraq chooses to continue its brutal occupation of Kuwait, it will choose a military confrontation which it cannot win.*"²²⁹ Baker also underlined that "*This will not be another Vietnam... Should war begin, God forbid, it will be fought to a swift, decisive conclusion.*"²³⁰ The Baker-Aziz meeting was the last chance for peace given by the Bush administration. When Aziz equated Iraq's invasion with Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories the meeting ended. It was now evident that Iraq would not consent to the UN Security resolutions and end its aggression against Kuwait.²³¹

Despite President Bush's emphasis on the threats emanating from Iraq against the United States and the new world order, the Congress was hesitant about resorting to military force against the Saddam regime. Many senators argued that sanctions were enough to punish the Iraqi aggression. When the issue of use of force against Iraq was voted in the Congress on 13 January 1991, it passed by the margin of 52 to 47 in the Senate and 250 to 183 in the House of Representatives. This was clear indication of the unwillingness in the Congress to authorize use of force against Iraq. Even though there were criticisms levelled at the Bush administration's hawkish attitude to the Saddam regime, it was able to get the approval from the Congress.²³²

The coalition forces launched the Operation Desert Storm forces on 17 January 1991. The coalition's airstrikes targeted Iraq's communication networks, airbases and electricity hubs with high-technology smart weapons such as Tomahawk missiles and laser-guided bombs, which paralyzed the Iraqi army and deprived it of any maneuvers.²³³ Ferocious aerial

²²⁸ Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, 301-302.

²²⁹ Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad*, 59.

²³⁰ Little, *American Orientalism*, 260.

²³¹ Schmidt, *The Folly of War*, 310.

²³² Cameron, *US Foreign Policy after the Cold War*, 15.

²³³ Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 611.

bombardment of Iraqi positions continued six weeks and the Operation Desert Storm was followed by a ground offensive on 24 February 1991. The ground offensive lasted only four days and the U.S.-led coalition forces inflicted heavy losses on the Iraqi army. Saddam Hussein's elite Republican Guards and their tanks were exterminated. Thousands of Iraqi soldiers were trapped on the Iraq-Kuwait highway or the so-called Highway of Death while retreating from Kuwait. The Operation Desert Storm resulted in total withdrawal of the battered Iraqi army from Kuwait and a temporary ceasefire.²³⁴

On 27 February 1991, President Bush victoriously announced the defeat of belligerent Saddam Hussein and the liberation of Kuwait from Iraq. He also declared that the coalition would immediately cease hostilities.²³⁵ The UN Security Council issued the Resolution 687 setting the terms for a formal ceasefire on 3 April 1990. The resolution demanded reduction of Iraq's military capabilities by obliging Baghdad to destroy its chemical and biological weapons as well as its ballistic missiles. Saddam Hussein accepted the terms of ceasefire on 6 April 1990.²³⁶

Even though the operation was a victory for the U.S.-led coalition, the Bush administration did not bring down the Saddam regime. Because the UN resolutions had entitled the United States to free Kuwait from occupation not to topple Saddam Hussein.²³⁷ Violation of the UN authorization might undermine President Bush's vision of the new world order, in which the UN was expected to occupy a central place. Coalition partners of the United States might also oppose to the venture of creating new Iraq.²³⁸ Bush and his advisors feared that Iraq might become another Vietnam quagmire for the American troops. Furthermore, they were concerned about outbreak of a civil war between the Sunnis and the Shiites as well as the Kurds following the overthrow of the Saddam regime, which would bolster Iran's influence not only in Iraq but also in the Middle East. They thought that if Saddam were going to be

²³⁴ Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, 567; Kaufman, *The Arab Middle East and the United States*, 163; McCrisken, *American Exceptionalism*, 141.

²³⁵ Gerald Seib, "U.S. Declares Victory and Moves to Shape a Stable Gulf Region," *Wall Street Journal*, February 28, 1991, 1; Ambrose and Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism*, 395.

²³⁶ Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 486.

²³⁷ Lynch, *In the Shadow of the Cold War*, 39.

²³⁸ Schmidt, *The Folly of War*, 319-320.

deposed, this should be achieved by the Iraqi people not by the Americans. The United States went to Iraq for stabilizing the Middle East, not destabilizing it.²³⁹

President Bush and his foreign policy team anticipated a military coup that would topple Saddam Hussein. For this reason, they covertly backed dissident Shiites in the south and the Kurds in the north to revolt against the Saddam regime. However, Saddam quelled these revolts with brutal and bloody methods and even killed thousands of civilian people by using chemical weapons.²⁴⁰ President Bush did nothing to thwart Saddam's massacres because the United States did not want to see Iraq under Iran's influence and Turkey partitioned by Kurdish secessionism. According to the Bush administration, disintegration of Iraq would unfold crises in the Middle East and the Bush administration could not deal with them at all. Especially Chairman of the JCS Powell and the American military were determined to bring American troops home. Thus, they strongly opposed to a prolonged war in Iraq. In sum, order prevailed over freedom once again.²⁴¹

Why did the United States intervene in the crisis to stop Saddam Hussein's aggression against Kuwait? The Bush administration had five political, economic, and strategic objectives while forging an international coalition against Iraq. First, according to President Bush, acquisition of territory by force was violation of international law and it was an international misdemeanor. He argued that use of force could potentially trigger similar actions detrimental to rule of law and international stability in the post-Cold War era. Second, the Bush administration was worried about economic implications of Saddam's aggression for American and global economy. Senior Bush administration officials thought that Saddam's expansionism would create a shock wave in the oil market, which would cause world-wide recession or depression. Third, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait would threaten stability in the Persian Gulf and other Arab states would jump on Iraq's bandwagon. In this scenario, Middle East peace process between Israel and the Arab states could not be started. Fourth, President Bush feared that Saddam Hussein would target American citizens living in the region and use them as human shields. Bush's fears came true when Americans and other foreign nationals were detained by the Iraqis. Finally, the Bush administration was concerned about Iraq's quest for nuclear weapons which would bolster its WMD stock including chemical and biological

²³⁹ Powaski, *Ideals, Interests, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 36; Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, 314.

²⁴⁰ Lynch, *In the Shadow of the Cold War*, 40; Ambrose and Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism*, 395-396.

²⁴¹ Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 613; Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, 567.

weapons. Bush and his team were aware of the Saddam regime's WMD capability as he resorted to chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq War and against the Kurds without hesitation.²⁴²

3.4.2.2. The Hegemon at War: Saving the New World Order in the Persian Gulf

According to Le Prestre, the Bush administration heavily used the term "role" during the Gulf War. Le Prestre argues that President Bush constantly emphasized the twin roles of the United States, namely "leadership" and "stabilizer" during the Gulf War.²⁴³ The Bush administration regarded Saddam Hussein's aggression as a dire threat to the new world order and a challenge to American hegemony in the post-Cold War era. According to President Bush and Secretary of State Baker, reversal of Iraqi aggression was a moral responsibility of the United States and a prerequisite of establishing a secure post-Cold War international order based on American leadership.²⁴⁴

President Bush conceived of the invasion of Kuwait as a litmus test for the United States' leadership role in the newly emerging post-Cold War international order. President Bush detailed the relationship between the Gulf crisis and the new world order in his address to the Congress on 11 September 1990. Bush noted that the Gulf crisis was the first test for the new world order which must be preserved by the leadership of the United States.²⁴⁵ He stated that:

"We stand today at a unique and extraordinary moment. The crisis in the Persian Gulf, as grave as it is, also offers a rare opportunity to move toward an historic period of cooperation. Out of these troubled times ... a new world order can emerge: a new era – freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace. An era in which the nations of the world, East and West, North and South, can prosper and live in harmony. A hundred generations have searched for this elusive path to peace, while a thousand wars raged across the span of human endeavor. Today that new world is struggling to be born, a world quite different from the one we've known. A world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle. A world in which nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice. A world where the strong respect the rights of the weak."²⁴⁶

"[the Iraqi takeover of Kuwait] is the first assault on the new world that we seek, the first test of our mettle. Had we not responded to this first provocation with

²⁴² McCrisken, *American Exceptionalism*, 142.

²⁴³ Le Prestre, "The United States: An Elusive Role Quest after the Cold War," 72.

²⁴⁴ Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, 307.

²⁴⁵ Bente Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria's Waiting Game: Foreign Policy under the Assads* (London: Hurst&Company, 2013), 50; Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, 302.

²⁴⁶ McCrisken, *American Exceptionalism*, 155-156.

clarity of purpose, if we do not continue to demonstrate our determination, it would be a signal to actual and potential despots around the world.”²⁴⁷

President Bush reiterated his ideas on the relationship between the Gulf crisis and the new world order on 8 November 1990 by saying that:

“Iraq’s aggression is not just a challenge to the security of Kuwait and other Gulf nations, but to the better world that we have all hoped to build in the wake of the Cold War. And therefore, we and our allies cannot and will not shirk our responsibilities. The state of Kuwait must be restored, or no nation will be safe, and the promising future we anticipate will indeed be jeopardized.”²⁴⁸

In Bush’s mind, the NRC of hegemon was so evident that he wrote in his diary the following sentences on 28 November 1990: “*We will prevail... Our role as a world leader will once again be reaffirmed, but if we compromise and we fail, we would be reduced to total impotence, and that is not going to happen.*”²⁴⁹

Secretary of State Baker was also thinking similarly. According to him, the newly emerging post-Cold War international system was so precarious that it must be protected by the United States. For this reason, the Gulf crisis was a defining moment which would shape the contours of the new international system in the post-Cold War era. According to Baker, the ground rules of the new world order would be determined by the American response to the Gulf crisis. Baker told the House of Foreign Affairs Committee in early September 1990 that:

“We live in one of those rare transforming moments in history [...] Saddam Hussein's aggression shattered the vision of a better world in the aftermath of the Cold War. [...] Hussein is trying to drag us back to the 1930s. [...] the bright promise of the post-Cold War era could be eclipsed by new dangers, new disorders, and a far less peaceful future. [...] If his [Hussein’s] way of doing business prevails, there will be no hope for peace in the area.”²⁵⁰

“If we are to build a stable and more comprehensive peace, we must respond to the defining moments of this new era, recognizing the emerging dangers lurking before us. We are entering an era in which ethnic and sectarian identities could easily breed new violence and conflict. It is an era in which new hostilities and threats could erupt

²⁴⁷ Stanley R. Sloan, *The US Role in a New World Order: Prospects for George Bush’s Global Vision*, CRS Report for Congress (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service – The Library of the Congress, 1991), 19.

²⁴⁸ George Bush, “The Need for an Offensive Military Option,” in *The Gulf War Reader: History, Documents, Opinions*, ed. Micah L. Sifry and Christopher Cerf (New York: Times Books, 1991), 229.

²⁴⁹ McCrisken, *American Exceptionalism*, 146.

²⁵⁰ McEvoy-Levy, *American Exceptionalism and US Foreign Policy*, 79.

as misguided leaders are tempted to assert regional dominance before the ground rules of a new order can be accepted.”²⁵¹

Baker also noted the expectations of other actors for the enactment of leadership role of the United States during the Gulf crisis by saying that: “*What the President did in the Gulf was simply the right thing to do... George Bush took the difficult choices the world expects of American leadership.*”²⁵²

President Bush believed that the defeat of Saddam Hussein was the manifestation of the new world order, which was characterized by Wilson’s vision of maintaining peace by means of collective security under the enlightened leadership of the United States and instrumentalization of the UN on this way.²⁵³ Multilateralism was the keystone of American leadership to protect international peace and stability in the post-Cold War era. Thus, the Bush administration performed the NRC of hegemon multilaterally by forging an international coalition during the Gulf crisis. According to President Bush, the formation of a huge and wide-range international coalition against Iraqi aggression was the proof of functioning multilateral international system. He expressed his happiness to see the formation of a coalition cutting across the traditional geopolitical visions as follows: “*We are seeing international cooperation that is truly historic...The Soviets, the Chinese, our traditional allies, our friends in the Arab world—the cooperation is unprecedented.*”²⁵⁴

NSA Scowcroft pointed to the significance of multilateralism and international community for American leadership in the post-Cold War era. He stated that “*The United States henceforth would be obligated to lead the world community to an unprecedented degree...*” and it should “*pursue our national interests, wherever possible, within a framework of concert with our friends and the international community.*”²⁵⁵ So, it can be argued that the United States enacted the NRC of hegemon by acting multilaterally rather than unilaterally to guarantee world peace in the Middle East.

²⁵¹ Sloan, *The US Role in a New World Order*, 18.

²⁵² Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, 568.

²⁵³ Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 614.

²⁵⁴ Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, 305.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 301-303.

The Bush administration believed that thwarting Saddam Hussein's aggression was moral responsibility of the United States as a special nation. Thus, the Bush administration performed the NRC of hegemon during the Gulf crisis as it stemmed from the idea of American exceptionalism which was the essence of American political culture. According to Bush, the Gulf War was not an ordinary battle but the battle between good and evil. Moral principles that guided the United States as a special nation forced him to curb Iraqi aggression in the Middle East. By underlining abiding moral principles and American exceptionalism, Bush reiterated the United States' dedication to its principles on 8 August 1990 as follows: "*In the life of a nation, we're called upon to define who we are and what we believe... I've witnessed throughout my life in both war and peace, America has never wavered when her purpose is driven by principle. And on this August day, at home and abroad, I know she will do no less.*"²⁵⁶

Baker also underlined the moral aspect of the Gulf War in his memoirs as follows:

"We must stand for American leadership, not because we seek it but simply because no one else can do the job. We did not stand united for forty years to bring the Cold War to a peaceful end in order to make the world safe for the likes of Saddam Hussein.... it is a choice between what's right and what's wrong.... I think that we have the courage and the fortitude to do what is right."²⁵⁷

In addition to the NRC of hegemon, the Bush administration performed the NRCs of regional stabilizer and balancer to maintain regional stability and balance of power in the Middle East during the Gulf crisis. President Bush already noted the United States' NRC of regional stabilizer by declaring that the United States was determined to play an active role in settling regional conflicts in the post-Cold War era. President Bush believed that it was responsibility of the United States as the sole superpower to settle the Gulf conflict. He underlined the NRC of regional stabilizer during the crisis by stating that "*Our role than: the deter future aggression...help our friends in their own self-defense.*"²⁵⁸

The Bush administration also sought to sustain balance of power in the Middle East by intervening in the Gulf crisis. President Bush thought that Saddam Hussein's aggression must be rolled back at all costs, because his success in Kuwait might threaten Saudi Arabia and upset the regional balance of power in favor of Iraq. By curbing Saddam Hussein's

²⁵⁶ David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 3; McCrisken, *American Exceptionalism*, 143.

²⁵⁷ James A. Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989-1992* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), 340.

²⁵⁸ Le Prestre, "The United States: An Elusive Role Quest after the Cold War," 72.

expansionism, the Bush administration restored regional balance of power and promoted cooperation among the Arab states. Performance of the NRC of balancer was welcomed by the Arab states including Egypt, Saudi Arabia and even Syria as they joined the U.S.-led coalition unhesitatingly to balance Saddam Hussein's hegemonic aspirations.²⁵⁹

The Bush administration also enacted the NRCs of defender of the Pacific Union and Tribune and Agent of American Values during the Gulf crisis. Since the onset of the Gulf crisis, the Bush administration portrayed Saddam Hussein as a dire threat to the free world and justified the war by emphasizing its responsibility to protect the new world order. Besides, the Bush administration legitimized its involvement in the Gulf crisis with reference to the promotion of American values and ideals. According to President Bush, the United States must punish aggressor states like Iraq to promote American values such as freedom and democracy in the world order.

In sum, we can say that the United States performed the NRCs of hegemon, regional stabilizer, balancer, defender of the Pacific Union and Tribune and Agent of American Values during the Gulf crisis. Syria's acceptance of the NRCs of the United States led to the U.S.-Syrian cooperation against Iraq during the Gulf crisis. In the next section, I will elaborate on why Syria decided to change its role in the Middle East and adapted to the U.S.-led new world order via the Gulf crisis. As Syria's changing posture formed the alter ego part of reproachment between Washington and Damascus, it should be examined in detail.

3.4.2.3. Readjusting to the New World Order: Syria's Role in the Gulf Crisis

The Gulf War was one of the unique and strange moments in the history of the Middle East conflicts. It was unique because the war ushered in the birth of the U.S.-dominated new world order. It was strange because Syria as a prominent and staunch member of radical anti-Western camp in the Middle East, surprisingly joined the U.S.-led coalition and fought side by side with the American troops to punish its Arab brother, Iraq. According to Hinnebusch, President Assad's decision to bandwagon with the United States was a radical break with the Arab nationalism, the traditional tool of legitimizing Syrian foreign policy. Syria could have remained neutral similar to Iran during the war, but Assad did not choose this path.²⁶⁰ Syria's realignment with the United States during the Gulf crisis was obviously violation of its Arab

²⁵⁹ Dobson, *US Foreign Policy since 1945*, 115-116.

²⁶⁰ Raymond Hinnebusch, "Syria's Role in the Gulf War Coalition," in *Friends in Need: Burden Sharing in the Persian Gulf War*, ed. Andrew Bennett, Joseph Lepgold, and Danny Unger (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 219-220.

nationalist credentials and anti-imperialist standing in the Middle East. Despite delegitimizing impacts of rapprochement with Washington, President Assad maintained cooperation with the Bush administration throughout the Gulf crisis. Syria's strategic decision to assist the U.S.-led coalition against Iraq's aggression against Kuwait paved the way for rapprochement between the United States and Syria.

Why Syria decided to collaborate with its Cold War foe - the United States - during the Gulf crisis? How Syria became the crucial member of the U.S.-led anti-Iraqi coalition? In this section, I will try to explain dynamics that pushed President Assad to join the U.S.-led anti-Iraqi coalition and the role of Syria in the Gulf crisis. Making sense of Syria's role is quite significant as Syria's compliance with the NRCs of the United States during the Gulf crisis shaped Washington's policy towards Damascus and transformed the nature of bilateral relations. It will be pinpointed that Syria's acknowledgement of the United States' NRCs of hegemon and regional stabilizer led to cooperation between the two countries in the Gulf crisis. Syria turned out to be a partner of the United States owing to its desire to find a place in the U.S.-led unipolar international order and its support for maintaining peace and stability in the Middle East, which were objectives of Washington as well. In so doing, Syria demonstrated that its national interests could be best served by changing its role in the Middle East and by reaching a *modus vivendi* with the United States.

There were several determinants that shaped Syria's decision to bandwagon with the United States during the Gulf crisis. First and foremost, changing international climate compelled Syria to reevaluate its position in world politics and to take part in the U.S.-led coalition. Assad recognized the necessity of change in Syrian foreign policy to adapt his country to the new world order because demise of the Soviet Union and subsequent wave of systemic changes in the Soviet satellites posed a serious threat to security of Syria.²⁶¹

The United States held tremendous sway over the new international equilibrium, which was unfavorable to the former client states of the Soviet Union including Syria. Assad calculated that Syria might be targeted or isolated by the United States in the new international system in the absence of its Cold War patron. In addition, Assad was aware that Syria could not resist Israel's assaults without Soviet military, economic and technological aids. He feared that Israel might attack Syria by capitalizing on the West's animosity toward Syria due to its rejectionism in the Arab-Israeli peace process as well as its link with international terrorism. Thus, the collapse of the Soviet Union dashed Assad's hopes of achieving strategic parity with Israel

²⁶¹ Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria's Waiting Game*, 51; al-Baidhani, *The United States and Syria*, 34

were. In this milieu, Assad was deprived of his regional objectives to survive in the Middle East: reasserting Syria's sovereignty over the Golan Heights and maintaining its hegemony in Lebanon. Assad acknowledged that the United States was the only actor capable of exerting pressure on Israel to force it to reach a settlement with Syria on an equal basis. Owing to these factors, Assad decided to participate in the Gulf War coalition against Iraq since Syria desperately needed the United States in the Arab-Israeli peace process. Assad also thought that by joining the U.S.-led coalition he could have a chance to manipulate the new power configuration in the new international in favor of Syria to protect its national interests.²⁶²

President Assad later admitted the changing context which pushed Syria to readjust to the new world order in his swearing-in ceremony for the fourth term in March 1992 as follows:

“Something has happened in the world and we must not ignore it. Stability reigned in the world for a long period, during which a clear system of equilibrium existed. But significant changes took place in this equilibrium.... The world today is turbulent and it is not clear where it is heading or what its last stop will be. However, even if we do not know how long the tempest in our world will continue or how it will conclude, it is clear that it will quiet down, and the world will stabilize, at least for a time.... The history of mankind teaches us that the duration of such stability differs from period to period, and that means the growth of systems of equilibrium and treaties different from those that were and those that are now. Therefore, it is important at this time to be alert to the dangers that threaten us until tranquility and stability are achieved in our world.”²⁶³

Syrian Vice President Abd al-Halim Khaddam also underlined the necessity of seeking accommodation and cooperation with the United States after the Cold War in 1992 as follows:

“The Cold War is over. All states should cooperate. We should work toward the creation of a new world order, based on justice, equality, self-determination of peoples, and non-interference in any country. Syria has a sincere desire to strengthen ties of friendship and cooperation with the U.S. government and people. We seek all means to open the channels of cooperation. We want to improve the climate, and we hope this can be achieved. In the past few years relations have been improved. Dialogue has been continuous since there are congruent interests, but also differences.”²⁶⁴

In sum, President Assad's stance throughout the Gulf crisis epitomized a major change in Syria's post-Cold War foreign policy orientation. Assad proved his acumen for making substantial changes in Syrian foreign policy by distancing himself from the anti-Western

²⁶² Raymond Hinnebusch, “The Foreign Policy of Syria,” in *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*, ed. Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami (Boulder&London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 158; Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 127-128; Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 155-156.

²⁶³ Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 128.

²⁶⁴ Sarkees and Zunes, “Disenchantment with the ‘New World Order’,” 361.

radical camp and tilting towards the United States to contribute to stability in the Middle East. By pursuing a pragmatic and flexible foreign policy, Assad was able to improve Syria's overall standing not only in the Middle East but also in the international system.²⁶⁵ This was a huge achievement for Assad because Syria was isolated and punished by the Western states, especially by the United States by means of political and economic sanctions in the 1980s owing to its support for international terrorism.²⁶⁶

Second, regional troubles that challenged Syria during the 1980s influenced Assad's decision to join the U.S.-led coalition against Saddam Hussein. The biggest challenge to Assad's regional aspirations was Iraq's hostility in the 1980s. There was a fierce ideological, political, and personal animosity between Assad and Saddam as both leaders saw themselves as the leader of Arab nationalism in the Middle East.²⁶⁷ Syria's relations with Iraq deteriorated owing to President Assad's active support for Iran during the Iran-Iraq War. Having emerged victorious from the war with Iran, Saddam wanted to make Iraq a leading force in regional and inter-Arab affairs by neutralizing Syria. After the war, Saddam and his coterie began to direct their verbal attacks against Assad and vowed to take revenge of Syria's betrayal to the cause of Arab nationalism. The Saddam regime's threats were not merely empty words. Iraq did not miss any single chance to exert pressure on Syria in regional affairs after the Iran-Iraq War. To illustrate, Saddam intervened in Lebanese politics to weaken Syria's hegemony by endorsing leading anti-Syrian political figure General Michel Aoun. Saddam thought that a destabilized Lebanon would undermine Syria's power and status in the Middle East. Iraq's efforts to destabilize Lebanon was not the only issue which was hurting Syria's interests in the region. Assad was concerned about a military assault due to the Iraqi army's military maneuvers across the eastern borders Syria. Thus, in addition to ideological power struggle, Assad felt threatened by Iraq's border maneuvers and Saddam's destabilizing policies in Lebanon at the expense of Syria's vital interests in late 1980s.²⁶⁸ According to Assad, if Iraq was able to undermine Syria's position in Lebanon, its frontline standing would weaken vis-

²⁶⁵ Tahir I. Shad, Steven Boucher and Jeniffer Gray Reddish, "Syrian Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 17, No. 1/2 (1995): 77.

²⁶⁶ Zisser, "Syria and the Gulf Crisis," 566.

²⁶⁷ Richard K. Herrmann, "The Middle East and the New World Order: Rethinking U.S. Political Strategy after the Gulf War," *International Security* 16, No. 2 (1991): 65.

²⁶⁸ Zisser, "Syria and the Gulf Crisis," 564-565; Ann Mosely Lesch, "Contrasting Reactions to the Persian Gulf Crisis: Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and the Palestinians," *Middle East Journal* 45, No. 1 (1991): 31.

à-vis Israel. What's more, Iraq's capture of leadership in the Arab world would push Syria into a war with Israel or compel it to reach a peace settlement unfavorable to its national interests.²⁶⁹

In February 1989, Iraq, Egypt, Jordan and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) established the Arab Cooperation Council (ACC) to develop political and economic cooperation among the member states. Iraq was the real power center in the ACC, which was designed to undermine Syria's bid for leadership in the Arab world.²⁷⁰ Syria was deliberately left out of this organization and owing to Saddam's policy of isolating Damascus in the inter-Arab affairs. In addition to Iraq, Syria's unfriendly relations with Egypt after its realignment with Israel and the United States through the Camp David Accords of 1978 enhanced Syria's isolation in the Middle East in the 1980s. Egypt's decision to forgo its previous anti-Western stance became a fatal blow to Syria's unified Arab block strategy in its struggle with Israel. Another factor that exacerbated Syria's isolation was the tense relations between Syria and the Gulf states because of Assad's support for Iran during the Iran-Iraq war.²⁷¹

Third, Syria was suffering an economic crisis at the domestic front in the 1980s due to its excessive military spending to achieve strategic parity with Israel. The economic crisis threatened the security of the Baath regime's security as the opposition mounted its activities against the regime in the 1980s.²⁷² All of these factors impelled Assad to reconsider Syria's role in the post-Cold War international system dominated by the United States. Assad understood that the only way to cope with Syria's regional isolation, security challenges emanating from Israel and Iraq as well as its economic crisis was to reach compromise with the United States. Hence Assad perceived Iraq's invasion of Kuwait as an opportunity to initiate rapprochement with Washington.

Iraq's attack on Kuwait surprised not only the United States but also the Arab world. When Iraq started its operation on 2 August 1990, the Arab League foreign ministers were in the meeting of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in Cairo. On 3 August 1990, they had an emergency meeting to discuss Iraq's recent attack on Kuwait. After the meeting, they condemned Iraq's aggression, called for immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait and declared their full commitment to preserve territorial integrity and

²⁶⁹ Hinnebusch, "The Foreign Policy of Syria," 157.

²⁷⁰ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 160.

²⁷¹ Zisser, "Syria and the Gulf Crisis," 565.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 565.

sovereignty of all member states. They also announced their opposition to foreign intervention in the Gulf crisis, but also refused Kuwait's demand for a joint Arab force to push back Iraq's aggression. The foreign ministers' meeting was significant as 14 member states (including Egypt and Syria) voted in favor of the declaration against 5 abstained members (Jordan, Mauritania, Sudan, Yemen and the Palestinians). Saudi Arabia and Kuwait requested military support from the United States owing to foreign ministers' failure to form a unified Arab force against Iraq.²⁷³

Syria's adopted a decisive posture on the Gulf crisis. President Assad was the first leader in the Arab world who publicly condemned the invasion and demanded unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait on 2 August 1990.²⁷⁴ Assad saw the Gulf crisis as a dire threat to stability of the Arab regional system, because Iraq breached the basic principles of inter-Arab affairs by invading Kuwait, which would pave the way for foreign intervention. According to him, Saddam's irresponsible policies put the Arab nation at risk as he had done during the useless war with Iran between 1980 and 1988. Assad also blamed Saddam for inciting an artificial crisis in the Middle East and diverting the attention of the Arab peoples from the struggle against Israel.²⁷⁵ That's why, Iraq's invasion of a sovereign Arab state was unacceptable to President Assad. He took immediate steps and called on Arab leaders to hold an emergency Arab summit to form a united Arab front that would find a solution to the crisis before interference of foreign powers. Because Assad was initially worried that Washington might capitalize on the crisis and intervene in the Gulf crisis by enforcing the UN Security Council resolutions.²⁷⁶

On 10-11 August 1990, an emergency summit was held in Cairo to discuss the Gulf crisis. During the summit, differences of opinion between the Arab states surfaced. Pro-Iraqi actors Jordan, Libya, Yemen, and the PLO called for formation of an Arab mediation team without condemning Iraq. On the other hand, Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia prepared several anti-Iraqi resolutions during the summit. The resolutions, condemning the occupation of Kuwait, demanding immediate withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait, and supporting the UNSC

²⁷³ Lesch, "Contrasting Reactions to the Persian Gulf Crisis," 36.

²⁷⁴ Eberhard Kienle, "Syria, the Kuwait War and the New World Order," in *The Gulf War and the New World Order: International Relations of the Middle East*, ed. Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismail (Florida: Florida University Press, 1994): 385.

²⁷⁵ Lesch, "Contrasting Reactions to the Persian Gulf Crisis," 41.

²⁷⁶ Zisser, "Syria and the Gulf Crisis," 567.

resolutions including economic sanctions on Iraq, were approved. More importantly, the Arab League took a decision to dispatch Arab forces to defend Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states against the Iraqi threat. Despite opposition of some member states, resolutions were passed by the margin of 12 to 8 in the Arab League. Following the resolutions, Syria sent its military forces (chiefly commando units) along with Egypt and Morocco to the Gulf to protect Saudi Arabia against Iraq. In August-September 1990, the number of Syrian military forces in Saudi Arabia rose roughly 15,000 soldiers and 300 tanks.²⁷⁷

At the Cairo summit, President Assad accused Saddam Hussein of pursuing irresponsible policies that triggered the outbreak of the recent crisis. Assad castigated Saddam by stating that *“The foreigners who came to the region were not responsible for the event; the event brought them to the region. If we want these foreigners to be out as soon as possible, we have to find a solution to this event... so we might not leave a pretext... [for them to remain] as unwanted guests.”*²⁷⁸ In addition to Assad, Sharaa blamed Saddam for threatening the Arab regional order as follows: *“It is not acceptable to have any ruler [Saddam] given free rein to make decisions that affect the interests of everyone because the security of any Arab country is part of the [Arab] nation’s security.”*²⁷⁹

Assad publicly evaluated the Gulf crisis in his address to the graduates of a paratrooper course of the Baath Party’s youth organization on 12 September 1990. He continued criticisms against Saddam Hussein by claiming that the recent crisis destroyed collaboration among the Arab countries, diverted attention from the Palestinian question, and caused Western intervention in the region owing to his attack on Kuwait. Assad argued that he could not remain aloof when interests of whole Arab nation were at stake. Assad explained that if the current Arab system needed rectification as claimed by Saddam, it must be done by the Arabs, not by the foreign powers. He firmly underlined that the issue was not a conflict between the West and the Arabs but Iraq’s irresponsible violation of international norms by occupying a sovereign state. Assad claimed that Syria’s policy had nothing to do with animosity toward Iraq because Syria and Iraq were the parts of the same nation. Assad also emphasized that Syria could not leave the security of the Gulf to the hands of the West. Thus, Syria took part in the coalition to defend Saudi Arabia and the rights of the Arab people. Finally, he declared that Syria would not fight

²⁷⁷ Kienle, “Syria, the Kuwait War and the New World Order,” 385-386; Zisser, “Syria and the Gulf Crisis,” 567.

²⁷⁸ Lesch, “Contrasting Reactions to the Persian Gulf Crisis,” 42.

²⁷⁹ Hinnebusch, “Syria’s Role in the Gulf War Coalition,” 226.

Iraq and Syrian forces would be a buffer zone to prevent inter-Arab fighting. Assad also underscored that Syria was ready to assume responsibility to protect the Gulf when foreign forces withdrew from the region.²⁸⁰

In addition to sending troops to the Gulf against Iraq, Assad did not refrain from implementing economic sanctions on his embattled neighbor. Throughout the crisis, Iraq's calls for reconciliation and accommodation fell on the deaf ears of Syrian politicians. Iraq sought Syria's help in its struggle against the United States by demanding the opening of the border between the two countries and pumping Iraqi oil through Syria's territories in exchange for providing oil for Syria at a cost lower than the market.²⁸¹ When Turkey and Saudi Arabia closed oil pipelines after the outbreak of the war, Iraq asked Syria to reopen the pipeline closed during the Iraq-Iran war for the sake of Arab brotherhood. Yet, Assad firmly refused Iraq's request for the pipeline to punish Saddam Hussein and prove his dedication to the coalition's goals during the crisis.²⁸²

Although Syria was a small partner in the coalition in comparison to other Arab states, it performed significant roles during the crisis. To illustrate, Syria played a role of bridge between the United States and Iran. Owing to its amicable relations with Tehran, Syria was given the duty of finding a *modus vivendi* between Iran and the U.S.-led coalition because Iran seemed willing to back Iraq in its struggle with the United States at the onset of the crisis. Relations between Iran and Iraq was improving thanks to Saddam Hussein's gestures to Tehran to settle the Shatt al-Arab issue on 15 August 1990. The old foes were about to form an alliance after Iraq's annexation of Kuwait. The Bush administration wanted to capitalize on its new alliance with Syria to change Iran's posture on the crisis. The Bush administration asked President Assad to press for Tehran's compliance with economic embargo imposed on Iraq. Following James Baker's visit to Damascus on 13 September 1990, Assad went to Tehran and had meeting with Iranian leaders on 22-25 September 1990. Assad's main objectives were to prod Iran into joining the anti-Iraqi coalition, at least to make sure that Iran would not violate embargo on Iraq. Assad also aimed to alleviate Iran's concerns about Syria's Gulf crisis policy to some extent. Despite Iran's criticisms about deployment of foreign troops in the Gulf, Syria and Iran were able to reach an understanding during Assad's visit. Iran promised to abide by

²⁸⁰ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 160; Hinnebusch, "Syria's Role in the Gulf War Coalition," 221.

²⁸¹ Zisser, "Syria and the Gulf Crisis," 568; Kienle, "Syria, the Kuwait War and the New World Order," 386.

²⁸² Shad, Boucher and Reddish, "Syrian Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era," 86.

the UN Security Council sanctions on Iraq and kept its promise throughout the Gulf crisis.²⁸³ This was quite significant for the Bush administration, because Syria further weakened Saddam Hussein by neutralizing Iran and cleared the way for the U.S.-led coalition's victory. In addition to neutralizing Iran throughout the crisis, Syria controlled radical Palestinian and Islamic factions in Lebanon that would find a common cause with Saddam Hussein and join the ranks of Iraq's army against the U.S.-led coalition. Syria also contributed to prevention of Iraqi agents who might carry out terrorist attacks against the United States and its allies.²⁸⁴

Syria's commitment to the U.S.-led coalition reached its climax with the start of the Operation Desert Storm in January 1991. Since the beginning of the crisis, Assad had anticipated that international pressures would not have been sufficient to evict Iraq from Kuwait and to thwart Iraq's further offensives. When the U.S.-led military operation loomed on the horizon, Assad as a cautious leader thought that military action could exacerbate Syria's vulnerability vis-à-vis Israel. For this reason, Assad sent a letter to Saddam, in which he promised to stand with Iraq if he complied with the UN Security resolutions and withdraw from Kuwait immediately as a last chance, on 12 January 1991. Yet, Assad's move was not sincere as he sought to placate Syrian public opinion against his Gulf war policy contradicting principles of Arab nationalism. When the U.S.-led coalition launched the Operation Desert Storm on 17 January 1991, Syria took part in the operation with limited ground forces. Assad did not hesitate to abandon Syria's buffer zone position by sending Syrian forces to the operation and standing side by side with the American troops. Although Syrian troops did not enter Iraq, they fought with the Iraq's army while it was retreating from Kuwait and suffered casualties during the ground offensive in February 1991.²⁸⁵

On 23 January 1991, Syria reaffirmed its commitment to the U.S.-led anti-Iraqi coalition after the start of the Operation Desert Storm. Syrian Minister of Information Muhammad Salman underlined that Syria was fully behind the UN Security Council and the Arab League resolutions demanding Iraq's total withdrawal from Kuwait.²⁸⁶ In addition to its military move against the Saddam regime, President Assad did not refrain from implementing economic

²⁸³ Lesch, "Contrasting Reactions to the Persian Gulf Crisis," 43; Zisser, "Syria and the Gulf Crisis," 568. Also see "Bush Will Meet Syria's Assad on Gulf Crisis," *Los Angeles Times*, November 21, 1990, 1.

²⁸⁴ Hinnebusch, "Syria's Role in the Gulf War Coalition," 220.

²⁸⁵ Zisser, "Syria and the Gulf Crisis," 570; Hinnebusch, "Syria's Role in the Gulf War Coalition," 223.

²⁸⁶ "Minister: Damascus 'Stands Fully Behind' UN," *FBIS*, Damascus Domestic Service in Arabic, January 23, 1991.

sanctions on his embattled neighbor. Throughout the crisis, Iraq's calls for reconciliation and accommodation fell on the deaf ears of Syrian politicians. Saddam Hussein asked Damascus to support Iraq against the United States, to open the border between the two countries, and to pump Iraqi oil via Syria in exchange for providing oil at low prices.²⁸⁷ When Turkey and Saudi Arabia closed the oil pipelines after the outbreak of the war, Iraq called on Syria to reopen the pipeline, which had been closed during the Iraq-Iran War, for the sake of Arab brotherhood. Yet, Assad firmly refused Iraq's request for the pipeline to punish Saddam Hussein and to demonstrate his dedication to the U.S.-led coalition's objectives during the crisis.²⁸⁸

When Saddam Hussein began missile attacks on Israel after the start of the Operation Desert Storm, Syria condemned this move as an attempt to drag the Arab world into war with Israel at a wrong time. Assad publicly declared that "*Nobody can drag Syria into an imposed war... as Saddam is trying to do with his theatrical missiles fired at Israel. Not content with dragging Iraq into the furnace, its regime is trying to embroil the whole Arab world.*"²⁸⁹ Vice President Abd al-Halim Khaddam and Defense Minister Mustafa Talas told foreign press that Syria did not want to be a part of war against Israel owing to Iraq's missile attacks. They also underlined that if Israel retaliated against Saddam, Syria would not change its attitude to the Saddam regime and its position the U.S.-led coalition.²⁹⁰

On 10 February 1991, Khaddam criticized Iraq's aggression at a conference participated by the senior officials of the Baath Party and other national organizations. After sketching out the long history of conflict between Syria and Iraq, Khaddam accused the Saddam regime of backing the Muslim Brothers' revolt in early 1980s. Khaddam claimed that Iraq's aggressive policies were undermining the common cause of the Arabs against Israel because Iraq was wasting the resources of the Arab peoples and inviting Western states' interference in the region.²⁹¹

Syria's decision to join the U.S.-led coalition in the Gulf War changed the regional equilibrium and put an end to Syria's isolation with the formation of a new axis composed of Egypt, Syria,

²⁸⁷ Zisser, "Syria and the Gulf Crisis," 568; Kienle, "Syria, the Kuwait War and the New World Order," 386.

²⁸⁸ Shad, Boucher and Reddish, "Syrian Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era," 86.

²⁸⁹ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 160.

²⁹⁰ Zisser, "Syria and the Gulf Crisis," 570-571.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 574.

and Saudi Arabia. They were irked by Saddam Hussein's hegemonic aspirations to establish Iraq-dominated regional system based on resurrection of pan-Arab nationalism. That's why, they defended sovereignty of Kuwait by supporting the U.S.-led coalition against Iraq.²⁹² The new Arab order materialized with the announcement of Damascus Declaration by Egypt and Syria on 6 March 1991, in which Cairo and Damascus declared their commitment to the defense of Saudi Arabia and other member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in exchange for financial aids and economic cooperation.²⁹³

What did Syria gain from bandwagoning with the United States in the Gulf crisis? Syria successfully utilized the Gulf crisis for breaking its isolation, countering Iraq's regional ambitions, and proving itself as a credible actor to the Western states, especially the United States. What's more Syria consolidated its position in Lebanon as a stabilizing force, which was recognized by Washington.²⁹⁴ What's more, Syria received substantial financial funds for its participation in the Gulf War coalition. Syria got \$700 million credits from the European countries and Japan. Saudi Arabia and oil rich Gulf states provided Syria with \$2 billion in cash for its contributions against Iraq's aggression. Western countries removed trade sanctions imposed after Syria's alleged involvement in the Hindawi affair of 1986. Above all, the United States and Britain, which cut relations with Syria after the Hindawi incident, decided to improve relations with Syria thanks to its changing role during the Gulf crisis.²⁹⁵

President Assad was aware of the risk he was taking by allying with the United States in the Gulf crisis. Because Arab nationalism was the main component of Syria's identity as a nation, Assad's political capital and credibility, as well as the Baath regime's ultimate source of legitimacy. Syria's regional status under Assad was stemming from the power of Arab nationalism appealing to a large audience in the Middle East. Assad now seemed to contravene the principles of Arab nationalism by siding with the imperialist powers against a fellow Baathist state.²⁹⁶ Although critics accuse Assad of bandwagoning with the United States at the

²⁹² Raymond Hinnebusch, "Egypt, Syria and the Arab State System in the New World Order," in *The Middle East in the New World Order*, ed. Haifaa A. Jawad, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), 165-167; Zisser, "Syria and the Gulf Crisis," 577.

²⁹³ Kienle, "Syria, the Kuwait War and the New World Order," 386-387.

²⁹⁴ Zisser, "Syria and the Gulf Crisis," 568.

²⁹⁵ Shad, Boucher and Reddish, "Syrian Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era," 86-87; Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 481.

²⁹⁶ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 165-166.

expense of Arab nationalism after the demise of the Soviet Union, Gani says that Assad legitimized his policy by referring to Syria's efforts to keep Middle East regional order intact. In this view, Iraq's aggression against Kuwait would lead to a regional mayhem, which would be used as a pretext by external powers to intervene in the region to restore the order. Thus, President Assad decided to intervene in the Gulf crisis along with the United States to prevent further external interferences in the Middle East. According to Assad, allowing U.S.-led intervention was the lesser evil because formation of a unified Arab bloc was impossible to counter Iraq's aggression against Kuwait. That's why, Gani argues that Assad considered Syria's participation in the U.S.-led coalition as the only way to prevent further Western encroachments and his decision had nothing to do with betraying the Arab nationalist cause.²⁹⁷

Whatever the justification of the Assad regime, Syria took part in the U.S.-led coalition and fought against Iraq during the Gulf War. Syria proved its eagerness to socialize in the U.S.-led new world order by recognizing the United States' NRC of hegemon performed throughout the Gulf crisis. This was a radical break with Syria's rejectionist and anti-American posture in the Middle East in the 1980s. As Zisser rightly argues that Syria abandoned its foreign policy tradition during the Gulf war, adopted a new moderate policy to readjust to the new world order under the hegemony of the United States.²⁹⁸ Especially, the Bush administration's multilateralist approach influenced Syria's acknowledgment of American leadership during the Gulf crisis. President Assad welcomed Washington's efforts to build a consensus by cooperating with Middle Eastern states, the UN and even with its old foes including Cuba rather than imposing its own will and agenda on other states. Hence, Assad indicated that Syria could accept the United States' hegemony when its interests and demands were addressed by Washington.²⁹⁹

In addition to the NRC of hegemon, Syria acknowledged the United States' NRCs of regional stabilizer and balancer during the Gulf crisis. Despite his initial opposition to foreign intervention and efforts to form a regional coalition to counter Iraq's aggression, President Assad decided to take part in the U.S.-led coalition when he understood that it was nearly impossible to find a regional solution to the crisis. So, Assad recognized the fact that it was the United States as the world's sole superpower capable of settling the Gulf conflict and restoring regional balance of power. Assad argued that Iraq's invasion of Kuwait would

²⁹⁷ Gani, *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations*, 159-160.

²⁹⁸ Zisser, "Syria and the Gulf Crisis," 563.

²⁹⁹ Gani, *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations*, 162.

threaten regional order and incite instability and chaos in the Middle East. That's why, he sought to portray Syria as a key stabilizing force in the Middle East by joining the U.S.-led coalition during the Gulf crisis. Syria's acceptance of the NRCs of the United States in settling the Gulf conflict and balancing Saddam Hussein was welcomed by the Bush administration, which rewarded Syria's role in the Gulf crisis by granting it a central position in the Arab-Israeli peace process and by recognizing its hegemony over Lebanon.

3.4.2.4. Embracing Damascus: U.S. Policy towards Syria during the Gulf Crisis

As mentioned above, the U.S.-Syrian relations improved during the Gulf crisis by virtue of Syria's candid contributions to the U.S.-led anti-Iraqi coalition and its strategic objectives in the Middle East. When Syria put aside its previous anti-Western posture and demonstrated its willingness to socialize in the U.S.-led new world order, the Bush administration did not hesitate to embrace Syria against Iraq's aggression. In this section, I will show that rapprochement between the United States and Syria during the Gulf crisis materialized owing to Syria's changing position in the international system and consistency of its stance with the NRCs of the United States.

The Bush administration's efforts to integrate Syria into the anti-Iraq block began after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait as Syria appeared as a staunch opponent of Saddam Hussein's venture at the Cairo summit. The Bush administration thought that an understanding could be reached between the United States and Syria to fight against Saddam Hussein's aggression. For this reason, the Bush administration launched a diplomatic campaign to enroll Syria in the anti-Iraq coalition since the onset of the Gulf crisis. On 8 August 1990, Secretary of State Baker announced that the United States was investigating the possibility of integrating Syria and Iran, two bitter enemies of Iraq, into the international effort to isolate Baghdad. According to Baker, Syria could play a crucial role in the anti-Iraq campaign owing to its strategic location, military might and ideological stance in the Middle East.³⁰⁰ On 12 August 1990, President Bush called President Assad to thank him for Syria's determination to oppose to Saddam Hussein's aggression at the Cairo summit. In the conversation, Assad told Bush that Kuwait was an independent state, and its invasion was an unacceptable act, that Iraq's troops must be withdrawn, and Kuwait's legitimate government must be restored. Assad said that the position of Syria at the Cairo summit was based on principle regardless of its relations with Iraq and Kuwait. In response to Assad, President Bush explained his satisfaction with the Cairo summit

³⁰⁰ Thomas L. Friedman, "U.S. Courts Syria and Iran To Join Anti-Iraq Coalition," *New York Times*, August 9, 1990, 17.

by stating that the resolution was the most important step since the invasion of Kuwait as it was declaration of Arab states' resistance to Saddam Hussein's illegitimate aggression.³⁰¹

After the Bush-Assad phone call, Assistant Secretary of State John H. Kelly arrived in Syria to discuss the Gulf crisis with senior Syrian officials on 13 August 1990.³⁰² In late August, Ambassador Djerejian credited Syria with working closely with Egypt to issue the Arab League resolution condemning Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and calling for the establishment of military force composed of the Arab states to help Saudi Arabia's defense, which gave the U.S.-led coalition in the Gulf an Arab cover. Djerejian appreciated Syria's position at the Cairo summit and congruence between Washington and Damascus as follows: "*Syria's position is very clear... The bottom line of the Syrian position is the commonality of views between the United States and Syria on this issue... The U.S.-Syrian relationship has really evolved. We have built up a dialogue, a relationship in which both sides have interests in common ground.*"³⁰³

Why was Syria perceived as a crucial partner in the anti-Iraq coalition by the United States? As Hinnebusch succinctly puts it, Syria's participation in the Gulf War as a radical Arab nationalist state legitimized the mission of the U.S.-led anti-Iraq coalition in the Arab world.³⁰⁴ According to Pipes, the existence of the Syrian troops in the U.S.-led coalition was a powerful symbolic message to the Arab world. Because Syria's participation in the U.S.-led coalition deprived Saddam Hussein of propaganda campaign selling the war as an imperialist act against the Arabs. This enabled the Bush administration to legitimize the war in the eyes of the world public opinion.³⁰⁵ Hence, the Bush administration appreciated Syria's decision to join the United States in its struggle against Iraq while the new world order was materializing. Syria's firm stance against Saddam Hussein bolstered legitimacy of the war against critical voices labeling it as a colonial endeavor and as a struggle between the West and the Arab world.³⁰⁶

³⁰¹ "Memorandum of Conversation," *George Bush Presidential Library*, August 12, 1990, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1990-08-12--Assad.pdf>.

³⁰² "U.S. Aide Visits Syria After Talks in Cairo," *New York Times*, August 14, 1990, 10.

³⁰³ John Kifner, "Syrian Gains Are Seen In the Shift Toward U.S.," *New York Times*, August 25, 1990, 6.

³⁰⁴ Hinnebusch, "Syria's Role in the Gulf War Coalition," 220.

³⁰⁵ Daniel Pipes, *Damascus Courts the West: Syrian Politics, 1989-1991*, Policy Papers 26 (Washington D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1991), 23-24.

³⁰⁶ Gani, *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations*, 157; Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria's Waiting Game*, 51.

In this context, Secretary of State Baker underlined significance of Syria's representation in the coalition not only for the legitimacy of the anti-Iraq coalition but also for peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict during the Gulf crisis as follows: "*With Syria represented, the credibility of our Arab coalition partners immeasurably strengthened... There was no way to move a comprehensive Mideast peace process forward without the active involvement of Syria.*"³⁰⁷

Syria was aware of its legitimizing mission in the U.S.-led coalition. In August 1990, Khaddam underlined importance of Syria's participation in the coalition by saying that "*Without Syria, the West would have had to fight against all the Arabs. It would have been a war of the West versus Islam. Syria's position also influenced Iran. Imagine if Syria and Iran had sided with Iraq!*"³⁰⁸ Assad also utilized Syria's position as a bargaining card with the Americans. He explicitly reminded visiting American officials that "*I am your cover*"³⁰⁹ and demanded some concessions such as financial support, Syria's removal from the list of states sponsoring terrorism, and pressure on Israel for peace negotiations and its use of force against Syria.³¹⁰

Syria's eagerness to act in accordance with the United States' NRC of hegemon during the Gulf crisis convinced President Bush to improve diplomatic relations with Damascus. He told Baker that "*I think you should consider going to Syria. I don't want to miss the boat again.*" As Baker had a long-term plan to achieve comprehensive peace in the Middle East with Syria's involvement, he immediately embraced Bush's offer to engage with Syria.³¹¹ Meanwhile President Bush called President Assad by phone on 6 September 1990 to discuss Iraq's ongoing invasion and subsequent developments in the Middle East. In the conversation, Bush thanked Assad for sending Syrian troops to Saudi Arabia, which he described as a powerful message to the Saddam regime. Bush told Assad that a new world order would emerge following the Gulf crisis and the United States and Syria could have better relations in the new order. Bush also explained his desire to visit Syria to speak with Assad directly. Assad reciprocated Bush by saying that Syria's position on the invasion of Kuwait remained

³⁰⁷ Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 296.

³⁰⁸ Sarkees and Zunes, "Disenchantment with the 'New World Order'," 363.

³⁰⁹ Knudsen, "United States-Syrian Diplomatic Relations," 73.

³¹⁰ Sarkees and Zunes, "Disenchantment with the 'New World Order'," 364.

³¹¹ Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 296.

unchanged. Assad said that he was sharing Bush's wishes for better relations between Washington and Damascus in the future.³¹²

On 10 September 1990, Baker announced that he would go to Syria to discuss common efforts to isolate Saddam Hussein and to roll back his invasion. At a press conference before his visit to Syria, he hailed prominent role of Syria in the U.S.-led coalition by stating that "*I don't think anything highlights more the isolation of Saddam Hussein in the Arab world than Syria's opposition to Iraq's invasion and occupation of Kuwait. It has contributed forces to the multinational effort-significant forces. I think its presence is significant.*" When a news reporter asked Baker about Syria's involvement in terrorist activities and the United States' indifference to it, he replied that "*it's very important... in a situation such as we have in the Gulf that we cooperate with a major Arab country who happens to share same goals we do.*"³¹³ Baker was keen to dismiss previous terrorism from the agenda of the U.S.-Syrian relations by expressing his appreciation of Syria's changing role in assisting the United States in the Gulf crisis against Iraq.³¹⁴

Secretary of State Baker's Damascus visit on 13 September 1990 was indicating that the Bush administration was determined to improve bilateral relations with Syria during the Gulf crisis. Sharaa interpreted Baker's visit as a positive step towards normalization and development of relations between Washington and Damascus.³¹⁵ President Assad had a meeting Baker on 14 September 1990, in which they talked about several issues including the current situation in Lebanon, the hostage issue, the prospects of a new peace process in the Middle East and more importantly the Gulf crisis. Assad and Baker discussed implementation of the UN resolutions to enforce Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait and restoration of legitimate Kuwaiti government. In the meeting, Baker wanted to learn Assad's position whether he would allow Syrian troops to take part in the ground offensive or not. Assad reiterated principled position of Syria in supporting the coalition's efforts against Iraq. Baker asked Assad's help to induce Iran not to launch a holy war against American troops in the Gulf. In the end, Assad pledged participation of one Syrian armored division and signaled that Syria's military participation would be

³¹² "Memorandum of Telephone Conversation," *George Bush Presidential Library*, September 6, 1990, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1990-09-06--Assad.pdf>.

³¹³ Rabil, "The Ineffective Role of the US," 418.

³¹⁴ Friedman, "Baker Will Go to Syria For Help Against Iraqis."

³¹⁵ "Buildup of U.S. Forces in the Gulf Is a Temporary Move, Assad Says," *New York Times*, September 13, 1990, 12.

expanded. Assad told Baker that “*We will do the right thing, but it is not easy to do because of our own public opinion.*”³¹⁶

Baker’s trip also demonstrated how thorny issues between the two countries could be handled. When Baker raised the issue of terrorism and asked Syria to expel terrorist organizations (especially the PFLP-GC) from Syria, Sharaa demanded sufficient evidence to take action against these organizations.³¹⁷ In the meeting, President Assad indicated that he would not apologize for his support for Palestinian resistance groups. He underlined that their armed opposition was not an act of terrorism but a legitimate struggle for liberation from an unjust occupation. Yet, Assad underlined that he was ready to condemn any terrorist conduct elsewhere outside the occupied Palestinian territories. After the Baker-Assad meeting, Baker and Sharaa held a press conference on 14 September 1990 at which Baker brought up the issue of terrorism and the problematic areas in the U.S.-Syrian relations. Surprisingly, Baker’s comments on terrorism were close to President Assad’s position. Baker said that:

“We consider any violent act outside the occupied territory is a terrorist act. But, at the same time, we cannot consider the legitimate struggle against the occupation forces as a terrorist act. Now we are talking about Kuwait, for instance. The Kuwaiti resistance to the Iraqi occupation is legitimate in every sense of the word. We believe that, so far, Syria was put on the terrorist list without any justification. We believe that the Pan Am 103, the disaster of that flight, did not, until this moment, bring hard evidence to who is responsible and for who is behind that terrorist act. But in our estimation, the accusation addressed to Syria in this respect is meant for political objectives rather than analyzing an objective situation.”³¹⁸

As Baker was content with his visit to Damascus, he continued to hail Syria’s role in the Gulf crisis. He told reporters on 15 September having good relations with Syria was important despite the contentious issues between Washington and Damascus. By emphasizing improvement in the U.S.-Syrian relations, Baker stated that “*We can have close relations only with countries that share our fundamental values... that is not to say that we cannot improve relations where we have a common goal and a common interest, as we have in this case.*”³¹⁹

³¹⁶ Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 297-298; “Baker, Al-Shar Comment on Damascus Talks,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Television in Arabic, September 14, 1990; Alan Cowell, “Iran Joins Syria Opposing Invasion,” *New York Times*, September 26, 1990, 9.

³¹⁷ Thomas L. Friedman, “Assad Assures Baker of Support in Gulf,” *New York Times*, September 15, 1990, 5.

³¹⁸ Rabil, *Syria, the United States, and the War on Terror*, 88-89; Rabil, “The Ineffective Role of the US,” 419.

³¹⁹ Pipes, *Damascus Courts the West*, 64.

Baker's visit aroused hopes for opening of a new chapter in the Arab-Israeli conflict as well. Assad thought that by supporting and cooperating with the United States, Syria could attain its legitimate goals. The United States came and helped the Kuwaitis against Saddam, why would not the United States do the same thing for the Palestinians against Israel? Cooperation with the Bush administration could be an opportunity for breaking the Arab-Israeli deadlock following the Gulf War. Despite its doubts, Syria acknowledged that the United States could play the role of "a useful power broker" for the Arab cause. Sharaa underlined this point at the press conference on 14 September 1990 as follows:

"We hope that these relations will improve to preserve the interest of the two countries and peace and stability in the region... we believe that an Iraqi unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait in implementation of UN security council resolution, would certainly pave the way after that for an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories... If we take into consideration the post cold war [situation] then it is important and imperative that this region should witness genuine peace and stability. The immediate issue now is to get Iraqi forces from Kuwait and the restoration of the legitimate government of Kuwait and then certainly if you want genuine stability in the region, then we should work for a comprehensive and just settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict."³²⁰

Baker's Damascus trip was interpreted as a breakthrough in the U.S.-Syrian diplomatic relations because both sides made significant gestures to each other as to the issues of terrorism and the Middle East peace process. Assad's spokesman Jubran Kuriyah commented on Baker's visit and said that despite differences of opinion between the two countries, they were determined to continue their cooperation in the Gulf crisis and their positions were largely identical on many issues.³²¹

After Baker's visit, President Assad went to Tehran in late September to discourage the Iranians from backing Saddam Hussein and attacking the coalition troops in the Gulf. Because Iran had already declared a holy war against the American forces after their deployment to the Gulf. After Assad's four-day visit, Iran came closer to American position in the Middle East and declared its opposition to the Iraqi aggression.³²² Assad's Iran trip was followed by John H. Kelly's visit to Damascus in early November 1990 to discuss the ongoing Gulf crisis with senior Syrian officials.³²³

³²⁰ Gani, *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations*, 162.

³²¹ "Al-Asad Spokesman Views U.S. Cooperation," *FBIS*, Munich Sueddeutsche Zeitung in German, September 19, 1990.

³²² Alan Cowell, "Syria Chief Risks Anger at Home Over Policies," *New York Times*, October 11, 1990, 13; Cowell, "Iran Joins Syria Opposing Invasion," 9.

³²³ "U.S. Aide Arrives in Syria for Talks on Gulf," *New York Times*, November 8, 1990, 14.

In his testimony before the House of Foreign Affairs Committee on 18 October 1990, Baker made similar comments on the U.S.-Syrian relations and explained his appreciation of Syria's role in the Gulf crisis despite the terrorism issue. Baker said that:

“We are appreciative of the role that Syria is playing in support of the international coalition in the gulf. Its commitments, of troops to that effort is particularly welcome. We would like to think that this could lead to a more constructive Syrian role on other issues... I spent a fair amount of time in my visit with President Assad in Damascus emphasizing the fact we have serious differences with the Syrian Government, pertaining primarily to the issue of terrorism. Better relations between Syria and the United States are really going to depend upon their being willing to take action to curb some of the activities of terrorist groups.”³²⁴

Baker's conciliatory tone toward Syria's link with terrorism was interpreted as the United States' tilt towards Syria's position in resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Bush administration's intention to mend fences with Syria. On the other hand, Syria was not removed from the list of states sponsoring terrorism throughout the Bush administration despite Baker's positive messages.³²⁵

Diplomatic exchanges between Washington and Syria continued apace after Baker's trip. A congressional delegation went to Syria and held a meeting with Foreign Minister Sharaa on 13 November 1990. Ambassador Djerejian was also present in the meeting. Sharaa and American delegation discussed the U.S.-Syrian relations and recent developments in the Middle East.³²⁶

The U.S.-Syrian cooperation during the Gulf crisis came to the forefront when the presidents of two countries decided to meet in Geneva in November 1990. Despite the accusations of the American media against the Bush administration for ignoring Syria's finger in international terrorism and drug-trafficking just before the meeting, President Bush did not step back from meeting with Assad personally.³²⁷ On 21 November 1990, President Bush told reporters in his visit to Saudi Arabia that he appreciated President Assad's posture on the Gulf crisis. In response to a question about his upcoming meeting with Assad, Bush said that:

³²⁴ Thomas L. Friedman, “U.S. Says It Sent No Signals to Expel Lebanese General,” *New York Times*, October 28, 1990, 12.

³²⁵ Rabil, “The Ineffective Role of the US,” 419.

³²⁶ “Al-Shar Receives U.S. Congressional Delegation,” *FBIS*, Damascus Domestic Service in Arabic, November 13, 1990.

³²⁷ Andrew Rosenthal, “Our Ally, The Killer,” *New York Times*, October 2, 1990, 27; Rachel Ehrenfeld, “With Friends Like Syria,” *New York Times*, October 28, 1990, 19; Michael Wines, “Ex-C.I.A. Official Says U.S. Ignores Syrian Terrorism,” *New York Times*, November 21, 1990, 11.

“He is a coalition partner. He’s in the process of moving substantial force here. We’ve worked to help others build a big, strong coalition. And I will be talking to him about our common objectives in the Gulf, and they are common objectives because I understand that the Syrians want to see Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait just as much as we do.”³²⁸

On 23 November 1990, President Bush commented on the role of Syria in the Gulf crisis in Cairo before leaving for Geneva. Bush defined Syria as a “frontline ally against Iraq” by saying that “*Mr. Assad is lined up with us with a commitment to force. They are on the front line, or will be, standing up against aggression... As long as I have one American troop – one man, one woman – out there, I will work closely with all those who stand up this aggression.*”³²⁹

President Bush met with President Assad in Geneva on 23 November 1990. Geneva summit was the first meeting between the leaders of the United States and Syria after 13 years. During the three hours talks, Bush and Assad exchanged views about the restoration of Kuwait’s sovereignty, the ways of the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of UN Resolutions 242 and 338, Syria’s support for rescuing all hostages held in Lebanon, and the issue of international terrorism.³³⁰ In the meeting, President Bush told President Assad that better U.S.-Syrian relations and the resolution of the Palestinian Question would be a part of the new world order. Bush also pledged that after solving the Saddam problem, the United States and Syria would work in a good spirit to handle other problems in the region.³³¹

Although it was speculated that the Bush-Assad meeting would poison the U.S.-Israeli relations, Bush did not refrain from shaking hands with Assad prior to the meeting. Bush said that Syria was a part of the international coalition to evict Saddam from Kuwait and assured Assad that Syria was a full partner of the United States in the anti-Iraqi coalition.³³² Despite

³²⁸ George Bush, “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session with Reporters in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, Following Discussions with Amir Jabir al-Ahmad al-Jabir al-Sabah of Kuwait, November 21, 1990,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George Bush, Book II-July 1 to December 31, 1990* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1991), 1662.

³²⁹ Andrew Rosenthal, “Bush Says Syria Supports the Use of Force in Iraq,” *New York Times*, November 24, 1990, 1; Jim Hoagland, “Assad Breaks Out of His Isolation by West,” *Washington Post*, November 24, 1990, 15.

³³⁰ “Assad and Bush Raise 13-Year Barrier,” *Times*, November 24, 1990, 9.

³³¹ “Memorandum of Conversation,” *George Bush Presidential Library*, November 23, 1990, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1990-11-23--Assad.pdf>.

³³² Rosenthal, “Bush Says Syria Supports the Use of Force in Iraq,” 4.

divergences of opinion on some issues such as international terrorism, the United States and Syria continued to be on the same side against Iraq after the Bush-Assad meeting.³³³

According to Hinnebusch, the Bush-Assad meeting in Geneva became a symbol of Syria's accommodation with the United States after years of international terrorism charges. Washington and Damascus maintained dialog after the Bush-Assad meeting in Geneva. Ambassador Djerejian and Foreign Minister Sharaa met one month after the Geneva meeting to discuss the Gulf crisis. The United States and Syria began to exchange views about the Middle East peace process as well. In this context, Syria hailed determination of the Bush administration to organize an international peace conference, in which the Arab-Israeli conflict would be settled on the basis of the UN Resolutions 242 and 338.³³⁴

Just before the Operation Desert Storm, Baker went to Damascus on 12 January 1991 to discuss with President Assad the participation of Syrian troops in offensive operations against Iraqi troops in Kuwait. In the meeting, Assad and Baker also discussed the prospect of Middle East peace process as well. Assad thought that post-Saddam Middle East would offer Syria a chance to recover the Golan Heights. He demonstrated Syria's willingness to cooperate with the Bush administration by saying that "*We want to work with you, and are prepared to do so.*"³³⁵

After the Gulf War, Secretary of State Baker hailed Syria's posture on the Gulf crisis and differentiated it from other Middle Eastern states in an interview on 28 June 1994. Baker said that:

"Syria supports terrorism, permits drug trafficking, and much more that we don't like, but there are other very significant differences between it and rogue states like Iran, Iraq, and Libya. Syria is important because there won't be peace between Arabs and Israel until Israel and Syria make peace. There are certain similarities with the rogue states, but in terms of rejecting an Arab-Israeli settlement, Iran is at one extreme, followed by Iraq and then Syria. Real differences exist there. Syria was a member of the coalition that defeated Iraq, an even more rejectionist state."³³⁶

³³³ Zisser, "Syria and the Gulf Crisis," 569; Rabil, "The Ineffective Role of the US," 420.

³³⁴ Hinnebusch, "Syria's Role in the Gulf War Coalition," 223.

³³⁵ Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 427.

³³⁶ Daniel Pipes and Patrick Clawson, "Looking Back on the Middle East: James A. Baker III," *Middle East Quarterly* (1994), <https://www.meforum.org/233/looking-back-on-the-middle-east-james-a-baker-iii>.

The United States and Syria were able to reach a compromise during the Gulf crisis since the Assad regime recognized the United States' NRC of hegemon in the post-Cold War era. Quillam argues that Syria had to accept dominant role of the United States in the new world order as unipolarity was the new reality of the international system and Syria did not possess alternative options in the absence of the Soviet Union. If Assad had chosen defying the United States during the Gulf crisis, Syria could have been isolated by Washington. That's why, adapting to the U.S.-led new world order became the main goal of Syrian foreign policy in the post-Cold War era. Assad pursued a strategy like that of Egypt in the late 1970s by collaborating with the United States and accepting its hegemonic role during the Gulf crisis.³³⁷ Kienle also underlines the same point and says that the Gulf crisis proved not only Syria's readiness to accept the U.S.-led new world order but also its willingness to be a part of it. Indeed, President Assad successfully incorporated Syria into the new world order by joining the Gulf War coalition.³³⁸ So, Syria's acknowledgement of the United States' NRC of hegemon and its quest for socialization in the post-Soviet international system by cooperating with the United States contributed to rapprochement between Washington and Damascus during the Gulf crisis.

As mentioned above, in addition to the NRC of hegemon, the Bush administration performed the NRCs of regional stabilizer and balancer during the Gulf crisis. The United States intervened in the Middle East to settle the first post-Cold War regional conflict and maintain regional balance of power. Syria complied with these NRCs of the United States as well. During the crisis, President Assad blamed Saddam for breaching international law and threatening regional security and stability by occupying a sovereign state. Senior Syrian officials also accused Iraq of undermining regional and international stability. To illustrate, Walid al-Muallem said that "*security in the Gulf is essential for the industrialized world, essential for the developing world, and therefore we wanted to do our share in this stability and we are still ready to do so.*"³³⁹

In this context, Syria did not oppose to Washington's involvement in the Gulf crisis to settle the conflict and preserve balance of power in the Middle East by containing Saddam Hussein's expansionism. Syria maintained its posture even after the Operation Desert Storm. Syria along with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the GCC states continued to endorse President Bush's

³³⁷ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 170.

³³⁸ Kienle, "Syria, the Kuwait War and the New World Order," 394.

³³⁹ Sarkees and Zunes, "Disenchantment with the 'New World Order'," 362.

stabilization efforts in the Middle East. Foreign ministers of 8 Arab countries met in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on 10 March 1991 and announced their support for American naval presence in the Gulf and joint military exercises between the United States and the Gulf countries.³⁴⁰

President Assad's quest for détente with the United States in the new world order was the manifestation of Syria's changing role after the Cold War. Syria forewent its strict anti-Western foreign policy posture by playing the game with the Western rules, proved its eagerness to be a part of the international community by joining the U.S.-led coalition and avoided terrorist activities of the 1980s. When Syria demonstrated its determination sincerely to readjusting to the new world order and acknowledged the NRCs of the United States, the Bush administration embraced Damascus as a key to peace and stability in the Middle East, whose interests must be taken into consideration. Thanks to its contributions during the Gulf crisis, the Bush administration understated contentious issues between the two countries such as international terrorism and emphasized the potential for further improvement in the U.S.-Syrian relations.

In the wake of the Gulf War, American counterterrorism experts met with Syrian officials in July 1991 to reach an understanding between the two countries on the terrorism issue. A few months later, the United States Information Agency paid for visit of six Syrian security officials including two senior military officers to the United States to join orientation programs of the Drug Enforcement Administration. Pipes mocked this visit as "inviting foxes into chicken coop protection classes."³⁴¹ What's more, American investment increased in Syria in the post-Gulf War period. The Bush administration also expanded Fulbright programs and cultural exchanges with the Syrian government as a sign of goodwill.³⁴² The Bush administration's attitude to Syria's connection with international terrorism changed considerably. President Bush publicly dismissed Syria's alleged culpability in the Pan Am airliner bombing as "bum rap" in November 1991.³⁴³

To sum up, the Gulf crisis can be described as the first instance of cooperation between the U.S. and Syria in the post-Cold War era. The Bush administration embraced Syria during the

³⁴⁰ Thomas L. Friedman, "8 Arab Countries Back Bush's Plan On Mideast Peace," *New York Times*, March 11, 1991, 1.

³⁴¹ Daniel Pipes, *Syria Beyond the Peace Process*, The Washington Institute Policy Papers 40 (Washington D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1996), 98.

³⁴² Sarkees and Zunes, "Disenchantment with the 'New World Order'," 366.

³⁴³ Pipes, *Syria Beyond the Peace Process*, 99.

Gulf crisis because it acted in accordance with the NRCs of the United States in the new world order. The Bush administration also rewarded Syria's new world order posture with broadening cooperation in other areas: Lebanon and Middle East peace process. It recognized Syria's hegemonic role in Lebanon and its key role to achieve a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. In the next section, I will elaborate on the Madrid peace process, the U.S.' role of peace catalyst in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and its policy towards Syria within the framework of the peace process in terms of role theory.

3.4.3. The Madrid Peace Process: From Hope to Impasse

3.4.3.1. The Strategic Milieu of the Madrid Peace Conference

Post-Gulf War regional and international contexts were conducive to opening of a new chapter in the Arab-Israeli peace process under the auspices of the United States. The Cold War was over, the Soviet Union crumbled, and the Arab rejectionist front of Syria, Iraq, Libya, and the PLO could no longer bank on Moscow's patronage to confront Israel. What's more, Israel was willing to adopt a flexible posture on peace talks, Israeli public was supportive of peace process and the PLO was distancing itself from radical violent anti-Zionist campaign. More importantly, having eliminated Saddam Hussein's threat to the new world order by liberating Kuwait, President Bush was bent on bringing an end to the decades-long Arab-Israeli deadlock. To achieve a comprehensive settlement in the Middle East, the Bush administration was committed itself to playing the NRCs of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst. In so doing, the Bush administration aimed at establishing a new order in the Middle East based on a neo-Wilsonian faith in the post-Cold War era.³⁴⁴ All of these stimulating factors paved the way for the first multilateral Arab-Israeli peace conference in Madrid, Spain in late October and early November 1991 and then subsequent bilateral and multilateral peace negotiations between Israel and the Arab states.³⁴⁵

President Bush's familiarity with the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict and his critical attitude to Israel aroused hopes in the Arab states including Syria for a comprehensive peace agreement. Bush had come across with the Palestinian issue in 1971 when he was appointed as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations by President Nixon. He had denounced Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem and had castigated Israel's unilateral practices to deepen occupation in the Palestinian territories as the major stumbling block in front of a just and

³⁴⁴ Little, *American Orientalism*, 296-297; Itamar Rabinovich, *Waging Peace: Israel and the Arabs, 1948-2003* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004), 32-34.

³⁴⁵ Pressman, "From Madrid and Oslo to Camp David," 247.

viable peace in the Middle East. Besides, Bush had been critical of Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982. He had even called for imposing sanctions on Israel unless Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon immediately ordered the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon. After his election, President Bush initiated a dialogue with the PLO to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. So, from the beginning, the Bush administration was seriously interested in achieving peace ending the occupation of Palestinian territories, restoring political rights of the Palestinians, and ensuring security of Israel. Owing to history of President Bush's critical attitude towards Israel's policies since the 1970s, Israeli politicians and diplomats were hesitant about the Bush administration's Middle East plans.³⁴⁶

As mentioned above, the Gulf War was a turning point in the post-Cold War international system. The Bush administration was grateful to the Arab states for their contribution to ending Saddam Hussein's aggression in Kuwait and his threat to the U.S.-led new world order. President Bush had promised the Arab coalition partners to handle the Arab-Israel conflict after the Gulf War. In Bush's mind, liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi aggression could be an example for the Palestinians living under Israeli occupation for a long time. That's why, Bush believed that it was moral obligation of the United States to address the Palestinian Question. President Bush and Secretary of State Baker regarded the United States' exceptional position as the world's sole hegemon in the new world order as an historic opportunity to resolve the Arab-Israeli conundrum. According to them, any state except for the United States could play this role in the Middle East.³⁴⁷

The Bush administration had already indicated its willingness to assume responsibility for a comprehensive peace in the region encapsulating the Syrian-Israeli track during the Gulf crisis. While visiting Damascus in September 1990 to assure Syria's participation in the U.S.-led coalition, Baker told President Assad that "*We're optimistic that the circumstances that bring Syria, Egypt, and the Gulf states together in a major Arab coalition can augur well for the future of the Arab-Israeli process.*" In response to Baker, Assad uttered his belief in further cooperation between Washington and Damascus and desire for a real peace with Israel.³⁴⁸

With the successful completion of the coalition's mission in the Gulf, the Bush administration launched a diplomatic campaign to convene an international peace conference, at which Israel

³⁴⁶ Little, *American Orientalism*, 297.

³⁴⁷ Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 500.

³⁴⁸ Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 298.

and the Arab states would conduct direct negotiations under the sponsorship of the United States and the Soviet Union, by March 1991.³⁴⁹ However, the Bush administration had to overcome several hurdles to bring the parties of the conflict together. First and foremost, Israel and the Arab states had eternal disagreements over the content and scope of the concept of peace. Second, the Bush administration had to prove itself as a reliable and sincere peace broker to all parties before undertaking the task. Yet, it was easier said than done owing to the United States' historical baggage and different expectations of the parties from Washington. The third and biggest stumbling block in front of peace conference was distrust between the Bush administration and Yitzhak Shamir's right-wing Likud government. Although Shamir was not against the idea of international peace conference in principle, he was hesitant about embarking on a peace process sponsored by the Bush administration. The relationship between the Bush administration and Israeli leaders as well as the Israel lobby was not cordial. They conceived of Bush and Baker as representatives of Texas oil market much closer to Saudi Arabia and the Arab world than Israel. Especially, Baker was not obviously a man of Israel. He demonstrated his distance to Israel by not visiting Tel Aviv during his first two years in the State Department. Baker considered hardline Likud government as an impediment to progress on the Middle East peace process.³⁵⁰

According to the Bush administration, settlement issue was the biggest problem between Washington and Tel Aviv. The Shamir government was adamant about its illegal construction policy aiming at changing demography in the occupied Palestinian territories in favor of Israel. The Shamir government had strongly rejected requests for stopping new constructions for settling thousands of Soviet Jews pouring into Israel after the collapse of the Soviet Union.³⁵¹ For this reason Baker had publicly expressed his discontent with Israel's settlement policy at the annual meeting of AIPAC in Washington on 22 May 1989.³⁵² He had told 1200 AIPAC members his opposition to settlement policy of Israel by stating that:

“For Israel, now is the time to lay aside once and for all the unrealistic vision of a Greater Israel. Israeli interests in the West Bank and Gaza – security and otherwise – can be accommodated in a settlement based on Resolution 242. For swear annexation. Stop settlement activity. Allow schools to reopen, reach out to the Palestinians as neighbors who deserve political rights.”³⁵³

³⁴⁹ Thomas L. Friedman, “U.S. Offers A Plan For Mideast Talks,” *New York Times*, March 28, 1991, 1.

³⁵⁰ Tyler, *A World of Trouble*, 387.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 389.

³⁵² Quandt, *Peace Process*, 307.

³⁵³ Little, *American Orientalism*, 298; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 296.

President Bush had also publicly expressed his objection to new settlements for the Soviet Jews in the occupied Palestinian territories at a press conference in March 1990 as follows:

“My position is that the foreign policy of the United States says we do not believe there should be new settlements in the West Bank or in East Jerusalem. And I will conduct that policy as if it’s firm, which it is, and I will be shaped in whatever decisions we make to see whether people can comply with that policy. And that’s our strongly held view, and we think it’s constructive to peace – the peace process, to – if Israel will follow that view... this is the position of the United States and I’m not going to change that position.”³⁵⁴

In this context, the Bush administration was aware that Shamir’s uncompromising posture on the settlement issue could derail confidence building steps and undermine its peace initiative after the Gulf War. While the settlement issue was continuing to be the source of tension between the Bush administration and the Shamir government, Baker visited Israel to prod Shamir into joining international peace conference in April 1991. However, Baker returned from Israel empty-handed as the Shamir government put forward certain requirements for joining peace conference: rejection of land-for-peace formula and prevention of the PLO’s participation.³⁵⁵ Baker, who was bitterly disappointed at the result of visit, told the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Foreign Operations on 23 May 1991 that Israel’s settlement activities were the biggest obstacle to Middle East peace process.³⁵⁶

During the second half of 1991, Bush and Baker continued their criticisms levelled against the Shamir government due to its uncompromising and tough stance on the settlement issue and blamed it for stalling Middle peace process. Baker even declared that the Shamir government’s refusal to stop new settlements in the occupied territories would force Washington “*to make some very tough and politically unpopular choices*” against Israel.³⁵⁷ Baker’s remarks escalated the tension between the Bush administration and the Israel lobby as well as pro-Israeli congressmen. On the other hand, having appeared victorious in the Gulf War, President Bush, who was enjoying overwhelming domestic support, countered the AIPAC’s pressures successfully. In September 1991, he was able to convince the Congress to withhold \$10 billion in loan guarantees to Israel for 120 days, which the Shamir government was planning to spend

³⁵⁴ “Excerpts of President Bush’s Remarks at News Conference at the End of Talks,” *New York Times*, March 4, 1990, 22.

³⁵⁵ Thomas L. Friedman, “Baker Says Israel Fails to Provide Needed Responses,” *New York Times*, April 27, 1991, 6.

³⁵⁶ Thomas L. Friedman, “Baker Cites Israel for Settlements,” *New York Times*, May 23, 1991, 5.

³⁵⁷ Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, “The United States and Israel since 1948: A “Special Relationship?”” *Diplomatic History* 22, No. 2 (1998): 257.

for settling newly arrived Soviet Jews. This was a serious blow to the U.S.-Israeli relations. According to Baker, the United States could not turn blind eye to Israel's construction policy as it was a deliberate sabotage to the peace process.³⁵⁸

After the Bush administration's decision to block loans and its harsh remarks against Israel, the U.S.-Israeli relations further exacerbated. When Israel's Ambassador to the U.S. Zalman Shoval accused the Bush administration of giving Tel Aviv the runaround, Baker was infuriated and considered expelling him from Washington seriously.³⁵⁹ In this milieu, the Bush administration's tough stance vis-à-vis Israel was welcomed by the Arab states and the perception of the Arab states began to change thanks to the Bush administration's less ideological pro-Israeli attitude in comparison to previous administrations and the State Department's impartiality between Israel and the Arab states.³⁶⁰

Owing to mutual mistrust between the United States and Israel, the Shamir government regarded an international peace conference under the aegis of the Bush administration as a useless effort. It was concerned that Israel would be forced to give up occupied territories for intangible concession of peace and could be outvoted by the Arab states in such a conference. Nonetheless, the Shamir government eventually concurred with the idea of participating in a peace conference because it did not want to further antagonize the United States. It concluded that Israel's interest could be best served by joining the peace process rather than remaining outside of it.³⁶¹ In addition, the Shamir government was left with owing to the Bush administration's tough stance on the settlement issue and the blockade of the loans as well as President Assad's decision to attend peace conference.³⁶²

Not only Israel but also the PLO had serious problems with the United States on the way to the Madrid Peace Conference. Despite its engagement with the United States since President Bush's assumption of power, the PLO's eagerness to use violent methods against Israel was the biggest obstacle to its participation in an international peace conference. To illustrate, violence flared up once again between Israel and the Palestinians in the spring of 1990 after

³⁵⁸ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 310; Gani, *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations*, 168.

³⁵⁹ Tyler, *A World of Trouble*, 388.

³⁶⁰ Gani, *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations*, 165.

³⁶¹ Kaufman, *The Arab Middle East and the United States*, 171.

³⁶² Elie Podeh, *Chances for Peace: Missed Opportunities in the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Texas, Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2015), 210.

the killing of seven Palestinians in Rishon le Zion by a deranged Israeli soldier. Abul Abbas' Palestinian Liberation Front (PLF) militants carried out an infiltration operation against Israel, which was intercepted by Israeli security forces, in late May 1990. PLO leader Yasser Arafat refused to condemn the operation despite the rivalry between the PLF and the PLO. Frustrated with the PLO's reluctance to denounce terrorism, President Bush decided to suspend the U.S.-PLO dialogue on 20 June 1990. Arafat made a huge mistake during the Gulf crisis by supporting Saddam Hussein against the U.S.-led coalition, which totally undermined his credibility in Washington. Arafat and the PLO leadership found themselves isolated after the defeat of Iraq in 1991. In this milieu, the Madrid Peace Conference offered the PLO the chance to break its isolation in the post-Gulf War regional environment. Owing to Israel's strict opposition to direct negotiations with the PLO, the Bush administration endorsed the formation of a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation to participate in the peace conference. Having no alternative, the PLO concurred with the idea of joint delegation to be able to take part in the Madrid Peace Conference.³⁶³

In the end, the Bush administration was able to get commitments from Israel and the Arab states including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Jordan, Kuwait, and Lebanon for convening an international peace conference in Madrid, Spain. Especially Secretary of State Baker's post-Gulf War shuttle diplomacy narrowed the gap between Israel and the Arab states and paved the way for the Madrid Peace Conference, whose structure was based on multi-track negotiations modelled on the Committee on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). In the conference, along with parallel and bilateral negotiations between Israel and the Arab states, multilateral negotiations participated by the parties of the conflict as well as the developed countries were organized. The Madrid Peace Conference was ultimately convened under the auspices of the United States and the Soviet Union between 30 October and 4 November 1991.³⁶⁴

3.4.3.2. No More Rejectionism: Syria's Changing Role in the Madrid Peace Process

As mentioned above, Syria had adopted the role of tactical rejectionism after Egypt's decision to clinch the Camp David Accords in 1978. After this agreement, Syria had striven to prevent signing of new peace agreements between Israel and the Arab states by supporting militant Palestinian groups and opening a new front against Israel in Lebanon. In this context, President Assad had sought to achieve strategic parity with Israel by receiving Soviet military and

³⁶³ Little, *American Orientalism*, 298; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 300-301.

³⁶⁴ Hudson, "To Play the Hegemon," 336.

economic assistance in the 1980s. Assad had seen military confrontation as the only way to recover the Golan Heights rather than negotiating peace with Israel. In this period, Assad also had made clear that Syria could not join peace negotiations with Israel unless it totally withdrew from all Arab territories occupied during the 1967 War. In sum, Syria had adopted a tough and uncompromising attitude to any peace settlement with Israel in the 1980s.

In early 1990s, President Assad took a bold decision and abandoned Syria's role of tactical rejectionism in the Arab-Israeli conflict by attending the Madrid Peace Conference. Why did Syria change its role and took part in the Madrid Peace Conference and subsequent bilateral negotiations with Israel? There were several reasons for Syria's participation in the Madrid peace process. President Assad was aware that the global balance of power at the onset of the 1990s was much more unfavorable than in the 1980s. The United States showed up as the sole hegemonic power in the new international system and in the Middle East sub-system in the post-Cold War era. Besides, Syria could not maintain its policy of strategic parity with Israel after the demise of the Soviet Union. Taking the changing contours of global and regional politics into consideration, Assad thought that Syria had to readjust to the new world order to protect Syria's national interests, primarily retaking the Golan Heights. According to him, it was not an option but a necessity because Syria could evade isolation by socializing in the U.S.-dominated new world order. For Assad, if Syria played with the rules of the game, it could find a place and its interests could be addressed in the new world order. Assad expressed his willingness to be a part of the new world order by stating that: "*If the New World Order is actually to be global, then it must adhere to legitimacy and we, along with others, must be part of it.*"³⁶⁵

The Bush administration, which was willing to perform the NRC of regional stabilizer to resolve the Arab-Israeli conundrum, had already recognized the principal role of Syria in the Middle East peace process. It had promised Syria to convene a peace conference in exchange for its legitimizing mission in the U.S.-led anti-Iraqi coalition.³⁶⁶ That's why, President Assad decided to join the U.S.-led anti-Iraqi coalition to boost Syria's regional stature and gain greater leverage over the regional issues including the Arab-Israeli conflict. Indeed, Syria was able to break its regional and international isolation by siding with Washington during the Gulf crisis and turned out to be a key player in the subsequent Madrid peace process. After the Gulf

³⁶⁵ Nejad, "The Ineffective Role of the United States," 49-50; Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 175.

³⁶⁶ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 160.

War, Assad welcomed the Bush administration's posture on the Arab-Israeli conflict and its broker role to recover the Golan Heights. Assad also hoped that the Bush administration might remove Syria from the list of states sponsoring international terrorism, which would end sanctions and make Syria eligible for American economic aids.³⁶⁷ So, it can be argued that the Gulf crisis not only diminished mutual distrust between Syria and the United States but also cleared the way for Syria's participation in the Madrid peace process to negotiate separate peace with Israel.³⁶⁸

Immediately after the Gulf War, Syria together with Egypt called for an international peace conference on the Arab-Israeli conflict in late March 1991.³⁶⁹ Syria welcomed the diplomatic overtures of the Bush administration and senior officials of the two countries continuously met to overcome their differences on the way to the Madrid Peace Conference. When pre-conference negotiations reached an impasse owing to Syria's requirements, President Bush sent a letter of assurances to prod Assad into joining the peace conference on 1 June 1991. In the letter, Bush pledged that negotiations would be carried out on the basis of the UN Resolution 242 and 338 and the land-for-peace formula. Assad accepted Bush's invitation to peace conference on 14 July 1991 and informed Secretary of State Baker of his commitment on 18 July 1991. Assad told Baker that he accepted Bush's proposals for the peace conference, which would lead to bilateral negotiations between Syria and Israel, under sponsorship of the United States and the Soviet Union.³⁷⁰ President Assad thought that it was a victory for Syria to take part the international peace conference based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338 as it was one of the prerequisites of Syria for a long time.³⁷¹

After agreeing to attend the peace conference proposed in President Bush's letter, President Assad gave an interview to the Washington Post on 28 July 1991. In the interview, Assad explained that, despite its closeness to Israel, the Bush administration was seriously pushing the peace process forward and Syria never felt such seriousness from previous administrations before. Assad said that "*if there is seriousness on all sides, the outcome will be a real peace.*"

³⁶⁷ Anthony Lewis, "The Damascus Road," *New York Times*, September 14, 1990, 33; Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 160; Kaufman, *The Arab Middle East and the United States*, 171.

³⁶⁸ Gani, *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations*, 163-164.

³⁶⁹ Rabil, "The Ineffective Role of the US," 423.

³⁷⁰ David Hoffman and Caryle Murphy, "Assad Tells Baker He Accepts U.S. Plan on Mideast Talks," *Washington Post*, July 19, 1991, 15.

³⁷¹ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 186.

He also hailed the Bush administration's effort to broker peace deal by pointing to President Bush's letter as follows:

“The letter revolves around the points mentioned in the letter President Bush wrote to me... President Bush's letter contained a number of points and ideas which, in our view, constitute a minimum acceptance to get the peace process started... The U.S. was concentrating on the importance of peace for the region and the world and certainly we shared that view.”³⁷²

Nevertheless, President Assad made some concession before accepting Syria's participation in the Madrid Peace Conference. In addition to the land-for-peace formula, he wanted such a conference should be under UN supervision and the Arabs should form a joint delegation in the negotiations. Even though the proposed negotiation pattern of the Madrid Peace Conference was not fitting Syria's traditional procedural prerequisites (UN supervision and united Arab delegation), Assad did not eschew direct bilateral talks with Israel. Because he was aware that he was not in a position of strength to achieve strategic parity with Israel and to dismiss diplomatic initiatives in the absence of Soviet aids to choose military option against Israel. Even though Israel persistently represented Syria as a threat to peace in the region, President Assad was shrewd and experienced enough to deflect international pressures by joining the Madrid peace process.³⁷³

In sum, President Assad gave up Syria's role of tactical rejectionism at the onset of the post-Cold War era and demonstrated his willingness to sign a peace agreement with Israel. By participating in the U.S.-sponsored Madrid Peace Conference and subsequent bilateral negotiations with Israel, Assad acknowledged the United States' NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst in the Middle East in the post-Gulf War period. In this regard, Assad sought to influence President Bush's new world order in the absence of the Soviet Union. By complying with the NRCs of the United States, Assad secured Syria's place and avoided isolation successfully in the U.S.-led post-Cold War international system.³⁷⁴ Syria's changing role in the Arab-Israeli conflict was significant because it composed the alter ego part of the United States' NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst in the Middle East in the post-War era. In addition to the Bush administration's self-perception of this role, Syria's acceptance of

³⁷² Lally Wemouth, “Assad Speaks,” *Washington Post*, July 28, 1991, 1.

³⁷³ Hinnebusch, “Egypt, Syria and the Arab State System in the New World Order,” 176.

³⁷⁴ Raymond Hinnebusch, “Assad's Syria and the New World Order: The Struggle for Regime Survival,” *Middle East Policy* 2, No. 1 (1993): 14; Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 167.

its broker role in the Syrian-Israeli track stimulated the United States to perform this role effectively after the Gulf War.

3.4.3.3. Peace Catalyst: The Role of the United States in the Madrid Peace Process

The Madrid Peace Conference, cosponsored by the United States and the Soviet Union, was convened inside the Crystal Pavilion in Madrid, Spain from 30 October 1991 to 4 November 1991. It was a historic breakthrough since Israel and the neighboring Arab countries (Syria, Lebanon and Jordan with a Palestinian delegation), which yet to recognize Israel and its right to exist, sat down across a table in a hall to discuss peace face-to-face for the first time in the history of the conflict. The primary goal of the conference was to find a genuine and enduring solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict in the post-Cold War era. Even though there was no breakthrough in the Madrid Peace Conference, it facilitated rounds of bilateral and multilateral negotiations between Israel and the Arab states from October 1991 to the summer of 1993. Bilateral negotiations, usually held in Washington D.C., was comprised of Israeli-Jordanian, Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese tracks.³⁷⁵

The United States performed the NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst during the Madrid peace process as it assumed an active role in settling the Arab-Israeli conflict after the Gulf War. On 6 March 1991, President Bush announced that the United States would sponsor the Middle East peace process in a joint session of the Congress by stating that:

“Our commitment to peace in the Middle East does not end with the liberation of Kuwait... By now it should be plain to all parties that peacemaking in the Middle East requires compromise... We must do all that we can do to close the gap between Israel and the Arab states and between Israelis and Palestinians... A comprehensive peace must be grounded in United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of territory for peace. This principle must be elaborated to provide for Israel’s security and recognition, and at the same time for legitimate Palestinian rights. Anything else would fail the twin tests of fairness and security. The time has come to put an end to Arab-Israeli conflict.”³⁷⁶

While kicking off one of his Middle East trips to bring parties of the conflict to the peace conference, Secretary of State Baker also explained the United States’ role of peace catalyst on 7 April 1991 as follows: “*Neither the United States nor anybody else can impose peace in the Middle East. And you are not going to get peace in the Middle East unless the parties*

³⁷⁵ Charles Smith, “The Arab-Israeli Conflict,” in *International Relations of the Middle East*, ed. Louise Fawcett, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 260; Pressman, “From Madrid and Oslo to Camp David,” 247.

³⁷⁶ “Transcript of President Bush’s Address on the End of the Gulf War,” *New York Times*, March 7, 1991, 8.

*themselves really want it, and at the most the United States can only serve as a catalyst.*³⁷⁷ Just before the Madrid Peace Conference, President Bush reiterated the United States' peace catalyst role on 25 October 1991 by saying that: *"We're trying to be a catalyst to bring people together and let them talk about the differences. We're not trying to impose a settlement... The United States' positions are clear... We're having a conference about bringing people together to settle age-old disputes."*³⁷⁸

Although the Soviet Union was the co-organizer of the Madrid Peace Conference, the driving force behind the organization was the United States. The role of the Soviet Union was just to assist the United States. Hence, Gorbachev disappeared from the scene after delivering some opening remarks and left the initiative to President Bush. In the opening session of the conference, Bush outlined his vision of Middle East peace as follows:³⁷⁹

"Our objective... is not simply to end the state of war in the Middle East and replace it with a state of non-belligerency... Rather, we seek peace, real peace. And by real peace I mean treaties. Security. Diplomatic relations. Economic relations. Trade. Investment. Cultural exchange. Even tourism... Now is the ideal moment for the Arab world to demonstrate... Peace cannot be imposed from the outside by the United States or anyone else. While we will continue to do everything possible to help the parties overcome obstacles, peace must come from within."³⁸⁰

Although President Bush admitted that reaching a comprehensive peace might take years, he assured the interlocutors that the United States was ready to play an active and constructive role for the success of the peace process. In the opening session of the Madrid Peace Conference, he reiterated the regional stabilizer role of the United States by stating that:

"I want to say something about the role of the United States of America. We played an active role in making this conference possible; both the secretary of state, Jim Baker, and I will play an active role in helping the process succeed... And we will call upon our friends and allies in Europe and in Asia to join with us in providing resources so that peace and prosperity go hand in hand."³⁸¹

³⁷⁷ Thomas L. Friedman, "Baker Starts Mideast Trip as Peace Hope Dims," *New York Times*, April 8, 1991, 7.

³⁷⁸ Thomas L. Friedman, "Bush Sees U.S. as a Catalyst in Mideast Talks, Not as a Judge," *New York Times*, October 26, 1991, 4.

³⁷⁹ Kaufman, *The Arab Middle East and the United States*, 172.

³⁸⁰ "Excerpts From Speeches in Madrid: 'Long and Painful History' of Struggle," *New York Times*, October 31, 1991, 17; Eyal Zisser, "Assad Inches toward Peace with Israel," *Middle East Quarterly* 1, No. 3 (1994): 42.

³⁸¹ "The Madrid Peace Conference," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 21, No. 2 (1992): 127.

On the opening day of the conference, President Bush met with Syrian Foreign Minister Sharaa and privately assured him that the United States was committed to playing the role of peace catalyst as follows: “*We want to be an honest broker. You can assure Assad of this; there is no change. We want to be a catalyst for peace. Our policy is underlined by principal.*”³⁸²

On 1 November 1991, Baker also underlined the United States’ determination to perform the NRC of regional stabilizer as follows:

“The United States is willing to be a catalytic force, an energizing force, and a driving force in the negotiation process. Our involvement in this process will be rooted solidly in the core principles enunciated by President Bush last March... The U.S. is and will be an honest broker. We have our own positions and views on the peace process, and we will not forego our right to state these. But, as an honest broker with experience - successful experience- in Middle East negotiations, we also know that our critical contribution will often be to exert quiet, behind-the-scenes influence and persuasion.”³⁸³

3.4.3.4. The U.S.-Israeli-Syrian Triangle in the Madrid Peace Process

Despite the historic nature of the Madrid Peace Conference, Israel and the Arab states had major disagreements as to what they mean by peace and how it could be achieved. In his opening address, Sharaa announced Syria’s commitment to safeguarding legitimate political and national rights of the Palestinians, principally their right to self-determination. He underlined significance of implementing the UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338 for achieving a genuine peace in the Middle East as follows:

“The implementation of these resolutions should not be the subject of new bargaining during the bilateral organisation. Rather they should be implemented in all provisions and on all fronts. Resolution 242 emphasized in its preamble the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war. This means that every inch of Arab land occupied by the Israelis by war and force, the Golan, the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, must be returned in their entirety to their legitimate owners.”³⁸⁴

What’s more, Sharaa adopted a conciliatory tone while explaining Syria’s peace vision in his opening address. He did not call for a Palestinian state and accepted a transitory period from three to five years after which the final status of the occupied territories would be determined. On the other hand, Israeli delegation led by Yitzhak Shamir was not keen to discuss territorial issues at the conference. Having seen Shamir’s reluctance to give up occupied territories in

³⁸² “Memorandum of Conversation,” *George Bush Presidential Library*, October 30, 1991, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1991-10-30--Shara.pdf>.

³⁸³ “The Madrid Peace Conference,” 141.

³⁸⁴ “3 Speeches: The Area Is ‘a Dangerous Battleground,’” *New York Times*, November 1, 1991, 10.

exchange for comprehensive peace agreement, the Bush administration emphasized the significance of the land-for-peace formula for the success of the conference. However, Shamir countered this argument by reminding promises given by President Ford about Israel's control over the Golan Heights. Despite Shamir's stubbornness, Sharaa insisted on a comprehensive peace based on UNSC resolutions 242 and 338 and demanded return of all occupied territories including the Golan Heights, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the south of Lebanon.³⁸⁵

During the conference, delegates had fierce quarrels and accused each other of tyranny and terrorism to appease their domestic constituencies.³⁸⁶ To illustrate, Shamir wanted to scorn the Syrian delegate in front of other delegates and the international press by saying that "*Syria is the home of a host of terrorist organizations that spread violence and death to all kinds of innocent targets... Syria merits the dubious honor of being one of the most oppressive tyrannical regimes in the world.*"³⁸⁷ Sharaa reciprocated by citing Shamir's terrorist activities in his youth. He showed a poster of Shamir when he was at 32 as a militant of terrorist underground Stern Gang organization carrying out terrorist campaign against the British mandate authority in the Palestinian lands. Sharaa said that:

"I shall just show you if I may a photograph, an old photograph of Mr. Shamir... It was distributed because he was wanted. He himself recognized that he was a terrorist, that he practices terrorism and that he helped in the assassination of Count Bernadotte, the UN mediator in Palestine, as I recall, in 1948. He killed peace negotiators, and then talks of Syria, Lebanon and terrorism."³⁸⁸

The most challenging issue was the lack of confidence between the two sides during the conference. Syria did its part by offering the end of conflict and striking a deal with Israel within the framework of a comprehensive peace agreement among the parties of the conflict. According to Syria, a genuine and comprehensive peace could be possible if Israel withdrew totally from all occupied territories it captured since 4 June 1967 and recognized the political rights of the Palestinians.³⁸⁹ Yet, the Syrian delegation was disappointed with Shamir's indifference to UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338 that provided a genuine framework for

³⁸⁵ Kienle, "Syria, the Kuwait War and the New World Order," 390; Gani, *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations*, 166.

³⁸⁶ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 187.

³⁸⁷ "The Madrid Peace Conference," 144; Erik L. Knudsen, "The Syrian-Israeli Political Impasse: A Study in Conflict, War and Mistrust," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 12, No. 1 (2001): 227.

³⁸⁸ Tyler, *A World of Trouble*, 392; Knudsen, "The Syrian-Israeli Political Impasse," 227.

³⁸⁹ Gani, *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations*, 167.

settlement: land-for-peace formula. The Shamir government was also unhappy with the Madrid experience because it witnessed the Arab states' reluctance to address legitimate security concerns of Israel. Procedural issues also stalled the conference such as disagreement over the next venue of the talks after the Madrid Peace Conference. In sum, neither Israel nor the Arab states developed or put new proposals on the table to resolve the conflict during the conference. This brought about stalemate in the negotiations as all sides expected concessions from each other.³⁹⁰

Despite its failure, the Madrid Peace Conference was a milestone in the Middle peace process since it paved the way for a regular diplomatic process from which all sides gained insights about position of their interlocutors. Secretary of Baker was still hopeful about comprehensive peace agreement and expressed his satisfaction with the Madrid Peace Conference. Baker said that it was a good beginning owing to the start of direct bilateral negotiations between Israel and the joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, Israel and Lebanon, as well as Israel and Syria.³⁹¹ Nevertheless, Syrian-Israeli track had some setbacks at the beginning. Syria blamed Israel of dragging its feet about peace negotiations by trying to change the venue of the bilateral negotiations. On 28 November 1991, Syrian Foreign Ministry announced that the Syrian delegation led by Muwaffaq al-Allaf would go to Washington on 3 December 1991 to participate in the bilateral negotiations whether the Israeli delegation came or not. Foreign Ministry also noted that peace talks must continue in Washington, and it was the responsibility of the Bush administration to fulfill its mediator role to bring Israel to the table.³⁹² On the other hand, there was no progress on five rounds of the bilateral negotiations carried out in Washington from December 1991 to April 1992 owing to different interpretations of Resolutions 242 and 338 and how to treat the Palestinian delegation within the Jordanian delegation.³⁹³

Post-Madrid Conference multilateral talks between Israel and the Arab states further complicated the scene in the U.S.-Israeli-Syrian triangle. After the conference, multilateral

³⁹⁰ Kaufman, *The Arab Middle East and the United States*, 173; Youssef M. Ibrahim, "Syria's Tough Choice," *New York Times*, November 3, 1991, 22; Youssef M. Ibrahim, "Baker Is Hopeful," *New York Times*, November 4, 1991, 1.

³⁹¹ "The Madrid Peace Conference," 147.

³⁹² "Government Agrees to 4 Dec Washington Peace Talks," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, November 28, 1991.

³⁹³ "The Middle East," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/1992/1992-3-6.htm>.

talks began with the backing of the Bush administration in Moscow in January 1992.³⁹⁴ The foci of the talks were how to achieve regional economic cooperation, water sharing and security between Israel and the Arab states including Egypt and the GCC. Yet, Syria declined to attend the multilateral talks before Israel's announcement of its readiness to hand over the Golan Heights to Syria. It was not willing to join these talks because it meant normalization of relations before reaching a genuine peace agreement with Israel. In that regard, Syria considered multilateral talks fruitless unless Israel signed a peace agreement on the basis of UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338.³⁹⁵

Despite Syria's warnings, Jordan and the Palestinians joined the multilateral talks in Moscow in January 1992, which led to President Assad's harsh criticisms against the United States for boosting Israel's regional position. He accused the Bush administration of not forcing Tel Aviv to comply with the UN resolutions and of not exerting pressure on Tel Aviv to sign a peace agreement with the Arab states.³⁹⁶ In February 1992, the Bush administration lambasted Syria for ordering North Korean-made Scud-C missiles as well as for seeking the M-9 medium-range missiles from China. American officials claimed that Syria's quest for acquiring such advanced weapons were threatening peace and stability in the Middle East.³⁹⁷

Meanwhile, the defeat of Shamir government by Yitzhak Rabin's Labor Party in the June 1992 elections accelerated the peace momentum in the Middle East. Rabin's moderate attitude and his eagerness to clinch a deal with the Arab parties aroused hopes for revival of the Syrian-Israeli peace track. After assuming power, Rabin immediately announced the cancellation of more than 6,000 housing units in the West Bank as a confidence building step and expressed his willingness to negotiate with Syria to find a way to settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.³⁹⁸ With Baker's support and promise to invest in the Israeli-Syrian peace, Rabin adopted Syria-first policy to explore the possibility of signing a separate peace agreement with Syria. Rabin nominated renowned Syria expert Itamar Rabinovich as the new head of

³⁹⁴ "The Madrid Conference, 1991," U.S. Department of State Office of the Historian, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1989-1992/madrid-conference>; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 311.

³⁹⁵ Michael Wines, "U.S. Planning Mideast Talks on Trade and Regional Issues," *New York Times*, November 13, 1991, 13; "Mideast Rivals Put Off Replying to Invitation to Negotiate in U.S.," *New York Times*, November 24, 1991, 20.

³⁹⁶ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 191.

³⁹⁷ Doyle McManus, "U.S. Presses Syria to Scuttle Order for N. Korean Scuds," *Los Angeles Times*, February 22, 1992, 7.

³⁹⁸ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 314.

delegation and publicly announced that Resolution 242 could be applied to the Golan Heights. In so doing, the Rabin government showed flexibility as a sign of Israel's willingness to make a territorial compromise vis-à-vis Syria. Having seen the willingness on the side of Israel, Assad began to consider peace with Israel as a serious option.³⁹⁹

The changing attitude of the Rabin government became catalyst of the sixth round of bilateral talks, held in Washington from 24 August to 2 September 1992, after the Madrid Peace Conference.⁴⁰⁰ The Bush administration rewarded Rabin's changing posture by releasing previously blocked loan guarantees to Israel just before the sixth round of talks. Although Syrian official media channels slammed the Bush administration's loan decision as a blow to its honest broker role and credibility as well as to the Middle East peace process, the Assad regime participated in the talks in Washington.⁴⁰¹ There were positive remarks of the Syrian and Israeli negotiators before and during the sixth round of talks. The most significant change was the Rabin government's refusal to continue Shamir's "peace-for-peace" formula and its readiness to negotiate Resolution 242 and the "land-for-peace" formula to advance the Syrian-Israeli track. It meant that the Rabin government could evacuate the Golan Heights in return for peace with Syria. So, Israel recognized territorial nature of the conflict with Syria for the first time, which was close to Syria's long-held position in the peace talks.⁴⁰²

In return for this gesture, Syria's Chief Negotiator Walid al-Muallem presented a document to Rabinovich entitled "Draft Declaration of Principles" outlining main negotiation points as well as Syria's principles on these points. Rabinovich did not hesitate to accept the document as a working paper for bilateral negotiations. With this document, Syria offered Israel a peace treaty in exchange for its total withdrawal from the Golan Heights in the sixth round of the talks. However, Syria's offer could not culminate in a final peace agreement due to the disagreement over the line of Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. While Syria insisted on Israel's

³⁹⁹ Efraim Inbar, "Israeli Negotiations with Syria," *Israel Affairs* 1, No. 4 (1995): 90; Pressman, "Mediation, Domestic Politics, and the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations," 357; Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 247-248.

⁴⁰⁰ Rabinovich, *Waging Peace*, 45.

⁴⁰¹ "Press Comments," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, August 12, 1992; "U.S. Responsible for 'Setback' to Peace Process," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, August 15, 1992; "U.S. Abandoned its Role as 'Honest Broker'," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, August 18, 1992.

⁴⁰² Marwa Daoudy, "A Missed Chance for Peace: Israel and Syria's Negotiations Over the Golan Heights," *Journal of International Affairs* 61, No. 2 (Spring, 2008): 224; Eyal Zisser, "The Israel-Syria Negotiations – What went wrong?," *Orient* 42, No. 2 (2000): 226-227; Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 192-193.

withdrawal to the 4 July 1967 line in accordance with Resolution 242, Israel argued that withdrawal line must be the international border drawn by the French and British mandate authorities in 1923. As it was difficult to sell the normalization with Israel at home and its potential implications in the Arab world, Assad did want to pay the price of peace with Tel Aviv without achieving full withdrawal from the Golan.⁴⁰³

Although there was not a big difference between the two lines (just 20 square kilometers), the 1967 line was providing Syria with an access to the northeastern shore of the Lake Tiberias and the upper Jordan Valley. Water was a determining factor in both Syria's and Israel's positions. While the 4 July line was giving Syria an access to water and the city of al-Hamma, the 1923 line was enabling Israel to establish its sovereignty over water resources of the Jordan River.⁴⁰⁴

Despite Israel's intransigent posture on the Golan Heights and the Bush administration's decision to mend fences with Israel through loan guarantees, President Assad did not want to be spoiler in the Middle East peace process. After the sixth round of talks, he began talk about "peace of the brave" resembling the words of famous French President Charles De Gaulle.⁴⁰⁵ In a meeting with a delegation of Druze leaders from the Golan Heights on 8 September 1992, Assad clarified what he meant by the peace of brave as follows:

"In the past we always used to say that we wanted peace and we said it sincerely. Today we want a dignified comprehensive peace that will be acceptable to our peoples, that would entail no retraction of any of our national rights and would not hurt in any way the pride and dignity of our nation. We want the peace of the brave, the peace of the knights, a true durable peace that protects everybody's interests. If the others [namely, Israel] agree to that kind of peace, it could be achieved. But if we encounter games, traps and ambushes that would hurt national values, well, surrender is not part of our lexicon."⁴⁰⁶

In September 1992, Sharaa also announced that Syria was ready to sign a total peace agreement with Israel in exchange for Israel's total withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied during the June War of 1967. In addition to Sharaa, top Syrian officials indicated that total peace

⁴⁰³ Raymond Hinnebusch, "Does Syria Want Peace? Syrian Policy in the Syrian-Israeli Peace Negotiations," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 46, No. 1 (Autumn, 1996): 51-52; Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 248.

⁴⁰⁴ Daoudy, "A Missed Chance for Peace," 222-223; Pressman, "Mediation, Domestic Politics, and the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations," 355-357.

⁴⁰⁵ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 316.

⁴⁰⁶ Itamar Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace: The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 79; Zisser, "Assad Inches toward Peace with Israel," 40-41.

meant not only a nonbelligerency pact but also full diplomatic and economic normalization with Israel. Syria's eagerness for striking a peace deal with Israel revived hopes for peaceful settlement of the conflict. In early November 1992, Rabin reciprocated Assad's call for peace of the brave by offering a new formula: "the depth of withdrawal will reflect the depth of peace." So, Rabin hinted at possibility of Israel's full withdrawal from the Golan Heights with successful conclusion of the negotiations.⁴⁰⁷

On 30 November 1992, President Assad made a gesture in response to Rabin's bold move and accepted making progress on the Syrian-Israeli track before other tracks. He had previously insisted on simultaneous progress on all tracks to achieve comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Assad uttered his new posture in the peace talks as follows:

"When we speak of a comprehensive peace we do not mean that everybody marches shoulder to shoulder, like soldiers on parade. A little progress may take place on one front, a little delay on another. All the Arab parties understand that there are certain peculiarities regarding each of the issues. As long as they are satisfied that we are proceeding toward a comprehensive solution, progress on one issue can be made more speedily than on others."⁴⁰⁸

In the negotiations, there emerged four major issues to be resolved in the Syrian-Israeli track: the return of the Golan Heights to Syria without threatening Israel's security, allocation of the water resources on the Golan, the exact line of the future Syrian-Israeli border and the timing and the terms of diplomatic normalization process.⁴⁰⁹ Syrian-Israeli track was deadlocked owing to Israel's insistence on the terms of the peace agreement such as normalization, open borders, exchange of embassies, security matters and connection with other tracks as well as its reluctance to withdraw totally from the Golan Heights. According to Syria, this was an indication of Israel's unwillingness to evacuate Syrian territories and apply the Sinai formula to the Golan Heights, which was clear violation of Resolutions 242 and 338.⁴¹⁰

The upcoming presidential elections in the United States further complicated the scene in the Syrian-Israeli peace track. Syria and Israel were frustrated with the inaction of the United States due to the 1992 elections. The Bush administration was not able to play the role of

⁴⁰⁷ Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace*, 83.

⁴⁰⁸ Muhammad Muslih, "The Golan: Israel, Syria, and Strategic Calculations," *Middle East Journal* 47, No. 4 (Autumn, 1993): 630.

⁴⁰⁹ Jerome Slater, "Lost Opportunities for Peace in the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Israel and Syria, 1948-2001," *International Security* 27, No. 1 (Summer, 2002): 94-95.

⁴¹⁰ Helena Cobban, *Syria and the Peace: A Good Chance Missed* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1997), 4; Podedh, *Chances for Peace*, 248.

mediator efficiently to advance negotiations between Israel and Syria during the election process.⁴¹¹ Syrian-Israeli track collapsed when Israel expelled 415 Palestinians, who were alleged Hamas supporters, from the occupied Palestinian territories to Lebanon after abduction and murder of an Israeli border policeman in December 1992. Syria refused to continue peace talks before the Palestinians were allowed to return to their homeland.⁴¹²

In sum, the Madrid Peace Conference and the subsequent Syrian-Israeli bilateral negotiations in Washington did not produce any tangible result owing to Israel's reluctance to return the Golan Heights to Syria through the land-for-peace formula and Syria's evasive and unclear definition of peace with Israel.⁴¹³

3.4.3.5. Syria as a Key to Peace: U.S. Policy towards Syria during the Madrid Peace Process

During the Cold War, the United States had considered Syria as an instrumental actor facilitating other Arab states' participation in the peace process. Syria's demands and interests had been mostly sidelined by Washington especially after Israeli-Egyptian settlement was guaranteed at Camp David in 1978. Yet, the Bush administration decided to reassess the United States' attitude towards Syria during the Gulf crisis as it kept its promise by joining the U.S.-led coalition against Iraq. The Bush administration began to consider Syria as a key to achieve comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Secretary of Baker defined Syria as a key to peace during the Gulf crisis as follows: "*With Syria represented, the credibility of our Arab coalition partners was immeasurably strengthened. But I had a more long-term purpose in mind. There was no way to move a comprehensive Mideast peace process forward without the active involvement of Syria...*"⁴¹⁴

On the other hand, there was a debate within the Bush administration about Syria's role in peace process after the Gulf War. While some senior Bush administration officials were skeptical about Assad's intentions considering his past record in the Middle East, others argued that there could not be peace in the Middle East without Syria. They thought that Syria's acceptance of peace negotiations with Israel might encourage the Palestinians to follow suit.

⁴¹¹ Gani, *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations*, 169.

⁴¹² Avi Shlaim, "The Oslo Accords," *Journal of Palestinian Studies* 23, No. 3 (Spring, 1994): 28; Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 250.

⁴¹³ Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 247; Thomas L. Friedman, "U.S. Invitation to Mideast Talks Offers Compromise Approaches," *New York Times*, November 26, 1991, 1.

⁴¹⁴ Gani, *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations*, 166-167.

Eventually, the Bush administration concluded that the Syrian-Israeli track was the keystone of the Middle East peace process. That's why, Secretary of State Baker kicked off shuttle diplomacy immediately after the Gulf War to find a common ground between Israel and the Arab states including Syria. He visited the region eight times between March and October 1991 and spent endless hours with the Syrian and the Israeli side to cajole them into joining international peace conference.⁴¹⁵

As mentioned above, Baker had two meetings with Assad (September 1990 and January 1991) before the Gulf War, in which they discussed the future of Middle East peace process. With the end of the war, Baker paid his first visit to Damascus on 13 March 1991. The primary goal of Baker's visit was to utilize the post-Gulf War regional environment to induce Syria to join the Middle East peace conference. This was not a remote possibility as Syria seemed willing to acknowledge the United States' NRC of peace catalyst in the post-war period. To illustrate, official Syrian newspaper *Tishreen* praised the United States' policies in the Middle East and its eagerness to address the Arab-Israeli conflict on the eve of Baker's first visit to Syria. *Tishreen* hailed the Bush administration's decision to call for an international peace conference while Israel was strongly opposing it. It also welcomed Baker's insistence on the implementation of UN resolution 425 demanding Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon as an important step. Before Baker's meeting with President Assad in Damascus, a senior American official noted pivotal role of Syria in the peace talks by stating that "*It's a fact of life that you can't make peace in the Middle East without Syria, and the Syrians don't want us to forget that.*"⁴¹⁶

On 13 March 1991, Baker and Assad met more than six hours and discussed security in the Gulf, Middle East peace process, economic cooperation, limiting the weapons of mass destruction, American hostages in Lebanon and the implementation of the Taif agreement. In the meeting, Assad and Baker totally agreed on all of these topics.⁴¹⁷ In the meeting, the most crucial topic was the Middle East peace process. Assad told Baker that he did not see such an American commitment to peace before and he pledged to respond to it seriously. According to Baker, this meeting with Assad was the most positive one in terms of atmospherics in

⁴¹⁵ Nejad, "The Ineffective Role of the United States," 50; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 303-304.

⁴¹⁶ Paul Adams, "Damascus Hails American Policy," *Times*, March 13, 1991, 10; Doyle McManus, "Baker and Assad Hold Marathon 7-Hour Talks," *Los Angeles Times*, March 14, 1991, 11.

⁴¹⁷ "Baker Holds News Conference, Departs," *FBIS*, Damascus Domestic Service in Arabic, March 14, 1991; Thomas L. Friedman, "Baker-Assad Talks Extended; One Topic: The U.S. Hostages," *New York Times*, March 14, 1991, 12.

comparison to previous meetings. He noted in a cable to President Bush that “*Assad gave me a clear impression that he is serious about pursuing peace, but that he will be a tough nut to crack.*”⁴¹⁸

During the trip, senior Syrian officials informed Baker of Syria’s changing position and willingness not only to end the state of war with Israel but also to sign a peace agreement based on a genuine reconciliation. Baker’s visit was successful as it aroused hopes for Syria’s participation in the international peace conference. Before leaving Damascus, Baker underscored his hope for the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict and Syria’s role to achieve peace by saying that:

“We find ourselves in agreement with respect to the fact that there is, we think, an opportunity now in the aftermath of the gulf crisis that should be seized – a window of opportunity that could make it possible for us to make significant progress in the Arab-Israeli conflict... I sensed a very serious intent on the part of the Syrian Government to pursue an active peace process and to continue to work toward that end with the coalition countries that worked together to reverse Saddam Hussein’s aggression... The feeling to which I have already referred is that the Syrian Government agrees with the U.S. Government... I feel that Syria has an effective role to play in this process.”⁴¹⁹

In this period, the Bush administration did not want to damage its relations with Syria at a critical juncture and surprisingly turned blind eye to Syria’s military build-up. While Baker was visiting Syria on 13 March 1991, a shipment of Scud-C missiles arrived at the Latakia Port. Pentagon pressed for protesting Syria’s military build-up, yet the State Department refused this demand by claiming that it was not the right time for such an action.⁴²⁰

Baker visited Damascus once again on 11 April 1991 to discuss details and procedure of the peace conference with President Assad and Foreign Minister Sharaa. In his meeting with Baker, Assad reiterated that he was ready to attend the peace conference. Yet, he set four preconditions for Syria’s participation: it must be an international conference, its results would be guaranteed by co-sponsors, the conference must continue to guarantee further negotiations and the conference must be under the auspices of the United Nations to ensure its international legitimacy.⁴²¹ In the meeting, Sharaa also told Baker that Syria was convinced that the Bush

⁴¹⁸ Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 427-428.

⁴¹⁹ Thomas L. Friedman, “Baker and Syrian Chief Call Time Ripe for Peace Effort,” *New York Times*, March 15, 1991, 12; “Baker Holds News Conference, Departs.”

⁴²⁰ Pipes, *Damascus Courts the West*, 61.

⁴²¹ For details of the meeting, see Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 447-449.

administration was serious to achieve the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of Resolutions 242 and 338.⁴²²

On 12 April 1991, Baker and Sharaa held a press conference to evaluate the visit. Baker expressed appreciation of President Assad's attitude toward the peace conference by stating that:

“Yesterday I met with President Hafiz al-Assad and Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shar’ for five and a half hours in two separate meetings. The talks focused on the process of settling the Arab-Israeli conflict. During these two meetings, we exchanged opinions and views which I believe were useful. We agreed that there is an opportunity to give a momentum to the peace process, and that we should not waste this chance... The Syrian leadership yesterday expressed its desire to continue working toward the peace process in the coming phase.”⁴²³

The Bush administration intensified its diplomatic efforts in the spring of 1991. Baker visited the Middle East to prod parties of the conflict into joining international peace conference. In this context, Baker went to Syria on 23 April 1991 to meet with President Assad. Baker noted in his memoirs that it was the toughest meeting with President Assad. In the meeting, Assad underlined his two preconditions once again: full participation of the UN and continuation of negotiations after conference. Assad's insistence on the UN role was an impediment to peace conference because Israel firmly rejected participation of the UN. Regarding Assad's demand for guarantee of the co-sponsors of conference, Baker pledged that the United States would maintain security of the Syrian-Israeli border along the Golan Heights. Assad replied to Baker's offer by saying that he needed to consult with the institutions of the Baath Party and the National Progressive Front. Baker was irritated with this reply as he was aware of Assad's unquestionable leadership in Syria. Baker's April visit ended without ensuring Syria's participation in the peace conference.⁴²⁴

On 11 May 1991, Baker once again travelled to Syria to entice President Assad into taking part in the peace conference because he was insisting that such a conference could be convened if his four preconditions were met.⁴²⁵ Baker's May visit was not productive due to Assad's

⁴²² Alan Cowell, “Syria's Foreign Minister Sees Real Hope for Mideast Peace,” *New York Times*, April 18, 1991, 18.

⁴²³ “Reporters Briefed,” *FBIS*, Damascus Domestic Service in Arabic, April 12, 1991.

⁴²⁴ Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 454-457.

⁴²⁵ “Commentary Stresses ‘Continuous’ Peace Conference,” *FBIS*, Damascus Domestic Service in Arabic, May 8, 1991; Thomas L. Friedman, “U.S. Sees New Mideast Peace Momentum,” *New York Times*, May 12, 1991, 10.

posture on the role of the UN as a full participant in peace conference and the form of subsequent negotiations after conference. After the meeting, Baker expressed his disappointment with Assad's inflexible attitude in the meeting.⁴²⁶ Baker went to Egypt empty-handed and met with Soviet Foreign Minister Aleksandr Bessmertnykh in Cairo on 13 May 1991. At a joint news conference, Baker explained essential differences between Syria and Israel as to the role of the UN in peace conference. At the same time, he underlined that peace conference could be successful with Syria's participation.⁴²⁷ Meanwhile, President Bush publicly announced that recent ups and downs did not discourage him, and they were normal in the peace process. He also said that "*there's room for optimism*" and sometimes setbacks served moving forward in such processes.⁴²⁸

The breakthrough in peace diplomacy came with the President Bush's letter to President Assad on 1 June 1991. He sent a letter of assurances outlining his posture on the Middle East peace and his ideas about convening an international peace conference in Madrid. In addition to Assad, Bush sent similar letters to King Hussein, Mubarak, Shamir and King Fahd, in which he urged them to demonstrate flexibility and to participate in peace conference. Secretary of State Baker gave Bush's letter to Foreign Minister Sharaa while they were in Lisbon, Portugal.⁴²⁹

In the letter assurances to Assad, Bush pledged that peace conference and subsequent negotiations would be based on Resolutions 242 and 338. He assured Assad of a peace agreement based on the land-for-peace formula including the Golan Heights. He also underlined that the United States had not recognized Israel's extension of sovereignty over the Golan Heights. He wrote in the letter that:

"I want to make clear that we will be doing so on the only basis possible for a comprehensive peace. Territory for peace applied to all fronts, including the Golan Heights. We will not change this fundamental policy position of ours; nor will we

⁴²⁶ Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 460-463; Thomas L. Friedman, "Syria Turns Down Baker's Proposal for Mideast Talks," *New York Times*, May 13, 1991, 1.

⁴²⁷ "Statements on Syrian-Israeli Differences," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, May 14, 1991.

⁴²⁸ George Bush, "Remarks Announcing the Nomination of Robert M. Gates To Be Director of the Central Intelligence Agency and a News Conference, May 14, 1991," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George Bush, Book I-January 1 to June 30, 1991* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1992), 505.

⁴²⁹ Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 468-469; Doyle McManus, "Baker Gives New Bush Peace Proposal to Syria," *Los Angeles Times*, June 2, 1991, 5; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 308.

change our non-recognition of Israel's purported "Annexation" of the Golan Heights."⁴³⁰

In the letter, President Bush explained that his administration was determined to continue performing the role of mediator which was seeking genuine resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict by addressing needs and requirements of all parties. He also emphasized that the United States as a driving force behind the process had a special responsibility to make it successful. In order to satisfy Assad's demands, Bush accepted the observer role of the UN in peace conference and reiterated his commitment to protecting the political rights of the Palestinians in the letter of assurances.⁴³¹

After sending the letter of assurances to Assad, Bush told in a news conference in Kennebunkport, Maine on 1 July 1991 that parties of the Middle East peace process accepted broker role of the United States. Bush said that *"I am told that the credibility of the United States for being the catalyst for peace is still very, very strong and very good, not only in Israel but in the Arab countries as well. So, that is an ingredient that wasn't there before, that's still there, that I hope will lead to peace."*⁴³²

Although Yitzhak Shamir firmly rejected President Bush's letter owing to his opposition to participation of UN representatives on 8 June 1991,⁴³³ President Assad replied to Bush positively by sending a letter on 14 July 1991. In his letter, Assad defined Bush's proposals as "a firm basis" for peace in the Middle East.⁴³⁴ Assad also explained his appreciation of the United States' role as a peace catalyst and its efforts to convene a peace conference whose objectives were defined by Resolutions 242 and 338 rejecting Israel's illegitimate occupation on all fronts and recognizing the legitimate political rights of the Palestinians. This was a turning point in the Middle East diplomacy because Syria's decision to attend peace conference opened the first direct two-way negotiations for a comprehensive peace between

⁴³⁰ Patrick Seale, "The Syria-Israel Negotiations: Who is Telling the Truth?," *Journal of Palestinian Studies* 29, No. 2 (Winter 2000): 77.

⁴³¹ "The Madrid Peace Conference," 119-120.

⁴³² George Bush, "The President's News Conference in Kennebunkport, Maine, July 1, 1991," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George Bush, Book II-July 1 to December 31, 1991* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1992), 809.

⁴³³ Daniel Williams, "Shamir Rejects Role for U.N., Format for Mideast Talks," *Los Angeles Times*, June 8, 1991, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1991-06-08-mn-104-story.html>.

⁴³⁴ John M. Goshko, "Assad Gives Impetus to Bush Plan," *Washington Post*, July 15, 1991, 1.

Syria and Israel after Israel's capture of the Golan Heights in 1967.⁴³⁵ President Assad's positive response to the Bush administration's peace initiative was an outcome of transformation of the international system into unipolarity as well as the Bush administration's acknowledgment of the long-held contention that there could be no peace in the Middle East without Syria.⁴³⁶

Syria was the first state which accepted the Bush administration's peace proposals for the Madrid Peace Conference, and other Arab states followed suit.⁴³⁷ Yet, President Assad made significant concessions in his letter by not pushing for a united Arab front and the UN supervision.⁴³⁸ In so doing, Assad sought to improve Syria's relations with the United States by showing his willingness to join the peace negotiations. He also anticipated that the only way to regain the Golan Heights was to exert pressure on Israel via the United States.⁴³⁹ Furthermore, Assad wanted to receive economic assistance from Western countries and to ensure the Bush administration's recognition of Syria's hegemony over Lebanon.⁴⁴⁰ So, it can be argued that President Assad recognized the role of the United States as a peace broker in the Middle East by accepting President Bush's invitation to international peace conference.

Secretary of State Baker commented on Assad's letter and its content in Washington. He appreciated Assad's positive response as a huge step towards the peace conference by stating that it "*moves the Syrian government further than they have been willing to move in any peace process effort that I'm aware of before.*" On the content of Assad's letter, Baker commented that "*I would characterize it as positive.*"⁴⁴¹ President Bush was glad about Syria's decision to attend the international peace conference, too. He defined Assad's letter as a very positive

⁴³⁵ Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 487-488; "Al-Shar' Delivers al-Asad Reply to Bush Letter," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Television Network in Arabic, July 14, 1991; Thomas L. Friedman, "Syria Accepts Bush's Compromise On Middle East Peace Conference," *New York Times*, July 15, 1991, 1.

⁴³⁶ Patrick Seale and Linda Butler, "Assad's Regional Strategy and the Challenge from Netanyahu," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 26, No. 1 (1996): 33-34.

⁴³⁷ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 186.

⁴³⁸ Thomas L. Friedman, "U.S. Said to Give Israel and Syria Private Assurances to Get Them to Talks," *New York Times*, July 31, 1991, 6.

⁴³⁹ Thomas L. Friedman, "Syria's Move Toward Peace Talks: Is It Primarily to Improve U.S. Ties," *New York Times*, July 17, 1991, 1.

⁴⁴⁰ Zisser, "Syrian Foreign Policy," 84.

⁴⁴¹ Nick B. Williams Jr., "Syria Accepts Formula for Seeking Peace," *Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 1991, 1.

breakthrough on the way of peace talks.⁴⁴² Bush said that “*This [the Syrian response] is a breakthrough from what we know about it. Clearly it is a coming forward by President Assad that we view as very, very positive.*”⁴⁴³ White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater also defined Syria’s participation as a real step on the way of peace. He said that Assad’s decision was “*well beyond any previous position taken by Syria.*” In this milieu, senior American officials urged the Shamir government, which refused President Bush’s proposals, to take part in the international peace conference.⁴⁴⁴

More importantly, Assad relinquished leadership role of Syria in the Arab rejectionist front with his formal acceptance of direct peace talks with Israel. After Assad’s letter, Secretary of State Baker visited Syria in mid-July 1991 to discuss details of the peace conference with President Assad. After three hours meeting with Baker on 18 July 1991, Assad reaffirmed his commitment to Middle East peace conference sponsored by the Bush administration. Baker held a press conference in Damascus with Sharaa, in which he hinted that the United States made some concession by agreeing to a broader UN role in international peace conference, to which Israel had strongly opposed before. Baker commented on the role of UN by saying that “*The [U.N.] representative would be an observer...He will be able to communicate with the participants and the sponsors.*”⁴⁴⁵ Baker also hailed Syria’s acceptance of American peace proposals and expressed his gratitude to President Assad at the press conference as follows:

“I had a very good meeting with President Assad. It is apparent to me that Syria has made a very important decision. As a result of that meeting, I am pleased to report that Syria has agreed to the proposals we have made, including coming to a peace conference, the terms of reference would be a comprehensive settlement based on U.N. Resolutions 242 and 338. I think that this is an extraordinarily important and positive step.”⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴² George Bush, “Exchange With Reporters in London, United Kingdom, July 15, 1991,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George Bush, Book II-July 1 to December 31, 1991* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1992), 888; William E. Schmidt, “Syria’s Reply Buoy Bush, Who Now Looks to Israelis,” *New York Times*, July 16, 1991, 9.

⁴⁴³ Ian Black, “Pressure on Israel as Bush Welcomes Syrian Response,” *Guardian*, July 16, 1991, 10.

⁴⁴⁴ Martin Fletcher and Paul Adams, “Syrian Approval Sends Baker Back to Middle East,” *Times*, July 16, 1991, 10.

⁴⁴⁵ Jim Mann, “Syria Commits to Talks, Baker Says,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 19, 1991, 1.

⁴⁴⁶ Thomas L. Friedman, “Turning Point Seen: Palestinians and Jordan Also Urged to Agree to a Peace Parley,” *New York Times*, July 19, 1991, 1; “Syria Accepts U.S. Terms for Talks; Golan Issue May Defy Resolution,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 19, 1991, 8.

At the press conference, Sharaa reiterated that Syria accepted President Bush's pledge that the United States and the Soviet Union would be a "driving force" to make peace process successful.⁴⁴⁷ It was now evident that signing a peace agreement with Israel was a strategic objective of Syria. In an interview with ABC Television in July 1991, Assad underlined his commitment to peace by stating that: "*From our point of view, they [the Israelis] are to benefit the most from the peace. Peace does not destroy: it builds. I seek peace, not destruction.*"⁴⁴⁸

In another interview with the Washington Post and Newsweek in late July 1991, Assad said that the United States' greater role in achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East was stemming from its position and significance as a superpower and as an international decisionmaker in the world.⁴⁴⁹ In this period, American officials were aware of Syria's changing role to adapt to the post-Cold War era. They considered Assad's acceptance of the U.S.-sponsored peace conference as a result of a far-reach strategic decision of Assad. An American official said that "*He [Assad] saw the wave of the future is with the West...and with a Damascus-Riyadh-Cairo axis.*" A senior Bush administration official explained that Assad's decision was reflecting the last year's changes in the U.S.-Soviet relations. He said that Syria recognized the superpower status of the United States as follows: "*They [the Syrians] have taken strong note of the U.S.-Soviet rapprochement...It is their perception that we [the United States] are the preeminent superpower.*"⁴⁵⁰

For the Bush administration, Syria was a key player in peace conference because the Syrian-Israeli peace track would accelerate the progress on other tracks, which would ultimately bring a comprehensive peace to the region. Hence, Syria was viewed by greater importance by Bush and Baker in comparison to previous administrations.⁴⁵¹ Before the Madrid Peace Conference, Baker once again visited Damascus on 18 September 1991. He held meetings with President Assad, Vice President Khaddam and Foreign Minister Sharaa and submitted a draft of letter of assurances to the Syrian side. The visit was made at a critical juncture when the Bush administration blocked loans to Israel for new settlements in the occupied territories. Syria

⁴⁴⁷ Richard Beeston, "Baker Hails Syrian Acceptance of US Peace Proposals," *Times*, July 19, 1991, 15.

⁴⁴⁸ Zisser, "Assad Inches toward Peace with Israel," 40.

⁴⁴⁹ "U.S. Urged to Shoulder Responsibility for Peace," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, July 30, 1991.

⁴⁵⁰ Mann, "Syria Commits to Talks, Baker Says."

⁴⁵¹ Gani, *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations*, 167.

welcomed the Bush administration's determination to prevent further settlements at the expense of damaging its relations with Israel. Thus, the meetings between Baker and Syrian officials were productive and positive. At the press conference, Baker underscored the Bush administration's commitment to the UN resolutions by saying that:

“As we always said, and this was confirmed by the U.S. Administration, the basis for the solution are UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. Here, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that Resolution 242 stipulates the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territories by war. This means that, in the final settlement, Israel must withdraw from all occupied Arab territories... from the U.S. viewpoint, Resolutions 242 and 338 must be applied on all fronts. This does not only apply to the West Bank and Gaza, but also to the Golan.”⁴⁵²

After his one-day visit to Jordan, Baker returned to Syria on 20 September 1991 to discuss peace conference with the Syrian side. However, he was surprised when Syrian officials informed him that President Assad was deeply disappointed about the letter of assurances. In the meeting, Assad told Baker that the letter of assurances given to Israel was destroying all progress made so far. Assad also criticized the formation of multilateral committees to discuss regional issues while Syria's territories were still under Israeli occupation. That was unacceptable to Assad. He firmly rejected the idea of talking about economic cooperation while Syrian and Israel were still in a state of war. He argued that multilateral talks could begin after successful conclusion of the bilateral talks. Frustrated with Assad's posture as an impediment to peace conference, Baker told Assad that Syria could not attend multilateral talks. Baker said that they could work on a compromise language to begin multilateral talks only after making significant progress on bilateral talks. Baker asked Assad to start bilateral talks within two days after opening ceremonies of conference instead of five to seven days. In the meeting, Baker and Assad agreed on further discussion and meeting again within few weeks.⁴⁵³

Baker went to Damascus and held extensive meetings with President Assad on 15-16 October 1991. They discussed difference on multilateral talks between the two sides. Assad did not step back from his previous posture on multilateral talks and even rejected changing the language to open a space for Syria's non-involvement in these talks. The first meeting ended without a compromise. After the meeting, Baker sent a cable to President Bush, in which he stated that “*Assad failed to understand that the multilaterals could encourage tangible*

⁴⁵² “Joint News Conference With al-Shar’,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, September 19, 1991.

⁴⁵³ Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 501-502.

concessions from Israel by demonstrating the Arabs were willing to treat them as regional partners.” On 16 October, Assad and Baker met again. It was a tough meeting, in which Assad got on Baker’s nerves. Finally, both sides agreed on the letter of assurances and the letter of invitation as Assad did not raise the issue of multilateral talks for now. Baker got what he wanted from Assad after exhausting meetings.⁴⁵⁴

Why did Assad show stubbornness during the meeting? Because he wanted to measure the United States’ commitment to the land-for-peace formula and involvement of Washington and Moscow in the subsequent peace talks after the opening ceremony of the conference.⁴⁵⁵ At the press conference after the meeting, Baker hailed Syria’s commitment to peace conference as follows:

“For some time, I think Syria has been on the record as being in support of this process. In my view that has not changed; and President al-Assad reiterated to me his intention to participate in this process. Having said that, there is one issue having to do with the timing of the multilateral negotiations and on which there is a difference, and with respect to which there is a difference, and with respect to which we will continue to exchange views.”⁴⁵⁶

In the wake of Baker’s visit, Assad gave an interview to BBC on 27 October 1991, in which he recognized the leading role played by the United States for convening the peace conference. Assad said that he was hopeful about peace this time and underlined his commitment to comprehensive peace in the Middle East.⁴⁵⁷ On the way to the Madrid Peace Conference, the Bush administration made a gesture to Syria and Iran by easing trade sanctions. The U.S. Commerce Department made significant changes in American export laws, which enabled Syria and Iran to receive dual-use military technology by evading the Export Administration Act (EAA). Some pro-Israeli members of the Congress assailed this move as a preliminary step to remove all sanctions on Syria. They thought that the Administration was planning to remove Syria from the terrorism and narcotics list and wanted to make it eligible for military and economic aids. Thus, they criticized the White House for providing sophisticated

⁴⁵⁴ Bouthaina Shaaban, *Damascus Diary: An Inside Account of Hafez al-Assad’s Peace Diplomacy, 1990-2000* (Boulder&London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013), 27-28; Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 504-507.

⁴⁵⁵ Thomas L. Friedman, “Baker Meets Syrian Leader; Palestinian Progress Is Seen,” *New York Times*, October 16, 1991, 8.

⁴⁵⁶ “Baker, al-Shar’ Hold News Conference 16 Oct,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Television in Arabic, October 16, 1991.

⁴⁵⁷ “Al-Asad Discusses Peace,” *FBIS*, Damascus SANA in Arabic, October 27, 1991; Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 216.

technology to Syria while it was still supporting international terrorism. There was a kind of tug-of-war between the Bush administration and the Congress over Syria during the Madrid Peace process. The tension between the Congress and the Bush administration soared the relationship between the Bush administration and the Israel lobby as well, which continued till the election of Bill Clinton in 1992.⁴⁵⁸

After the start of the Madrid Peace Conference, Baker expressed the Bush administration's appreciation of Syria's commitment to peace negotiations in a press conference on 3 November 1991 by saying that:

“I absolutely do not think that President Asad, in any way or to any extent, broke any commitment... My view about the role of Syria in this process remains what I said in my speech to the conference, that I do believe their earlier commitment was very, very important and that until given some reason to think the contrary, I believe, that when they tell us that this represents a historical change in their policy approach, we have no reason to disbelieve that. They are at the table. They attended the conference.”⁴⁵⁹

During the subsequent bilateral negotiations after the Madrid Peace Conference, the Bush administration continued to underscore the key role of Syria to achieve peace in the Middle East. After the election of Yitzhak Rabin as Israel's new prime minister, Baker visited Syria on 22 July 1992 to stimulate peace talks between the Rabin government and Syria. Baker was aware that the reluctant party in the peace negotiations was Israel. Syria showed willingness to make a fresh start with Israel after the formation of Rabin government. Baker's meeting with President Assad was quite positive. On 23 July 1992, Baker and Sharaa held a press conference to evaluate the visit. Baker thanked Syria for its positive approach to the peace process as follows:

“We concluded our talks with President Hafiz al-Asad and Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shar' last night. The talks, which lasted four and a half hours, were good... I believe there is a general feeling of the existence of new real and fruitful opportunities that should be explored as soon as possible. We spoke about the peace process in the light of the chance of the Israeli Government... I would like to seize this opportunity to again thank President Hafiz al-Assad for receiving us...”⁴⁶⁰

Meanwhile the Bush administration's decision to release loan guarantees to Israel in August 1992 just before the sixth round of bilateral talks between Damascus and Tel Aviv strained the U.S.-Syrian relations. Nevertheless, President Assad sent the Syrian delegation to Washington for the sixth round of talks on 24 August-2 September 1992. President Bush conveyed a written

⁴⁵⁸ Rabil, “The Ineffective Role of the US,” 424-426.

⁴⁵⁹ “The Madrid Peace Conference,” 147.

⁴⁶⁰ “Holds News Conference With al-Shar’,” *FBIS*, Damascus SANA in Arabic, July 23, 1992.

message to President Assad, in which he assured Assad of the United States' role and adherence to the solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict as well as to the principles of the Madrid Peace Conference. Bush also noted that illegal settlements would be diminished until the coming of next phase in the peace negotiations.⁴⁶¹

In August 1992, Baker resigned as the Secretary of the State Department for managing President Bush's election campaign and assumed new responsibilities as the White House Chief of Staff. Before leaving the office, he sent a letter to Sharaa, in which he underlined that the United States was commitment itself to play a role to advance peace process started in Madrid. Baker also mentioned the importance of the role of Syria and effectiveness of its participation to advance the bilateral peace talks in Washington.⁴⁶²

New Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger met Sharaa during the UN General Assembly meetings in New York on 24 September 1992. In the meeting, Eagleburger expressed the United States' appreciation of the Syria's serious position in the Arab-Israeli peace process to reach a comprehensive settlement in the Middle East.⁴⁶³ However, there was no substantial development in the peace process because Syria felt that it did not get much from Washington despite its cooperative attitude. On the other hand, the United States regarded Syria half-hearted to comply with the demands of Washington.⁴⁶⁴ According to Gani, the United States perceived Syria of not doing enough by demonstrating inflexibility during the Madrid peace process. The Syrian side accused the United States of not doing its part to assist the Arab states and of behaving too gentle with Israel.⁴⁶⁵

In November 1992 presidential elections, Bill Clinton defeated incumbent Bush and the task of advancing peace negotiations between Syria and Israel was left to the new president. Nevertheless, the Bush administration continued to play the role of peace broker to salvage the Madrid peace process till the last moment. After the Palestinian deportee crisis, Bush met with Syrian, Jordanian-Palestinian and Israeli delegations on 17 December 1992. In his

⁴⁶¹ "Bush Message to al-Asad," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, August 21, 1992.

⁴⁶² "Baker Message to al-Shar," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, August 23, 1992.

⁴⁶³ "Al-Shar Makes Contacts at UN General Assembly," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, September 24, 1992.

⁴⁶⁴ Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria's Waiting Game*, 53-54.

⁴⁶⁵ Gani, *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations*, 183.

meeting with the Syrian delegation led by Muwaffaq al-Allaf, President Bush discussed the current state of the peace talks and explained his position on the deportee crisis. Bush underlined that the administration did not approve the deportations and tried to prevent it.⁴⁶⁶ After Bush's meetings with the delegations, Press Secretary Fitzwater made a statement in which he emphasized the United States' NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst as follows: "*The U.S. role as catalyst, honest broker, and driving force was instrumental in achieving the historic breakthrough at Madrid. The United States remains an essential participant in the search for peace, willing to assist actively in making the negotiations succeed.*"⁴⁶⁷

The Bush administration performed the NRC regional stabilizer/peace catalyst during the Madrid peace process owing to the interplay between domestic and international determinants. At the ego part, the Bush administration believed that initiating a peace process was a moral obligation for the United States as the world's sole hegemonic power. It was only the United States with its enormous sway over the region after the Gulf War could settle the Arab-Israeli conflict. At the alter ego part, Syria showed willingness to readjust to the U.S.-led new world order and accepted the United States' broker role between Israel and the Arab states. Thanks to its contributions during the Gulf crisis, Syria expected the United States' active involvement in the peace process to exert pressure on Israel to comply with Resolutions 242 and 338, based on the principles of the rejection of territorial gains by force and the land-for-peace formula.⁴⁶⁸

To illustrate, President Assad explained in an interview with BBC on 2 June 1992 that the ties between Syria and the United States were cordial and better than they had been in the past and they were willing to improve relations. Regarding the peace process, Assad underlined his expectation from the United States as a member of the UN Security Council to enforce the implementation of Resolutions 242 and 338.⁴⁶⁹ In another interview with Patrick Seale in the summer of 1993, Assad explained the reasons for Syria's participation in the Madrid Peace Conference by pointing to the United States' posture as a serious broker. Assad said that:

⁴⁶⁶ "Memorandum of Conversation," *George Bush Presidential Library*, December 17, 1991, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1992-12-17--Syrian%20Delegation.pdf>.

⁴⁶⁷ Marlin Fitzwater, "Statement by Press Secretary Fitzwater on the Middle East Peace Talks, December 17, 1992," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George Bush, Book II-August 1, 1992 to January 20, 1993* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1993), 2199.

⁴⁶⁸ Sarkees and Zunes, "Disenchantment with the 'New World Order,'" 366.

⁴⁶⁹ "Al-Asad Views Peace Process, U.S. Ties, Lebanon," *FBIS*, Damascus SANA in Arabic, June 2, 1992.

“It is a mistake to suggest that we joined the peace process because of the Soviet collapse. In fact we went to Madrid when [former Soviet president Mikhail] Gorbachev was still in power. The Soviet collapse had not yet taken place. What persuaded us to go to Madrid was evidence of new American seriousness, and in particular the text of the American initiative which struck us as fair.”⁴⁷⁰

Assad’s posture during the Madrid peace process was a radical break with Syria’s role of tactical rejectionism refusing separate peace deals with Israel and insisting on a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict in the 1980s. Syria had been excluded from any peace process by the United States owing to its role of tactical rejectionism. In this context, the Bush administration welcomed Syria’s abandonment of the role of tactical rejectionism and its willingness to accept the peace catalyst role of the United States in the Madrid peace process. The Bush administration’s evolving relations with Syria during and after the Gulf crisis shaped its relations with Israel. It exerted pressure on Israel through loan guarantees to join the Madrid peace process and adopted a more balanced attitude towards Tel Aviv. NSA Scowcroft even considered Israel as the major stumbling block to comprehensive peace rather than Syria.⁴⁷¹

In sum, it can be put forward that the U.S.-Syrian cooperation during the Madrid peace process materialized owing to Syria’s changing role in the post-Cold War era and its acceptance of the United States’ NRCs of hegemon and regional stabilizer in the Middle East. So, the alter ego aspect of the United States’ NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst in the Madrid peace process was shaped by Syria’s expectations from the Bush administration to perform this role. The Bush administration accommodated Syria owing to its willingness to readjust to the U.S.-led new world order which was proved by its participation in the U.S.-led anti-Iraqi coalition during the Gulf crisis and to play a constructive role in the Madrid peace process in tandem with its NRC of peace catalyst.

3.4.4. The Lebanese Dimension in the U.S.-Syrian Relations under the Bush Administration

3.4.4.1. Syria in Lebanon: From Intervention to the Taif Agreement (1976-1989)

Syria’s historical ties with and interests in Lebanon were preceding its intervention in 1976. Syrian leaders considered Lebanon a backyard bound to Syria by distinctive relations as it was a part of the Greater Syrian territories under the Ottoman Empire. According to them, although Lebanon was a natural extension of Syrian territories, Western imperialism separated it from

⁴⁷⁰ Hafiz al-Asad and Patrick Seale, “Interview with Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 22, No. 4 (Summer, 1993): 121.

⁴⁷¹ Gani, *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations*, 186.

the motherland artificially. Thus, reintegration of Lebanon into Syrian territories was political goal of Syrian leaders since independence because they refused to establish formal diplomatic relations with Lebanon. However, domestic instability, weak state formation and lack of resources thwarted Syrian leaders' ambitions to assert its hegemony over Lebanon until the 1970s. Hafez al-Assad became the first leader who achieved Syria's strategic objectives in Lebanon by pursuing a comprehensive and effective policy after his rise to power in 1970. In addition to historical claims, Assad considered Lebanon vital for protecting Syria's economic and security/military interests. Thus, he promoted the vision of "Greater Syria", which he perceived as a unified political entity, to deepen Syria's influence and control over the historic lands of *Bilad al-Sham* including Lebanon. In Assad's political calculations, Lebanon's strategic importance increased in the wake of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. He attributed the success of his Eastern Front Strategy, in which Lebanon's Beqaa Valley was regarded as Syria's soft belly vis-à-vis Israel in a possible military confrontation and as a ground for an offensive attack against Israel, to Syria's hegemony over Lebanon. In this context, Assad believed that Syria's intervention in the Lebanese Civil War of 1975-76 was a chance to bring Lebanon into Syria's political orbit to overcome its security concerns about Israel.⁴⁷²

The Lebanese Civil War, which broke out on 13 April 1975 between the Christian Maronite parties and the PLO-Lebanese National Movement (LNM) bloc, divided Lebanon into several spheres of influence controlled by the armed gangs of different sectarian groups. In the early phase of the civil war, President Assad played a dual role by supporting sometimes his clients -the PLO and Kamal Jumblatt's LNM- and sometimes playing the role of mediator and peacemaker between the warring parties. In this context, a temporary Palestinian-Lebanese ceasefire agreement was signed after Syrian Foreign Minister Abd al-Halim Khaddam's diplomatic efforts in July 1975. However, Assad had to reassess his strategy and chose a decisive line in early 1976 due to the complexity of the crisis and its possible negative outcomes for Syria's security. That's why, he decided to intervene in Lebanon via Syria's proxies Palestinian Liberation Army (PLA) and the *Saiqa* in January 1976 to restore the balance of power for the sake of the PLO-LNM bloc.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷² Itamar Rabinovich, "The Changing Prism: Syrian Policy in Lebanon As A Mirror, An Issue and An Instrument," in *Syria under Assad: Domestic Constraints and Regional Risks*, ed. Moshe Ma'oz and Avner Yaniv (London&Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986), 180-181; Bassel F. Salloukh, "Syria and Lebanon: A Brotherhood Transformed," *Middle East Report* No. 236 (Fall 2005): 14-15; Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 174.

⁴⁷³ Marius Deeb, *Syria's Terrorist War on Lebanon and the Peace Process* (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 9-14; Raymond Hinnebusch, "Pax Syriana? The Origins, Causes and Consequences of Syria's Role in Lebanon," *Mediterranean Politics* 3, No. 1 (1998): 140-141.

Syria's intervention in the civil war boosted its mediator and peacemaker position in Lebanon. Senior Syrian officials visited Lebanon to find a persistent solution to the civil war. In this respect, Syria sponsored the Constitutional Document, which was jointly prepared by President Assad and President Suleiman Frangieh in February 1976, to bring an end to the bloodshed. The Constitutional Document was composed of significant articles such as reorganization of Lebanon's power structure in favor of Muslims and the PLO's respect for Lebanon's sovereignty. On the other hand, Syria's allies -the PLO and the LNM- firmly rejected the document, which put them on a collision course with Syria and brought about rapprochement between Damascus and the U.S.-backed Christian Maronites. In this respect, the document totally changed Syria's alliance dynamics in Lebanon as it made previous allies of Damascus (the PLO and the leftist Muslim groups) its new foes. While Syria's attitude towards the PLO-LNM bloc was changing, the Maronite Christians led by the Phalange began to perceive Syria as their chief ally and savior in the civil war.⁴⁷⁴

After rejecting Syria-sponsored political settlement, the PLO-LNM bloc sought to defeat the Christian forces by instigating an uprising in the Lebanese army, which changed the balance of power on the ground in favor of the PLO-LNM bloc. Military offensive of the PLO-LNM bloc pushed the Christian leaders to seek Syria's military intervention against it. In this milieu, President Suleiman Frangieh requested Syria's intervention in the civil war in March 1976. Fearing that the PLO-LNM victory would bring about American, Israeli or French intervention in Lebanon, Assad decided to launch direct military intervention in Lebanon on 1 June 1976 on the side of the Maronite Christian militias. After entering Lebanon, Syrian troops immediately removed the blockade imposed on the Christians in Zahleh city in the Beqaa valley and engaged in heavy fighting with the PLO in different parts of Lebanon. Syria's intervention expanded gradually across Lebanon and Syrian troops were embroiled in the Lebanese civil war. Syria relinquished the role of mediator and peacemaker by siding with the Maronites in the conflict, which led to never-ending animosity between Hafez al-Assad and Yasser Arafat in the future.⁴⁷⁵

Why President Assad decided to intervene in Lebanon against the PLO even though his decision was interpreted as a betrayal to Arab nationalism? Assad elaborated on reasons for Syria's intervention in Lebanon in a speech in Damascus on 20 July 1976. During his speech,

⁴⁷⁴ Rabinovich, "The Changing Prism," 182.

⁴⁷⁵ Radwan Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria: Intelligence Services, Foreign Relations and Democracy in the Modern Middle East* (London: I.B.&Tauris, 2011), 101-102; Deeb, *Syria's Terrorist War on Lebanon*; 15-21; Rabinovich, "The Changing Prism," 181.

he ironically claimed that Syria intervened in the civil war to safeguard the PLO. According to Assad, victory of the PLO-LNM alliance against the Maronite forces might internationalize the conflict and led to partition of Lebanon along sectarian lines. In this context, Assad was concerned that a pro-Israeli and pro-Western Maronite statelet along Syria's western border and an independent entity governed by the PLO-LNM alliance in the south of Beirut-Damascus highway would be established in Lebanon. For Assad, the PLO-LNM statelet would bring Israel's intervention and drag Syria into a costly military confrontation with Israel as such an entity would probably ally with the radical states, namely Iraq and Libya. Assad thought that the PLO-LNM statelet would also weaken Syria's western flank and counteract his Eastern Front Strategy. Assad also anticipated that the emergence of new statelets in Lebanon along ethnic and religious identities might incite a secessionist wave in the Middle East and threaten the fabric of the Syrian society.⁴⁷⁶

In order to prevent these scenarios, Assad decided to intervene in Lebanon on the side of the Christian Maronites against his previous allies. In so doing, Assad sought to transform Lebanon into Syria's fiefdom by controlling its foreign policy and using it as a pawn for his regional and international calculations. According to Assad, Lebanon must remain as a buffer zone between Damascus and Tel Aviv and a ground for Syria's proxy war against Israel.⁴⁷⁷

More importantly, Assad regarded the Lebanese Civil War as an opportunity to demonstrate the United States that Syria was a capable and credible actor in the Middle East. Assad wanted to assume a new regional role in Lebanon compatible with that of the United States. That's why, he wanted to capitalize on his new alliance with the Maronites to open a diplomatic channel with Washington. In fact, while forging its relations with the Maronites, the Assad regime was in contact with high-level American officials. Following Syria's early intervention in the Lebanese Civil War in January 1976, the Ford administration had begun to change its perception of Syria's role in Lebanon. Especially Kissinger regarded Syria as a stabilizing force in Lebanon and sought to achieve a *modus vivendi* between Israel and Syria to stabilize Lebanon. Thanks to Kissinger's efforts, Syria and Israel reached a secret and unwritten red line agreement/understanding, which divided Lebanon into spheres of influence between Damascus and Tel Aviv. According to the red line agreement, the United States and Israel recognized Syria's hegemony in Lebanon, Syria in turn implicitly acknowledged Israel's legitimate security concerns. According to the agreement, Syrian troops would not cross the line running directly east from Sidon towards the eastern Beqaa region, Syrian troops in south

⁴⁷⁶ Salloukh, "Syria and Lebanon," 15; Deeb, *Syria's Terrorist War on Lebanon*, 24-25.

⁴⁷⁷ Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria's Waiting Game*, 121-123; Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, 99.

of Beirut-Damascus line could not be more than a single brigade and Syria could not deploy surface-to-air missiles in Lebanon. The red line agreement demonstrated that both Israel and Syria had common interest in Lebanon's stability, and they were open to bargaining while respecting interests of each other. Having secured the approval of the United States and Israel, the Syrian army entered Lebanon in June 1976 to fought alongside the Christian Maronite forces to defeat the PLO and its leftist Muslim allies across Lebanon. Neither the United States nor Israel opposed to Syria's intervention, which was interpreted as their green light to Syria. The United States welcomed Syria's offensive against the PLO and its protection of the Christian Maronites as compatible with its interests in Lebanon.⁴⁷⁸

While the Syrian army was about to crush the PLO and its allies in September 1976, Saudi Arabia decided to act to find a diplomatic solution to the ongoing civil war through the Arab League. On 16-17 October 1976, the Arab League's extraordinary summit was convened in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. At the Riyadh Summit, Syria's military presence in Lebanon was recognized as the Arab Deterrent Force consisting of 30,000 soldiers. Syria's position in Lebanon further consolidated at the Cairo Summit, at which decisions of the Riyadh Summit were approved, on 25 October 1976. Despite its multi-national structure, the Arab Deterrence Force was almost composed of Syrian troops, outnumbered soldiers of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Libya, Tunisia, and Sudan. So, the Arab League acknowledged Syria's hegemony over Lebanon by allowing it to dominate the Arab Deterrence Force.⁴⁷⁹

The Riyadh and Cairo summits bolstered Syria's regional and international standing by late 1976. Thanks to Syria's hegemonic position in Lebanon, President Assad met with the Soviet and American leaders on his own terms in this period. Although Assad enjoyed international prestige, he suffered a serious domestic crisis owing to his Lebanon policy. The Muslim Brotherhood launched an uprising against the Assad regime by utilizing grievances of Sunni public against the Baath regime after the Lebanon intervention against the PLO and its Muslim allies.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁸ Anne Marie Baylouny, "US foreign policy in Lebanon," in *Handbook of U.S.-Middle East Relations: Formative Factors and Regional Perspectives*, ed. Robert Looney (New York: Routledge, 2009), 315-316; Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 246. Also see Hilde Henriksen Waage and Geir Bergensen Huse, "A Careful Minuet: The United States, Israel, Syria and the Lebanese Civil War, 1975-1976," *The International History Review* 42, No. 5 (2019): 1-22.

⁴⁷⁹ Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, 101-102.

⁴⁸⁰ Rabinovich, "The Changing Prism," 182-183.

President Assad faced serious challenges in Lebanon in the second half of the 1970s by virtue of his domestic difficulties as well as changing regional dynamics such as Iraq's threats, Sadat's realignment with the West and the end of the Syrian-Jordanian alliance. By the end of the 1970s, Israel and the Maronite-led Lebanese Front began to threaten Syria's presence in Lebanon by forging a solid alliance. After becoming prime minister, Likud leader Menachem Begin enhanced Israel's support for Bashir Gemayel and his Maronite militias to diminish security threats posed by Syria and the PLO in Lebanon. Begin thought that Syria's hegemony could be undermined through Israeli-Maronite alliance and enhancing Israel's influence in Lebanon via this alliance.⁴⁸¹

Begin showed his determination to weaken Syria's presence in Lebanon by invading south Lebanon with the Litani Operation in March 1978. The United States protested the invasion and voted for the UN Security Resolution 425 demanding Israel's withdrawal from Lebanese territory and formation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). After the Carter administration's threat to cut its aids, Israel pulled its troops back to the so-called "security zone" in south Lebanon and created a new Christian-dominated proxy force -the South Lebanese Army (SLA)- along the Lebanese-Syrian border to maintain its control in the security zone. Meanwhile the UNIFIL was dispatched to the region to maintain security and monitor Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon.⁴⁸²

After the missile crisis of 1981, which brought Syria and Israel to the brink of war, the most serious confrontation between the two countries took place during the June 1982 War. When Assad understood Israel's determination to launch a large-scale military operation in Lebanon in 1982, he warned Israel not to execute such an occupation operation if it did not want military escalation with Syria. Despite Syria's warnings, Israel was bent on achieving its strategic objectives by starting full-scale invasion of Lebanon on 6 June 1982.⁴⁸³ Israel, emboldened by the new regional fragmentation after the Camp David Accords, sought to assert its hegemony over Lebanon against Syria. It also aimed at eliminating Syria's resistance to the Camp David regional order. In addition this regional-strategic calculation, there were three major objectives of the Begin government in the 1982 War: evicting the PLO totally from Lebanon, forcing Syria out of Lebanon and, and making Bashir Gemayel, who could sign a separate peace

⁴⁸¹ Itamar Rabinovich, "Israel, Syria and Lebanon," in *The View From Damascus: State, Political Community and Foreign Relations in the Twentieth-Century Syria* (London, Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008), 242.

⁴⁸² Baylouny, "US foreign policy in Lebanon," 316.

⁴⁸³ Rabinovich, "The Changing Prism," 185.

agreement with Israel, new president of Lebanon.⁴⁸⁴ The Reagan administration gave a green light to Israel's invasion as its strategic objectives were totally consistent with that of the United States in the Middle East. Even though the international community condemned Israel's invasion of a sovereign country, the United States vetoed UN resolutions demanding Israel's withdrawal or a ceasefire between the warring parties.⁴⁸⁵

During the 1982 War, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and the Syrian army clashed in different parts of Lebanon including the Beqaa valley and Beirut. Syria suffered a heavy military defeat especially in the air, it failed to garner Arab support and its political allies in Lebanon were either defeated or decided to lower their relations with Damascus owing to Israel's fierce attacks. Therefore, the 1982 War turned out to be a serious blow to Syria's role and influence in Lebanon.⁴⁸⁶ As a result of the war, Syria lost most of its positions in Lebanon and the PLO had to leave Beirut and transfer its administrative center to Tunisia. Furthermore, Israel was able to establish a client Maronite regime with the backing of the United States in Lebanon. Israel's chief ally Bashir Gemayel was elected as president of Lebanon, but he was assassinated allegedly by Syria shortly after his election in September 1982. Upon Gemayel's murder, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 520, urging the withdrawal of all non-Lebanese factions from Lebanon, on 17 September 1982. After the killing of Bashir, his brother Amin Gemayel became new president of Lebanon. During the 1980s, Syria's main goal was to restore its position in Lebanon by curbing influence of Israel, the United States and the Christian forces. Syria also tried every way to stifle the implementation of the Reagan Middle East Peace Initiative, promoting Jordan to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian Question, in September 1982. In this context, Syria strengthened its relations with the Soviet Union to achieve its strategic objectives in Lebanon after the 1982 War. The Soviet Union rehabilitated Syria's ground-to-air missile system in late 1982. Syria was able to rebuild its position in Lebanon in the 1980s thanks to the Soviet Union's generous military aids.⁴⁸⁷

In the 1980s, the most challenging development against Syria's presence in Lebanon was the signing of the Lebanese-Israeli agreement under American auspices on 17 May 1983. The

⁴⁸⁴ Salloukh, "Syria and Lebanon," 16; Hinnebusch, "Pax Syriana?," 143; Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 387.

⁴⁸⁵ Baylouny, "US foreign policy in Lebanon," 316.

⁴⁸⁶ Yair Evron, "Washington, Damascus and the Lebanon Crisis," in *Syria under Assad: Domestic Constraints and Regional Risks*, ed. Moshe Ma'oz and Avner Yaniv (London&Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986), 218.

⁴⁸⁷ Rabinovich, "The Changing Prism," 186; Hinnebusch, "Pax Syriana?," 143.

agreement was putting Lebanon into Israel's orbit by leaving security of Lebanon to Israel totally. Besides, while the 17 May agreement disregarded interests of Syria and the PLO completely, it satisfied Israel's security demands especially as to its proxy army SLA.⁴⁸⁸ The Reagan administration sponsored the agreement to accomplish its objectives in Lebanon, namely the withdrawal of all foreign troops (hinting at the Syrian army) and strengthening Amin Gemayel against Syria. Yet, the United States miscalculated Syria's steadfastness as it did not bow to external pressures and refused to withdraw its troops from Lebanon.⁴⁸⁹

President Assad considered the U.S.-backed 17 May agreement as an extension of the Camp David Accords and its prevention as a symbolic message to the U.S.-Israel crafted regional order. For this reason, Assad capitalized on the growing discontent of the Druze and Shiite communities against the Maronite-dominated regime by endorsing. Assad endorsed their militias guerrilla style armed struggle against the Maronite regime during the 1980s. By 1983, Hezbollah also entered the scene and started operations against Israeli forces. In face of military escalation, President Gemayel called for direct military assistance from the United States. This move led to confrontation between Syria-backed militias and the United States in Lebanon, which caused American casualties owing to a series of suicide attacks. In this milieu, the Reagan administration decided to withdraw American troops from Lebanon in 1984. President Gemayel faced serious difficulties in domestic politics after the Reagan administration's withdrawal decision. Not only the United States but also Israel decided to evacuate Lebanon due to increasing number of casualties and possibility of a war with Syria, supported by Soviet arms and weapons. Yet, Israel continued its presence with its proxy force in the security zone in south Lebanon until May 2000. Having lost his main supporters (Israel and the United States), Gemayel desperately approached Syria to save his government. Assad demanded abrogation of the 17 May agreement to negotiate with him. On 5 March 1984, Gemayel cancelled the 17 May agreement, which manifested Syria's hegemony in Lebanon once again.⁴⁹⁰

Israel's decision to reach an understanding with Syria after abrogation of the 17 May Agreement and to withdraw unilaterally from Lebanon (completed in June 1985 apart from the security zone) left Syria without rival in Lebanon arena from the mid-1980s onwards.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁸ Salloukh, "Syria and Lebanon," 16; Baylouny, "US foreign policy in Lebanon," 317.

⁴⁸⁹ Evron, "Washington, Damascus and the Lebanon Crisis," 219-220.

⁴⁹⁰ Rabinovich, "The Changing Prism," 187-188.

⁴⁹¹ Rabinovich, "Israel, Syria and Lebanon," 245; Hinnebusch, "Pax Syriana?," 144; Salloukh, "Syria and Lebanon," 16.

3.4.4.2. The Taif Agreement and Beyond: Syria as the Ultimate Power Broker in Lebanon

After Israel's invasion of 1982, Lebanon suffered vicious cycle of sectarian violence and governmental inability to restore political stability and order. Muslim and Christian communities struggled for power and the armed wing of the PLO strove to reestablish itself in Lebanon. The rise of the Shiite community and growing activities of its two main representatives, namely Amal and Hezbollah, further exacerbated sectarianism in the 1980s. Outside players' ongoing involvement fueled instability as well. Israel's influence in south Lebanon was a source of tension in the country. In addition to Israel, Syria was dominating the central and eastern regions of Lebanon with its army and intelligence. Iran was also meddling in internal affairs of Lebanon via Hezbollah to establish an Islamic state. Above all, the root cause of domestic instability and sectarian strife was insufficiency of the political system based on the sectarian loyalties. It was obvious that the National Pact of 1943 failed to address changing demographic realities of Lebanon in the 1980s.⁴⁹²

The crisis and ensuing civil war, which paved the way for the Taif Agreement, erupted when the term of President Amin Gemayel expired in September 1988. Gemayel appointed General Michael Aoun, Maronite Commander in Chief of the Lebanese army, as Interim Prime Minister. But the acting Prime Minister Salim al-Hoss rejected this appointment for being unlawful and declared his cabinet as the sole legitimate government of Lebanon. So, there emerged two governments: the military government of Aoun in East Beirut supported by Iraq and the government of Hoss in West Beirut backed by Syria. Governmental crisis escalated sectarian polarization as one of the two competing governments was headed by a Maronite and the other by a Sunni Muslim. In this milieu, having received Iraq's support, General Aoun declared a war of liberation against Syria's occupation on 14 March 1989, which triggered the last round of the Lebanese Civil War between 1989 and 1990.⁴⁹³

In September 1989, Lebanese deputies were summoned in Taif, Saudi Arabia under the supervision of the Arab League in order to end the civil war and to reform the political structure of Lebanon. The Taif Agreement, which formally ended the Lebanese Civil War, was signed by Lebanese deputies on 22 October 1989 and was ratified by the Lebanese parliament on 4 November 1989. The Taif Agreement, which was an updated and revised version of the National Charter of 1943, reformed the governmental system of Lebanon by equalizing the

⁴⁹² Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 389-390.

⁴⁹³ Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria's Waiting Game*, 127; Salloukh, "Syria and Lebanon," 17.

status of Maronite president, Sunni prime minister and Shiite speaker of the parliament. In addition, Muslims were given a larger role in Lebanon's political system and an equal number of seats for Christians and Muslims in the parliament was accepted. In the agreement, it was stressed that the authority of the Lebanese government would be extended across the country including south Lebanon and the militia groups would be disbanded and their heavy weapons would be handed over to the Lebanese army. The Taif Agreement also stipulated that Syrian troops would withdraw from Lebanon at least within two years after the fulfillment of constitutional reforms envisaged in the agreement. More importantly, the Taif Agreement established a special relationship between Syria and Lebanon.⁴⁹⁴

The Taif Agreement rendered Syria a tangible role in ending the civil war and established its hegemony over Lebanon. Syria's role encapsulated a range of issues from disbanding and disarming the militias to coordination of political, military and other issues due to the special relationship between the two countries. The agreement emphasized the need for cultivating Syria's consent in decision-making, which made Damascus the ultimate power broker in Lebanon's domestic issues. According to Syria, restrictions imposed on Lebanon's foreign relations in the Taif Agreement made conclusion of a separate peace agreement between Israel and Lebanon totally impossible. The agreement also strengthened Syria vis-à-vis Israel in Lebanon as it recognized the right to resist Israeli occupation in southern Lebanon. Given Syria's alliance with Hezbollah, it allowed Syria to back military resistance against Israel without engaging in direct fighting.⁴⁹⁵

In November 1989, Syrian Vice President Abd al-Halim Khaddam gave an extensive interview about Syrian-Lebanese relations. In the interview, Khaddam noted Syria's adherence to the Taif Agreement as follows:

“What was achieved at the meetings of the Lebanese deputies in al-Taif is important for ending the civil war in Lebanon, and all Lebanese should make serious to implement it, because the national accord document constitutes the basis and framework for rebuilding the Lebanese state and removing the obstacles that have prevented it. On the instructions of President Hafiz al-Assad, Syria will do everything it can for the implementation of al-Taif agreement.”⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁴ Salloukh, “Syria and Lebanon,” 18; Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 176; Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 390-391.

⁴⁹⁵ Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria's Waiting Game*, 125-126.

⁴⁹⁶ “Vice President Reviews Developments in Lebanon,” *FBIS*, London al-Majallah in Arabic, November 7, 1989.

Although the Taif Agreement aimed at changing Lebanon's institutional structure, it was far from removing provisions triggering the civil war. In the post-Taif era, Lebanon was governed by weak governments with a sectarian political system. That's why, Lebanon continued to be susceptible to external influence and domestic infighting.⁴⁹⁷ General Aoun became the first politician who refused to abide by the provisions of the Taif Agreement. Aoun claimed that the agreement legitimized Syria's influence over Lebanon and failed to set a clear timetable for withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. That's why, he declared himself as a Lebanese patriot and launched a military campaign to drive Syrian forces out of Lebanon. Assad perceived the Aoun rebellion as a dire threat to Syria's presence in Lebanon. According to Assad, Aoun was backed by Iraq and Israel to weaken Syria's hegemony in Lebanon, approved by the Taif Agreement.⁴⁹⁸

In this context, Assad decided to quell the Aoun rebellion with force, which made military confrontation between Aoun's forces and Syrian troops unavoidable. There were bloody artillery exchanges between the two warring parties by late 1989 in Beirut, which caused destruction of the city's residential areas and killing of more than 1000 people. Although Aoun's anti-Syrian rebellion garnered support from within Muslim and Christian factions, his indifference to civilian losses undermined his credibility in a short time. By early 1990, Aoun was fighting not only the Syrians and the Lebanese Muslims but also the Maronite militias. Aoun's rebellion was finally quashed when Syrian troops together with Lebanese soldiers of the pro-Taif government attacked Aoun's forces in East Beirut and stormed his presidential palace at Baabda on 13 October 1990. While the Syrian tanks were taking control of the streets in Beirut, Aoun sought asylum in the French Embassy. With the ultimate defeat of the Aoun rebellion, pro-Syrian cabinet of President Elias Hrawi was established to implement the Taif Agreement, which manifested Syria's role as ultimate power broker in Lebanon and a major regional actor in the Middle East.⁴⁹⁹

After the suppression of the Aoun rebellion, several post-Taif treaties formalized Syria's presence in Lebanon and consolidated its de facto hegemony. It was now evident that Syria had no intention to leave Lebanon after years of bloody clashes as Damascus got involved in Lebanese politics and economy either directly or indirectly. The special relationship between Syria and Lebanon, which was recognized in the Taif Agreement, was formalized with the

⁴⁹⁷ Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria's Waiting Game*, 125.

⁴⁹⁸ Rabinovich, "Israel, Syria and Lebanon," 247-248.

⁴⁹⁹ Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 391.

signing of the Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination by President Assad and President Hrawi in Damascus on 22 May 1991. Syria's presence in Lebanon was given a formal status and was legitimized with this agreement.⁵⁰⁰ According to the agreement, joint government institutions for cooperation in defense, security, foreign policy and economy were established. The agreement gave Syria and Lebanon the right to make binding policy decisions within the framework of a higher council composed of the heads of state, parliament speakers and prime ministers.⁵⁰¹

After the Treaty of Brotherhood, the Defense and Security Agreement, which provided a framework for comprehensive coordination and cooperation between the military, security, and intelligence organizations of Syria and Lebanon, was signed on 1 September 1991. Thanks to the agreement, Syria had an ideological and organizational clout over Lebanon's military establishment and intelligence service. The Treaty of Brotherhood and the Defense Agreement were together formed the political and security backbone of Syria's hegemony over Lebanon. By signing these agreements, Syria was also able to prevent Lebanon from joining peace negotiations with Israel independently and signing a separate peace agreement in the Middle East peace process.⁵⁰² Rafiq Hariri, who served as a prime minister during the 1990s, explained this fact stating that "*Our moves are coordinated entirely with Syria's moves. If Syria takes a step forward, we follow suit, and if Syria takes even one step backward, we step backward in its wake.*"⁵⁰³

Syria claimed that its primary goal was to restore Lebanon's unity and security after the brutal civil war and its presence in Lebanon had nothing to do with political or economic benefits. Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa expressed Syria's role in settling the conflict and maintaining stability in Lebanon at the United Nations General Assembly in October 1991 as follows:

"Lebanon's restoration of its national unity, constitutional institutions and a large degree of its security and normal life, is a great source of satisfaction to the international community in general and to my country, Syria, in particular... The cooperation of my country with Lebanon, with whom we enjoy bonds of kinship, history and common destiny, was a crucial factor that helped brotherly Lebanon

⁵⁰⁰ Pipes, *Damascus Courts the West*, 27-28; Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 177.

⁵⁰¹ Ihsan A. Hijazi, "Syria-Lebanon Cooperation Pact Signed," *New York Times*, May 23, 1991, 3.

⁵⁰² Salloukh, "Syria and Lebanon," 19; Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria's Waiting Game*, 128-129.

⁵⁰³ Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 177.

recover from its plight, restore its sovereignty and integrity, and resume its role in the Arab and international arena.”⁵⁰⁴

Like Sharaa, Walid al-Muallem noted Syria’s stabilizing role in Lebanon in an interview in 1992 by stating that Syria was “*the only country who had the courage to help: We came to Lebanon to put an end to the civil war, an end to the dismantling of Lebanon, and we insisted on the unity, independence, and sovereignty of Lebanon. We supported the Ta’if accord and put an end to the civil war.*”⁵⁰⁵

3.4.4.3. From Troublemaker to Stabilizer: Washington’s Changing Perception of Syria’s Role in Lebanon

The Lebanese arena was an important dimension of the U.S.-Syrian relations before the Bush administration. The United States and Syria were on a collision course in Lebanon during the early phases of the Cold War owing to Syria-sponsored radical pan-Arab nationalism’s challenge to American interests in Lebanon. The U.S.-Syrian tension deescalated to some extent after Syria’s intervention in the Lebanese Civil War in 1976. With the signing of the secret red line agreement, the United States began to view Syria as a stabilizing force in Lebanon, which was clear indication of Washington’s changing perception of Syria’s role in Lebanon in the second half of the 1970s. Yet, Lebanon became a source of tension between the United States and Syria once again especially after the 1982 War.⁵⁰⁶

The United States and Israel strove to undermine Syria’s hegemony over Lebanon in the 1980s. The Reagan administration emphasized the need for complete withdrawal of foreign forces including Syrian troops from Lebanon and the establishment of a strong central government controlled by the Christians to curb activities of anti-American Lebanese forces such as the PLO and Hezbollah. As explained above, Syria refused the 17 May 1983 agreement sponsored by the Reagan administration and opposed to American designs in Lebanon, which enhanced mutual distrust between Washington and Damascus. In late 1983 and in 1984, the Reagan administration decided to apply the strategy direct use of force against Syria to defend the Gemayel government. Yet, the outcome of this strategy was dramatic as the military confrontation between the American forces and the Syria-backed anti-Gemayel factions resulted in suicide attacks against U.S. embassy compound in April and the headquarter of American marines in Beirut in October 1983. In the latter attack, 241 American servicemen

⁵⁰⁴ Sarkees and Zunes, “Disenchantment with the ‘New World Order’,” 360.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 359.

⁵⁰⁶ Evron, “Washington, Damascus and the Lebanon Crisis,” 209.

were brutally killed. Growing violence against American targets proved unsustainability of American strategy in Lebanon, which forced the Reagan administration to reassess strategic importance of Lebanon in U.S. foreign policy. Eventually it withdrew American forces from Lebanon in February 1984. In the end, the United States returned to its 1976 position and concluded that Syria could contribute to stability of Lebanon more than the American military did.⁵⁰⁷

Before the signing of the Taif Agreement, the Bush administration's attitude to Syria's role in Lebanon was not positive. It firmly stood out of the crisis and adopted a balanced role during the latest round of civil war between the Aoun forces and Syria-backed Muslim factions in March 1989. Despite its call for a ceasefire under the auspices of the Arab League, the Bush administration did not refrain from accusing Syria of escalation of the violence in Lebanon. In April 1989, the United States decided to exert pressure on Syria to stop bombing of the Christian areas in East Beirut. The State Department condemned the indiscriminate Syrian shelling for going beyond a proportional response or self-defense. The Bush administration also urged General Aoun to reach a compromise with the Muslim factions to evict Syria from Lebanon. What's more, the Bush administration underlined that it wanted to forge solidarity and legality in Lebanon via General Aoun's political efforts not his military moves. On 18 April 1989, State Department Spokesperson Richard Boucher pointed to the role of Syria for worsening situation in Lebanon as follows:

“We are appalled by the continued exchanges of indiscriminate shelling in Beirut by all sides... We condemn these actions, which are in total disregard for human values and innocent lives. All parties, including Syria, which is a direct participant in the artillery exchanges which cause so much death and devastation, must stop the fighting and abide by the Arab League's call for a cease-fire forth-with.”⁵⁰⁸

On the same day, White House Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater explained President Bush's concern about escalation of the violence in Lebanon by stating that:

“President Bush is deeply concerned about the growing violence in Lebanon and the escalating suffering of the Lebanese people. The President calls for all internal parties and Syria to cease shelling and to step back from confrontation. The President strongly supports efforts currently underway, such as the one by the Arab League, to bring about a cease-fire and an end to the violence.”⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁷ Baylouny, “US foreign policy in Lebanon,” 317; Evron, “Washington, Damascus and the Lebanon Crisis,” 220-222; Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 175.

⁵⁰⁸ Thomas L. Friedman, “U.S. Is Pressing Syria to End Beirut Shelling,” *New York Times*, April 18, 1989, 10.

⁵⁰⁹ Marlin Fitzwater, “Statement by Secretary Fitzwater on the Situation in Lebanon, April 18, 1989,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George Bush, Book I-January 20 to June 30, 1989* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1990), 441.

The Bush administration also condemned the death of the Spanish Ambassador Pedro Manuel de Aristegui and a number of people in an artillery exchange between Muslim and Christian factions in late April 1989 as indiscriminate and in total disregard of human life. The State department accused Syria of being a direct participant in the artillery exchanges causing death and destruction in Beirut.⁵¹⁰

In August 1989, the State Department accused Syria of escalating the recent violence in Beirut. State Department Spokesperson Margaret D. Tutwiler said that:

“The United States condemns the indiscriminate slaughter of innocent people and the renewed use of heavy-caliber weapons, such as the 240-millimeter mortar, which are in Syrian arsenal. We again call upon Syria, an active participant in the fighting, the Lebanese armed forces, as well as various Lebanese factions, for an immediate cease-fire, the lifting of all blockades, and the initiation of a dialogue for the political reconstruction of Lebanon.”⁵¹¹

The Taif Agreement, which formally ended the Lebanese Civil War in October 1989, became a turning point in the U.S.-Syrian relations in the Lebanese arena as the two countries cooperated in the preparation of the document. In May 1990, American Ambassador Djerejian noted the changing nature of the U.S.-Syrian relations and growing trust and cooperation between Washington and Damascus despite the ongoing differences. He underlined the cooperation between the two countries in the preparation of the Taif Agreement by stating that *“We have shown Syria the value of joint efforts when our interests are spelled out. For example, our consultations with Syria and Lebanon provided the backbone for the al-Taif agreement. Had it not been for these consultations, the al-Taif agreement would not have materialized.”*⁵¹²

In addition to the Taif Agreement, the Gulf crisis influenced the Bush administration’s perception of Syria’s role in Lebanon. The Bush administration set out to view Syria as a stabilizing force in Lebanon in tandem with the United States’ NRCs of regional stabilizer and balancer in the Middle East. It decided to recognize Syria’s hegemony over Lebanon on account of Assad’s support for the U.S.-led coalition in the Gulf War to settle the conflict and to balance Saddam Hussein. Assad reaped the benefits of his posture on the Gulf crisis in the Lebanese arena. So, Lebanon became a payoff for Syria’s alliance with the United States

⁵¹⁰ “U.S. Condemns Syria,” *New York Times*, April 24, 1989, 21.

⁵¹¹ “U.S. Faults Syria in Shelling,” *New York Times*, August 12, 1989, 4.

⁵¹² “Syrian Ministers, Djerejian on Mideast Peace,” *FBIS*, Kuwait Al-Qabas al-Duwali in Arabic, May 24, 1990.

against Iraq. President Assad's spokesman Jubran Kuriyah acknowledged the Lebanese arena as an example of possible the U.S-Syrian cooperation in September 1990. Kuriyah said that similar to Syria, the United States endorsed the Taif Agreement which put an end to the civil war.⁵¹³

In September 1990, President Bush admitted Syria's key role in achieving peace and stability in Lebanon and the U.S.-Syrian compromise in a meeting with Lebanese-Americans. In response to a question about the similarity of Iraq's action against Kuwait and Syria's action in Lebanon, Bush said that "*One of the great frustrations of my job...is my inability to have helped bring peace to Lebanon. And Syria does have a key role. And I hope out of this we can use this new world order, if you will, that might emerge if we all stay together to be catalysts for peace in the Lebanon...*"⁵¹⁴

After these remarks, the Bush administration gave Assad a green light to eliminate his arch enemy General Aoun to stabilize the country and to restore political order envisioned in the Taif Agreement in October 1990.⁵¹⁵ The United States allowed Syria to dislodge General Aoun in return for its participation in the Gulf War coalition. By crushing the Aoun rebellion, Syria was able to prevent Lebanon from *de facto* disintegration and to secure full implementation of the Taif Agreement, which was designed to achieve reconciliation between Muslim and Christian communities.⁵¹⁶ The U.S. approval for such a military operation was probably given during Baker's visit to Syria in mid-September. After the operation, American Ambassador Djerejian announced the United States' commitment to the implementation of the Taif agreement, and Syria's operation was carried out to help the Lebanese government extend its sovereignty over every inch of Lebanese territories. Such an operation was unthinkable one year ago due to objections of the United States. With the removal his enemy from Lebanese politics, there was no obstacle in front of Assad to sustain order and establish a stable regime in Lebanon under the auspices of Syria.⁵¹⁷

⁵¹³ "Al-Asad Spokesman Views U.S. Cooperation," *FBIS*, Munich Sueddeutsche Zeitung in German, September 19, 1990.

⁵¹⁴ A. M. Rosenthal, "The New World Order," *New York Times*, October 23, 1990.

⁵¹⁵ Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria's Waiting Game*, 51-52; al-Baidhani, *The United States and Syria*, 35; Schmidt, *The Folly of War*, 305.

⁵¹⁶ Zisser, "Syrian Foreign Policy," 83.

⁵¹⁷ Zisser, "Syria and the Gulf Crisis," 570.

In October 1990, senior Bush administration officials said that they did not give any red or green light to Syria's operation to oust General Aoun. Yet, they indicated their discontent with Aoun, who declined to recognize the constitutional changes granting equal rights for Lebanon's Muslim and Christian communities in the Taif Agreement. American officials also underlined that Syria was invited by the Lebanese government to end the conflict. On 18 October 1990, Baker commented on the Lebanese Civil War in his testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee. He said that the United States did not give green light to Syria, and it went to Lebanon after the Lebanese government's call. Baker commented that:

“We've condemned violence in Lebanon for a long time. Most recently, we argued against that President Bush's meeting on the 29th of September with the Prime Minister of Lebanon in New York, so suggestions that somehow we've given a green light for this are wrong. That's not the case. I do think we should recognize that Syria was there at the request of the legitimate Government of Lebanon, a Government that we recognize and a Government that we support.”⁵¹⁸

In June 1994, Baker expressed same ideas about the United States' perception of Syria's presence in Lebanon in an interview as follows:

“What Hafiz al-Asad did in Lebanon did not differ that much from what Saddam did in Kuwait, but he didn't do it in the same way. He did not send the military in there and brutalize the population; and there were Lebanese who wanted Syrian protection and stability. That did not exist in Kuwait. Nor did Asad engage in the abhorrent humanitarian excesses that Saddam did in Kuwait.

By the way, the notion that the U.S. government made a deal with Asad, allowing him to take over Lebanon in October 1990 in return for his joining the coalition against Iraq, is wrong. There were no hints sent to him that he could move in. Rather, a vacuum existed in Lebanon and Asad took advantage of it. We were not going to send forces in there; after all, we'd put forces in Lebanon in whatever year it was and lost 250 Marines [in 1983]. We were not going to peacekeeping Lebanon.”⁵¹⁹

Despite Baker's denial, the Bush administration did not oppose to Syria's tightening grip on Lebanon after the Taif Agreement. On 8 March 1991, President Bush gave an interview to Middle Eastern journalists after the Operation Iraqi Freedom, in which emphasized the constructive role of Syria in Lebanon. By citing the Gulf crisis, he said that the United States and Syria would work on Lebanon as follows:

“We've had some differences with Syria that we have spoken very frankly about regarding terrorism and other things. I think that because we were able to work together with Syria here and we did this...I think we have a much better chance to work with them toward peace in Lebanon... I think in terms of Lebanon...we've got

⁵¹⁸ Friedman, “U.S. Says It Sent No Signals to Expel Lebanese General.”

⁵¹⁹ Pipes and Clawson, “Looking Back on the Middle East: James A. Baker III.”

a big door we can walk in... We can talk about them more frankly without the door being slammed. And that can help Lebanon, that can help it."⁵²⁰

Four days after this interview, President Bush reiterated his appreciation of Syria's cooperation with the anti-Iraqi coalition and its central position in Lebanon at a press conference with President Mitterrand of France by stating saying that:

"We were very pleased with Syria's role in the coalition, very pleased, indeed, that they were side by side on the ground with forces... Syria is an important country in the area. They're vital to what happens in the Lebanon and, of course, they are vital a little longer-run in what solutions there are to the Palestinian question. So, having contact with this country, very openly discussing our differences with them as we do, but trying to find common ground, in my view is a very good, commonsense approach following on the coalition's solidarity in the Gulf."⁵²¹

In this context, the Bush administration rewarded Syria's participation in the Gulf War coalition by turning a blind eye to the signing of the Treaty of Brotherhood between Syria and Lebanon in May 1991, which formalized Syria's hegemony over Lebanon. The Bush administration even approved the release of \$4 million non-lethal military aid to Lebanon, which had been blocked since the early 1980s, after the Treaty of Brotherhood.⁵²² On 29 May 1991, U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon Ryan Crocker declared the United States' support for peace in Lebanon and its endorsement of the Treaty of Brotherhood as follows: "*We hope that the treaty will be a step toward Lebanon's full independence and sovereignty.*"⁵²³ The State Department Spokesperson Richard Boucher also announced the United States' satisfaction with the treaty by saying that the agreement was already planned in Taif and it would contribute to expansion of the central authority of the Lebanese government and consolidate sovereignty and unity of Lebanon.⁵²⁴

In sum, the Bush administration initially criticized Syria's conflict with General Aoun in the last round of the civil war. Yet, it later acknowledged Syria as a stabilizing force in Lebanon with the signing of the Taif Agreement. The Bush administration's belief in Syria's

⁵²⁰ George Bush, "Interview with Middle Eastern Journalists, March 8, 1991," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George Bush, Book I-January 1 to June 30, 1991* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1992), 239.

⁵²¹ George Bush, "The President's News Conference with President Francois Mitterrand of France in Martinique, French West Indies, March 14, 1991," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George Bush, Book I-January 1 to June 30, 1991* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1992), 268.

⁵²² Pipes, *Damascus Courts the West*, 61; Herrmann, "*The Middle East and the New World Order*," 57.

⁵²³ "U.S. Envoy Tries to Reassure Lebanese on Pact with Syria," *New York Times*, May 30, 1991, 7.

⁵²⁴ M. Hüseyin Mercan, *Suriye: Rejim ve Dış Politika* (İstanbul: Açılım Kitap, 2012), 136.

constructive role in Lebanon consolidated with its participation in the U.S.-led anti-Iraqi coalition during the Gulf War. Syria's readiness to join the Middle East peace talks under the auspices of the United States further improved Syria's image in Washington. In this context, the Bush administration welcomed Syria's willingness to contribute to regional peace and stability not only during the Gulf crisis but also during the last round of the Lebanese Civil War. It can be argued that Syria's stabilizing role in Lebanon overlapped with the United States' NRCs of regional stabilizer and balancer in the Middle East in the post-Cold War era. Syria's constructive policy to maintain regional stability and to resolve regional conflicts influenced the Bush administration's perception of Syria's role in Lebanon.

3.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I elaborated on the NRCs of the United States in the post-Cold War era and how they were produced by the Bush administration. I have tried to indicate that U.S.-Syrian relations were mostly cooperative and cordial under the Bush administration from 1989 to 1993 owing to Syria's willingness to act in accordance with the NRCs of the United States, namely hegemon, regional stabilizer/peace catalyst and balancer in the Middle East in the post-Cold War era. Having seen transformation of the international system from bipolarity to unipolarity, Assad understood the need for change in Syrian foreign policy to readjust it to the U.S.-led new world order. Assad believed that Syria's national interests could be served by socializing in the new world order and by reaching a *modus vivendi* with the United States as the world's sole superpower.

When the Bush administration enacted NRCs of the United States in the Middle East during the Gulf crisis and the Madrid peace process, Syria complied with American strategy in the region. Thus, Syria's acceptance of the NRCs of the United States contributed to improvement in bilateral relations considerably. Syria's constructive role in the Gulf crisis, in the Madrid peace process and in Lebanon was welcomed by the Bush administration. Although the United States and Syria did not forge a formal alliance, the Bush administration accommodated Syria in the new world order. Thanks to its partnership with the United States in the Gulf crisis, in the Madrid peace process and in the Lebanese arena, the Bush administration acknowledged Syria as a key to peace and stability in the Middle East. So, the U.S.-Syrian relations witnessed normalization and cooperation under the Bush administration.

I think Ambassador Djerejian's remarks about Syria's role in the Middle East summarizes the essence of the Bush administration's policy towards Syria. Djerejian said that Syria was a key actor in the Middle East because "*There can be no peace with Israel without Syria; there can*

be no peace in Lebanon without Syria; there can be no real progress on combatting terrorism without Syria."⁵²⁵

⁵²⁵ Kifner, "Syrian Gains Are Seen In the Shift Toward U.S.," 6.

CHAPTER 4

U.S. FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS SYRIA UNDER BILL CLINTON (1993-2001): DEMOCRATIC ENLARGEMENT AND BEYOND

“The US is the indispensable nation whose work never stops...”
Madeleine Albright

4.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on U.S. foreign policy towards Syria under the Clinton administration from 1993 to 2001. This part of the dissertation will begin with elucidating the NRCs of the United States under the Clinton administration to understand U.S. foreign policy in the wake of the Cold War. The chapter will demonstrate that the NRCs of hegemon, tribune and agent of American values, defender of the pacific union, catalyst/integrator and internal developer guided U.S. foreign policy under the Clinton administration. The chapter will also indicate that durability of the NRCs from Bush to Clinton administrations was noteworthy. In this context, the Clinton administration continued to perform the NRC of hegemon in a multilateral way as the Bush administration did.

In the second section, the NRCs of the United States in the Middle East sub-system under the Clinton administration will be explained. In this section, it will be pointed out that the Clinton administration performed the NRCs of hegemon, regional stabilizer, and balancer in the Middle East. Having been the world’s sole hegemon, the Clinton administration believed that the United States was the only actor capable of settling the Arab-Israeli conflict in a peaceful way during the 1990s. So, the Clinton administration enacted the NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst in the Middle East peace process. By achieving a comprehensive peace in the region, the Clinton administration aimed at balancing its two Middle Eastern foes Iran and Iraq. In this respect, its “dual containment” strategy was stemming from the NRC of balancer.

In the third section, U.S. foreign policy towards Syria will be analyzed within the framework of the Syrian-Israeli peace process. In this section, it will be shown that the Clinton administration accommodated Syria during the peace negotiations because Syria welcomed

Washington's involvement and full partnership role in the Syrian-Israeli peace track. While the Assad regime was acknowledging the United States' NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst, the Clinton administration embraced Syria as key to comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Hence, despite unresolved problems such as international terrorism, convergence of roles contributed to normalization and accommodation between the United States and Syria under the Clinton administration.

4.2. The Indispensable Nation: U.S. Foreign Policy under Bill Clinton

"It's the economy, stupid!" This was the most popular slogan of William Jefferson "Bill" Clinton during the 1992 election campaign against incumbent President George H. W. Bush. Clinton, who served as the former governor of Arkansas from 1979 to 1981 and again from 1983 to 1992, carried out an election campaign focusing on domestic economic problems to challenge Bush's foreign policy-oriented election campaign. Clinton sought to garner support of the American people by blaming Bush for dealing excessively with international affairs and thus neglecting domestic economic problems of the United States. In the election campaign, Clinton promised that he would address economic crisis undermining welfare of the American people after his election.⁵²⁶

Despite his preoccupation with economy, Clinton was not totally disinterested in the future direction of American foreign policy. So, he criticized President Bush for insisting on "business as usual" foreign policy and lacking a clear strategic vision for American foreign policy while the world was undergoing a profound transformation process from bipolarity to unipolarity. In April 1992, Clinton made a speech to the Foreign Policy Association in New York, in which he expressed his contention about the Bush administration's foreign policy by stating that "*My central criticism is this: George Bush has invoked a new world order without enunciating a new American purpose...the president has failed to articulate clear goals for American foreign policy.*"⁵²⁷ Clinton also assailed Bush for indulging the communist regime in China, acting slowly to back democratic forces led by Boris Yeltsin in Russia and turning a blind eye to humanitarian catastrophe in the Balkans.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁶ Stephen M. Walt, "Two Cheers for Clinton's Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 79, No. 2 (2000): 63-79.

⁵²⁷ Richard N. Haas, "Fatal Distraction: Bill Clinton's Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy* No. 108 (1997): 115.

⁵²⁸ Schulzinger, *U.S. Diplomacy Since 1900*, 358.

Although Clinton did not unveil details of his post-Cold War grand strategy in the election campaign, he set three major foreign policy objectives for American foreign policy in the post-Cold War era: modernizing and strengthening military and economic capabilities of the U.S. army, enhancing the role of economics in international relations, and promoting democracy abroad.⁵²⁹

In the first term, Clinton's foreign policy team was composed of Vice President Al Gore, Secretary of State Warren Christopher, National Security Advisor Anthony Lake and Secretary of Defense Les Aspin and his successor William Perry. Especially Christopher and Lake, who were known for their disapproval of unilateral intervention and tendency to work with international organizations, mainly with the UN, to tackle crises, oversaw foreign relations of the United States in the early years of the Clinton administration.⁵³⁰

After entering the White House in 1993, President Clinton hoped that his foreign policy team could handle foreign policy issues while he was dealing with domestic reforms as to budget, health care and more importantly economic renewal. As a matter of fact, President Clinton was not as experienced as President Bush in foreign policy and made only four foreign policy speeches during the first eight months in office, in which he mainly emphasized continuity with President Bush's foreign policy vision.⁵³¹ President Clinton articulated some aspects of his administration's foreign policy outlook in one of these rare speeches delivered at the American University on 26 February 1993. In this speech, Clinton sketched out priorities of his administration in foreign policy, mainly promoting globalization in the post-Cold War era. He also elaborated on five objectives of American foreign policy: restoring American economy to good health, accentuating the significance of trade, and opening markets for American goods and business, showing leadership of the United States in global economy, accelerating the growth of developing countries and promoting democracy in Russia and in other parts of the world.⁵³²

In January 1993, Secretary of State Warren Christopher also commented on the future trajectory of the Clinton administration's foreign policy. He stressed that the end of the Cold War enabled the United States to deemphasize power politics and to promote American ideals

⁵²⁹ Ambrose and Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism*, 399.

⁵³⁰ Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 626; Lynch, *In the Shadow of the Cold War*, 51-54.

⁵³¹ Ambrose and Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism*, 401.

⁵³² Cameron, *US Foreign Policy after the Cold War*, 18-19.

without disregarding national interests. Besides, Christopher contended that the new administration might shape the international environment in the image of the United States by endorsing the expansion of democracy and respect for human rights across the world.⁵³³

Drawing on Clinton's and Christopher's early remarks, it can be argued that the Clinton administration adopted liberal internationalism in foreign policy, which was formulized around three major themes: the spread of democracy and liberty, the promotion of free trade and the creation of international institutions and norms.⁵³⁴ Despite the pronouncement of these objectives, some critics slammed the Clinton administration's foreign policy for being directionless, lacking meaningful and coherent grand strategy or all-encompassing foreign policy doctrine for making sense of the post-Cold War international order. To counter such criticisms, President Clinton ordered NSA Anthony Lake to organize a study group to craft a new concept encapsulating his foreign policy promises during the election campaign. The team was tasked with clarifying the guiding principles of America's grand strategy in the post-Cold War era like the concept of containment of the Cold War years. Lake and his team finally came up with the concept of "enlargement" to define the administration's grand strategy in the post-Cold War era. President Clinton embraced the concept of enlargement wholeheartedly and believed that it would enable the United States to move beyond the old-fashioned containment strategy in the post-Cold War era.⁵³⁵

NSA Lake announced basic tenets of the new grand strategy of the Clinton administration in a speech entitled "from containment to enlargement", echoing Wilsonian idealism, at Johns Hopkins University on 21 September 1993. Lake said that "*We contained a global threat to market democracies; now we should seek to enlarge their reach, particularly in places of special to us. The successor to a doctrine of containment must be a strategy of enlargement - enlargement of the world's free community of market democracies.*"⁵³⁶ Along with this strategy, Lake declared the intention of the Clinton administration "*to engage actively in the world in order to increase our prosperity, update our security arrangements, and promote democracy abroad.*"⁵³⁷

⁵³³ Powaski, *Ideals, Interests, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 60.

⁵³⁴ Schmidt, "Theories of US Foreign Policy," 17-18.

⁵³⁵ Douglas Brinkley, "Democratic Enlargement: The Clinton Doctrine," *Foreign Policy* 106 (1997): 112-116.

⁵³⁶ Suri, "American Grand Strategy from the Cold War's End to 9/11," 623; Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, 333.

⁵³⁷ Melanson, "Post-Cold War Policy," 158.

According to Lake, the Clinton administration's enlargement strategy hinged on four principles: reinforcing the community of major market democracies, helping new democracies and market economies, supporting liberalization of states that are hostile to democracy and market economy as well as countering offensives emanating from these states, and pursuing humanitarian agenda in the regions smacked of humanitarian concerns not only through humanitarian aids but also through measures to deepen democracy and market economy.⁵³⁸ According to Brinkley, the mantra of enlargement was nothing more than "*spreading democracy through promoting the gospel of geoeconomics.*"⁵³⁹

Just six days after Christopher's speech, President Clinton talked at the UN General Assembly on 27 September 1993. In his address, he also pronounced enlargement as the new grand strategy of the United States in the post-Cold War era as follows:

"We cannot solve every problem, but we must and will serve as a fulcrum for change and a pivot point for peace. In a new era of peril and opportunity, our overriding purpose must be to expand and strengthen the world's community of market-based democracies. During the Cold War we sought to contain a threat to the survival of free institutions. Now we seek to enlarge the circle of nations that live under those institutions."⁵⁴⁰

President Clinton believed that expansion of global market economy, spread of democracy, human rights, and respect for rule of law were not only reflecting American values but also enhancing security and prosperity of the United States. In Clinton's mind, democratic ideals, values, and their promotion were closely associated with the international leadership role of the United States as well. Clinton underlined this point by saying that "*U.S. strategy is founded on continued U.S. principled engagement and leadership abroad.*"⁵⁴¹

In addition to multilateralist democratic enlargement, there were three main integrating themes in the Clinton administration's foreign policy during the first term: economism, selective engagement and military restructuring.⁵⁴² The first theme was economics. As mentioned above, Clinton emphasized domestic economic troubles of ordinary Americans during the election campaign. For this reason, he was heavily preoccupied with the role of economy in

⁵³⁸ Brinkley, "Democratic Enlargement," 116; Melanson, "Post-Cold War Policy," 158.

⁵³⁹ Brinkley, "Democratic Enlargement," 125.

⁵⁴⁰ Bill Clinton, "Address by President Bill Clinton to the UN General Assembly," *U.S. Department of State Archive*, September 27, 1993, <https://2009-2017./p/io/potusunga/207375.htm>.

⁵⁴¹ Charountaki, "U.S. Foreign Policy in Theory and Practice," 260.

⁵⁴² John Dumbrell, "Was There a Clinton Doctrine?," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 13, No. 2 (June 2002): 47.

foreign policy after entering the White House. According to President Clinton, there was an intimate link between foreign policy and domestic economic issues. In his 1994 budget message to the Congress, Clinton underlined this point by saying that “*We have put our economic competitiveness at the heart of our foreign policy.*”⁵⁴³

Like the 18th century philosophers, Clinton believed that commerce was the main catalyzer of not only free market economy and democracy but also peace and prosperity among the nations. For him, domestic prosperity and welfare could be achieved by expanding foreign trade of a country.⁵⁴⁴ Accordingly, he thought that the only way to sustain domestic economic growth was to promote American exports and global free market. As an ardent proponent of globalization, the priority of the Clinton administration in foreign policy was to increase trade relations of the United States and to expand its role in regional trading blocs.⁵⁴⁵ In this context, economic acronyms such as NAFTA, APEC, GATT and G7 became the most pronounced words in President Clinton’s foreign policy speeches in the early phase of his first term.⁵⁴⁶

Senior Clinton administration officials were thinking similarly. Secretary of State Christopher replied to a question about the administration’s obsession with the role of economy in foreign policy by saying that “*I make no apologies for putting economics at the top of our foreign policy agenda.*”⁵⁴⁷ Economy was so central in the Clinton administration’s foreign policy that President Clinton even treated foreign policy as a branch of domestic economic policy. In this vein, he ordered the formation of a new executive body to shape American foreign policy: the National Economic Council (NEC). President Clinton portrayed the creation of the NEC as an emergency measure to sustain American leadership in the post-Cold War era by stating that: “*If we do not regain control of our economic destiny, we will soon lose the ability not only to provide for a future for our children but to lead the world that has come to look to us.*”⁵⁴⁸

Clinton viewed the NEC as a counterbalance to the NSC to formulate and execute U.S. foreign policy. It was designed to alter foreign policy habits in Washington by incorporating several

⁵⁴³ Brinkley, “Democratic Enlargement,” 116.

⁵⁴⁴ Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 627.

⁵⁴⁵ Hook and Spainer, *American Foreign Policy*, 197.

⁵⁴⁶ Ambrose and Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism*, 404.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 409.

⁵⁴⁸ McEvoy-Levy, *American Exceptionalism and US Foreign Policy*, 131-132.

economy-related institutions to foreign policy decision making process. The NEC was composed of the Departments of Commerce, Agriculture, Labor, Housing and Urban Development, Energy, Transportation and Environmental Protection Agency as well as the Secretaries of Treasury, the Office of Management and Budget and the Council of Economic Advisors.⁵⁴⁹ The primary task of the NEC was to coordinate policies pertaining to domestic and international economic issues. Robert E. Rubin and later Laura Tyson became the chairs of the NEC, which made it an effective force in U.S. foreign policy during the Clinton administration.⁵⁵⁰

Clinton's preoccupation with trade affairs and the role of the United States in fostering regional and international trade relations resulted in the ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in November 1993. NAFTA, which had been signed by President Bush, was aiming at removing trade barriers between the United States, Canada, and Mexico.⁵⁵¹ According to Clinton, NAFTA was a historic moment in U.S. foreign policy in the post-Cold War era as it truly symbolized the spirit of the United States. Clinton claimed that the United States was at a critical juncture as it was at the beginning of the post-Second World War period. That's why, the United States must engage economically with the world instead of choosing an isolationist path. According to Clinton, NAFTA-like trade organizations were vital for revitalizing American leadership via new economic order in the post-Cold War era. The Clinton administration contended that this policy would serve not only international stability but also domestic welfare of the Americans.⁵⁵²

In July 1994, the Clinton administration published the so-called En-En document (the National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement) to broaden the enlargement theme. In the document, it was stated that "*the line between domestic and foreign policy has increasingly disappeared – that we must revitalize our economy if we are to sustain our military forces, foreign initiatives and global influence, and that we must engage actively abroad if we are to open foreign markets and create jobs for our people.*"⁵⁵³ In this context, President Clinton launched "big, emerging markets" (BEM) strategy for China, India, Brazil and South Africa.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 131.

⁵⁵⁰ Dobson, *US Foreign Policy Since 1945*, 12; Dumbrell, "America in the 1990s," 89.

⁵⁵¹ Dumbrell, "America in the 1990s," 91; Schulzinger, *U.S. Diplomacy Since 1900*, 361-362.

⁵⁵² McEvoy-Levy, *American Exceptionalism and US Foreign Policy*, 127.

⁵⁵³ Ambrose and Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism*, 409-410.

At the core of this strategy, there was a notion that the United States was the only actor capable of fostering integrative economic structures that would produce prosperity for all nations across the world.⁵⁵⁴ In December 1994, President Clinton ratified the Uruguay Round Agreements Act of GATT, which substantially lowered tariffs and led to the creation of a new international trade regime: the World Trade Organization (WTO).⁵⁵⁵ President Clinton also encouraged China to become a member of WTO and negotiated trade agreements with Caribbean and African states and backed debt relief efforts for poor countries.⁵⁵⁶ As economy and trade became central themes in U.S. foreign policy, Clinton signed more than 300 trade agreements with other countries in different parts of the world.⁵⁵⁷

The second theme was the concept of selective engagement, accounting for the United States' military interventions abroad in the post-Cold War era.⁵⁵⁸ Due to disastrous experience of involvement in Somalia, President Clinton set several criteria for carrying out humanitarian intervention under the aegis of the UN in different parts of the world. A grave threat to international peace and security, a natural disaster warranting urgent relief and glaring human rights violations were at the top of the list. The most critical aspect of military involvement was that the United States must perceive a dire threat to its vital economic interests. Approval of the Congress and funding were other prerequisites for such an interventionist policy.⁵⁵⁹ The military interventions of the United States did not always yield result and sometimes further exacerbated the problems in the intervened countries or regions. Furthermore, these interventions aroused suspicions about the United States' compliance with the international norms. The United States' experiment in Somali was so tragic that Clinton administration initially did not want to intervene in the crises in Bosnia and Rwanda.⁵⁶⁰ Clinton later admitted that the United States' indifference to the Rwanda genocide was the greatest shame of his administration.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁴ Melanson, "Post-Cold War Policy," 155; Dobson, *US Foreign Policy Since 1945*, 53-54.

⁵⁵⁵ Ambrose and Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism*, 412.

⁵⁵⁶ Cameron, *US Foreign Policy after the Cold War*, 22.

⁵⁵⁷ Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 638.

⁵⁵⁸ Dumbrell, "Was There a Clinton Doctrine?," 48.

⁵⁵⁹ Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 629.

⁵⁶⁰ Cameron, *US Foreign Policy after the Cold War*, 19-22; Melanson, "Post-Cold War Policy," 160.

⁵⁶¹ Dumbrell, "America in the 1990s," 92.

The last theme of the Clinton administration's foreign policy was military restructuring. Especially Les Aspin's bottom-up review aimed at reducing Pentagon spending as a percentage of GDP less than half level of 1970.⁵⁶² During the Clinton administration, the United States' military spending decreased from \$331.3 billion to \$289 billion annually. Nonetheless, the United States' military spending was bigger than the total spending of its nine closest rivals.⁵⁶³

The year 1995 became a breaking point in the early trajectory of the Clinton administration's foreign policy. There were three major developments that caused that change towards the end of the first term and continued to impact the administration's foreign policy in the second term from 1997 to 2001. First, President Clinton understood the unsustainability of the selective engagement in the Balkans. By mid-1995, inability of the European Union, pressures of the Congress and a potential threat emanating from the instability of the southeastern Europe to American interests pushed the Clinton administration to actively engage in Bosnia. Second, the Republican Party took control of the Congress in 1995, which created a wave of American nationalism, unilateralism, hostility to the United Nations and a sense of isolationism in American foreign policy. Although President Clinton sought to respond to this rival foreign policy vision, he finally decided to make significant compromises. Third, the changing international environment from bipolarity to unipolarity, enormous military capability and economic growth under the Clinton administration encouraged American policymakers to evaluate opportunities and options available to the United States. After involving in the Bosnian War in 1995, the Clinton administration's confidence for exercising hegemony and its tendency towards unilateralism and remilitarization increased. The Republican Congress also supported the president to execute unilateralist foreign policy and allocated much more resources for military spending.⁵⁶⁴

In the second term from 1997 to 2001, there were substantial changes in the Clinton administration's foreign policy team, which influenced the new direction of U.S. foreign policy. To illustrate, NSA Anthony Lake was replaced by Samuel "Sandy" Berger, who was a close associate of President Clinton, but he had little foreign policy experience. Secretary of State Warren Christopher was succeeded by Madeleine Albright, who was the daughter of a Czech diplomat and the former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. Albright, who became

⁵⁶² Dumbrell, "Was There a Clinton Doctrine?," 48.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵⁶⁴ Dumbrell, "America in the 1990s," 92-93; Dumbrell, "Was There a Clinton Doctrine?," 48-49.

the first female secretary of state in the history of the United States, was the most hawkish personality in the second Clinton administration and supported the use of force to demonstrate the military might of America. For Albright, there was no way for the United States to evade responsibility for functioning of the world order in the post-Cold War era.⁵⁶⁵ Vice President Al Gore and Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke were other hawkish personalities who were advocate of use of military force against the foes of the United States.⁵⁶⁶

In the second term, the idea of democratic enlargement continued to be the guiding principle of the Clinton administration's foreign policy even with a stronger identification between democracy and markets.⁵⁶⁷ It was the responsibility of the United States to lead the global progress towards market economy across the world. In his second inaugural speech, Clinton said that:

“The world is no longer divided into two hostile camps. Instead, we are building bonds with nations that once were our adversaries. Growing connections of commerce and culture give us a chance to lift the fortunes and spirits of people the world over. And for the very first time in all of history, more people on this planet live under democracy than dictatorship.”⁵⁶⁸

In tandem with globalization of U.S.-led market economy, democracy promotion was another priority of the Clinton administration in the second term. Secretary of State Albright underlined this point by referring to self-interest of the United States as follows:

“Promoting human rights is – and must remain – an integral part of US foreign policy. When governments respect human rights, they contribute to a more stable, just and peaceful world. When they do not, they often engender strife, for regimes that run roughshod over the rights of their own citizens may well show similar disregard for the rights of others. Such governments are also more likely to spark unrest by persecuting minorities, sheltering terrorists, running drugs or secretly building weapons of mass destruction. As a global power with global interests, our nation will be more secure, our armed forces less at risk, and our citizens safer and more prosperous in a world where international standards of human rights are increasingly observed.”⁵⁶⁹

In this context, the Clinton administration invoked the concept of “family of nations”, led by the United States and composed of states having market economy and democracy. Rogue or

⁵⁶⁵ Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 633; Schulzinger, *U.S. Diplomacy Since 1900*, 360.

⁵⁶⁶ Lynch, *In the Shadow of the Cold War*, 79.

⁵⁶⁷ Dumbrell, “Was There a Clinton Doctrine?,” 49.

⁵⁶⁸ Schmidt, “Theories of US Foreign Policy,” 87.

⁵⁶⁹ Barbara Ann J. Rieffer and Kristan Mercer, “US Democracy Promotion: The Clinton and Bush Administrations,” *Global Society* 19, No. 4 (2005): 391.

backlash states such as Iraq, Iran, Cuba, North Korea, and Libya were to be excluded from that family. Democratic peace in the post-Cold War era had to be supported and protected by means of marginalization of those states. President Clinton used the concept of rogue nations for the first time in his 1999 State of Union address.⁵⁷⁰

In the second term, another theme in the Clinton administration's foreign policy was "assertive humanitarianism", which was linked to the trend of unilateralism, democracy promotion and remilitarization. Assertive humanitarianism was plainly practiced with an active engagement in the Kosovo conflict.⁵⁷¹ When a brutal war broke out in Kosovo in late 1990s, Secretary of State Albright insisted on going to war with Serbia despite reservations of some circles in Washington. The U.S. army and NATO launched a huge air campaign against the positions of the Serbian forces to prevent Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic from massacring innocent Muslims.⁵⁷²

Albright came up with the concept of "indispensable nation" to legitimize the use of force in the Balkans. She said that "*if we have to use force, it is because we are America. We are the indispensable nation. We stand tall. We see further into the future.*"⁵⁷³ During the Kosovo crisis, President Clinton also underscored the United States' commitment to humanitarian cause in a speech delivered to NATO forces in Macedonia in June 1999. Clinton said that: "*Whether you live in Africa or Central Europe or any other place, if somebody comes after civilians and tries to kill them en masse because of their race, their ethnic background, or their religion, and it is within our power to stop it, we will stop it. We should not countenance genocide or ethnic cleansing anywhere in the world.*"⁵⁷⁴

The Kosovo intervention was hailed by some observers not only as the first humanitarian war, but also as the first war won by air power just in eleven weeks.⁵⁷⁵ The Clinton administration decided to step in to resolve the Kosovo crisis because Milosevic threatened the market-

⁵⁷⁰ Dumbrell, "Was There a Clinton Doctrine?," 54.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., 49.

⁵⁷² Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 634-635.

⁵⁷³ David P. Calleo, "The Tyranny of False Vision: America's Unipolar Fantasy," *Global Politics and Strategy* 50, No. 5 (2008): 74; Samuel Huntington, "The Lonely Superpower," *Foreign Affairs* 78, No. 2 (Mar.-Apr. 1999): 37.

⁵⁷⁴ Dumbrell, "Was There a Clinton Doctrine?," 51.

⁵⁷⁵ Dumbrell, "America in the 1990s," 93.

democratic vision of the Clinton administration by his efforts to divide peoples, close markets and govern via dictatorship.⁵⁷⁶ Thus, *liberal internationalist* foreign policy orientation of the United States mutated into *liberal interventionism* during the second Clinton administration.⁵⁷⁷

In short, what we see during the Clinton administration is that most of the high-profile personalities such as NSA Anthony Lake, Secretary of States Warren Christopher and Madeleine Albright supported assertive multilateralism through UN to cope with international crises. They also championed the idea of engagement and enlargement of democratic community of nations and free-market economy to change the Cold War's containment mentality in Washington D.C.⁵⁷⁸ In other words, the Clinton administration assumed the responsibility for expanding the landscape of liberalization, market economy and democracy in different parts of the world from 1993 to 2001.⁵⁷⁹

What can be said about the NRCs of the Bush and Clinton administrations if we compare the two? We can see the continuity of the NRCs from Bush to Clinton administrations. As clearly expressed by Maull, the most evident and significant NRC of the United States during the Clinton years was global hegemony or leadership, which stemmed from the belief in American exceptionalism vetted in American political culture. A special mission was bestowed upon the United States by the idea of American exceptionalism to perform leadership in the world.⁵⁸⁰ Clinton uttered his belief in American exceptionalism as follows:

“No less than those who founded the Republic or fought to keep it together in the Civil War, we, too, must have the vision and courage to change, to preserve our unchanging purposes in a dynamic and difficult world. [...] This Nation has endured and triumphed over a bloody Civil War, two World Wars, the Great Depression, the civil rights struggles, riots in our streets, economic problems and social discord at home and great challenges abroad.”⁵⁸¹

President Clinton and his team believed that the United States had a predominant role in the international system as the world's sole superpower and that globalization and expansion of trade relations would offer a good future for the people across the world. They also thought

⁵⁷⁶ Suri, “American Grand Strategy from the Cold War's End to 9/11,” 624.

⁵⁷⁷ Lynch, *In the Shadow of the Cold War*, 80.

⁵⁷⁸ Dobson, *US Foreign Policy Since 1945*, 17.

⁵⁷⁹ Hoff, *A Faustian Foreign Policy*, 143.

⁵⁸⁰ Maull, “Hegemony Reconstructed?,” 168.

⁵⁸¹ McEvoy-Levy, *American Exceptionalism and US Foreign Policy*, 125.

that the use of force for humanitarian aims was necessary and legitimate.⁵⁸² President Clinton stated that the United States must utilize advantages of its unique position in the unipolar world to execute leadership in world affairs accordingly. In the 1992 election campaign, Clinton had already declared that “*No national security issue is more urgent, nowhere is our country’s imperative more clear... I believe it is time for America to lead a global alliance for democracy as united and steadfast as the global alliance that defeated communism.*”⁵⁸³ In 1992, Clinton also underscored the inevitability of American leadership in world affairs by stating that “*History is calling upon our nation to decide anew whether we will lead or defer; whether we will engage or abstain; whether we will shape a new era or instead be shaped by it... Unless we work to shape events, we will be shaped by them, often in ways that put us at risk.*”⁵⁸⁴

While assessing the first term of President Clinton, Secretary of State Warren Christopher also pointed to the necessity of the global leadership role of the United States in the post-Cold War era by stating that:

“What would the world be like without American leadership just in the last two years? We might have four nuclear states with the breakup of the Soviet Union instead of one; a North Korea building nuclear bombs; a rising protectionist tide rather than rising trade flows... brutal dictators still terrorizing Haiti and forcing its people to flee; and Iraqi troops very likely back in Kuwait, threatening the world’s oil supplies.”⁵⁸⁵

Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott was thinking similarly about the leadership role of the United States. He said that “*If we do not provide international leadership, then there is no other country that can or will step in and lead in our place as a constructive, positive influencer.*” Vice President Al Gore also uttered his belief in American leadership as follows “*America’s destiny is to lead, not retreat.*”⁵⁸⁶

The Clinton administration made it clear that it had no option to pursue an isolationist foreign policy in the post-Cold War era. The United States should not define its foreign policy with narrowly defined national interests but closely work with like-minded governments and international institutions, especially the UN, to preserve its supremacy and to mold the new

⁵⁸² Schulzinger, *U.S. Diplomacy Since 1900*, 359.

⁵⁸³ Hook and Spainer, *American Foreign Policy*, 202.

⁵⁸⁴ McEvoy-Levy, *American Exceptionalism and US Foreign Policy*, 120-121.

⁵⁸⁵ Dumbrell, “America in the 1990s,” 92.

⁵⁸⁶ Bacevich, *American Empire*, 51; Powaski, *Ideals, Interests, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 61.

international order.⁵⁸⁷ Thus, Clinton and his advisors sought to create an open and multilateral international system, in which the United States would execute leadership through building consensus, institutions and market economies. This strategy was basically conceptualized as liberal internationalism.⁵⁸⁸ President Clinton believed that the United States should work in a good spirit of harmony with the international community to tackle the crises in different parts of the world. Talbott explained multilateralist approach of the Clinton administration in executing leadership as follows:

“In a fashion and to an extent that is unique in the history of Great Powers, the United States defines its strength – indeed, its very greatness – not in terms of its ability to achieve or maintain dominance over others, but in terms of its ability to work *with* others in the interests of international community as a whole... American foreign policy is consciously intended to advance *universal* values.”⁵⁸⁹

We can infer from all these remarks that Bush and Clinton perceived the NRC of hegemon in the post-Cold War international system in the same way. President Clinton’s foreign policy vision was consistent with the soul of President Bush’s new world order and the idea of liberal internationalism. So, the core objectives and guiding principles of U.S. foreign policy remained same under the Clinton administration. There were only methodological differences between the two presidents. While Bush underlined the necessity of achieving international order first, Clinton emphasized the primacy of order at home, especially domestic economy in preserving American power and prestige with sustainment of credibility of the United States.⁵⁹⁰

Similar to the Bush administration, the Clinton administration’s foreign policy to keep the hegemonic position of the United States depended primarily on multilateralist approach. As rightly explained by Dumbrell, there was a unity of purpose between the two administrations whatever the concept they utilized in foreign policy – new world order, assertive multilateralism, assertive humanitarianism, democratic enlargement, engagement and enlargement – all of them was designed to expand American internationalism in the post-Cold War era. Despite Clinton’s inclination toward unilateralism in his second term, both Bush and Clinton were committed to multilateralism in achieving American interests.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁷ Hook and Spainer, *American Foreign Policy*, 192.

⁵⁸⁸ Suri, “American Grand Strategy from the Cold War’s End to 9/11,” 622.

⁵⁸⁹ Huntington, “The Lonely Superpower,” 38.

⁵⁹⁰ McEvoy-Levy, *American Exceptionalism and US Foreign Policy*, 121.

⁵⁹¹ Dumbrell, “America in the 1990s,” 94.

The similarity between Bush's and Clinton's perceptions of the NRC of hegemon can be found in the official documents as well. In January 1993, Regional Defense (RDS) document, containing each essential themes of Defense Planning Guidance, was released by the Clinton administration. This document proved that DPG was a foundational document in determining basic principles of the post-Cold war grand strategy of the United States. In RDS, it was stressed that the United States must use its great influence as the world's sole superpower to create a liberal global system. In the document, the leadership role of the United States in the post-Cold War era was emphasized as follows: "*The United States remains the nation whose strength and leadership are essential to a stable and democratic world order.*" The document also suggested that regional balances through alliances and deployments be sustained to prevent hostile non-democratic states from dominating regions critical to American interests. International order must be strengthened by thwarting terrorism and WMD proliferation and by means of promoting liberal institutions to widen the democratic zone of peace. In the document, it was underlined that the United States would resort to use of force unilaterally to defeat serious threats if necessary. America must also lead military and technological revolution to counter challenges to its hegemony. In sum, it was evident that the DPG had only changed in name, its strategic outlook remained same in the RDS.⁵⁹²

The Clinton administration executed leadership role of the United States on many occasions. To illustrate, the United States sent military force to Haiti to restore the democratically elected government, intervened in Bosnia to prevent genocide of the Muslims and got involved in the Somalian civil war. Especially, Clinton considered the Somalia operation as a test of American authority and leadership in world affairs. For him, the Somalia operation was a community building effort to manage future crises easily and an early withdrawal from Somalia would diminish American influence in the international system. On the Somalia operation, Clinton commented that:

"Our credibility with friends and allies would be severely damaged. Our leadership in world affairs would be undermined at the very time when people are looking to America to help promote peace and freedom in the post-cold war world. And all around the world, aggressors, thugs, and terrorists will conclude that the best way to get us to change our policies is to kill our people. It would be open season on Americans."⁵⁹³

Other NRCs of the United States under the Clinton administration was tribune and agent of American values, defender of the pacific union, catalyst/integrator and internal developer. As

⁵⁹² Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, 331-332.

⁵⁹³ McEvoy-Levy, *American Exceptionalism and US Foreign Policy*, 136-137.

explained in detail above, the concept of democratic enlargement was encapsulating the idea of globalizing market economy, democracy and human rights across the world. Thus, the mantra of enlargement was directly linked to the NRC of tribune and agent of American values as it required promotion of democracy, freedom and human rights. As mentioned above, the second pillar of the Clinton administration's foreign policy was economism. This theme was stemming from the NRCs of catalyst/integrator and internal developer. The Clinton administration sought to promote economic cooperation on world scale by leading several international economic organizations such as WTO, NAFTA and APEC. In so doing, the Clinton administration aimed at strengthening multilateral institutions and regimes and to create a peaceful world via these organizations. As there was no difference between economy and foreign policy in Clinton's mind, he made economic security a central theme in American foreign policy. He believed that economism in foreign policy would ultimately serve increasing domestic prosperity of the Americans. So, the idea of economism was closely associated with the NRC of internal developer.⁵⁹⁴

Another NRC of the United States during the Clinton administration was defender of the pacific union which was formulated with the concept of assertive humanitarianism. The Clinton administration performed this role conception especially during the Kosovo crisis, which it perceived as a dire threat to the free world led and protected by the United States. It was also related to the NRC of hegemon as the Clinton administration claimed responsibility for protecting world peace as the world's sole superpower in the post-Cold War era.

In sum, as under the Bush administration, the interplay of domestic and international determinants engendered the NRCs of the United States under the Clinton administration. The Clinton administration was situated at the intersection of a web of domestic and international factors, which shaped its formulation of the NRCs in the post-Cold War era. While economic and military might of the United States, American public opinion, and the idea of American exceptionalism formed domestic factors; international factors were composed of the unipolar international system and expectations of other actors. As rightly explained by Prestre, identity variables dominated the Clinton administration's NRCs.⁵⁹⁵ As the transition from bipolarity to unipolarity was over, the Clinton administration's ideological outlook encapsulating promotion of democracy and free market economy across the world affected the NRCs of the United States rather than its quest for status in the post-Cold War era.

⁵⁹⁴ Le Prestre, "The United States: An Elusive Role Quest after the Cold War," 85.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

4.3. The U.S. and the Middle East under Bill Clinton: Between Peace Process and Dual Containment

Although the Clinton administration pursued a worldwide strategy of enlargement supporting democratic movements, freedom, and market economies in developing world, it was wary of implementing its grand strategy in the Middle East. From the beginning, the Clinton administration recognized that the Middle East would not be conducive to profound social or economic transformation as the region was plagued with perennial conflicts and disagreements. If the United States compelled regional countries to launch substantial reforms towards the ends of democracy, human rights, and market economy without resolving or at least containing these conflicts, such a policy could not bear fruit. That's why, President Clinton formulated his policy towards the Middle East on a realist basis encapsulating major themes such as preventive diplomacy, deterrence, containment of conflicts, isolation of extremist actors and prevention of weapons of mass destruction. In this context, he deemed the Arab-Israeli conflict as the root cause of instability in the Middle East and peace negotiations must be maintained with a goal of achieving a permanent settlement to make progress towards American values and ideals in the region.⁵⁹⁶

The Clinton administration was mostly caught up by the dilemma of global democratic idealism and regional realities in the Middle East. It ultimately preferred stability of authoritarianism to unfamiliar democratic future in the region. Despite the region's need for peace, stability and democracy, President Clinton did not exert pressure over the regional leaders to initiate democratic reforms in their countries. Except for Israel, United States' allies in the region were undemocratic and having political legitimacy deficit. Furthermore, American policy makers feared that elections may end up with the rise of anti-American Islamic political actors.⁵⁹⁷ Thus, Clinton's mantra of democratic enlargement remained limited in the Middle East to encouraging Kuwait for better human rights record and strengthening its parliamentary system and supporting quasi-democratic experiment of the Kurds in northern Iraq.⁵⁹⁸

There were two major issues that dominated U.S. foreign policy agenda in the Middle East under the Clinton administration from 1993 to 2001: the Arab-Israeli peace process and the dual containment of Iraq and Iran. The Clinton administration performed two major NRCs -

⁵⁹⁶ Phebe Marr, "The United States, Europe, and the Middle East: An Uneasy Triangle," *Middle East Journal* 48, No. 2 (1994): 222.

⁵⁹⁷ Hudson, "To Play the Hegemon," 341-342.

⁵⁹⁸ Marr, "The United States, Europe, and the Middle East," 218-219.

regional stabilizer and balancer - in dealing with these issues respectively. Another NRC of the United States in the Middle East under the Clinton administration was hegemon. There was a close relationship between the hegemon and regional stabilizer role conceptions of the United States under President Clinton. In a speech to the Congress on 23 January 1996, President Clinton stated that the United States must assume responsibility as the world's sole superpower to achieve peace across the world. The Middle East peace process was an extension of this understanding as President Clinton underlined that the United States must be the architect of peace in the post-Cold War era.⁵⁹⁹

Like the Bush administration, the Clinton administration was committed to performing the NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst in the Middle East. At the beginning, the Clinton administration made it clear that that it was willing to assume an active role in the Arab-Israeli peace process and the United States would be "full partner" in such a process.⁶⁰⁰ As mentioned above, the Clinton administration conceived the Arab-Israeli impasse of the biggest stumbling block in front of normalization and socio-economic development in the Middle East. Before the 1996 presidential elections, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Robert H. Pelletreau elucidated this point by referring to the importance of the Arab-Israeli peace initiative for American objectives in the Middle East as follows:

"Securing a just, lasting and comprehensive peace between Israel and its neighbors remains a cornerstone of our overall foreign policy. A successful peace process will enhance regional stability, remove a rallying point for fanaticism, and enhance prospects for political and economic development. The United States is engaged in several fronts to advance peace negotiations, an engagement which in turn helps achieve our other objectives in the Middle East. These include preserving Israel's security and well-being; maintaining security arrangements to preserve stability in the Persian Gulf and commercial access to its resources; combating terrorism and weapons proliferation; assisting U.S. businesses, and promoting political and economic reform."⁶⁰¹

Moreover, the United States' involvement in the Arab-Israeli peace process was deemed the responsibility of the United States as the world's sole superpower. Secretary of State Warren Christopher pointed to the responsibility of the United States while the Clinton administration was endeavoring to keep the Arab-Israeli peace process intact toward the end of the first term by stating that:

⁵⁹⁹ "Damascus Radio Cites Christopher's Remarks on New Round of Talks," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, January 24, 1996.

⁶⁰⁰ Bar-Siman-Tov, "The United States and Israel since 1948," 257.

⁶⁰¹ Robert O. Freedman, "U.S. Policy Toward the Middle East in Clinton's Second Term," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 3, No. 1 (1999): 55.

“We must resume the peace process, and this is one of those times when the United States has a responsibility. We can’t turn away from it. The parties themselves will have to make difficult decisions, but we in the United States have had such a long stake. Our interests are deeply engaged here. The President is the leader of the free world, and I think he recognized that in extending this invitation.”⁶⁰²

There were major successes in the Arab-Israeli peace process in first term of the Clinton administration. When Clinton took the office in 1993, the pace of the Madrid Peace Conference and subsequent bilateral negotiations between the Arabs and the Israelis had slowed down. President Clinton thought that the United States had a historical chance to reshape the Middle East after the Cold War on account of the demise of the Soviet Union, the defeat of Iraq in the Gulf War and the participation of the PLO in the Madrid peace process. With the secret and surprising compromise between the PLO and Israel in Oslo, Washington once again found itself in the position of peacemaking and mediator in the Middle East. In September 1993, President Clinton hosted Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin in Washington D.C. to put an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which resulted in the signing of the Oslo I “Declaration of Principles” and then the signing of the Oslo II in September 1995. However, the assassination of Israel’s Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by Yigal Amir, a religious fanatic, in November 1995 and the rise of right-wing Likud Party under the leadership of Benjamin Netanyahu weakened the Arab-Israeli peace process.⁶⁰³

The rise of the Israeli right in domestic politics and factionalist rivalry in Palestinian politics warranted further efforts of the Clinton administration. This process led to an interim accord signed at Wye Plantation in Maryland in October 1998. In this accord, Israel promised to give more territory to the Palestinians in exchange for their peace pledges.⁶⁰⁴ Although the peace negotiations continued until the end of Clinton’s presidency, a final agreement could not be reached due to the rise of radical voices on both sides. During the peace process, the United States’ inability to compel both sides to uphold the Oslo timetable and to thwart Israeli settlements in the occupied territories stalled the talks as well. Eventually, the peace negotiations collapsed at Camp David in August 2000. When Ariel Sharon visited holy places

⁶⁰² Warren Christopher, “Interview of Secretary of State Warren Christopher by Tim Russet – NBC TV Meet the Press,” *U.S. Department of State Archive*, September 29, 1996, <https://1997-2001.state.gov/regions/nea/9-29meet.html>.

⁶⁰³ Freedman, “U.S. Policy Toward the Middle East in Clinton’s Second Term,” 56.

⁶⁰⁴ Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, 577.

of Islam in Jerusalem in September 2000, a new intifada broke out in the West Bank, which turned out to be the last nail into the coffin of the peace process.⁶⁰⁵

Despite its ultimate failure on securing an Israeli-Palestinian peace treaty, the Clinton administration's approach to the peace negotiations was multi-track and multilateral. In addition to bilateral talks between Israel and the Palestinians, the Clinton administration encouraged bilateral talks between Israel and Syria, Israel and Jordan and Israel and Lebanon. President Clinton's peace efforts finally resulted in the signing of a formal peace treaty between Jordan and Israel in October 1994.⁶⁰⁶

In addition to the NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst in the Middle East, the Clinton administration performed the NRC of catalyst/integrator during the Arab-Israeli peace process. President Clinton promoted cooperation between Israel and 13 Arab states (along with 30 states outside the Arab world) through multilateral talks on transnational issues such as arms control, refugees, water, environment, and economic development. At the center of multilateral talks between Israel and the Arab states, there was the issue of regional economic integration.⁶⁰⁷ Here, we can see the impact of the idea of economism on the Clinton administration's Middle East policy. It endorsed economic integration not only among the Middle Eastern states but also between the United States and regional states. It especially sought to replace the old Arab state system with new and vibrant regional economic projects including Turkey, Israel, and other Mediterranean countries. It was thought that the end of the Arab boycott against Israel would boost economic interactions between the Arab states and Israel, which could curb arms race and social problems caused by population boom in the region. To achieve these objectives, the Clinton administration paid special attention to the success of the Israeli-Jordanian and the Israeli-Syrian peace tracks. Although it succeeded in the former, it failed in the latter.⁶⁰⁸

In addition to the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations, the image of rogue state dominated most of the foreign policy behaviors of the Clinton administration towards the Middle East. NSA Anthony Lake defined backlash/rogue/outlaw states as the actors outside the democratic

⁶⁰⁵ Michael C. Hudson, "The United States in the Middle East," in *International Relations of the Middle East*, ed. Louise Fawcett, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 334; Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 637.

⁶⁰⁶ Ambrose and Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism*, 416.

⁶⁰⁷ Freedman, "U.S. Policy Toward the Middle East in Clinton's Second Term," 56.

⁶⁰⁸ Hudson, "To Play the Hegemon," 339; Marr, "The United States, Europe, and the Middle East," 221.

community of states and threatening the democratic order. Lake mentioned five states in this category, namely Cuba, North Korea, Iran, Iraq and Libya. Three of these states were in the Middle East. Lake considered these states incapable actors to engage positively with the outside world as they were violating basic human rights and spreading radical ideologies. According to Lake, these states were possessing WMDs and thus posing a grave threat to security of the United States and whole international community. That's why, the primary duty of the United States was to contain this threat and pressure them to be the good members of the global community of states. They were routinely punished by the United States through several sanctions. Interestingly, Lake did not categorize Syria as a rogue state because it was expected to play a constructive role in the Arab-Israeli peace process.⁶⁰⁹

The Clinton administration also performed the NRC of balancer through the policy of dual containment of Iraq and Iran. The concept of dual containment was announced by Martin Indyk, who was a senior official in the NSC, for the first time on 18 May 1993.⁶¹⁰ NSA Anthony Lake portrayed backlash states like Iran and Iraq hostile to vital American interests and explained the logic of dual containment in the Gulf as follows:

“The basic strategic principle in the Persian Gulf region is to establish a favorable balance of power, one that will protect critical American interests in the security of our friends and in the free flow of oil at stable prices. In previous administration, this was pursued by relying on one regional power to balance the other. First the United States built up Iran under the shah as a supposed regional pillar of stability. Then it backed Saddam Hussein's Iraq in its war with revolutionary Iran to contain the influence of Khomeini's Islamic government. Both approaches proved disastrous.

This is not a crusade, but a genuine and responsible effort, over time, to protect American strategic interests, stabilize the international system and enlarge the community of nations committed to democracy, free markets and peace.”⁶¹¹

For the Clinton administration, the containment of Iraq and Iran in the Gulf was sine qua non for the balance of power in the Middle East as these states were seeking nuclear weapons to undermine the Arab-Israeli peace process and to support international terrorism. In this strategy, the United States sought to topple the Saddam regime in Baghdad and to reform the mullah regime in Tehran. The GCC countries appeared as the prime beneficiaries of the Clinton administration's policy of dual containment against Iraqi or Iranian encroachments in

⁶⁰⁹ Anthony Lake, “Confronting Backlash States,” *Foreign Affairs* 73:2 (1994): 44-55.

⁶¹⁰ Toby Dodge, “US Foreign Policy in the Middle East,” in *US Foreign Policy*, ed. Michael Cox and Doug Stokes, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 204.

⁶¹¹ Lake, “Confronting Backlash States,” 47-48.

the Gulf.⁶¹² In April 1995, President Clinton announced that the United States was determined not to allow Iraq or Iran to destabilize the Middle East in his famous dual containment speech at the World Jewish Congress by saying that:

“[Iran and Iraq] harbor terrorists within their borders. They establish and support terrorist base camps in other lands. They hunger for nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. Every day, they put innocent civilians in danger and stir up discord among nations. Our policy toward them is simple: They must be contained.”⁶¹³

He declared his determination to punish these states by stating that “*When our vital interests are challenged or the will and conscience of the international community is defied, we will act with peaceful diplomacy whenever possible, with force when necessary.*”⁶¹⁴ In fact, the Clinton administration did not refrain from resorting to military means and economic sanctions against Iran and Iraq when it was deemed necessary. To illustrate, the Clinton administration imposed heavy economic sanctions on Iran and carried out air strikes against the Iraqi targets in 1993 after a suspected Iraqi assassination attempt to former President George Bush in Kuwait.⁶¹⁵ In October 1994, the Clinton administration deployed 36,000 American troops and more than 100 warplanes to the Gulf region when Saddam Hussein amassed his 70,000 elite troops near the Iraqi-Kuwait border. In so doing, Clinton demonstrated the United States’ readiness to deter Saddam Hussein and protect the Gulf countries.⁶¹⁶

In December 1998, the United States along with Britain carried out a major military attack against Iraq when Saddam Hussein adamantly refused to cooperate with the inspectors of UNSCOM (United Nations Special Commission), established after the Gulf War for inspecting Iraq’s WMD capabilities. After launching the operation, Clinton reasoned his move by referring to balancer role of the United States in the Middle East as follows:

“This situation presents a clear and present danger to the stability of the Persian Gulf and the safety of people everywhere. The international community gave Saddam one last chance to resume co-operation with the weapons inspectors. Saddam has failed to seize the chance.

And so we had to act and to act now. Let me explain why: First, without a strong inspection system, Iraq would be free to retain and begin to rebuild its chemical, biological and nuclear weapons programs in months, not years. Second, if Saddam

⁶¹² Hudson, “To Play the Hegemon,” 340.

⁶¹³ Ambrose and Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism*, 417.

⁶¹⁴ Charountaki, “U.S. Foreign Policy in Theory and Practice,” 260.

⁶¹⁵ Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, 574; Marr, “The United States, Europe, and the Middle East,” 217.

⁶¹⁶ Kaufman, *The Arab Middle East and the United States*, 183-184.

can cripple the weapons inspection system and get away with it, he would conclude that the international community, led by the United States, had simply lost its will. He will surmise that he has free rein to rebuild his arsenal of destruction. And some day, make no mistake, he will use it again as he has in the past. Third, in halting our air strikes in November, I gave Saddam a chance, not a licence. If we turn our backs on his defiance, the credibility of U.S. power as a check against Saddam will be destroyed.”⁶¹⁷

It should be noted that dual containment strategy was closely associated with the peace catalyst role of the United States in the Middle East peace process. From the onset, the Clinton administration calculated that attaining a peace between Israel and Syria would enhance the United States’ strategic position in the region as well as Israel’s security. It considered improving relations with Syria and Syrian-Israeli reconciliation as a means of achieving dual containment of Iran and Iraq.⁶¹⁸

The Clinton administration also developed a special relationship with Israel. Under the Clinton administration, the United States and Israel became strategic partners by sharing various advanced military technology and equipment. In 1994 and 1996, Washington and Tel Aviv concluded memoranda of understanding on counterterrorism and established a steering committee headed by U.S. Secretary of State and Israeli Foreign Minister to forge strategic cooperation on the proliferation of WMDs in the Middle East.⁶¹⁹ The Clinton administration also supported Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories by giving funds for Jewish housing plans.⁶²⁰

The Clinton administration believed that a new regional security architecture could be built up in the Middle East. Israel would play a crucial role in such an architecture as the vulnerable Gulf states were not capable of defending themselves against Iraqi and Iranian threats. According to Hudson, Clinton and his team were dedicated to the identity of Israeli and American interests like Truman and Johnson administrations. Thus, the aggressive ideological stance of the Clinton administration on some issues pertaining to the Middle East such as rogue states and terrorism was related to the goal of obtaining domestic electoral support from the Israel lobby.⁶²¹

⁶¹⁷ Freedman, “U.S. Policy Toward the Middle East in Clinton’s Second Term,” 66-67.

⁶¹⁸ Warren Christopher, *Chances of A Lifetime* (New York: Scribner, 2001), 218-219.

⁶¹⁹ Bar-Siman-Tov, “The United States and Israel since 1948,” 259.

⁶²⁰ Abdel-Fattah Mady, “American Foreign Policy and Peace in the Middle East,” *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 3, No. 3 (2010): 277.

⁶²¹ Hudson, “To Play the Hegemon,” 338-339.

In sum, the Clinton administration mainly performed the NRCs of hegemon, regional stabilizer, and balancer in the Middle East. Similar to the Bush administration, the Clinton administration enacted the NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst in the Middle East peace process. It performed the NRC of balancer while containing Iraq and Iran in the Gulf.

4.4. Constructing Mutual Understanding: U.S. Foreign Policy towards Syria under the Clinton Administration

4.4.1. The Politics of U.S.-Sponsored Peace Talks between Israel and Syria (1993- 2001)

4.4.1.1. A Hopeful Start: Early U.S.-Syrian Engagement under the Clinton Administration

When Bill Clinton entered the White House in January 1993, the peace talks between Israel and the Arab parties had already stalled. In the beginning, there was no sign of the resumption of the talks because President Clinton was concerned with the Bosnian crisis and the new Democrat administration, traditionally close to the Israel lobby, did not want to stir up a crisis with Israel by virtue of the Middle East peace process.⁶²² What's more, employment of many pro-Israeli officials in the Clinton administration aroused suspicions about the broker role of the United States in the Middle East. The new administration seemed much more favorable and closer to Israel than the Bush administration.⁶²³ That's why, the Arab parties, particularly Syria, had serious doubts about President Clinton's future policies in the Middle East on account of his cordial relations with the American Jewish community and unwillingness to incorporate the PLO into the peace process directly. Syria also suspected the Clinton administration's respect of its security interests and sincerity regarding the comprehensive peace in the Middle East.⁶²⁴

Nonetheless, like the Bush administration, the Clinton administration promptly announced that it would assume responsibility to resuscitate the Middle East peace process. After the election, President Clinton told in an interview that negotiations started by President Bush was "*the best chance for peace in a decade.*" He also described the United States' role as "*an honest broker and at times a catalyst.*"⁶²⁵ Besides, it recognized Syria's key role in bringing an end to the

⁶²² Helena Cobban, *The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks, 1991-96 and Beyond* (Washington D.C., United States Institute of Peace Process, 1999), 47.

⁶²³ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 195.

⁶²⁴ Sarkees and Zunes, "Disenchantment with the 'New World Order'," 373.

⁶²⁵ Elaine Sciolino, "U.S. Awaits Signals on Mideast Talks," *New York Times*, February 19, 1993, 5.

decades-long Arab-Israeli impasse.⁶²⁶ In this respect, President Clinton embraced “Syria-first” policy in the early months of his administration due to complicated and unstable state of the PLO-Israeli peace track. The 415-deportee crisis was still a source of tension between Israel and the PLO. Given the negative impacts of the deportee crisis, President Clinton sought to bring Syria back to the negotiation table to achieve a breakthrough in the peace talks. Interestingly, Syria concurred with the idea of the resumption of the talks without putting the plight of the deportees on the table. So, Syria made clear that it was regarding such isolated incidents having little importance to halt the Middle East peace process.⁶²⁷ This posture was an early signal of Syria’s readiness to readjust itself to the regional stabilizer/peace catalyst role conception of the United States in the Middle East under the Clinton administration.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher’s diplomatic efforts contributed much to the resumption of the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations. He took twenty trips to the Middle East to achieve a breakthrough in the Syrian-Israeli track during his four years in office.⁶²⁸ Christopher went to Damascus for the first time to meet President Assad on 20 February 1993. In the meeting, Assad told Warren that Syria was ready to negotiate with Israel but Syrian-Israeli peace could only be realized after Israel’s total withdrawal from the Golan Heights. By accepting the formula of gradual withdrawal over time, Assad stepped back from one of his prerequisites before signing a peace treaty: Israel’s immediate withdrawal from the Golan Heights. In the wake of Christopher’s visit, Assad sought to forge good relations with the Clinton administration by giving positive messages about Syrian-Israeli peace talks. In so doing, Assad demonstrated his willingness to reach a compromise with the Clinton administration in the Middle East. In so doing, Assad’s primary objective was to achieve removal of his country from the list of countries supporting international terrorism and to obtain financial aids Syria desperately needed.⁶²⁹ Nevertheless, Assad was still committed to comprehensive peace rather than a separate Syrian-Israeli peace deal. Assad strongly underlined that Syria would not clinch a separate peace agreement with Israel, which convinced Prime Minister Rabin that his Syria-first strategy would not work in a way he expected.⁶³⁰

⁶²⁶ Knudsen, “United States-Syrian Diplomatic Relations,” 75.

⁶²⁷ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 194-195.

⁶²⁸ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 325.

⁶²⁹ Knudsen, “United States-Syrian Diplomatic Relations,” 75; Pipes, *Syria Beyond the Peace Process*, 72.

⁶³⁰ Hinnebusch, “Does Syria Want Peace?,” 49-50.

In Damascus, Christopher also met with Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa. After the meeting on 21 February 1993, Sharaa indicated that peace process was more significant than the issue of Palestinian deportees in Lebanon, which was interpreted as Syria's abandonment of its policy of coordinating Arab diplomatic unity against Israel in the peace process. However, Syria denied the rumors about its negligence of the Palestinians and its quest for a fast track with Tel Aviv. Similar to Assad, Sharaa underscored the necessity of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East rather than a separate Syrian-Israeli peace agreement. On 26 February 1993, he told French newspaper *Le Figaro* that "*If we wanted a separate peace, we could have done it years ago. If more attention is paid to the Syrian-Israeli negotiations than to the others, that is because there can be no peace without Syria.*"⁶³¹

The pace of the Syrian-Israeli peace track accelerated after the Clinton-Rabin meeting in Washington on 15 March 1993. In the meeting, Clinton tried to convince Rabin of the advantages of the Syria-first track strategy in the Arab-Israeli peace process. Rabin told Clinton that he did not disregard the possibility of full withdrawal from the Golan Heights in return for a genuine peace with Syria, unconnected to other peace tracks and supported by all necessary security arrangements on the Golan Heights. Rabin also explained that a personal meeting with President Assad would be a good idea to nurture the idea of peace and, in any case, a future Israeli-Syrian peace would be put to the referendum as he did not see himself in a position to make such a decision on his own. Clinton inferred from Rabin's remarks that if Israel was reciprocated by Syria, it might totally evacuate the Golan Heights.⁶³²

In this milieu, the ninth round of the peace talks between Israel and the Arab parties began in Washington on 27 April 1993. President Assad's efforts for the start of this round of the peace talks should be noted. Assad insisted that the Palestinians participate in the ninth round of talks, before the implementation of UN Resolution 799 (condemning Israel's deportation of Palestinians as illegal), which was interpreted as a sign of Syria's commitment to the peace process. What's more, Syria coordinated this effort with the United States and stimulated the Palestinian delegation to attend the talks despite the ongoing debacle of the Palestinian deportees in Lebanon.⁶³³ President Assad made other gestures to Israel and the United States during the ninth round of the talks. The talks were held in a positive environment thanks to Assad's decision to allow Syrian Jews to emigrate and to publicly pronounce a new peace

⁶³¹ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 195.

⁶³² Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 250.

⁶³³ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 196.

formula “*full peace for full withdrawal*” in response to Rabin’s previous formula that “*the depth of withdrawal will reflect the depth of peace.*”⁶³⁴ Assad’s statement about full peace for full withdrawal formula was first seen in an Arabic interview with Patrick Seale in London-based *al-Wasat* on 10 May 1993 and the next day it was repeated in Seale’s op-ed article in *New York Times*.⁶³⁵

Assad’s new formula was interpreted as Syria’s new position that the total withdrawal would only refer to the Golan Heights, not to all Arab territories previously occupied by Israel. Although Assad publicly underlined the need for comprehensive peace in the Middle East, he admitted that different peace tracks might continue at “different speeds.” Thus, it was speculated that Assad stepped back from its previous position to liberate all occupied territories. Surprisingly, there was no real progress on the ninth round of the talks despite the positive atmosphere and messages given by Syria to achieve a peace deal. After the failure of the ninth round of talks, the tenth round was held in Washington in June 1993, which again yielded no tangible result.⁶³⁶

Although Secretary of State Christopher gave the Israelis the message that Syria admitted that peace agreement did not mean signing a piece of paper or a limited state of nonbelligerency during the negotiations, Israel was reluctant to buy this argument as Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres claimed that Syria’s approach to peace was technical without open borders and diplomatic relations.⁶³⁷

In the summer of 1993, Christopher appointed Dennis Ross as the Special Middle East Coordinator to break the deadlock in the Arab-Israeli peace process. When the American peace team sought to bring the Syrian and Israeli delegations to the table again in late June 1993, Lebanon diverted attention of all sides from the Syrian-Israeli peace track. In response to Hezbollah’s Katyusha rocket attacks, Israel launched the Operation Accountability to punish Syria and Iran-backed Hezbollah and diminish its influence in south Lebanon in late July 1993.⁶³⁸ Syria’s constructive and cooperative attitude toward the United States during the

⁶³⁴ Daoudy, “A Missed Chance for Peace,” 224; Pressman, “From Madrid and Oslo to Camp David,” 249.

⁶³⁵ Pressman, “Mediation, Domestic Politics, and the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations,” 357.

⁶³⁶ Cobban, *The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks*, 48; Pressman, “Mediation, Domestic Politics, and the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations,” 358-359; Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 250.

⁶³⁷ Hinnebusch, “Does Syria Want Peace?,” 52.

⁶³⁸ Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 250; Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace*, 86.

Lebanese crisis was noteworthy. Having sufficient leverage over the Lebanese government and Hezbollah, Syria assisted Warren Christopher's mediation efforts during the crisis. Furthermore, Assad pressured Hezbollah to stop its assaults on northern Israel despite the loss of Syrian soldiers after the Israeli retaliation attacks. Syria's candid contributions to the U.S.-sponsored ceasefire efforts after Israel's Operation Accountability and its efforts to maintain stability in Lebanon was rewarded by the Clinton administration with a more constructive role in the Syrian-Israeli peace track.⁶³⁹

By August 1993, there was considerable improvement in the Syrian-Israeli peace track thanks to efforts of Christopher and Ross. Rabin thought that ceasefire in Lebanon might be a sign of Assad's readiness to adopt a larger and strategic view. He believed that sometimes new opportunities came after big crises. In a meeting with Christopher on 3 August 1993, Rabin asked him to explore the possibility of peace with Syria. Rabin offered full evacuation of the Golan Heights if Syria was ready to meet certain conditions pertaining to Israel's security needs and demands.⁶⁴⁰ In the meeting, Rabin asked Christopher some hypothetical questions as to Israel's total evacuation of the Golan Heights. Christopher cites this crucial episode in his memoirs *Chances of A Lifetime* as follows:

“When I arrived for my second visit to Jerusalem on the morning of August 3, 1993, Rabin was prepared to make a major move. He invited me into his small private office, with only U.S. ambassador Dennis Ross and Israeli ambassador Itamar Rabinovich present. As we drank coffee, Rabin came right to the point. He wanted me to pose a hypothetical question to Assad: What was Syria willing to do in exchange for Israel's full withdrawal from the territory in the Golan Heights seized by Israel in the 1967 war? More specifically, was Assad willing to (a) sign a stand-alone treaty with Israel, i.e., one without linkage to the Jordanian and the Palestinian negotiating tracks; (b) join in personal, public diplomacy to reassure the Israeli public of Syria's commitment to peace, including a meeting with Rabin; and (c) agree to a five-year timetable for Israel's full withdrawal from the Golan, with incremental normalization of relations between the two countries, such as the exchange of diplomats, as the withdrawal progressed? I was more than a little surprised. Rabin was entrusting me with what should have been the ultimate winning hand on the Syrian track: Israel's departure from the Golan Heights.”⁶⁴¹

So, Rabin deposited with Christopher a hypothetical/conditional offer to evacuate the Golan Heights as a part of a peace deal with Syria on terms acceptable to Tel Aviv. Israel seemed ready to sign a peace agreement with Syria providing that its demands were sufficiently addressed by Damascus. Specifically, Israel's needs were cited as a gradual and a five-year

⁶³⁹ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 196-197; Pipes, *Syria Beyond the Peace Process*, 72.

⁶⁴⁰ Pressman, “Mediation, Domestic Politics, and the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations,” 359.

⁶⁴¹ Christopher, *Chances of A Lifetime*, 221.

period of withdrawal from the Golan Heights, full normalization of diplomatic relations including exchange of ambassadors, continuation of Israeli settlements on the Golan, necessary security arrangements, trade and tourism, securing Israel's water supplies and stationing early-warning systems on the Golan. Rabin wanted to make sure that Syria's agreement should not be bound up with another peace track as well. Rabin also wanted to know whether Syria would expel the rejectionist Palestinian groups from Damascus, curb Hezbollah's influence in Lebanon and sever its alliance with Iran.⁶⁴² Rabin's deposit was depended on the model of the Israeli-Egyptian peace agreement of 1979. In the meeting, Rabin underlined that it was a secret deposit, and it should not be put on the table by the United States until certain progress was made with the Syrians.⁶⁴³

President Clinton recalls the secrecy of the "deposit issue" briefly in his autobiography *My Life* as follows: "*Before he was killed, Yitzhak Rabin had given me a commitment to withdraw from the Golan to the June 4, 1967, borders as long as Israel's concerns were satisfied. The commitment was given on the condition that I keep it "in my pocket" until it could be formally presented to Syria in the context of a complete solution.*"⁶⁴⁴

According to Christopher, Rabin's attitude was groundbreaking because for the first time an Israeli prime minister offered total withdrawal from the Golan Heights explicitly providing the fulfillment of Israel's security needs and demands. On the other hand, Rabinovich underlined that Rabin did not give any commitment but expressed a conditional willingness to withdraw from the Golan Heights as a part of a peace deal with Syria. Rabin came up with hypothetical question technique as the peace efforts of the United States in the Syrian-Israeli track had collapsed one year ago due to Assad's refusal to start negotiations without seeing Israel's commitment to fully evacuate the Golan. Rabin asked hypothetical questions to gauge if Assad was ready to follow the path of Sadat in substance and process. By substance, Rabin referred to contractual peace, normalization and adequate security arrangements, process meant withdrawal from the Golan over several years. Rabin's conditional peace offer later became famous as "deposit" and formed the backbone of the Syrian-Israeli peace track in the future.⁶⁴⁵

⁶⁴² Quandt, *Peace Process*, 327-328; Seale, "The Syria-Israel Negotiations," 67; Pressman, "Mediation, Domestic Politics, and the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations," 359.

⁶⁴³ Itamar Rabinovich, "From Deposit to Commitment: The Evolution of US-Israeli-Syrian Peace Negotiations," in *The View From Damascus: State, Political Community and Foreign Relations in the Twentieth-Century Syria* (London, Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008), 255.

⁶⁴⁴ Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 883.

⁶⁴⁵ Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 251; Rabinovich, "From Deposit to Commitment," 256.

On 4 August 1993, Christopher and Ross went to Damascus to meet President Assad and convey Rabin's hypothetical questions. Christopher told Assad that "*Prime Minister Rabin has asked me to tell you that Israel is ready for full withdrawal from the Golan provided its requirements on security and normalization are met.*"⁶⁴⁶ In response, Assad told Christopher that he was okay with the land-for-peace formula but had some reservations in detail. Assad took exception to the concept of normalization, underlined that security arrangements must be equal and Israel's withdrawal from the Golan must be completed within six months not five years as proposed by Rabin.⁶⁴⁷ Assad also wanted to clarify the possible line of Israeli withdrawal and asked if Tel Aviv was ready to withdraw to the 4 June 1967 line. Christopher replied that he got a commitment to full withdrawal from the Golan but without a clear withdrawal line.⁶⁴⁸

Christopher wrote his meeting with President Assad in his memoirs as follows:

"I posed the hypothetical questions that Rabin had asked me to deliver. I thought I detected a thin smile on Assad's face, but his only verbal response was a series of nitpicking questions and contentious pronouncements that I tried to answer without displaying my irritation.

Assad said that public diplomacy should come only after a peace agreement, and that he could never meet Rabin until the Golan had been returned to Syria. While he would not resist a separate peace agreement with Israel, he said he could not agree to early normalization as withdrawal proceeded. Finally, he insisted that Israel's withdrawal be accomplished in six months, not five years, despite the need to dismantle the Israeli settlements in the Golan and find new homes in Israel for the settlers.

After four hours of discussion, Yitzhak Rabin's risky, visionary step had not found reciprocity in Damascus. Our meeting ended with Assad having given me little of consequence to bring to Rabin, apart from a willingness to talk further."⁶⁴⁹

Unlike Christopher's comments, the Syrian side offers different account of the Assad-Christopher meeting. According to this account, Assad took Rabin's peace offer with seriousness and explained his satisfaction, but he wanted to know which line Israel was planning to withdraw: the 1923 line or the 1967 line. Furthermore, Assad talked about the security arrangements with Israel and underlined that all settlements -civilian and military- on the Golan Heights would have to be removed within six months of signing a peace

⁶⁴⁶ Seale, "The Syria-Israel Negotiations," 66.

⁶⁴⁷ Rabinovich, "From Deposit to Commitment," 256; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 328.

⁶⁴⁸ Seale, "The Syria-Israel Negotiations," 69.

⁶⁴⁹ Christopher, *Chances of A Lifetime*, 221-222.

agreement.⁶⁵⁰ Syrian resources hinted that Israel agreed on a general agreement on the principle that in exchange for full peace with Syria, Israel would fully withdraw from the Golan Heights. Even though it was not publicly announced, and its content was not fully clarified, the concepts of withdrawal and normalization began to be used concurrently, which meant Syrian-Israeli peace was in the making. But the exact line of withdrawal (the 1923 line or 1967 line) was a matter of discussion between the two sides.⁶⁵¹

Bouthaina Shaban, Assad's interpreter, explained in her diary that although Assad appreciated the importance of the Rabin deposit, he was not impressed by it. So, he gave an unenthusiastic response due to its vagueness about the withdrawal line (1923 or 1967) as well as the timing of the withdrawal.⁶⁵²

Like Christopher, Dennis Ross claimed that Assad's response was not sufficient and groundbreaking. Rabin was also disappointed with Assad's response to his bold move to break the diplomatic deadlock. That's why, he ordered Peres to conclude the Oslo negotiations with the Palestinians rather than making progress on the Syrian track. While Israel was negotiating with Syria, it was also secretly trying to reach a compromise with the PLO in Oslo, Norway. Rabin decided to cultivate the reward of the Palestinian track rather than insisting on the Syrian track as the negotiations with the PLO were promising. The Rabin government badly needed a success story in the Arab-Israeli peace process to utilize in domestic politics.⁶⁵³ The Syrian-Israeli peace track collapsed suddenly with the pronouncement of the Oslo Accords, which opened a new chapter in the Arab-Israeli peace process.⁶⁵⁴

4.4.1.2. The Oslo Accords and Its Implications for the Syrian-Israeli Peace Track

Secret negotiations between Israel and the PLO in Oslo, Norway since early 1993 resulted in the signing of Oslo Accords based on the land-for-peace formula in September 1993. Norway's Foreign Minister Johann Jorgen Holst announced that Israel and the PLO concluded a comprehensive peace deal, in which the PLO officially recognized Israel's right to exist and renounced terrorism, Israel in return accepted ceding the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town

⁶⁵⁰ Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 252.

⁶⁵¹ Cobban, *Syria and the Peace*, 5-6.

⁶⁵² Shaaban, *Damascus Diary*, 99-100.

⁶⁵³ Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 253.

⁶⁵⁴ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 198; Pressman, "Mediation, Domestic Politics, and the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations," 360.

of Jericho to the Palestinian Authority by the end of 1993. After the first step of recognition and partial withdrawal, both sides would begin negotiations on the final status of the West Bank including the future of Jewish settlements and Jerusalem as well as the fate of the Palestinian refugees.⁶⁵⁵

Despite his imprecise knowledge of the general terms of the agreement between Israel and the PLO, President Clinton was not aware of the imminence of its signing. At first, Clinton was surprised by the announcement of the Oslo Accords as he was pressing for a breakthrough in the Syrian track and then in the Palestinian track as it was the reasonable sequence of the Middle East peace for him. But once Clinton learned the Oslo Accords, he reacted pragmatically to make signing ceremony an American-sponsored one. In so doing, he wanted to demonstrate his support for the agreement and his will to closely monitor its implementation. Clinton was aware of Assad's disappointment and anger owing to the PLO-Israeli peace deal. As Clinton felt himself responsible to Assad, who just agreed to go along with the United States in the peace process, he assumed responsibility to calm down Assad. Hence, Clinton reassured Assad that the Oslo Accords did not mean the end of the peace process and that the United States would continue its broker role between Syria and Israel on the basis of the promises given in August 1993.⁶⁵⁶

Upon Rabin's request, Clinton requested Assad in a phone call to send Walid al-Muallem, Syria's Ambassador to the United States, to the signing ceremony of the Oslo Accords as a sign of Syria's consent. Assad reciprocated by letting Muallem to be present in the ceremony of the Oslo Accords at the White House. On 13 September 1993, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO leader Yasser Arafat shook hands on the White House lawn and signed the Oslo Accords.⁶⁵⁷

Despite Clinton's assurances, American officials notified the Syrian negotiation delegation in the wake of the Oslo Accords that Israeli public might not digest simultaneous peace agreements with the PLO and Syria. That's why, the United States and Israel asked Syria to slow down the Syrian-Israeli peace track, to which Syria consented miserably.⁶⁵⁸ It was evident

⁶⁵⁵ Little, *American Orientalism*, 301.

⁶⁵⁶ Rabinovich, "From Deposit to Commitment," 257; Seale, "The Syria-Israel Negotiations," 68.

⁶⁵⁷ Daoudy, "A Missed Chance for Peace," 226; Pressman, "From Madrid and Oslo to Camp David," 248; Seale, "The Syria-Israel Negotiations," 68.

⁶⁵⁸ Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 253; Gani, *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations*, 170.

that the Oslo Accords made the Palestinian track the Rabin government's priority in the Middle East peace process. In this respect, Foreign Minister Peres announced that Syria would have to wait for negotiations and even claimed that "*Asad was put in superhuman dimensions, as though everything depends upon him.*" The Rabin government's decision to freeze the Syrian track was interpreted as Israel's new strategy to sideline Syria in the Middle East peace process. The Assad regime was frustrated with the Rabin government's posture on the Syrian track after the Oslo Accords. Syrian Minister of Information expressed that "*It was not a coincidence that Rabin declared after the agreement was signed with the PLO that he is not in a hurry to negotiate with Syria.*"⁶⁵⁹

As rightly argued by Rabinovich, the Oslo Accords struck a heavy blow to hopes for a Syrian-Israeli peace deal.⁶⁶⁰ Indeed, it accelerated the Jordanian-Israeli peace agreement, stalled further progress on the Syrian-Israeli peace track and may have thwarted a peace agreement between the two countries. The Oslo Accords enabled Israel to maneuver in the Syrian-Israeli peace track as Prime Minister Rabin announced that partial territorial concession on the Palestinian front was more favorable than full territorial concession on the Syrian front. In the wake of the signing of the Oslo Accords, the U.S.-sponsored direct Syrian-Israeli negotiations ceased for several months.⁶⁶¹

Although Yasser Arafat and Palestinian Foreign Minister Farouq Qaddumi had gone to Damascus to receive Assad's approval for the deal, a separate agreement between the PLO and Israel was unacceptable to him. When Assad learned the Oslo negotiations, he was shocked by Arafat's Sadat-style secret negotiations with Israel. According to Assad, Arafat and the PLO leadership betrayed Syria's efforts to form a pan-Arab front against Israel in the Middle East peace process. Yet, Syria could not return to its rejectionist path owing to the changing contours of world politics in the post-Cold War era. Indeed, Syria had no means neither to oppose to the American predominance in the Middle East nor to resist the signing of another separate peace deal.⁶⁶²

In this context, even though Syria was frustrated with the PLO's separate deal with Israel, it did not openly condemn it and used a diplomatic language by stating that it was neither against

⁶⁵⁹ Knudsen, "The Syrian-Israeli Political Impasse," 228.

⁶⁶⁰ Rabinovich, *Waging Peace*, 56.

⁶⁶¹ Hinnebusch, "Does Syria Want Peace?," 52-53; Pipes, *Syria Beyond the Peace Process*, 73.

⁶⁶² Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 198-199.

nor supportive of the Oslo Accords. According to Syria, it was totally the responsibility of the PLO leadership to reach a separate peace agreement with Israel without consulting Arab states in the peace process.⁶⁶³ President Assad elaborated on Syria's response to the Oslo Accords by taking the determinants of the U.S.-led new world order into consideration and stated that: *"If Syria wanted to obstruct the agreement it would have foiled it, and if it becomes clear to us that this agreement will create major damage, we will do so. But we do not believe it constituted a threat and was just a step along a long road."*⁶⁶⁴

In fact, Syria was seriously concerned that the Oslo Accords might lead to further normalization of relations between Israel and the Arab world and finally there would be no reason for rejecting normal diplomatic relations with Israel. Assad was concerned that the PLO's decision to recognize Israel, as Egypt did in the 1970s, would change regional dynamics and isolate Syria in the Middle East similar to the mid-1970s.⁶⁶⁵ Furthermore, the Oslo Accords would inhibit Israel's willingness to make concessions and undermine Syria's bargaining power vis-à-vis Israel and the United States in the peace process as well as its coordinator role for a united Arab front to achieve a comprehensive peace.⁶⁶⁶

According to Syria, Israel once again divided the Arab unity successfully via the Oslo Accords and the Palestinian issue was no longer the collective cause of the Arab world but rather a Palestinian one.⁶⁶⁷ As Assad was frustrated with Arafat's decision to follow his own path, he decided to distance his struggle with Israel from the Palestinian struggle. In that regard, Syria publicly indicated its unwillingness to get involved in the Palestinian issue more than the Palestinians did. Syrian Foreign Minister Sharaa pronounced Syria's new position after Oslo by saying that: *"Syria's stance has never changed. Syria insisted and continues to insist on withdrawal from all the Arab lands occupied in 1967. However, the others, or some of the others, have broken away and negotiated for the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Jordanian territories. Thus Syria does not wish to be more royal than the king."*⁶⁶⁸

⁶⁶³ Cobban, *Syria and the Peace*, 7.

⁶⁶⁴ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 201-202.

⁶⁶⁵ Shlaim, "The Oslo Accords," 37-38.

⁶⁶⁶ Gani, *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations*, 184-185.

⁶⁶⁷ Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 253.

⁶⁶⁸ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 200.

President Assad pursued wait and see policy while Arafat was negotiating the details of the Oslo Accord. Assad elucidated Syria's position in the Arab-Israeli peace process in a speech at the People's Council by stating that:

“From the beginning [of the current peace process], our decision was clear: coordination with Arab parties participating in the peace process... when we raised the matter of coordination, we did so on the premise that the other Arab parties, which were involved in a negotiating process in an unequal manner with the Israeli side, should benefit from Syria's situation - its negotiating strength and its various capabilities on the battlefield - in addition to the fact that Syria is the basic element for peace in the region.”⁶⁶⁹

It can be argued that the Oslo Accords compelled Syria to improve its relations with the United States to avoid exclusion from the Middle East peace process. After Oslo, Syria decided to reevaluate its insistence on a unified Arab front and all-encompassing peace. Syria began to focus on recovery of the Golan Heights rather than rescuing all occupied Arab territories. Thus, the idea of comprehensive peace after the Oslo Accords began to encapsulate only recovery of the Golan. To investigate the possibility of resumption of the peace talks, Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa visited Washington in October 1993, which was the first high level visit of a senior Syrian official after 20 years. In December 1993, Assad also made some gestures to the United States and Israel by issuing exit visas to 1200 Syrian Jews and announcing that he was ready to collaborate to learn the fate of a missing Israeli soldiers in Lebanon. In so doing, Assad sought to improve the image of Syria in Washington and to demonstrate his goodwill to Israel for future peace negotiations. In response to these gestures, the Clinton administration eased sanctions by sending an American commercial aircraft to Damascus. Yet, this gesture did not mean total removal of previous economic sanctions on Syria.⁶⁷⁰

In this milieu, the United States continued to play the role of mediator in the Syrian-Israeli peace track. In December 1993, Secretary of State Christopher prodded President Assad into restarting dialog with Israel and helped to open a new channel of communication in the form of secret talks between ambassadors in Washington.⁶⁷¹

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid., 202.

⁶⁷⁰ Knudsen, “United States-Syrian Diplomatic Relations,” 75. Also see Norman Kempster, “Christopher Recognizes Syria Move on MIAs,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 8, 1993, 8.

⁶⁷¹ Inbar, “Israeli Negotiations with Syria,” 91.

4.4.1.3. The Syrian-Israeli Track from the Clinton-Assad Summit in Geneva to the COS Talks

Diplomatic contacts between the United States and Syria in the second half of 1993 culminated in the Clinton-Assad meeting in January 1994 in Geneva. President Clinton met with President Assad on 16 January 1994 to achieve a breakthrough in the Syrian-Israeli track. President Clinton assured Assad that Rabin was committed to total withdrawal from the Golan Heights if Syria was ready to provide proper security arrangements and to normalize bilateral relations. In the meeting, Clinton obtained two significant concessions from Assad: peace agreement with Israel before the resolution of the Palestinian conflict and acceptance of normal peaceful relations with Israel in return for full withdrawal.⁶⁷²

Clinton and Assad held a joint press conference in Geneva to evaluate the meeting and the prospects of the peace process. At the conference, Assad expressed his vision of peace and its meaning for Syria by stating that a just and comprehensive peace with Israel as Syria's strategic choice,⁶⁷³ which "*guarantees Arab rights, terminates the Israeli occupation, and enables all the region's peoples to live in peace, safety, and dignity.*"⁶⁷⁴ Assad announced his dedication to peace process as follows: "*We want the peace of the brave, a real place that thrives, continues, guarantees the interests of all, and gives rights to their owners. If the leaders of Israel have enough courage to respond to such a peace, a new era of security and stability and normal peaceful relations among all will emerge in the region.*"⁶⁷⁵

Assad also underlined Syria's adherence to comprehensive peace despite the signing of the Oslo Accords by saying that: "*I hope that our meeting today will contribute to the realisation of the aspirations of the people of the region... that this new year will be the year of achieving the just and comprehensive peace which puts an end to the tragedies of violence and wars endured by them for several decades.*"⁶⁷⁶

⁶⁷² Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 253.

⁶⁷³ Eyal Zisser, "Syria and Israel: from war to peace," *Orient* 36, No. 3 (1995): 487; Pressman, "Mediation, Domestic Politics, and the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations," 360.

⁶⁷⁴ "Al-Asad, Clinton Meet in Geneva 16 Jan," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, January 16, 1994.

⁶⁷⁵ Ann Devroy and Daniel Williams, "Assad Tells Clinton Syria Wants Peace," *Washington Post*, January 17, 1994, 1; Cobban, *Syria and the Peace*, 7-8.

⁶⁷⁶ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 203.

There were significant messages in Assad's speech. At the press conference, Assad said that Syria and Israel could establish normal, peaceful relations. He also underlined that Syria was committed to a just and comprehensive peace with Israel as a strategic choice. By conceptualizing peace with Israel as a strategic choice, Assad reiterated his position that Syria was no longer seeking strategic parity with Israel.⁶⁷⁷

President Clinton hailed Assad's statements as "*clear, forthright and very important*" and called on Israel to respond Assad's message positively. He said that the Geneva meeting prepared the ground for real improvement in the Syrian-Israeli peace track. Clinton also suggested that American troops might be deployed as a peace keeping force in the Golan Heights.⁶⁷⁸ While Clinton was talking about the meaning of peace between Israel and Syria at the press conference, he mentioned open borders, diplomatic relations, and free trade within the scope of normalization between the two countries. Assad did not oppose to content of Clinton's peace formula and nodded in agreement. This was considered as a huge step by the Americans as Assad agreed to establishment of normal peaceful relations between Israel and Syria.⁶⁷⁹

At the press conference, President Clinton admitted the key role of Syria to attain a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. In so doing, Clinton also thought that improvement in the Syrian-Israeli peace track would accelerate the Lebanese and Palestinian tracks. Although the meeting itself did not yield tangible result, it prepared the ground for Syria's rapprochement with the United States. Assad conveyed a message to the international community that Syria was moving towards the norms of the hegemonic power in the international system. Assad attained his three main objectives through the Geneva meeting: a progress on the peace talks, improvement in the U.S.-Syrian bilateral relations and strengthening Syria's regional role. So, the Geneva meeting boosted Assad's international prestige and his regional posture to implement his agenda in the Middle East.⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷⁷ Zisser, "Syria and Israel: from war to peace," 495.

⁶⁷⁸ Martin Fletcher, "Clinton Hails Breakthrough, Assad Ready to Sign Peace with Israel," *Times*, January 17, 1994, 1.

⁶⁷⁹ Tyler, *A World of Trouble*, 411. Also see Michael K. Frisby, "Syria's Assad, After Talks with Clinton, Says He Seeks 'Normal' Ties with Israel," *Wall Street Journal*, January 17, 1994, 10.

⁶⁸⁰ Nejad, "The Ineffective Role of the United States," 52; Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 202.

President Clinton recalls his historic meeting with President Assad in Geneva by pointing to Syria's quest for realignment with the West in the post-Soviet era as follows:

“On the way home from Russia, after a brief stop in Belarus, I flew to Geneva, for my first meeting with President Assad of Syria... Assad rarely left Syria, and when he did it was almost always to come to Geneva to meet with foreign leaders. On our visit, I was impressed by his intelligence and his almost total recall of detailed events going back more than twenty years. Assad was famous for long meetings—he could go on for six or seven hours without taking a break. I, on the other hand, was tired and needed to drink coffee, tea, or water to stay awake. Fortunately, the meeting ran only a few hours. Our discussion produced the two things I wanted: Assad's first explicit statement that he was willing to make peace and establish normal relations with Israel, and his commitment to withdraw all Syrian forces from Lebanon and respect its independence once a comprehensive Middle East peace was reached. I knew the success of the meeting resulted from more than personal chemistry. Assad had received a lot of economic support from the former Soviet Union; that was gone now, so he needed to reach out to the West. To do that, he had to stop supporting terrorism in the region, which would be easy to do if he made an agreement with Israel that succeeded in giving back to Syria the Golan Heights, lost in the 1967 war.”⁶⁸¹

Why was Assad eager for maintaining peace talks with Israel after the Oslo Accords? The answer lies with the transformation of the international system from bipolarity to unipolarity. The U.S.-led world order after the Cold War era and the absence of the Soviet Union limited Syria's options for liberating the Golan Heights and other occupied territories. With the collapse of its Cold War patron and the advent of unipolarity, peace turned out to be a strategic option for Syria. In order to achieve its goals, Syria had to demonstrate its willingness to cooperate with the United States without sacrificing its regional ambitions.⁶⁸² Besides, in comparison to other presidents with whom Assad met before, the impact of Clinton upon him was greater than Nixon, Carter and Bush. Assad believed that Clinton was aware the significance of the Golan Heights to him and his quest for recovering it with dignity.⁶⁸³

Although Syria's role as a key player and a full partner in peace negotiations was appreciated at the Geneva meeting by President Clinton, there were several obstacles to further progress on the Syrian-Israeli peace track. For instance, Prime Minister Rabin announced that withdrawal from the Golan and a peace agreement with Syria would be put to a national referendum only one day after the Geneva summit.⁶⁸⁴ This was indicating that Rabin was not fully prepared to withdraw from the Golan Heights because the future of Jewish residents in

⁶⁸¹ Clinton, *My Life*, 574-575.

⁶⁸² Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 203.

⁶⁸³ Hinnebusch, “Does Syria Want Peace?,” 53.

⁶⁸⁴ Pipes, *Syria Beyond the Peace Process*, 74.

the Golan was not clear, the future security arrangements between Israel and Syria were vague and the Israeli public opinion was not still ready for an Israeli-Syrian peace.⁶⁸⁵

On 17 January 1994, Israeli Defense Minister Mordechai Gur also declared on behalf of the Israeli government that territorial concession on the Golan Heights would be brought to a referendum.⁶⁸⁶ These remarks rose Syria's concern about Israel's seriousness. According to Assad, putting peace agreement to referendum was totally unacceptable.⁶⁸⁷ Assad also thought that Rabin adopted a tactical approach to Syrian track and the Palestinian track bogged down in 1994. According to Assad, Rabin was aiming at undermining Syria's opposition to the Oslo Accords and exerting pressure on Arafat to bypass him by reviving the Syrian track. Thus, Assad criticized Rabin's remarks by saying that "*We said full peace but Rabin hasn't said full withdrawal.*"⁶⁸⁸

In this milieu, a brutal massacre took place in Hebron, where 48 innocent Muslims were killed by an Israeli settler while they were praying in the Ibrahim Mosque on 25 February 1994. The massacre halted the peace process between Israel and the Arab states. Although the talks stopped in all tracks (the PLO-Israel, Jordan-Israel and Lebanon-Israel), Syria surprisingly sought to ease the tension with Israel by taking some confidence building steps. To illustrate, Syria encouraged Jordan and Lebanon to curb the PLO's resistance to return to the table after the Hebron massacre. This was clear indication of Syria's eagerness to continue peace negotiations and its indifference to the interests of the PLO.⁶⁸⁹ Nonetheless, Syria's conception of peace did not mean totally friendly relations with Israel. In March 1994, Foreign Minister Sharaa announced that Syria was ready to conduct usual international practices with Israel to achieve normalization in bilateral relations after a peace deal. Yet, this did not mean a warm peace with Tel Aviv. Syria wanted to have a cold peace by protracting the normalization process.⁶⁹⁰

⁶⁸⁵ Knudsen, "United States-Syrian Diplomatic Relations," 75-76.

⁶⁸⁶ Cobban, *Syria and the Peace*, 8.

⁶⁸⁷ Inbar, "Israeli Negotiations with Syria," 91; Slater, "Lost Opportunities for Peace in the Arab-Israeli Conflict," 96-97.

⁶⁸⁸ Hinnebusch, "Does Syria Want Peace?," 53.

⁶⁸⁹ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 203-204.

⁶⁹⁰ Hinnebusch, "Does Syria Want Peace?," 51.

Despite troubles, the Clinton administration's efforts continued apace to revive the Syrian-Israeli peace track. Secretary of State Christopher and Special Coordinator Ross carried out shuttle diplomacy from April to July 1994 to make progress on the Syrian-Israeli peace track.⁶⁹¹ Rabin also began to concentrate on the Syrian track seriously since April 1994. On 19 April 1994, he told in a closed session of the Knesset that he accepted full military and civilian withdrawal from the Golan Heights. Rabin also publicly announced that peace with Syria was more important than the settlements in the Golan and that peace deal with Syria within one year was an urgency. It was reported that Israel offered evacuation of the Golan Heights in three phases and over five to eight years in exchange for peace and normal relations with Syria. Israel also asked stationing of international monitors on Mount Hermon as well as its demilitarization. In the summer of 1994, the Rabin government seemed willing to fully withdraw from the Golan Heights.⁶⁹²

Secretary of State Christopher went to Damascus for a two-day visit from 30 April to 1 May 1994 and submitted Assad a new package of peace proposals prepared by Rabin. The package was not containing new proposals and it was totally same what he had offered in August 1993. In the package, Rabin underlined his commitment to full withdrawal but in gradual stage over five years, in return he demanded open borders, full diplomatic relations including exchange of ambassadors and all necessary security arrangements. In the meeting, Assad asked Christopher about Israel's readiness to withdraw to the 4 June 1967 line. When he could not clarify the exact withdrawal line, Assad underlined that without withdrawal to the 4 June line, there could be no peace with Israel. Assad also reiterated that he could not sacrifice Syria's inch of land. Due to vagueness of Rabin's withdrawal offer, Christopher's initiative did not yield result.⁶⁹³

Christopher shuttled between Israel and Syria from 18 to 22 July 1994. This time Christopher was able to get clarification on the withdrawal line, which Assad demanded since August 1993. When Rabin met with Christopher on 18 July 1994, he stated for the first time that his "deposit" amounted to a pullback to the 4 June 1967 line. When Rabin underlined that Israel could not publicly announce the withdrawal line and Syria could not get the commitment until Israel's security needs were addressed, Christopher replied that "*It is not on the table, it is in my pocket*" to protect Rabin against criticisms. Next day, Christopher went to Damascus and

⁶⁹¹ Seale, "The Syria-Israel Negotiations," 70.

⁶⁹² Inbar, "Israeli Negotiations with Syria," 92; Pipes, *Syria Beyond the Peace Process*, 74-75.

⁶⁹³ Seale, "The Syria-Israel Negotiations," 70.

met with President Assad. He told Assad that once a package agreement meeting the needs of Syria and Israel was made, Israel's full withdrawal under these circumstances would be the 4 June 1967.⁶⁹⁴

In the meeting, Christopher explained what Rabin meant by full withdrawal in response to a question by saying that "*response by Prime Minister Rabin was that full withdrawal would consist in a withdrawal to the line of 4 June 1967.*" To clarify the withdrawal line, the Syrian side insisted on the withdrawal up to the 4 June 1967 line, removal of all Israeli settlements and acceptance of global diplomacy in favor of global peace. It was rumored that Rabin accepted full withdrawal from the Golan when the Americans transmitted an oral message from Assad that he uttered for the first time his readiness to accept all the security arrangements demanded by Rabin in return for total withdrawal.⁶⁹⁵

Despite his suspicion about the Israeli offer, President Assad accepted resumption of the talks at ambassadors' level. Talks headed by Muallem and Rabinovich started in Washington in July 1994 and continued roughly a year. The foci of the talks were "four legs of the table" as termed by Rabin: withdrawal, normalization, security arrangements and timetable for implementation. In this period, Rabin and Assad carried out public diplomacy to demonstrate their seriousness and to prepare the public opinion for future concessions in a Syrian-Israeli peace deal.⁶⁹⁶ To illustrate, Assad announced in a speech on 10 September 1994 that "*Syria shall meet the objective requirements of peace that are agreed upon.*" Both American and the Israeli officials welcomed Assad's public remarks enthusiastically. Israeli politicians responded to Assad's speech by using the terms "very positive", "an important and positive speech", and "an important change." Shimon Peres even went further and claimed that Assad's speech as "*a declaration of peace.*" In this period, Foreign Minister Sharaa appeared in an interview with an Israeli journalist and commented on the peace process. However, Sharaa's criticisms against the Israeli media and denial of Syrian forces attacks on Israeli residential areas from the pre-1967 positions on the Golan Heights created unrest in Tel Aviv.⁶⁹⁷

⁶⁹⁴ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 332-333; Seale, "The Syria-Israel Negotiations," 70.

⁶⁹⁵ Daoudy, "A Missed Chance for Peace," 224-225; Cobban, *Syria and the Peace*, 8.

⁶⁹⁶ Walid al-Moualem, "Fresh Lights on the Syrian-Israeli Peace Negotiations. An Interview with Ambassador Walid al-Moualem," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 26, No. 2 (Winter, 1997): 84-85; Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 254.

⁶⁹⁷ Pipes, *Syria Beyond the Peace Process*, 76-77.

In September 1994, Muallem gave Rabinovich another document outlining Syria's position on the line, timing and stages of Israeli withdrawal, the content of peace, the nature of normalization, the types of security arrangements and the mutual obligations of the sides to each other. Moreover, Muallem and Rabinovich agreed that security component of the negotiations should be given priority and suggested that high-rank military officers be sent to Washington to initiate a dialogue between the two armies to move the negotiations forward. While there was a considerable improvement in the Syrian-Israeli peace track, Israel was also negotiating a separate peace deal with Jordan. On 25 July 1994, King Hussein and Rabin signed a non-belligerency agreement clarifying the principles for a peace deal between Jordan and Israel. This process culminated in a formal peace agreement between the two countries under the auspices of President Clinton on 26 October 1994.⁶⁹⁸

The Jordanian-Israeli peace deal must be cited yet another turning point in the Arab-Israeli peace process, which put Syria in a difficult position after the Oslo Accords. The Jordanian-Israeli deal was a second blow to Syria's quest for a united Arab front and forced Syria to pursue its own national interests to regain the Golan Heights.⁶⁹⁹ The PLO and Jordan were persuaded by the United States to follow their own paths in the peace process rather than pursuing a unified Arab front. Instead of waiting for Syria and then continuing the final round of multilateral talks, these actors were attracted by the benefits of separate peace agreement with Israel. The primary reason for this was the new world order which diminished Syria's regional influence in the Middle East. While Syria was able to influence regional actors' behaviors in the peace process in the past, the hegemonic position of the United States freed the PLO and Jordan from Syria in their decision-making processes. So, Syria became increasingly isolated after the Oslo Accords and the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty and its regional hegemony seemed under threat by Israel.⁷⁰⁰

President Assad uttered Syria's desperate position while commenting on the Jordanian-Israeli deal on Syrian TV by stating that "*What can we do since the others have left us and gone forward?*"⁷⁰¹

⁶⁹⁸ Cobban, *Syria and the Peace*, 8-9. Also see, Itamar Rabinovich, "Ambassador Rabinovich on the Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks," Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July 18, 1996, <https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/ambassaador%20rabinovitch%20on%20the%20israeli-syrian%20peac.aspx>.

⁶⁹⁹ Hinnebusch, "Does Syria Want Peace?," 50.

⁷⁰⁰ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 206-207.

⁷⁰¹ Hinnebusch, "Egypt, Syria and the Arab State System in the New World Order," 178.

According to Syria, the signing of the Jordan-Israel non-belligerency agreement warranted further American cooperation to achieve Israel's withdrawal from the Golan Heights. President Clinton called Assad on the day of the Jordanian-Israeli peace agreement and assured him of the United States' belief in Syria's key role in the peace talks. Assad's speech in the People's Assembly on 10 September 1994 was interpreted as his effort to prepare the Syrian public for a separate peace with Israel.⁷⁰² In this speech, Assad condemned King Hussein and accused him of betraying the Arab cause. Assad said that:

“For decades, Syria waged the Arabs’ battle against the Israeli occupation, to liberate the land and recover the [Arabs’] rights. Our people carried the principal burden in the confrontation and we offered great sacrifices in lives and suffering, and the conflict was reflected in the country’s public life...I do not want to discuss what they [the Palestinians and Jordanians] arrived at, but reality makes unambiguously clear the enormity of the damage that unilateralism has inflicted on the core of the causes for which we have long fought and struggled.”⁷⁰³

As mentioned above, Syria decided to modify the concept of comprehensive peace in the wake of the PLO's and Jordan's separate peace deals with Israel. Walid Muallem, who was Syria's chief negotiator and ambassador to the U.S., expressed the changing position of Syria as follows:

“We still want comprehensiveness - comprehensiveness was one basis of the Madrid process. Our foreign minister in Madrid went around to the various Arab delegations to insist on the same venue and timing for the negotiations, and here in Washington we had regular coordinating meetings for the heads of Arab delegations... But we were taken by surprise by Oslo - we did not know about the secret talks until the agreement was announced. We were also surprised by the Jordanian treaty. We were not informed of what was happening on that track, when King Hussein and Rabin met in London and agreed to sign. So we did not leave the Palestinians or the Jordanians. They left us. We are not complaining, but that's the way it is. Maybe things will change in the future.”⁷⁰⁴

The breakthrough on the Jordanian front diverted attention of American and Israeli officials from the Syrian-Israeli track once again. It also put enormous pressure on Syria as losing Jordan meant that Syria's hope for a comprehensive peace (encapsulating Israeli withdrawal from all territories invaded in the 1967 War and restoration of political rights of the Palestinians) dampened. Nonetheless, Assad did not want to antagonize the United States

⁷⁰² Knudsen, “United States-Syrian Diplomatic Relations,” 76.

⁷⁰³ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 206; For whole text of the speech see “Al-Asad Addresses People's Assembly,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Television Network in Arabic, September 10, 1994.

⁷⁰⁴ Moualem, “Fresh Lights on the Syrian-Israeli Peace Negotiations,” 89.

owing to Israeli-Jordanian and Israeli-PLO peace deals.⁷⁰⁵ According to the Clinton administration, the Jordanian-Israeli peace agreement increased the possibility of peace between Israel and Syria. Clinton did not cease his efforts to reconcile the sides on the basis of land-for-peace formula, i.e., exchanging the Golan Heights with Syria's recognition of Israel.⁷⁰⁶

After signing of Israeli-Jordanian peace agreement on 26 October 1994, President Clinton paid an official visit to Syria to initiate a shuttle diplomacy and break the deadlock over the Golan Heights on 27 October 1994. The visit was historic because Clinton became the first American president after Nixon visiting Syria 20 years later. With this visit, Clinton sought to demonstrate Syria's key role in the peace process and the United States' role as an honest mediator in the Syrian-Israeli peace track. In the meeting, Clinton and Assad reached a compromise to achieve their national interests with cooperation in the region.⁷⁰⁷

Assad made some small concessions in his meeting with Clinton. He reportedly agreed on Israeli evacuation of Golan over 18 months instead of 12 months. Besides, Assad accepted that some elements of normalization between Israel and Syria could be realized during the first stage of Israeli withdrawal. Assad's another concession was that he accepted in principle Clinton's offer that the private Syrian-Israeli talks carried out by ambassadors in Washington could include senior military officers up to the rank of chief of staff of the two countries. This concession opened the way to the COS talks in the Syrian-Israeli peace track.⁷⁰⁸

Although the Syrian-Israeli peace track could not move forward after Clinton's visit, it was a clear indication of normalization of relations between Washington and Damascus. In spite of the problematic issues such as Syria's links to international terrorism, human rights violations and military build-up, the diplomatic ice was broken in the U.S.-Syrian relations under the Clinton administration.⁷⁰⁹ Despite its doubts about Assad's seriousness, Israel welcomed Clinton's meeting with Assad. Prime Minister Rabin uttered his optimism that Clinton's Syria

⁷⁰⁵ Muhammad Muslih, "Dateline Damascus: Asad Is Ready," *Foreign Policy* No. 96 (Autumn, 1994): 157; Seale and Butler, "Assad's Regional Strategy," 35.

⁷⁰⁶ Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, 576; Gani, *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations*, 170-171.

⁷⁰⁷ Nejad, "The Ineffective Role of the United States," 53; Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 104-105.

⁷⁰⁸ Pipes, *Syria Beyond the Peace Process*, 78; Pressman, "Mediation, Domestic Politics, and the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations," 361.

⁷⁰⁹ Knudsen, "United States-Syrian Diplomatic Relations," 76.

visit could start better negotiations and ultimately result in a peace treaty with Syria. Senior White House officials also told that Syrian-Israeli peace could be reached within six months.⁷¹⁰

In November 1994, the Republican Party won the Senate and the House of Representatives in mid-term congressional elections, which brought about a temporary interlude in the Syrian-Israeli peace track. The Republican Congress was reluctant to send American peacekeeping force to the Golan Heights and compensate Syria and Israel for the risks undertaken in a future peace deal.⁷¹¹ In this milieu, Syria refused to attend the Casablanca Conference in the same month, which was the first meeting to bolster regional economic cooperation among the Middle Eastern states including Israel. Syria criticized the conference for legitimizing the regional role of Israel before signing of a peace agreement. Farouk al-Sharaa expressed the reason for Syria's refusal to attend the conference as follows:

“If we are not going to attend the Casablanca Conference, it is because we care about regional co-operation and development, and we believe that holding such conferences, holding multinational, multilateral talks before achieving genuine peace in the region, would not give the results these multilateral talks and international conferences would yield after being 100% sure that peace is going to be established in the region.”⁷¹²

4.4.1.4. Futile Attempts: The COS I and the COS II Talks (1994-1995)

After a brief hiatus following the signing of the Jordanian-Israeli peace agreement, President Clinton urged Israel and Syria to end the stalemate and to discuss the security arrangements, the second leg of the negotiations. In December 1994, Christopher went to the Middle East to convince Syria and Israel to return to the negotiation table. Upon the proposal of the United States, this time negotiations were carried out in Washington by the chiefs of staff of Syria and Israel instead of Syrian and Israeli political representatives.⁷¹³ That's why, the negotiations were defined as the chiefs of staff talks (COS).

The first round of security talks were held between Syria's Hikmat al-Shihabi and Israel's Ehud Barak on 21-23 December 1994. According to Assad, participation of his chief of staff in the peace negotiations strengthened the Syrian representation and demonstrated his seriousness to Israel and the United States. According to Ross, Syria's decision to attend the COS talks was the most serious step taken by Assad as Shihabi was one of his close confidants

⁷¹⁰ Martin Fletcher, “Clinton's Gamble Wins Assad Shift,” *Times*, October 28, 1994, 1.

⁷¹¹ Inbar, “Israeli Negotiations with Syria,” 92-93.

⁷¹² Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 191.

⁷¹³ Nejad, “The Ineffective Role of the United States,” 53; Inbar, “Israeli Negotiations with Syria,” 93.

and a renowned Baath Party member. Shihabi was known for his pro-Western orientation as he played a major role in the Disengagement Agreement in 1974 and sent his son to the United States for university education. Shihabi's participation in the peace talks was interpreted as Syria's willingness to improve its relations with the United States and to make progress on the Syrian-Israeli peace track. However, the COS I talks did not yield any tangible result because neither Shihabi nor Barak was aware of the Rabin deposit. In the negotiations, Barak focused on security arrangements, while Shihabi declined to discuss security issues without specifying the line of withdrawal. When Barak asked for a reduction in the size of Syria's armed forces, the establishment of a demilitarized zone within Syria's border nine times bigger than the size of the demilitarized zone planned in Israel (considering the land size of two states), and the joint use of early warning stations, the Syrian delegation rejected these offers directly. Syrian sources reported from Damascus that Assad found such demands unacceptable. According to Assad, Barak's demand for cutting the size of the Syrian army meant that Israel aims at destabilizing the Baath regime. Finally, Assad refused to send Shihabi to Washington for the second round of talks and suspended the negotiations in early 1995. He also strongly refused Israeli request for a summit between the leaders of the two countries.⁷¹⁴

There were four reasons for the failure of the COS I talks. First, the army chiefs did not possess authority to decide the final agreement in the absence of political authority. Second, the Israeli side started negotiations without sufficient preparation. Third, Barak's political concerns poisoned the talks as he was calculating the impact of the talks on his future election campaign. Fourth, there was disparity between the goals of two sides. While Israel focused on outlining agreed aims, Syria also sought to set agreed-upon principles. This discrepancy thwarted development of the COS I talks.⁷¹⁵

According to Syria, the failure of the COS I talks proved that it was necessary to negotiate a political framework for the security agreement before going into details of the technical-military issues.⁷¹⁶ Assad insisted that the security arrangements must be equal, reciprocal, and mutual. The size of the demilitarized zones on both sides of the border and the early warning station on Mount Hermon were the contentious issues. On 20 January 1995, President Assad sent a letter to Clinton outlining his version of aims and principles which he considered should shape the security arrangements. Main goal of Assad was to cut back Israel's security demands

⁷¹⁴ Pipes, *Syria Beyond the Peace Process*, 78-79; Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 254.

⁷¹⁵ Gani, *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations*, 188.

⁷¹⁶ Cobban, *Syria and the Peace*, 10.

to a reasonable and legitimate level and to prevent Israel from encroaching the 4 June lines with pretext of its security needs.⁷¹⁷ The next round of talks focusing on the creation of a document as to the security arrangements started in February 1995 at ambassadors' level. Producing a document was not an easy task due to Syria's ongoing suspicions and Israel's quest for neutralizing military power of Syria and securing its dominance. Eventually, on 22 May 1995, Syrian and Israeli delegations were able to reach an agreement on a one-page document entitled "Aims and Principles of the Security Arrangements" under the American auspices.⁷¹⁸

The Aims and Principles document was composed of two parts. The aims part of the document was designed to alleviate Israel's concerns and to decrease the possibility of surprise attacks, border conflicts and war or large-scale invasion. The principles part of the document was designed to address Syria's concerns and laid down equal security guarantee for all parties. Security deal had to be reciprocal and mutual as well as respectful of each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty.⁷¹⁹

Despite its ambiguous content, the Aims and Principles document formed the basis of the COS II, which were held between Israel's new Chief of Staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak and Hikmat al-Shihabi in Washington on 27-29 June 1995. They were also hosted by President Clinton at the White House after completing their negotiations. Before the COS II talks, Israeli generals were not briefed about the Rabin deposit. In the negotiations, Shahak and Shihabi agreed to negotiate the security arrangements in three categories: the security/demilitarization regime which was referred as the relevant areas in the Aims and Principles document, the issue of early warning systems on Mount Hermon and the role of the international forces in the Golan Heights. Yet, they could not reach a compromise on these issues.⁷²⁰

Syria and Israel were expected to do their part to implement the Aims and Principles document during the COS II talks. Yet, Israeli policymakers had difficulties in declaring their decision to withdraw from the Golan Heights to the Israeli public. Although they promised full

⁷¹⁷ Seale, "The Syria-Israel Negotiations," 72.

⁷¹⁸ Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 254-255; Zisser, "The Israel-Syria Negotiations," 227.

⁷¹⁹ Seale, "The Syria-Israel Negotiations," 73; Moualem, "Fresh Lights on the Syrian-Israeli Peace Negotiations," 92.

⁷²⁰ Cobban, *Syria and the Peace*, 10-11; Seale, "The Syria-Israel Negotiations," 74. Also see Steven Greenhouse, "At Israeli-Syrian Talks About Golan, Some Signs of a Thaw," *New York Times*, June 30, 1995, 6.

withdrawal to Syria and the United States, they were not ready to announce this decision publicly. When Rabin was asked about the demarcation line between Israel and Syria, he utilized the ambiguous nature of the negotiations to keep his agreements with Syria and the United States secret from the public. The issue of withdrawal from the Golan Heights triggered heated debates in Israel's domestic politics and escalated the tension. While Shimon Peres was supportive of the commitment about evacuation of the Golan, Benjamin Netanyahu opposed to the withdrawal and galvanized anti-withdrawal groups into action against the Rabin government. Netanyahu agitated Israeli public by claiming that the Rabin government agreed to remove settlements in the Golan Heights. Angry anti-withdrawal demonstrators protested the government and clashed with police.⁷²¹

While Syrian and Israeli chiefs of staff were negotiating, two internal documents of IDF related to the Aims and Principles document and signed by General Tzvi Stauber, head of IDF's Strategic Planning Branch and a member of Israeli negotiation team, were leaked to Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu and the Israeli press. On 28 June 1995, Netanyahu revealed the negotiation papers at the Knesset. Following day, another document titled "An Analysis of the Document of Understanding" was leaked to Haaretz reporter Aluf Ben.⁷²²

In the papers, there were debates about the military advantages of the positions occupied by Israel on the Golan Heights and Syria's demand for demilitarization of these positions after Israel's withdrawal. The opposition and the public were outraged by the documents as the withdrawal from the Golan Heights was considered unacceptable for undermining Israel's security. Despite Netanyahu's leak and the subsequent public outrage, the COS II talks were continued to achieve implementation of the Aims and Principles document. However, further leaks about the Golan Heights and the content Israel's withdrawal caused serious problems for the negotiation delegations. In this milieu, the Rabin government sought to utilize domestic hostility to the peace agreement to alter the initial terms of agreement. Israel now demanded that American troops be deployed to the Golan instead of Syrian troops and Israeli troops maintain their positions on the strategically important Mount Hermon. What's more, Israel insisted on placing an early warning system on Mount Hermon. Syria was disappointed with these demands for two reasons. First, the leaks of the meetings to the Knesset and the Israeli press were considered a lack of seriousness on the side of the Israelis. Second, Syria perceived

⁷²¹ Gani, *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations*, 171-172.

⁷²² Cobban, *Syria and the Peace*, 12.

Israel's demand to remain on Mount Hermon, deploy its troops and early warning system on the Golan as violation of Syria's sovereignty.⁷²³

President Assad was offended by the leaks and the new demands of Israel in COS II talks. For this reason, Assad did not want to continue the military talks but wanted to revive the diplomatic channels. Assad's new posture on the peace negotiations was not welcomed by Rabin as a sign of inflexibility and eventually the negotiations broke down and was not resumed until Rabin's assassination in November 1995.⁷²⁴

The Syrian-Israeli track stalled while there was substantial progress on the Palestinian-Israeli track. In addition to growing domestic opposition, the signing of the Oslo II Accords and its approval in the Knesset by a slim majority forced the Rabin government to be cautious about signing a peace agreement with Syria.⁷²⁵ Rabin's readiness to sacrifice the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights in exchange for peace was unacceptable to some radical groups. On the Palestinian side, Arafat was not able to curb violent activities of the radical Palestinian groups. The voice of hawks was suppressing the voice of doves both in Israel and Palestine. In this milieu, Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by a radical Jewish gunman while returning from a peace rally in Tel Aviv on 4 November 1995. Shimon Peres, the architect of Oslo process, succeeded Rabin and became new prime minister of Israel.⁷²⁶

4.4.1.5. The Downward Spiral of the Syrian-Israeli Track: From the Wye Plantation to Shepherdstown (1995-2000)

4.4.1.5.1. From Hope to Despair: The Wye Plantation Talks

On the day of Rabin's funeral, President Clinton and Dennis Ross met with Peres in Jerusalem, where they informed him about Rabin's pledge of full withdrawal from the Golan Heights. They also told Rabin that President Assad was aware of the Rabin deposit. Peres was surprised to hear the Rabin deposit yet expressed his willingness to keep his promise. Despite his concern about the limited time frame due to upcoming elections in October 1996, Peres decided to act swiftly and announced publicly that he was ready to "fly high and fast" on the

⁷²³ Hinnebusch, "Does Syria Want Peace?," 54; Gani, *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations*, 172.

⁷²⁴ Gani, *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations*, 173.

⁷²⁵ Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 256; Pipes, *Syria Beyond the Peace Process*, 80.

⁷²⁶ Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, 577.

Syrian track.⁷²⁷ While Rabin as a cautious leader focused on each track separately, Peres as a bold politician pushed for rapid improvement in all tracks simultaneously. Peres was a man of big think as he was the architect of the Oslo Accords and the vision of “New Middle East”. He thought that Syrian-Israeli peace deal would be a milestone to achieve comprehensive peace in the Middle East and boost his domestic stature further during the election campaign. That’s why, Peres embraced the Rabin deposit wholeheartedly to legitimize and then successfully conclude the Syrian-Israeli track.⁷²⁸

After Rabin’s assassination, conditions were also ripe for Syria to engage in peace talks with Israel. President Assad freed himself from the burden of historical legacy of the Palestinian Question with the Oslo Accords and the Jordanian-Israeli peace agreement, which enabled him to strike a separate deal with Israel in accordance with Syria’s national interests. Given the changing regional dynamics, Assad thought that reestablishing Syria’s sovereignty over the Golan Heights would be a new source of legitimacy for the Baath regime. Thus, Assad decided that it was high time to negotiate with Israel for total withdrawal from the Golan in exchange for full peace.⁷²⁹

By late 1995, the United States entered the scene to finalize the Syrian-Israeli peace track. On 4 December 1995, Dennis Ross went to Damascus and informed Assad that Peres was ready to withdraw to the 4 June line and to reach a comprehensive peace immediately. After meeting with Peres in Washington, President Clinton also telephoned President Assad to inform him that Peres was committed to the Rabin deposit on 11 December 1995. Few days later, Secretary of State Christopher went to Damascus to discuss the prospect of a Syrian-Israeli peace deal with President Assad. In the meeting, Christopher told Assad that Peres was willing to continue peace negotiations in accordance with the formula of full withdrawal from the Golan Heights and the document of Aims and Principles of Security Arrangements.⁷³⁰

Having received strong messages from Israel and the United States about conclusion of a peace agreement in 1996, Assad decided to reciprocate bold invitation of Peres by giving peace talks momentum. He considered Peres as “a leader with vision, imagination and creativity” who could achieve a genuine peace with Syria. In this period, the United States and Israel welcomed

⁷²⁷ Daoudy, “A Missed Chance for Peace,” 226; Rabinovich, “From Deposit to Commitment,” 258.

⁷²⁸ Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 256.

⁷²⁹ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 208-209.

⁷³⁰ Cobban, *Syria and the Peace*, 19-21; Seale, “The Syria-Israel Negotiations,” 75.

Syria's pressure on Hezbollah to curb its attacks in south Lebanon as a gesture to renew the peace talks and deescalate the tension in Lebanon. Ross argued that Assad's aim was to forge good relations with the United States by signing a peace agreement with Israel. Assad's move contributed to breaking the ice in the Syrian-Israeli peace track because Peres was convinced that Assad was sincere and Syrian-Israeli peace was not a remote possibility this time. So, he informed Clinton of his readiness to reach an agreement with Assad.⁷³¹

In this context, Secretary of State Christopher encouraged Israel and Syria to overcome the gridlock in the peace process by holding private talks at Wye Plantation in Maryland. Syria and Israel agreed to negotiate under the American auspices a peace deal encapsulating broad range of issues such as the withdrawal line, timetable for its implementation, nature and meaning of peace, parameters of normalization, security arrangements, and other topics like water and economic cooperation. Given the comprehensiveness of the agenda, it seemed that the Wye talks were totally different from previous talks. Syrian and Israeli delegations discussed these issues during the three rounds of intensive negotiations at Wye Plantation in Maryland from late December 1995 to early March 1996.⁷³²

The first round of the Wye Plantation talks was held on 27-29 December 1995 and 3-5 January 1996 to achieve a breakthrough in the Syrian-Israeli track.⁷³³ The Wye Plantation talks were organized in a new format, in which political figures came to the forefront once again. The Syrian delegation was headed by Walid Muallem and the Israeli delegation by Uri Savir, a close disciple of Prime Minister Peres. In the first session of the negotiations, demarcation of the border line, phases of withdrawal, the nature of normalization and issues of security and water were discussed. In July 1994, Rabin had already agreed to full withdrawal to the 4 June 1967 line, which prepared the ground for discussing major issues such as the meaning and the timetable of the withdrawal, and normalization of bilateral relations. At the Wye Plantation, talks were carried out in accordance with Rabin's promise to fully withdraw from the Golan Heights. According to the Syrian delegation, total withdrawal meant Israel's return to the 4 July 1967 line, which render Syria access to Lake Tiberias. On the other hand, the Israeli delegation insisted on the international boundary referring to the pre-1948 borders, which put the lake entirely under Israel's sovereignty.⁷³⁴ By the end of the first round of talks, Dennis

⁷³¹ Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 257; Cobban, *The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks*, 139.

⁷³² Cobban, *The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks*, 129-130; Nejad, "The Ineffective Role of the United States," 54.

⁷³³ Cobban, *The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks*, 133.

⁷³⁴ Daoudy, "A Missed Chance for Peace," 226; Cobban, *Syria and the Peace*, 21.

Ross hailed the progress by saying that the achievements within six days of discussions were greater than the four years of negotiations. On 5 January, Muallem underlined accomplishments at the Wye plantation as serious and useful. He reportedly said that “*The results of the talks show that it is possible to achieve substantive progress on the main issues despite the existence of difficulties and gaps between the positions of the two sides on some basic elements of peace.*”⁷³⁵

The second round of Wye Plantation talks were held on 24-26 January and 29-31 January 1996. In this round, the foci of the talks were the security arrangements. Thus, Assad sent two generals to attend the second round of the talks. Israeli and Syrian delegations carried out intensive negotiations and reached an understanding as to the nature of bilateral relations and the content of normalization between the two countries after the signing of peace agreement.⁷³⁶ Wye Plantation talks were so promising that American, Syrian and Israeli teams were talking about a major progress on the negotiations. They set a deadline to resolve the disagreement points and to finalize all elements of peace by June 1996. They expected that final peace document would be prepared by September 1996.⁷³⁷

At the end of the second round of talks, Peres decided to go for an early election to be held in May 1996. Hence, the third round of Wye Plantation talks on 27-29 February 1996, was held under the shadow of the election decision of Peres.⁷³⁸ According to the Syrian delegation, this round of talks was very positive. Senior Syrian officials reported that the Syrian delegation discussed “very deep details” of the security arrangements with the Israeli delegation and American officials.⁷³⁹ Furthermore, the Israeli delegation proposed several projects to integrate economies of the two countries at one of the last sessions at Wye Plantation. The Syrian side regarded such a proposal with suspicion as it would expose Syria’s economy, culture, tradition and national security to Israel’s penetration.⁷⁴⁰ While Muallem and Savir were preparing for negotiating the final text of the peace agreement in late February 1996,

⁷³⁵ Cobban, *The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks*, 134.

⁷³⁶ Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 257; Cobban, *Syria and the Peace*, 21; Zisser, “The Israel-Syria Negotiations,” 227.

⁷³⁷ Moualem, “Fresh Lights on the Syrian-Israeli Peace Negotiations,” 81.

⁷³⁸ Cobban, *The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks*, 139; Pressman, “Mediation, Domestic Politics, and the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations,” 363.

⁷³⁹ Cobban, *Syria and the Peace*, 23.

⁷⁴⁰ Seale and Butler, “Assad’s Regional Strategy,” 36.

Palestinian militants carried out suicide attacks in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, which left dozens of Israeli civilians dead, in retaliation to Israel's assassination of famous Hamas bomber Yahya al-Ayyash in January 1996. Violence overshadowed the peace talks once again.⁷⁴¹

In sum, two major developments put an end to the Wye Plantation talks: Peres' decision to call for an early election in May 1996 and growing violence of the Palestinian militants. On 11 February 1996, Peres publicly announced that negotiations with Syria could not be maintained under the pressure of elections and the agreement with Syria would be put to a national referendum. He also acknowledged that the Syrian-Israeli negotiations would last longer than his expectations. Due to looming elections and the Likud Party's growing challenge, Peres could not concentrate on the Syrian-Israeli peace track. A fatal blow to the Wye Plantation talks came from the spiral of violence of the Palestinian militants, especially Hamas, in late February-March 1996.⁷⁴²

Despite promising developments in the early rounds of Wye Plantation talks, Israel eventually decided to withdraw from the negotiations on 4 March 1996 with the pretext of Syria's refusal to denounce terrorist attacks. Syria (and Lebanon) declined to join the Sharm al-Sheikh Conference, co-organized by President Clinton and Hosni Mubarak to discuss the Middle East peace process and to end recent wave of terrorist attacks, on 13 March 1996. When Assad refused to condemn a series of suicide attacks in Jerusalem, Ashkelon and Tel Aviv, the Peres government informed Syria and the United States of the suspension of the talks. Peres claimed that Syria did not denounce the terrorist attacks and it was unacceptable to Israel that some people who incite the Palestinians could find shelter in Damascus. On the other hand, the Syrian officials slammed the Peres government for being non-compliant in the peace process and for trying to encircle Syria with a new military alliance with Turkey and a close contact with Jordan. In this milieu, Peres launched the Operation Grapes of Wrath in southern Lebanon on 11-16 April 1996 to punish Syria-backed Hezbollah and bolster his popularity in domestic politics for the upcoming elections.⁷⁴³

⁷⁴¹ Daoudy, "A Missed Chance for Peace," 226. For more information about the last round of Wye Plantation talks, see Cobban, *The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks*, 143-147.

⁷⁴² Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 211-212.

⁷⁴³ Gani, *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations*, 173-174; Cobban, *Syria and the Peace*, 23-26; Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, 106.

According to Syria's Chief Negotiator Walid Muallem, Syria and Israel made substantial progress at the Wye Plantation talks. According to him, 75 percent of peace agreement was finished during the negotiations. Muallem later elaborated on the talks as follows:

“We completed 75 percent of the work of negotiating an agreement. We agreed that there would be a complete Israeli withdrawal, to be implemented in two stages - though there was still a gap on the total implementation time, with them requiring three years, and us offering sixteen months. Regarding security arrangements, we agreed there would be early warning from air and space; zones of demilitarization and zones of limited forces in the area from Quneitra to Safad, that is, the “relevant areas”- though we still disagreed on the types and precise locations of these deployments. We even agreed on some confidence-building measures. Regarding normalization, I agreed on nine of the fifteen elements that were on the table.”⁷⁴⁴

The Operation Grapes of Wrath was a heavy blow to the Syrian-Israeli peace track as the issue of peace was replaced by diplomatic efforts to stop Israel's deadly attacks in south Lebanon. Nearly half a million Lebanese people were evicted from their homes after the start of the Operation Grapes of Wrath. Israel brutally slaughtered tens of innocent women, children and old men by shelling a UN refugee camp in the town of Qana on 18 July 1996. The Qana massacre created an international outrage against the Peres government. The Clinton administration decided that the U.S. must intervene in the crisis as hegemonic power to achieve a ceasefire after the bloody attacks of Israel. During Washington's ceasefire efforts, President Assad snubbed Secretary of State Christopher by declining to meet him. Even though the Americans were despised by the Syrians, they understood that isolating Syria in Lebanon was not a good option at that juncture. Thus, Syria once again turned out to be a major actor, whose consent was sought by external actors including the United States, Russia, France, Italy, Spain, and Ireland, to attain a ceasefire in Lebanon.⁷⁴⁵

In the end, the Clinton administration was able to broker a ceasefire agreement thanks to Christopher's mediation between Assad and Peres on 26 April 1996. President Clinton announced the formation of a ceasefire monitoring group composed of the United States, France, Israel, Lebanon, and Syria.⁷⁴⁶ Syria's participation in the ceasefire monitoring group was as a boost to Assad's regional and international prestige. The ceasefire agreement, which stipulated the end of mutual attacks, was protecting interests of Syria and Hezbollah as the document recognized the legality of resistance against Israeli occupation in Lebanon. In this

⁷⁴⁴ Cobban, *The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks*, 136.

⁷⁴⁵ Knudsen, “The Syrian-Israeli Political Impasse,” 230; Cobban, *Syria and the Peace*, 26-28.

⁷⁴⁶ Bill Clinton, “Statement by the President,” *William J. Clinton Presidential Library*, April 26, 1996, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/9469>.

context, it can be argued that President Assad successfully broke Syria's isolation in a short time after the Sharm al-Sheikh Conference. This proved that Syria was capable of surviving in the U.S.-led new world order by means of its cards.⁷⁴⁷

In sum, despite some progress, neither Syria nor Israel was able to achieve a breakthrough in the negotiations from 1992 to 1996. In addition to mutual mistrust, four major areas of contention between Syria and Israel prevented them from reaching a final peace deal: disagreement over Israel's withdrawal line (the 1923 line or the 1967 line), the essence and content of normalization between the two sides after the peace agreement, security arrangements and the Lebanese issue.⁷⁴⁸

4.4.1.5.2. The Netanyahu Interregnum in the Syrian-Israeli Track (1996-1999)

The defeat of Shimon Peres and victory of Benjamin Netanyahu in the 1996 elections changed the trajectory of the Middle East peace process and ushered in an interregnum in the Syrian-Israeli peace track from 1996 to 1999. Prime Minister Netanyahu, a leading critic of both Rabin's and Peres' engagement with Syria, refused the land-for-peace formula as he believed that Damascus could be forced to meet Israel's security demands without making concession on the Golan Heights.⁷⁴⁹ Netanyahu rejected the Rabin deposit by declaring that he was not responsible for the verbal commitments of the previous administrations. He also reiterated that Israel would continue new housing plans in the Golan Heights for additional Jewish settlers.⁷⁵⁰ These remarks were a heavy blow to Assad's main regional strategy, recovering the Golan and establishing full sovereignty over it. Although both sides underscored their commitment to peace process, there was no progress on the Syrian-Israeli peace track for nearly four years of the Netanyahu government owing to its uncompromising attitude.⁷⁵¹

During the interregnum period, the Clinton administration made some efforts to reinvigorate the Syrian-Israeli track but to no avail. In July 1996, Dennis Ross went to Latakia to prod President Assad into restarting the peace talks. Muallem elaborated on Ross' visit as follows:

⁷⁴⁷ Quillam, *Syria and the New World Order*, 213-215; Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, 107-108.

⁷⁴⁸ Zisser, "The Israel-Syria Negotiations," 228-229.

⁷⁴⁹ Seale and Butler, "Assad's Regional Strategy," 27.

⁷⁵⁰ Cobban, *Syria and the Peace*, 3; Zisser, "Syrian Foreign Policy," 85.

⁷⁵¹ Zisser, "The Israel-Syria Negotiations," 230; Nejad, "The Ineffective Role of the United States," 54.

“In July 1996, after Netanyahu's first visit to the United States, Dennis Ross visited President Asad in Latakia to assure him about the American position. He came with a written letter from President Clinton containing assurances of America's commitment to the principles and basis of the Madrid Conference-UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of land for peace. President Asad informed Dennis Ross that Syria is ready to resume talks on that basis and that Netanyahu honors the commitments and achievements on the Syrian track and goes forward from the point where we had left off in Maryland, with the American participation.”⁷⁵²

However, Ross' initiative failed owing to Netanyahu's refusal to take part in peace talks due to previous unwritten agreement between the two sides and Assad's insistence on resumption of the talks from the point where they had stopped. Syrian authorities stated repeatedly that they had struck an agreement with the Labor Party that Israel would totally evacuate the Golan Heights in return for peace and restoration of relations with Syria.⁷⁵³

In the second half of 1996, Syria called on the resumption of the talks on the basis of the principles uttered at the Madrid peace conference and the agreements negotiated with the previous administration. Yet, like Shamir, Netanyahu was talking about “peace-for-peace” instead of “land-for-peace” formula, which was totally unacceptable to the Syrian side.⁷⁵⁴ Muallem commented on the state of peace process and Syria's cautious posture due to the attitude of the Netanyahu government in 1997 as follows:

“Syria is committed to a comprehensive settlement based on the Madrid terms of reference-Security Council Resolutions 242, 338, and 425 and the principle of land for peace.... If peace fails, all options are open. In Syria, peace is still our strategic option, as it has been ever since President Asad first announced it in January 1994 during his first summit with President Clinton in Geneva. But you cannot achieve peace by yourself-you need a partner for peace. We do not yet see signs that the Netanyahu government is such a partner or that Netanyahu has a strategy for peace. He has a strategy for expanding the settlements, which are bullets in the heart of the peace process. For that reason, all options are open.”⁷⁵⁵

There was a single attempt Netanyahu's premiership to restart the Syrian-Israeli peace track. In the summer of 1998, Netanyahu secretly sent Ronald Lauder, a Jewish billionaire and U.S. Ambassador to Austria during the Regan period, to Damascus to convey his peace offer to Assad. Lauder held nine meetings with Assad and discussed Netanyahu's ten-point document entitled “Treaty of Peace between Israel and Syria”. In the document, Netanyahu allegedly

⁷⁵² Moualem, “Fresh Lights on the Syrian-Israeli Peace Negotiations,” 90.

⁷⁵³ Rabinovich, “From Deposit to Commitment,” 258; Nejad, “The Ineffective Role of the United States,” 56.

⁷⁵⁴ Cobban, *Syria and the Peace*, 31; Knudsen, “The Syrian-Israeli Political Impasse,” 231.

⁷⁵⁵ Moualem, “Fresh Lights on the Syrian-Israeli Peace Negotiations,” 93.

accepted withdrawal to the 4 July 1967 line in return for a peace agreement. However, Lauder's mission failed when the Syrian side asked Netanyahu to give a map clearly showing the withdrawal line accepted by Netanyahu.⁷⁵⁶ Netanyahu declined Assad's request as he had difficulties in domestic politics, especially with his coalition partners. After his election in 1999, Ehud Barak later claimed that when he took the report of Lauder he noticed that Netanyahu had accepted the 4 June 1967 line as the border between Israel and Syria. Yet, Netanyahu rejected Barak's claim and argued that the request came from Assad and his answer was that the border between Israel and Syria should be "miles away from the 4 June 1967 line". Despite its failure, the Lauder mission proved that President Assad was still eager to investigate the possibility of achieving peace with Israel.⁷⁵⁷

In early 1999, Netanyahu told at King Hussein's funeral that negotiations between Damascus and Tel Aviv could begin after the May 1999 elections. He also said that some positive signals were coming from Syria, and he was willing to reciprocate.⁷⁵⁸ Nevertheless, there was no improvement in the Syrian-Israeli peace track until the election of Ehud Barak, IDF's former Chief of Staff, as the new prime minister of Israel in May 1999.

4.4.1.5.3. The Clinton Administration's Mission Impossible: The Shepherdstown Talks (2000)

In the May 1999 elections, Netanyahu-led Likud lost out to Barak-led Labor. The coming of the Barak government aroused hopes for the renewal of the Syrian-Israeli and the PLO-Israeli peace tracks as Barak had promised achievement of a comprehensive peace on all fronts (Syria, Lebanon and the PLO) within 15 months and to withdrawal of the IDF from south Lebanon. So, Barak, who was considered Rabin's ideological heir, was committed to his legacy in the Syrian-Israeli track. In this respect, Barak was willing to evacuate the Golan Heights and to accept the 4 June line as the border between Israel and Syria as long as the Golan was demilitarized. He did not hide his opinion that painful territorial concessions on the Golan was unavoidable. As Barak primarily sought to ensure security of Israel by ending Syria's strategic threat in Lebanon, the Syrian track was preferable to the Palestinian track. According to Barak, it was easier to resolve the problems with the Syrians than the Palestinians. What's more, Barak considered Assad as a man of his word and a respected leader in the Middle East in comparison to Arafat. Assad and Barak exchanged public praises in their interviews with

⁷⁵⁶ Rabinovich, "From Deposit to Commitment," 259, Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 258-259.

⁷⁵⁷ Zisser, "The Israel-Syria Negotiations," 230-231.

⁷⁵⁸ Kenneth R. Bazinet, "U.S., Syria, Israel See Hope of Peace," *New York Daily News*, February 10, 1999, 20.

Patrick Seale in late June 1999, which created a positive atmosphere in the Syrian-Israeli peace track. Hence, many observers began to think that this was a golden opportunity to end the Syrian-Israeli animosity and to sign a genuine peace agreement.⁷⁵⁹

In this period, Syria put forward a prerequisite for renewal of the talks: returning to the negotiation table where the peace talks had stalled in March 1996 when the Israeli government had promised full withdrawal from the Golan Heights in exchange for full peace.⁷⁶⁰ Although Barak wanted peace, he seemed at the beginning reluctant to embrace the Rabin deposit by insisting on that it was a hypothetical and conditional offer depending on Syria's acceptance of Israel's security and other demands. Besides, he wanted Syria to clarify its position on a number of issues such as Lebanon, water, terrorism, the opening of the borders as well as the embassies before restarting the peace negotiations. The stalemate continued more than six months to bring the parties to the table. There were several U.S.-led unofficial and secret diplomatic efforts to close the gap between the two sides from July 1999 to December 1999.⁷⁶¹ To illustrate, Former Secretary of State James Baker and former American Ambassador to Israel and Syria Edward Djerejian went to Syria in July 1999. Moreover, Spain's Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar also visited Israel and Syria in July 1999 to contribute to the peace process. Patrick Seale, author of Assad's biography, also played a mediator role by carrying a number of messages between Israel and Syria.⁷⁶²

While diplomatic efforts were going apace, Prime Minister Barak gave positive messages about fresh peace talks with Syria under the aegis of the Clinton administration in mid-July 1999,⁷⁶³ President Assad also took some confidence building steps. To illustrate, Syria ordered the militant Palestinian groups and Hezbollah to declare ceasefire on 19 July 1999. Syria asked them to pursue peaceful means to express their opposition to the Middle East peace process. The Clinton administration welcomed Syria's posture on the militant groups. President Clinton

⁷⁵⁹ Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 259; Zisser, "The Israel-Syria Negotiations," 231-232.

⁷⁶⁰ Nejad, "The Ineffective Role of the United States," 56; Pressman, "Mediation, Domestic Politics, and the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations," 366.

⁷⁶¹ Seale, "The Syria-Israel Negotiations," 66; Daoudy, "A Missed Chance for Peace," 227; Zisser, "The Israel-Syria Negotiations," 232-233.

⁷⁶² Nejad, "The Ineffective Role of the United States," 67.

⁷⁶³ "Barak, Clinton Aim for New Peace Talks," *Wall Street Journal*, July 16, 1999, 10.

said that “*Anything Syria does to disassociate itself from terrorists is a step in the right direction.*”⁷⁶⁴

The Clinton administration mediated intensive contacts between Israel and Syria in late 1999. Secretary of State Madeline Albright and Dennis Ross went to Damascus and Jerusalem in early December 1999 to bring Israel and Syria back to the table. In his meeting with the American delegation, Assad said that peace negotiations had never finished and underlined his willingness to conduct comprehensive negotiations from bottom to top and to act promptly. He once again reiterated that negotiations would be resumed from the point where it had broken off in March 1996. Assad demonstrated his eagerness to conclude a peace deal with Israel because he believed in Barak’s seriousness. He also decided to send Foreign Minister Sharaa to Washington for the first time to negotiate directly with Israel. This move was evaluated as a concession and Assad’s readiness to sign a peace agreement with Israel.⁷⁶⁵

On 8 December 1999, President Clinton announced at a news conference the resumption of the talks between Israel and Syria with the participation of Ehud Barak and Farouk al-Sharaa “*from the point where they left off*” in 1996. Clinton said that the negotiations would be comprehensive, high level and carried out for reaching an agreement as soon as possible. Clinton also said that “*Peace has long been within our sight. Today, it is within our grasp, and we must seize it.*”⁷⁶⁶ Yet, this was an ambiguous statement, and the term “point” was open to different interpretations of both sides. Israel interpreted the point as no precondition and no guarantees of withdrawal from the Golan Heights for resumption of the talks. Syria understood the point as the approval of Rabin’s commitment to withdraw totally from the Golan Heights in exchange for full peace and establishment of normal peaceful relations with Israel.⁷⁶⁷

After a long hiatus, the Syrian-Israeli preliminary negotiations restarted at the Blair House in Washington on 15-16 December 1999. The Syrian delegation was headed by Sharaa and the

⁷⁶⁴ Ross Dunn, “Syria Orders ‘Ceasefire’ with Israel,” *Times*, July 20, 1999, 1; Gary C. Gambill, “Sponsoring Terrorism: Syria and the PFLP-GC,” *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin* 4, No. 9 (September 2002), https://www.meforum.org/meib/articles/0209_s1.htm.

⁷⁶⁵ Zisser, “The Israel-Syria Negotiations,” 233; Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 260; Pressman, “Mediation, Domestic Politics, and the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations,” 367; Clinton, *My Life*, 884.

⁷⁶⁶ Bill Clinton, “Press Conference by the President,” *The White House Archives*, December 8, 1999, <https://clintonwhitehouse4.archives.gov/WH/New/html/19991208.html>; Sam Kiley, “Syria and Israel Restart Talks on Golan Heights,” *Times*, December 9, 1999, 24; Bob Davis and Ralph T. King Jr., “Clinton Says Israel-Syria to Talk Anew,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 9, 1999, 3.

⁷⁶⁷ Nejad, “The Ineffective Role of the United States,” 57.

Israeli delegation led by Barak as announced by President Clinton. Yet, the negotiations started in a tense environment as Sharaa avoided shaking hands with Barak in front of the cameras and verbally attacked Israel in the opening ceremony. In the private talks, Sharaa said that the talks should start where they stalled in 1996, Barak said that although he did not make commitment on territory, “*we do not erase history.*” So, Barak adopted Rabin’s deposit to withdraw to the 4 June line providing that Israel’s security needs were satisfied by Syria.⁷⁶⁸ Despite Syria’s harsh criticisms, there was a feeling of optimism both in Israel and Syria to make progress on the peace talks in a short time. The Americans and the Israelis believed that Syria was so close to sign a peace agreement for the first time since the start of the peace talks. They thought that Assad’s deteriorating health condition would make him more flexible in the peace talks as he would like to see the return of the Golan Heights to Syria before his death. Assad was also planning the successful achievement of the succession to his son Bashar by eliminating the challenge of negotiating peace with Israel. Assad also wanted to exploit President Clinton’s last year in office to further improve relations between Syria and the United States. In so doing, Assad sought to receive financial aid from the United States as Syrian economy was on the brink of collapse. President Clinton’s motivation to end the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East by resolving the long-lasting animosity between Israel and Syria and signing a historic peace agreement between the two countries gave an extra impetus to the peace talks.⁷⁶⁹

In the Washington meeting, Sharaa and Barak agreed on the formation of four committees (boundary, water, security, and normalization). During the negotiations, only security and normalization committees were able to convene. Committees of border/withdrawal and water could not convene since Israel wanted to see Syria’s eagerness to address security arrangements such as the early warning stations and demilitarized zones before talking about Syria’s demand for full withdrawal from the Golan Heights. On the other hand, Syria wanted to ensure Israel’s withdrawal from the Golan Heights before discussing other issues such as normalization of relations, water rights, the nature of peace and future of bilateral relations. Contending priorities turned out to be a huge stumbling block in front of the Syrian-Israeli peace track.⁷⁷⁰

⁷⁶⁸ Clinton, *My Life*, 885.

⁷⁶⁹ Daoudy, “A Missed Chance for Peace,” 227; Zisser, “The Israel-Syria Negotiations,” 234-235.

⁷⁷⁰ Clinton, *My Life*, 886; Nejad, “The Ineffective Role of the United States,” 57-58.

Sharaa underlined that without Rabin's deposit there could be no progress on the talks. Barak made only one vague concession by stating that Rabin's deposit could be discussed in the next round of talks. It seemed that Barak changed his mind and began to worry about political consequences of giving the Golan Heights back to Syria. Although the Syrian delegation was disappointed with Barak's attitude, it was still hopeful about a breakthrough in the negotiations. Sharaa informed Arab ambassadors in Washington that Syria was about to make a deal with Israel. Yet, talks stalled and was suspended finally by Syria due to Israel's refusal to accept the meeting of the border committee. In sum, disagreement over which issues should be given priority in the talks put an end to the negotiations.⁷⁷¹

Despite the failure of the first high level Israeli-Syrian peace talks, Barak exerted pressure on Clinton to renew talks with Syria in order not to lose the momentum in the Syrian-Israeli peace track. The next round of talks was held in Shepherdstown, West Virginia on 3-10 January 2000. In the first day of the talks, there was a debate over the sequence of issues to be negotiated. Israel demanded that talks start with security arrangements and normalization of relations, yet Syria insisted that talks begin with discussing the extent of Israel's withdrawal from the Golan Heights. The Shepherdstown talks, which was the last round of the Syrian-Israeli peace track, were overshadowed by mutual mistrust between the two delegations.⁷⁷²

In the following days, negotiating teams strived to narrow the differences on several issues such as timetable for Israel's withdrawal, security arrangements for Israel and the ways of normalizing bilateral relations. According to Albright, the main question in this round of talks was the location of the future border between Israel and Syria or finding the exact location of the 4 June 1967 line.⁷⁷³

In the negotiations, Sharaa expected Barak to uphold the Rabin deposit. Although the Syrians demanded Israel's total withdrawal from the Golan to the 4 June line, they were willing to give Israel a small strip of land (10 meters/33 feet wide) along the border of Lake Tiberias. The Syrian delegation also demanded that Israel complete withdrawal within eighteen months and that early warning station on the Golan could be run by UN or American personnel. On the other hand, Barak demanded a wider strip off the lake, three years for implementing

⁷⁷¹ Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 260; Pressman, "Mediation, Domestic Politics, and the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations," 367.

⁷⁷² John Lancaster, "Israel and Syria Meet Face-to-Face," *Washington Post*, January 5, 2000, 15; Nejad, "The Ineffective Role of the United States," 57-58.

⁷⁷³ Madeleine Albright, *Madam Secretary: A Memoir* (New York: Miramax Books, 2003), 475-476.

withdrawal, exchange of embassies in the early phase of withdrawal, and an early warning station on the Mount Hermon run by Israel. During the negotiations, the Syrian delegation came up with the formula of “sovereignty of Israel over the lake, sovereignty of Syria over the land”. Furthermore, the Syrian delegation accepted that the 1923 line could be applied to the lake’s northern shore. For early warning station, Sharaa accepted that it could be controlled by France and the United States for first five years. However, the talks stalled owing to Barak’s unwillingness to make territorial concessions before the signing of a peace agreement.⁷⁷⁴ As Barak was overwhelmed by the public opinion polls showing a decline in his popularity, he was striving to demonstrate the Israeli public that his government was not willing to make territorial concessions and was determined to keep Israel’s access to water.⁷⁷⁵

In order to break the deadlock in the Shepherdstown talks, President Clinton prepared a draft of a future peace agreement encapsulating main issues on which Syria and Israel previously agreed. The document summarized the points of mutual understanding as well as the unresolved divergences of opinion between the two sides. In the document, it was stated that both Syria and Israel reached an understanding, even an agreement, despite the need for clarification and extra efforts to work on the problems to translate the points of agreements into practical terms.⁷⁷⁶ Basically, the Clinton initiative was based on ending the state of war between the two sides and achieving full normalization of diplomatic and economic relations including cooperation in the area of tourism.⁷⁷⁷ Syria responded positively to Clinton’s draft peace agreement and negotiations on border and security issues started again between the two sides. Syria showed flexibility on these issues by stating that they would accept a modification of the strip of land off the lake as much as 50 meters (164 feet) if Israel accepted withdrawal to the 4 June line. Yet, the pace of the Shepherdstown talks slowed down due to Barak’s unwillingness to compromise on the border and withdrawal line. Besides, he wanted to switch to the Lebanese track before making a peace deal with Syria, which was totally unacceptable to Syria. Sharaa said that Barak was not sincere, and Shepherdstown was a total failure. In the

⁷⁷⁴ Clinton, *My Life*, 885-886; Pressman, “Mediation, Domestic Politics, and the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations,” 367-368; Podesh, *Chances for Peace*, 261.

⁷⁷⁵ Daoudy, “A Missed Chance for Peace,” 227.

⁷⁷⁶ Zisser, “The Israel-Syria Negotiations,” 237.

⁷⁷⁷ Slater, “Lost Opportunities for Peace in the Arab-Israeli Conflict,” 98.

end, the Clinton administration's peace initiative faltered owing to Barak's reluctance to make territorial concessions and commit himself to total withdrawal from the Golan Heights.⁷⁷⁸

On 10 June 1999, the Syrian and Israeli delegations left Shepherdstown to reconvene one week later without having a closing ceremony or a press conference. The participants of the Shepherdstown talks observed that Syria was the flexible side in the negotiations while Israel demonstrated intransigence.⁷⁷⁹ Meanwhile, the draft treaty, given to the Syrian and Israeli delegations confidentially, was leaked to the Israeli press on 13 January 2000. In the peace document, Syria and Israel agreed on ending the state of war and establishing normal peaceful relations. Syria appeared the flexible side on key issues such as normalization of relations and security arrangements. In fact, Syria made a significant compromise in terms of early warning stations by agreeing that the United States and France would run these stations on Mount Hermon. It was also revealed that both sides reached an agreement on full diplomatic relations, open borders, free trade, and cooperation in tourism. It was apparent that they had yet to achieve an agreement on several major issues including security arrangements, water sharing, the depth and timing of Israel's withdrawal, the location of ultimate border, and the size of demilitarized zones. The leak of the document discouraged Syria from further negotiations. President Assad was offended by the leak of the document as it was undermining Syria's position in the Arab world. Thus, he did not send a delegation to the second round of talks to be held in mid-June 1999.⁷⁸⁰

4.4.1.5.4. The Death Knell of the Syrian-Israeli Track: The Clinton-Assad Meeting in Geneva in March 2000

On 27 February 2000, Barak publicly admitted the Rabin deposit and announced his desire to negotiate the issue of withdrawal from the Golan Heights. Barak told his cabinet that Rabin had accepted full withdrawal from the Golan to the 4 June 1967 line instead of the 1923 line with specified conditions.⁷⁸¹ This meant that Syria would have access to Lake Tiberias. Barak also underlined that Rabin's deposit was binding for his government. President Clinton,

⁷⁷⁸ William B. Quandt, "Clinton and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: The Limits of Incrementalism," *Journal of Palestinian Studies* 30, No. 2 (Winter 2001): 30; Albright, *Madam Secretary*, 478-479, Clinton, *My Life*, 886-887.

⁷⁷⁹ Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 262.

⁷⁸⁰ Daoudy, "A Missed Chance for Peace," 228; Nejad, "The Ineffective Role of the United States," 58; Pressman, "Mediation, Domestic Politics, and the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations," 370-371.

⁷⁸¹ Pressman, "Mediation, Domestic Politics, and the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations," 371; Rabil, *Syria, the United States, and the War on Terror*, 111.

apparently encouraged by Barak's new approach, made a final effort for putting the Syrian-Israeli negotiations on track by meeting President Assad in Geneva on 26 March 2000.⁷⁸²

President Clinton announced on 20 March 2000 that he would meet Assad in Geneva. Clinton said that although he did not want to raise expectations, the meeting would put the negotiations on track. Clinton's NSA Samuel Berger also told reporters that he did not expect an immediate result from the Geneva meeting, but it would hopefully contribute to the process. Foreign Minister Sharaa told reporters in Damascus that Assad-Clinton meeting was a positive step, which could lead to resumption of the peace talks.⁷⁸³

Before the Geneva meeting, Clinton called Assad and assured him that Barak was ready to honor Rabin's deposit once again. Clinton strongly urged him not to miss this opportunity as Barak was willing to make a peace deal encapsulating clear border lines. Despite his ill health, Assad, persuaded by Clinton's strong messages and promises as well as Barak's goodwill, decided to go to Geneva to meet Clinton. As Assad was ready to share the water resources on the Golan, he believed that the Geneva summit would bring a breakthrough in the stalled Syrian-Israeli peace talks. Yet, the Geneva summit turned out to be a real fiasco.⁷⁸⁴

In the meeting room, Albright, Sharaa and Ross were also present. President Clinton gave Assad a proposal, jointly prepared by Ross and Barak, on behalf of Israel. When Clinton told Assad that Israel was ready to withdraw to "a commonly agreed border" between Israel and Syria, Assad was surprised and asked the meaning of commonly agreed border. Dennis Ross pulled out a map showing Barak's position on the border.⁷⁸⁵ Clinton told Assad that Barak was ready to accept the 4 June 1967 line as the future border between Israel and Syria providing that Israel would have sovereignty over the entire northeastern shore of Lake Tiberias. While Assad was waiting for Israel's acceptance of the 4 June line, Barak demanded with this proposal that Israel given extra territories (400 to 500 meters) as a final border on the northeastern shore of Lake Tiberias in exchange for leaving the al-Hamma area to Syria. Rabin had already accepted leaving both areas to Syria. Thus, Barak's offer was even clear violation

⁷⁸² Slater, "Lost Opportunities for Peace in the Arab-Israeli Conflict," 96; Quandt, "Clinton and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," 30.

⁷⁸³ Charles Babington, "Clinton, Assad Set Meeting on Peace," *Washington Post*, March 21, 2000, 17.

⁷⁸⁴ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 363; Podesh, *Chances for Peace*, 264; Slater, "Lost Opportunities for Peace in the Arab-Israeli Conflict," 96.

⁷⁸⁵ Albright, *Madam Secretary*, 480-481; Pressman, "Mediation, Domestic Politics, and the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations," 372.

of the 1923 line between mandate Palestine and mandate Syria. With this border, Israel would secure its sovereignty over the waters of Lake Tiberias and the Jordan River. So, Assad understood that Barak was not committed to full withdrawal from the Golan and did not really want peace with Syria. Assad promptly put an end to the meeting.⁷⁸⁶

The Geneva meeting was a total failure as it became evident that the United States as a biased mediator having close ties with Israel could not force the Barak government to accept the 4 June withdrawal line. On the contrary, President Clinton backed Israel's arguments and estranged Syria. He thought that Syria would sign a peace agreement with Israel on terms acceptable to Tel Aviv due to changing international context which deprived Syria of its Cold War patron, the Soviet Union.⁷⁸⁷

James Baker, who spent countless hours with President Assad, later slammed Clinton for trying to sell Barak's position to Assad. He contended that American offer must have encapsulated full withdrawal in return for full security and peace.⁷⁸⁸ President Clinton wrote the Geneva meeting in his memoirs as follows:

“When I met Assad, he was friendly as I gave him a blue tie with a red line profile of a lion, the English meaning of his name. It was a small meeting: Assad was joined by Foreign Minister Shara and Butheina Shaban; Madeleine Albright and Dennis Ross accompanied me, with the National Security Council's Rob Malley serving as notetaker. After some pleasant small talk, I asked Dennis to spread out the maps I had studied carefully in preparing for our talks. Compared with his stated position at Shepherdstown, Barak was now willing to accept less land around the lake, though he still wanted a lot, 400 meters (1,312 feet); fewer people at the listening station; and a quicker withdrawal period. Assad didn't want me even to finish the presentation. He became agitated and, contradicting the Syrian position at Shepherdstown, said that he would never cede any of the land, that he wanted to be able to sit on the shore of the lake and put his feet in the water. We tried for two hours to get some traction with the Syrians, all to no avail. The Israeli rebuff in Shepherdstown and the leak of the working document in the Israeli press had embarrassed Assad and destroyed his fragile trust. And his health had deteriorated even more than I knew. Barak had made a respectable offer. If it had come at Shepherdstown, an agreement might have emerged. Now, Assad's first priority was his son's succession, and he had obviously decided that a new round of negotiations, no matter how it came out, could put that at risk. In less than four years, I had seen the prospects of peace between Israel and Syria dashed three times: by terror in Israel and Peres's defeat in 1996, by the Israeli rebuff of Syrian overtures at Shepherdstown, and by Assad's preoccupation with his own mortality. After we parted in Geneva, I never saw Assad again.”⁷⁸⁹

⁷⁸⁶ Daoudy, “A Missed Chance for Peace,” 228; Zisser, “The Israel-Syria Negotiations,” 237.

⁷⁸⁷ Pressman, “Mediation, Domestic Politics, and the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations,” 354-355.

⁷⁸⁸ Quandt, “Clinton and the Arab-Israeli Conflict,” 40.

⁷⁸⁹ Clinton, *My Life*, 903-904.

Why did Assad firmly reject Clinton's offer? For Assad, the issue of territory was a matter of national honor and dignity which could not be put aside. He underlined that Syria could not give up northeastern shore of Lake Tiberias and water rights as the northeastern shore was Syrian territory before the Six-Day War in 1967. American backing for maximum Israeli demands in the Geneva meeting was totally unacceptable and eroded the Clinton administration's image of honest broker in the eyes of Assad. Thus, the Geneva summit was a fatal blow to President Assad's friendly relations with President Clinton. For this reason, the Geneva summit turned out to be a fiasco for the Clinton administration. Although Clinton warned him of the future of the Syrian-Israeli peace track, Assad did not step back from his position.⁷⁹⁰

President Assad passed away ten weeks after the Geneva summit on 10 June 2000. Despite smooth transition of power to his young son Bashar al-Assad in July 2000, the Syrian-Israeli peace deal became a remote possibility due to Bashar's lack of charisma, experience and authority in comparison to his father.⁷⁹¹

4.4.1.5.5. Syria as a Key to Comprehensive Peace: The Clinton Administration's Policy towards Syria (1993-2001)

In this section, I will explain how the NRCs of the United States under the Clinton administration and their performance impacted the U.S.-Syrian relations from 1993 to 2001. I will try to demonstrate that Syria's acceptance of the NRCs of hegemon and regional stabilizer/peace catalyst during the peace negotiations contributed to cooperation and accommodation between the two countries. As rightly argued by Zisser, there was considerable improvement in the U.S.-Syrian relations in the 1990s, which can be observed in the continuous diplomatic visits and dialog between Damascus and Washington within the framework of the Middle East peace process. President Assad was keen to maintain cooperation with the Clinton administration because he wanted to promote Syria's interests in the Syrian-Israeli peace track and to receive economic aids from the United States that Syria desperately needed. What's more, Assad considered the U.S.-Syrian cooperation vital as it would protect Syria against potential threats coming from the United States and Israel in the post-Cold War era.⁷⁹²

⁷⁹⁰ Zisser, "The Israel-Syria Negotiations," 239; Nejad, "The Ineffective Role of the United States," 59.

⁷⁹¹ Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 264.

⁷⁹² Zisser, "Syrian Foreign Policy," 86-87.

There were signs of accommodation between the United States and Syria immediately after Bill Clinton's election as the new president of the United States in November 1992. Syria's initial reaction to Clinton's election was positive as he was expected to play a constructive role in favor of the Arab states in the Middle East peace process owing to his emphasis on human rights and justice during the election campaign. Syria also thought that Clinton's preoccupation with economy might pave the way for a more balanced relations between the United States and the Arab world. In the earlier contacts between Syrian and American officials, the American side confirmed the new administration's commitment to the peace process on the basis of Resolutions 242 and 338, the land-for-peace formula and President Bush's letters of assurances to Israel and the Arab parties. Syria appreciated Clinton's initial posture on the peace process as a sign of promising start.⁷⁹³

Like President Bush, Clinton threw his full weight behind the Syrian-Israeli peace track throughout his presidency. Although Clinton played a minor role in the PLO-Israeli and the Jordanian-Israeli peace tracks, he adopted Syria first approach and got involved in the Syrian-Israeli peace track from the onset of his presidency.⁷⁹⁴ Why the Clinton administration made the accomplishment of a Syrian-Israeli peace agreement one of its highest priorities in the Middle East? First, Clinton thought that the collapse of the Soviet Union would compel Syria to follow the path of Egypt and to depend on the United States as the sole mediator in the Middle East peace process. Second, unlike Arafat, President Assad was a mighty leader capable of striking a separate peace deal with Israel. He was also a trustworthy leader considering the longevity of the 1974 Disengagement Agreement.⁷⁹⁵ Third, President Clinton believed that Syrian-Israeli peace would have far-reaching effects because a compromise between the "beating hearth of Arab nationalism" and the "Zionist entity" would bring comprehensive peace to the Middle East. In this context, it would remove obstacles in front of the Israeli-Jordanian and the Israeli-Palestinian peace tracks. Comprehensive peace would also bring a genuine normalization between Israel and the Arab world at large. Fourth, President Clinton anticipated that Syrian-Israeli peace deal might end debates on Israel's legitimate borders and lead to Syria's disenchantment with the terrorist activities.⁷⁹⁶

⁷⁹³ "Hope, Optimism Linked with New Administration," *FBIS*, London AL-HAYAT in Arabic, November 9, 1992.

⁷⁹⁴ Rabinovich, "From Deposit to Commitment," 255; Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 271.

⁷⁹⁵ Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 248.

⁷⁹⁶ Robert Satloff, "The Path to Peace," *Foreign Policy* No. 100 (Fall 1995): 112-113; Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace*, 85.

The Clinton administration took immediate action for reinvigorating the Syrian-Israeli track, which had stalled due to the Palestinian deportee crisis. Secretary of State Christopher telephoned Foreign Minister Sharaa on 4 February 1993 to discuss the peace process. In the conversation, they exchanged views on the Palestinian deportee crisis, the need for implementing UN Security Council Resolution 799 and the repatriation of the Palestinian deportees to their homeland. Moreover, Christopher and Sharaa discussed in length the possibility of the resumption of the peace talks between Syria and Israel. Sharaa demonstrated Syria's willingness to make progress on the peace process but underlined its concerns about Israel's intransigence to abide by the legitimate UN resolutions. In the conversation, Christopher expressed his desire to visit Damascus within the framework of a regional tour to discuss the Middle East peace process.⁷⁹⁷

Christopher launched his first Middle East tour in late February 1993 to reinvigorate the Middle East peace process and went to Damascus on 20 February 1993. Christopher said at the Damascus airport that the United States was committed to supporting the parties of the Arab-Israeli conflict to achieve a just and comprehensive peace on the basis of Resolutions 242 and 338. More importantly, Christopher conceptualized the role of the United States as a "full partner" in the peace process. He also reiterated that Washington as a sponsor of the peace process was ready to play a constructive role as long as other parties did not refrain from doing their part. Christopher expressed the Clinton administration's intent to get involved in the peace negotiations by stating that "*We intend, if anything, to be more active than the United States has been in the past.*"⁷⁹⁸ He explained his appreciation of Syria's changing position in the post-Cold War era by pointing to its pivotal role in the convocation of the Madrid Peace Conference and the significance of its participation in the Gulf War coalition. Besides, Christopher expressed his appreciation of evolving nature of U.S.-Syrian relations by stating that: "*In the recent years, the United States and Syria worked together to advance the peace process and regional security, and we expect that this cooperation will continue and we look forward to it.*"⁷⁹⁹ Christopher's remarks before his meetings with senior Syrian officials were quite significant as he emphasized the United States' NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst

⁷⁹⁷ "Christopher Phones al-Shar' for Talks on Deportees," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, February 5, 1993.

⁷⁹⁸ Elaine Sciolino, "Syrians Put Issue of Peace Effort Before Deportees," *New York Times*, February 22, 1993, 1.

⁷⁹⁹ "Christopher Arrives, Welcomed by al-Shar'," *FBIS*, Damascus SANA in Arabic, February 20, 1993.

in the Syrian-Israeli track as well as the changing nature of the U.S.-Syrian relations in the post-Cold War era thanks to Syria's cooperative attitude.

In Damascus, Christopher met with Foreign Minister Sharaa and President Assad to discuss the current situation in the Middle East, the obstacles to resumption of the Middle East peace process and above all the Palestinian deportee crisis. In the meeting, Christopher witnessed how President Assad was a tough negotiator as he strongly emphasized his irrevocable demand that negotiations restart if Rabin was committed to full withdrawal from the Golan Heights.⁸⁰⁰ At the press conference on 20 February 1993, Christopher announced that the current efforts of the Clinton administration focused on the resumption and reinvigoration of the Washington talks. He brought proposals to Damascus to end the deportee crisis and assured the Syrian officials that the United States would exert pressure on Israel to end the crisis before the next round of talks.⁸⁰¹

More importantly, Christopher stressed the United States' NRC of regional stabilizer as well as importance of Syria's key role to achieve a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. He also welcomed President Assad's attitude to the Clinton administration's full partnership role in the peace process. Christopher underlined the convergence of the United States' and Syria's role conceptions in the peace talks as follows:

“We had good and constructive talks with President Hafiz al-Asad and before that with the foreign minister. We talked about a wide range of issues, and had a frank exchange of views about issues of bilateral and regional interests... Syria has played and continues to play a central part in the peace process. If this process is to succeed, Syria must continue to play this role. We have indicated a desire for an early resumption of the talks and the urgency for these talks to make headway. I have communicated to President al-Asad President Clinton's commitment to a full partnership role of the United States in the negotiating process... President Hafiz al-Asad has declared Syria's commitment to the peace process that kicked off in Madrid, and he welcomed the full partnership role of the United States in the peace process...”⁸⁰²

In response to a question whether the United States would exert pressure on Israel to allow the Palestinian deportees to return to their homeland to resume the peace talks, Christopher

⁸⁰⁰ Christopher, *Chances of A Lifetime*, 219.

⁸⁰¹ “Sources Report on Contents of Christopher Talks,” *FBIS*, London al-Sharq al-Awsat in Arabic, February 21, 1993.

⁸⁰² “Al-Shar’, Christopher Hold Talks,” *FBIS*, Damascus SANA in Arabic, February 21, 1993; “Further on Meeting,” *FBIS*, Damascus SANA in Arabic, February 21, 1993.

clarified the nature of broker role of the United States and intention of the Clinton administration to play an active role in the peace talks by stating that:

“We will play the role of a full partner through working closely and keenly, and through meeting with the parties, as I am doing now by this tour of the region... We are one of the co-sponsors of the conference, though we are not a party, but I believe that this enables us to play the role of a supportive and honest broker, and we intend to play this role. I think it is a mistake to speak about playing the role of an honest broker and putting pressure on any party... We will try to facilitate the talks and make sure that the parties have a full chance to tackle the issue. We may present some ideas. That, I think, is the role that we can effectively play, and we intend to be more active than the United States has been in the past.”⁸⁰³

As mentioned above, Sharaa indicated during Christopher’s visit that Syria did not want the Palestinian deportee crisis to hamper the peace process. Sharaa’s remarks understating the deportee crisis were welcomed by American officials.⁸⁰⁴ What’s more, there were positive comments on the mediator/broker role of the United States and Syria’s acceptance of that role in the official Syrian press. On 22 February 1993, *Tishreen* wrote that:

“Syria is concerned for the peace process and for extricating the Middle East from the tunnel of wars, instability, and crises, it has always urged the United States to play an active and effective role capable of placing the Washington talks on the sound path which leads to real progress. Definitely, Syria welcomes the Clinton administration’s commitment to invigorate the peace process on the basis of UN Security Council resolutions, and to play a full partnership role.”⁸⁰⁵

Christopher and Sharaa met once again in Brussels in late February 1993. After the meeting, Christopher told reporters that Sharaa offered his assistance in restarting the Middle East peace talks in April 1993. Christopher also said that Sharaa made it clear that Syria wanted the peace negotiations to restart.⁸⁰⁶ On the way to the ninth round of talks in Washington, which extricated the Middle East peace process from a four-month stalemate, President Assad pressured Arafat into ending his boycott of peace talks owing to the deportee crisis. On 21 April 1993, Sharaa met with foreign ministers of Arab countries in Damascus. After the meeting, Sharaa read a seven-point joint Arab declaration and announced that the ninth round of talks would be held in Washington on 27 April 1993. Sharaa also explained the Arab side’s expectation from the Clinton administration by stating that the Arab ministers meeting “*assert*

⁸⁰³ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁴ Sciolino, “Syrians Put Issue of Peace Effort Before Deportees.”

⁸⁰⁵ “Effective U.S. Role Needed,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, February 22, 1993.

⁸⁰⁶ Doyle McManus, “Syria Vows to Work Toward Mideast Talks,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 27, 1993, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-02-27-mn-657-story.html>.

*the need to put all the promises and assurances offered by the American administration and related to public positions and operational measures into action with the issuance of this communique.”*⁸⁰⁷

Despite Syria's contributions to the ninth round of talks in Washington on 27 April 1993, it did not yield any tangible result. In the summer of 1993, the Syrian-Israeli track gained momentum owing to the Clinton administration's efforts. On 18 June 1993, President Clinton pledged a new American effort to achieve a breakthrough in the peace negotiations. He also appointed Dennis Ross as special coordinator for the Middle East peace talks to demonstrate his administration's determination to handle the issue of Middle East peace.⁸⁰⁸ On the Syrian side, expectations were high from the United States as a full and fair partner in the peace talks. The Clinton administration was supposed to pressure Israel to comply with the UN resolutions, the formula of land-for-peace, and the principles of Madrid Peace Conference.⁸⁰⁹

When the tenth round of talks between Israel and Syria in Washington stalled in late June 1993, President Clinton announced that he would intervene in the peace talks directly in accordance with the full and fair partnership role of the United States. Syria expressed its appreciation of President Clinton's direct involvement of in the peace talks by stating that the United States as a full and fair partner in the peace talks should end the stalemate in the tenth round of talks. It was also stressed that the Clinton administration must prioritize the implementation of the Resolutions 242 and 338 and restoration of the national rights of the Palestinians against Israel's intransigence and maneuvers to avoid discussing substantial issues as to the peace deal at the tenth round of talks.⁸¹⁰

After the failure of the 10th round of talks, there were heated debates about the mediator role of the United States in Syria. In July 1993, Prime Minister Rabin's announcement that Israel

⁸⁰⁷ Nora Boustany, "Palestinians Agree to Return to Talks," *Washington Post*, April 22, 1993, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1993/04/22/palestinians-agree-to-return-to-talks/d7a13b36-e0ab-46c5-9e4a-8b6636fba690/>; "For the Middle East, a Fresh Start," *New York Times*, April 26, 1993, 16.

⁸⁰⁸ Thomas W. Lippman, "Clinton Pledges New Middle East Peace Push," *Washington Post*, June 19, 1993, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1993/06/19/clinton-pledges-new-mideast-peace-push/12623d13-a0e8-4fbf-954c-123f89e0b6d1/>.

⁸⁰⁹ "Commentary Urges U.S. to Exert Influence on Israel," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Radio Network in Arabic, June 4, 1993.

⁸¹⁰ "Clinton Involvement Seen as Stimulus," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Radio Network in Arabic, June 20, 1993; "Effective U.S. Role Stressed," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Radio Network in Arabic, June 22, 1993.

would not withdraw to the 4 June 1967 border was slammed by Syrian officials as an indication of Israel's unwillingness to make a just, genuine and sustainable peace. That's why, Syria urged the United States to play an active and influential role as an honest and impartial partner in the peace talks following the failure of the tenth round of talks. In this context, Dennis Ross started a tour in the Middle East in July 1993 to give the Syrian-Israeli peace track momentum. While Israel was escalating the tension in Lebanon in the summer of 1993, Syrian official media outlets also called on Washington to curb Israel's aggressive policies in south Lebanon, undermining the spirit of the Middle East peace process on the basis of Resolutions 242 and 338.⁸¹¹

In July 1993, President Assad uttered his disappointment about the Americans' failure to practice the role of a full partner after meeting with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, as it was not influencing Israel's uncompromising posture in the peace negotiations. Nevertheless, Assad said that Syria would not reach a quick judgement about the role of the United States and would wait for the results.⁸¹² Due to growing concerns of Syria about the broker role of the United States, President Clinton sent a letter to President Assad on 12 July 1993, in which he assured him of determination of the United States to play the role of full partner and honest broker in the Syrian-Israeli peace track to attain a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. In response to the Clinton letter, the Syrian side welcomed President Clinton's posture as an opportunity to achieve breakthrough in the peace talks to the achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the region.⁸¹³

In the summer of 1993, the role of the United States as a full partner and the sponsor of peace in the peace process was elucidated in detail in the official Syrian media outlets. In one of the commentaries, it was underlined that Washington was the sole superpower that could pressure Israel to clinch a deal with the Arab parties. In the commentary, it was clearly stated that Syria accepted the mediator role of the United States and had no problem with that role as follows:

⁸¹¹ "Failure to Bridge Gap in Talks Criticized," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Radio Network in Arabic, July 6, 1993; "Commentary Notes 'Special Importance' of Ross Tour," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Radio Network in Arabic, July 12, 1993; "Commentaries View Ross Mission, Obstacles to Peace," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Radio Network in Arabic, July 12, 1993; "Paper Hopes for Positive Results from Ross Tour," *FBIS*, Damascus SANA in Arabic, July 15, 1993.

⁸¹² "U.S. Urged to End Israel Attacks on Southern Lebanon," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Radio Network in Arabic, July 11, 1993.

⁸¹³ "Peace Efforts to Continue Following Clinton Message," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Radio Network in Arabic, July 13, 1993.

“Syria and the Arabs have given the United States very important cards to use in establishing a just and comprehensive peace that will not only serve Arab interests but the interests of everyone. So, we all have the right to ask the United States to shoulder its responsibility toward the initiative it launched and committed itself to before countries of the region and the international community.”⁸¹⁴

In *al-Ba'th* and *al-Thawrah* newspapers, Syria's perception of the Clinton administration's broker role in the peace process and its expectations from the new administration in the summer of 1993 can be seen clearly. Christopher's shuttle diplomacy in July 1993 to keep the Syrian-Israeli peace track intact was paid much attention in these newspapers. Before Christopher's tour of the region, *al-Thawra* commented that the United States had a central position in the peace process, and it must play the partner role with integrity and impartiality. It was also stressed that the United States was the only actor that could exert pressure on Israel to comply with the UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338. *Al-Baath* also welcomed the Clinton administration's efforts to promote peace, stability, and security in the Middle East, yet it stressed that the Arab peoples' expectation that the United States should shy away from amalgamating the roles of arbiter and antagonist.⁸¹⁵

While the resumption of the Syrian-Israeli peace talks was the main topic in the U.S.-Syrian relations in the summer of 1993, Israel's Operation Accountability against Hezbollah in south Lebanon on 25 July 1993 changed the scene in the Middle East. Despite the death of Syrian soldiers during the operation, Damascus pursued a balanced by restraining Hezbollah. The Clinton administration praised Syria's contribution to Christopher's mediating efforts during the Operation Accountability. Although the American press criticized Syria for being a party in the recent conflict owing to its link with Iran and support for Hezbollah, President Clinton publicly announced that Syria demonstrated “*commendable restraint*” while tension was mounting in the Middle East.⁸¹⁶

The Clinton administration welcomed Syria's cooperative attitude in Lebanon during the Operation Accountability and assigned it a greater role in the Middle East peace process. In

⁸¹⁴ “Commentary Views U.S. Role in Peace Process,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, July 15, 1993.

⁸¹⁵ “Christopher Tour, Israeli ‘Intransigence’ Viewed,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, July 23, 1993.

⁸¹⁶ Robert Satloff, “Assad's Double Game,” *New York Times*, July 28, 1993, 19; Paul Richter and Art Pine, “Clinton Says Hostilities Won't Derail Mideast Peace Push,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 28, 1993, 6; R. Jeffrey Smith, “Christopher to Pressure Syria to Block Cargo to Hezbollah,” *Washington Post*, July 31, 1993, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1993/07/31/christopher-to-pressure-syria-to-block-cargo-to-hezbollah/3d310ed5-e4b0-4753-8870-3f8833d4d333/>.

this context, Washington enhanced its efforts to reinvigorate the Syrian-Israeli peace track after the crisis. A senior Israeli official commented after the ceasefire in Lebanon that Secretary of State Christopher “*laid the foundations for an Israeli-Syrian peace settlement.*”⁸¹⁷ In this context, Christopher and Ross started a Middle East tour to reinvigorate the Syrian-Israeli track in early August 1993. Christopher conveyed the Rabin deposit to President Assad in a meeting in Damascus on 4 August 1993. After the meeting, Christopher was hopeful about the resumption of talks and said that “*I think we have salvaged this process.*” During Christopher’s tour, both Syrian and Israeli representatives urged the Clinton administration to take a more active role in the peace talks.⁸¹⁸

President Assad publicly embraced the Clinton administration’s peace efforts after Christopher’s shuttle diplomacy by underlining its positive impact on future of the peace talks as follows: “*We need to assume that the coming round of talks will have positive results, especially since we have noticed greater attention by the United States, perhaps stemming from the importance of the negotiations to American interests.*”⁸¹⁹ In his interview with Patrick Seale in the summer of 1993, Assad also expressed his appreciation of the Clinton administration’s peace broker role in the peace process by stating that:

“We are for the peace process. And certainly this is going well with the Clinton administration. But, as is well known, peace is not an Arab interest alone. It is, of course, an Arab interest, but it is also an American interest, as it is in the interest of many countries around the world. The Americans never suggested that the peace process was not in their interest. Quite the contrary, they have often assured us in the past that their interest lay in peace in this region. To sum up, we feel comfortable with the present situation, because we detect a sense of seriousness in what we have seen so far of the Clinton administration.”⁸²⁰

As mentioned above, the Syrian-Israeli track collapsed with the signing of the Oslo Accords in September 1993. Having obtained Syria’s trust in the peace talks, President Clinton felt himself indebted to President Assad and was concerned about his negative reaction to the PLO-Israeli peace deal. That’s why, Clinton called Assad on the phone before the signing of the agreement on 9 September 1993. In the conversation, Clinton assured him that Washington was still committed to the Syrian-Israeli peace track. Clinton also asked him to send a

⁸¹⁷ Pipes, *Syria Beyond the Peace Process*, 73.

⁸¹⁸ Steven A. Holmes, “Christopher Says Middle East Talks Are Revived,” *New York Times*, August 5, 1993, 6.

⁸¹⁹ “Al-Asad Comments on Requirements for Peace, U.S. Role,” *FBIS*, Shanay Voice of the Mountain in Arabic, August 13, 1993.

⁸²⁰ Asad and Seale, “Interview with Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad,” 115.

representative to the signing ceremony of the Oslo Accords at the White House. Assad agreed to send Syria's Ambassador to the United States Walid al-Muallem to the ceremony alongside other Arab ambassadors. Despite his displeasure, Assad decided not to boycott the Oslo Accords, which was interpreted by the Clinton administration as a sign of his adherence to the peace talks.⁸²¹

In the wake of the Oslo Accords, President Clinton had another phone call with President Assad on 15 September 1993. Clinton reiterated Washington's commitment to successful conclusion of the peace process, significance of success in all tracks and cooperation between the United States and Syria to overcome troubles on this path. Assad reciprocated Clinton by reaffirming Syria's adherence to the peace process and the need for a comprehensive peace. He also emphasized Syria's readiness to cooperate with the United States to achieve this objective.⁸²² On 23 September 1993, the Department of State announced that Syria was committed to making progress on the peace talks and working with the United States closely.⁸²³ U.S. Ambassador to Syria Christopher Ross informed Assad and Sharaa that the United States would play the role of honest broker, with due regard for Syria's interests, if Damascus wanted to clinch a peace deal with Tel Aviv after the Oslo Accords.⁸²⁴

Syria did not want to be excluded from the Middle East peace process following the Oslo Accords. For this reason, Assad made several gestures to the United States to demonstrate his commitment to the Middle East peace process. Foreign Minister Sharaa went to Washington on 5 October 1993 to explain Syria's posture on the peace process after Oslo. Sharaa's visit was historic because it was the first senior Syrian official visit to Washington after twenty years. Before meeting with Sharaa at the State Department, Christopher reiterated the broker role of the United States in the peace process as follows: "*I will inform Minister al-Shar' that the United States will continue its commitment as a full partner in the peace process and that it will try to help the parties to this process. I will affirm to Minister al-Shar' that the United States is committed to a comprehensive peace on the basis of the Madrid conference.*" After Christopher, Sharaa said that Syria and the United States would cooperate to give the Middle

⁸²¹ Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace*, 115.

⁸²² "Al-Asad, Clinton Confer Over Phone on Peace," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Television Network in Arabic, September 15, 1993; "Press on 'Continued Commitment' on Peace Process," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Television Network in Arabic, September 16, 1993.

⁸²³ "U.S. Statement on Syrian Peace Commitment," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Radio Network in Arabic, September 24, 1993.

⁸²⁴ Doyle McManus, "Assad Sees Peace as Syria's Best Bet," *Los Angeles Times*, January 27, 1994, 2.

East peace process momentum.⁸²⁵ Sharaa also announced that President Assad proposed a meeting with President Clinton to discuss the Syrian-Israeli track.⁸²⁶

In Washington, Sharaa gave a seminar and underlined Syria's adherence to the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of UN resolutions. Sharaa also noted his satisfaction with the Clinton administration's role in the Middle East peace process. Sharaa said that he had positive talks with Secretary of State Christopher who underscored the United States' commitment to the role of sponsorship of the Middle East peace process. In Washington, Sharaa also met with leading congressmen such as Chairman of the U.S. Congress Foreign Affairs Committee Lee Hamilton and the Vice Chair of the Committee Benjamin Gilman. In the meeting, Hamilton appreciated Sharaa's official visit to Washington and its significance for developing the U.S.-Syrian relations. He also explained his support to just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East and the United States' eagerness to maintain its efforts to reach that goal.⁸²⁷

On 7 October 1993, Sharaa met with President Clinton at the White House and gave him a message from President Assad on the current state of the peace talks and Syria's commitment to maintain bilateral negotiations to reach a just and comprehensive peace in the region based on Resolutions 242 and 338. In the meeting, President Clinton underscored the Washington's commitment to the peace process and the need for a comprehensive peace in the region. Clinton also noted that comprehensive peace could not be achieved without improvement in the Syrian and Lebanese tracks. He explained his readiness to work and cooperate closely with President Assad on the peace process. He hailed dialogue and cooperation between the United States and Syria to achieve peace and stability in the region. Clinton also expressed his determination to enhance bilateral contacts at all levels.⁸²⁸

On 9 October, a senior Syrian official spoke to London-based *al-Hayat* newspaper and explained Syria's appreciation of the Clinton administration's serious approach to the peace talks encapsulating comprehensiveness, justice and the land-for-peace formula as a source of

⁸²⁵ "Al-Shar', Christopher Discuss Ties, Peace Remarks Ahead of Talks Noted," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Television Network in Arabic, October 6, 1993.

⁸²⁶ "Syrian Seeks Washington's Help," *New York Times*, October 6, 1993.

⁸²⁷ "Al-Shar' Addresses Mideast Seminar in Washington," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, October 7, 1993.

⁸²⁸ "Al-Shar' Meeting with Clinton Reported," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, October 7, 1993.

hope in achieving progress on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks.⁸²⁹ *Al-Ba'th* newspaper also appreciated cooperation between the United States and Syria to initiate the peace process and set its bases and its framework. It was argued that this cooperation might push the peace process forward if the United States' commitment to the peace talks was maintained.⁸³⁰

On 25 October 1993, President Clinton held a news conference with President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and commented on the current state of Middle East peace process. In response to a question about the possibility of progress on the Syrian and the Palestinian peace tracks simultaneously, President Clinton underlined the significance of the Syrian peace track for his administration by reminding Israel the pivotal role of Syria in the peace process as follows:

“I can't offer you a definitive analysis of Israeli politics or public opinion, but I think what I'm committed to doing is to getting this thing on track. Everybody in Israel has got to know in the end there can't be a total peace in the Middle East unless there is some peace with Syria. But the timing is very important, and progress on the things that are now at hand is very important.”⁸³¹

In November 1993, the Clinton administration assured Syria of its commitment to comprehensive peace. After meeting with Rabin in Washington, Clinton sent a letter of assurances to Assad, which was delivered by Ambassador Christopher Ross to Foreign Minister Sharaa on 16 November 1993. Clinton also announced that Secretary of State Christopher would visit the Middle East in early December. An American official commented on Clinton's letter by saying that: “*The letter was designated to convey to Assad that the President believes that progress is possible on the Syrian track as well as on other tracks and that on the basis of his discussions with Rabin he believes that Rabin is committed to the same objective.*”⁸³²

⁸²⁹ “Official: U.S. Commitment ‘Keeping Hope Alive’ for Peace,” *FBIS*, London al-HAYAH in Arabic, October 9, 1993.

⁸³⁰ “Press on Peace Stance, Cooperation with U.S.,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, October 21, 1993.

⁸³¹ Bill Clinton, “Exchange with Reporters Prior to Discussions With President Hosni Mubarak, October 25, 1993,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of William J. Clinton, Book II* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1994), 1823.

⁸³² Elaine Sciolino, “U.S. Assures Damascus on Commitment to Peace,” *New York Times*, November 16, 1993, 11.

On the same day, Syrian Vice President Abd al-Halim Khaddam commented on the U.S.-Syrian relations in an interview, in which he hailed improvement in bilateral relations by saying that:

“The relations we have are good. They are normal, and are better than what they were in the past. As is well known, there is constant contact between the two governments and letters exchanged between the two presidents...U.S. officials have made frequent visits to Syria. This means that contacts and dialogue between the two countries have not ceased for a long time.”⁸³³

In early December 1993, senior American officials led by Secretary of State Christopher traveled to Damascus to discuss regional issues as well as the Middle East peace process. The American team was composed of Special Middle East Coordinator Dennis Ross, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs Edward Djerejian, President Clinton’s Special Advisor Martin Indyk, Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs Thomas E. Donilon and Director of Political Planning at the American State Department Sam Lewis. In the meetings, both Syrian and American officials reiterated their commitment to a just and comprehensive peace based on Resolutions 242 and 338. In his meeting with Christopher, President Assad reaffirmed Syria’s willingness to continue cooperation with the United States to make progress on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks to achieve objectives of the peace process.⁸³⁴

Meanwhile, the Clinton administration made a significant gesture to Syria by easing sanctions, which were imposed owing to Syria’s support for international terrorism. On 6 December 1993, Washington allowed transfer of three U.S.-made commercial aircraft to Syria from Kuwait as sign of goodwill. Christopher formally informed Assad of the American decision in their meeting. Senior American officials said that relaxation of sanctions was an important signal showing the United States’ willingness to make positive gestures to prod Syria into signing a peace agreement with Israel and its eagerness to improve its relations with Damascus. Although the United States did not remove Syria from the State Department’s list of states sponsoring terrorism and did not officially lift any sanctions, this step was a sign of the Clinton administration’s changing perception of Syria.⁸³⁵

⁸³³ “Vice President Discusses Peace, Foreign Policy,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, November 16, 1993.

⁸³⁴ “Paper on ‘Responsibility’ of U.S.,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, December 6, 1993.

⁸³⁵ Elaine Sciolino, “U.S. Plans to Ease Sanctions on Syria in a Peace Gesture,” *New York Times*, December 7, 1993, 1.

During Christopher's visit, both Syrian and American officials expressed their approval of each other's role in the Middle East peace process. Secretary of State Christopher hailed Syria's role and cooperation in achieving comprehensive peace in the region despite disagreement between the two sides on the issue of international terrorism. Christopher underscored Washington's adherence to the realization of progress on all tracks as well. Specifically, he said that the United States was eager to improve bilateral relations with Syria. The Syrian side welcomed Christopher's remarks about the role of Syria in the peace process and his emphasis on a comprehensive peace. Sharaa expressed Syria's gratitude for Washington's efforts as an honest broker to achieve a just and comprehensive peace.⁸³⁶

On 9 December 1993, Sharaa elaborated on the role of the United States at the press conference by saying that:

“We have been assured by Secretary Christopher that the bases for the resumption of the peace talks are still valid, and that's why we are confident that the next round of peace talks will give results. This is what we hope and this is what we work for, because we are committed to peace. This is a strategic option for us and we will continue to work with the American side as a full partner, an honest intermediary, and we hope all of us will achieve these objectives.”⁸³⁷

Christopher announced at the press conference that President Clinton would meet with President Assad in Geneva in January 1994. He also reiterated the NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst as follows:

“President Clinton and President al-Assad have agreed to meet in Geneva in mid-January. President Clinton has met with other heads of government involved in the peace process during the course of his first year in office. Such discussions at the highest level are important to our role as a full partner and active intermediary in the Arab-Israeli peace process...the United States is determined to play its role as a full partner in the peace process. Syria is a very important country for that peace process, as we've observed over the last days and weeks...”⁸³⁸

⁸³⁶ “Calls Talks ‘Successful’,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, December 5, 1993; “Christopher's Tour, Israeli Policy Viewed,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, December 11, 1993.

⁸³⁷ “TV Airs News Conference,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Television Network in Arabic, December 9, 1993.

⁸³⁸ Warren Christopher, “Statement by U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher at the Joint Press Conference with Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa,” *William J. Clinton Presidential Library*, December 9, 1993, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/100072>; Robert S. Greenberger, “White House Hopes U.S.-Syria Summit Will Rekindle Middle East Peace Talks,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 10, 1993, 7; “TV Airs News Conference.”

Christopher's visit turned out to be a watershed in the Syrian-Israeli track because Syria accepted the resumption of the bilateral talks in Washington during the visit.⁸³⁹ Besides, it boosted the image of the United States' role as an honest broker in Syria. Syrian officials praised Christopher's posture on the peace talks as it was close to terms and principles acceptable to Damascus. The Syrians also believed that Washington confirmed Syria's central role in the peace talks despite subversive attempts of Israel to undermine this fact. Christopher's visit also paved the way for the Clinton-Assad summit in Geneva in January 1994, which gave the peace talks extra impetus.⁸⁴⁰

After Christopher's visit, there were some comments in the official Syrian media on a need for cooperation between the United States and Syria in the region to achieve a genuine, just, and comprehensive peace. The message of cooperation and normalization with Washington in the Syrian official media was remarkable because it was indicating that Syria embraced the Clinton administration's NRC of peace catalyst. In one of these comments, the necessity of the U.S.-Syrian cooperation was stated openly as follows:

“Contrary to the Israeli stand, Syria sees eye to eye with the U.S. Administration, led by President Bill Clinton, on advancing the peace process in line with the foundations on which it was built. The purpose of this is to achieve a just and comprehensive peace. Syria, just like Washington, stresses the comprehensiveness of the solution and achieving stability in the region.

Syria has welcomed the Clinton administration's commitment to these foundations, because Syria too is committed to them. Therefore, cooperation in this spirit is possible and useful, in fact necessary. This cooperation is in the interest of Syria and the United States and everyone who looks forward to ending the chronic conflict in the Middle East on sound, just bases.”⁸⁴¹

Developments in the U.S.-Syrian relations in 1994 were noteworthy as President Clinton met with President Assad twice, once in Geneva in January and then in Damascus in October. Before the Clinton-Assad summit, the heads of Syrian and Lebanese peace delegations went to Washington to hold preliminary consultations with the Clinton administration to discuss the resumption of the peace talks in the light of the full and fair partnership role of the United

⁸³⁹ Elaine Sciolino, “Syria Is Willing to Renew Talks with the Israelis,” *New York Times*, December 10, 1993, 1.

⁸⁴⁰ “Commentary Views ‘Successful’ Christopher Tour,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, December 10, 1993.

⁸⁴¹ “Cooperation With U.S. Viewed As ‘Necessary’,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, December 16, 1993.

States.⁸⁴² Many observers thought that the Clinton-Assad meeting would break the diplomatic ice and bring substantial progress on the Syrian-Israeli peace track. President Clinton met with President Assad for five hours at the Geneva summit, which catalyzed the resumption of the peace talks. At the joint news conference in Geneva on 16 January 1994, President Assad said that Syria sought a just and comprehensive peace with Israel as a strategic choice that would secure Arab rights. Assad also appreciated the full partnership and broker role of the United States in the peace talks. He elaborated on the role of Washington as follows:

“At the conclusion of the important and constructive talks today between President Clinton and me, I would like to express my deepest satisfaction with what these talks reflected in terms of the United States’ determination to do its best in order to get the peace process to its aspired target – the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace in the region by implementing Security Council Resolutions No. 242, 338, and 425 and the land-for-peace principle. In this regard, I believe that despite the great importance that President Clinton attaches to domestic affairs in his country, he has given special attention as a full partner and honest broker in order to help the parties achieve a comprehensive peace that concerns not only the people of the region, but all world nations.”⁸⁴³

President Clinton underlined unity of purpose between the United States and Syria in the peace process and admitted Syria’s key role to achieve an enduring and comprehensive peace in the region.⁸⁴⁴ Clinton stated that “*I have said that I believe Syria to be the key and that its role is critical for achieving a true and lasting peace between Israel and its neighbors.*”⁸⁴⁵ He also said that “*There [will] be no comprehensive peace in the Middle East unless [Assad is] willing to take a lead.*”⁸⁴⁶ Besides, Clinton announced that U.S. Secretary of State and Syria’s Foreign Minister would establish a working-mechanism to solve the problems between the two countries to improve bilateral relations.⁸⁴⁷ Clinton said that:

“President Asad and I also discussed the state of relations between the United States and Syria and agreed on the desirability of improving them. This requires honestly addressing the problems in our relationship. Accordingly, we’ve instructed the

⁸⁴² “Preliminary Talks in Washington Viewed,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, January 4, 1994.

⁸⁴³ “Al-Asad, Clinton Meet in Geneva 16 Jan.”

⁸⁴⁴ Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace*, 129.

⁸⁴⁵ “Al-Asad, Clinton Meet in Geneva 16 Jan.”; Paul Richter, “Assad-Clinton Talks Raise Hopes for Peace,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 17, 1994, 1.

⁸⁴⁶ Doyle McManus, “Assad Now Seems to See Peace as Syria’s Best Bet,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 17, 1994, 1.

⁸⁴⁷ Ian Black, “Clinton Wins Peace Pledge from Assad,” *Guardian*, January 17, 1994, 18; “Al-Asad, Clinton Meet in Geneva 16 Jan.”

Secretary of State and the Syrian Foreign Minister to establish a mechanism to address these issues in detail and openly.”⁸⁴⁸

By referring to Assad’s previous call for the peace of the brave, Clinton said that he hoped that Israel would respond positively to Assad’s call. Clinton underlined that “*leaders of Israel have sufficient courage to respond to this kind of peace, a new era of security and stability in which normal peaceful relations among all shall dawn.*”⁸⁴⁹ According to Rabinovich, the chief negotiator with Syria and Israel’s Ambassador to the United States, President Clinton threw the ball to the side of Israel with these remarks. On the other hand, Rabin was uncomfortable with Assad’s remarks as he did not clarify what he meant by normal relations. For him, Clinton urged Tel Aviv to respond positively to Assad’s call by expressing his “hope”. What’s more, Clinton consented to the necessity of comprehensiveness in the Arab-Israeli peace process and approved Syria’s policy in Lebanon.⁸⁵⁰

In response to a question about Syria’s withdrawal from Lebanon, President Clinton affirmed his adherence to the Taif agreement and emphasized the outright connection between the Lebanese and Syrian tracks by saying that:

“We did discuss the importance of having the Lebanese peace process go on parallel to the Israeli-Syrian process. I reaffirmed my support for the Taif accords, and President Asad agreed that there should be a successful conclusion of the peace process which left Lebanon free and independent as a nation. So there was no difference between us on the objective.”⁸⁵¹

While returning from the Geneva meeting, President Clinton continued to give positive messages to President Assad by defining the Geneva summit a significant step on the way to peace in the Middle East. He said that “*I think he has reached a conclusion that it is in the interest of his people, his administration, and his legacy to make a meaningful and lasting peace.*”⁸⁵² Assad expressed similar ideas about Clinton to Dennis Ross as follows: “*Clinton is a real person... He speaks to you with awareness and understanding. He knows our problems better and he is committed to solving them. I haven’t felt this from an American president*

⁸⁴⁸ Bill Clinton, “The President’s News Conference With President Hafiz al-Asad of Syria in Geneva, January 16, 1994,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of William J. Clinton, Book I* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1995), 82.

⁸⁴⁹ Rabin, “The Ineffective Role of the US,” 427.

⁸⁵⁰ Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace*, 129. Kaufman, *The Arab Middle East and the United States*, 177.

⁸⁵¹ Clinton, “The President’s News Conference With President Hafiz al-Asad,” 84.

⁸⁵² Kaufman, *The Arab Middle East and the United States*, 177-178.

before.”⁸⁵³ Bouthaina Shaaban contended in her memoirs that President Assad considered President Clinton as the most trusted American president.⁸⁵⁴

In this period, President Assad was aware of Syria’s need for economic aids and better trade relations with the West. Assad understood that the only way to achieve a genuine improvement in relations with the United States was to reach a compromise with Israel on the peace talks. In his meeting with a delegation of the 1948 Palestinians in March 1994, Assad talked about the peace process and the current state of the U.S.-Syrian relations after his meeting with President Clinton. Assad said that Syria’s relations with the United States were much better than before. Syria did not have any problems with Washington, but the source of problem was Israel and its uncompromising attitude in the peace talks.⁸⁵⁵ Despite his positive messages, President Assad warned the United States not to bow to Israel’s pressures in the peace talks in April 1994. He said that the Zionist lobby was preventing the Clinton administration from playing the broker role effectively. Assad also noted that Syria was committed to the peace process, but it was expecting that the United States would keep its promises and practice the role of honest broker on the ground.⁸⁵⁶

Before Secretary of State Christopher’s visit to Syria in late April 1994, *al-Thawrah* newspaper underlined the convergence of roles of Syria and the United States in the peace talks. In the newspaper, it was stated that the United States appreciated Syria’s pivotal role in the peace talks, in return Syria admitted its need for effective American role to implement the UN resolutions.⁸⁵⁷ In this period, Syria made some gestures to the United States by curbing extremist activities of Hezbollah against Israel and by arresting militants of Abu Nidal organization in Lebanon as well as closing its camps in Beirut and Beqaa Valley.⁸⁵⁸

⁸⁵³ Tyler, *A World of Trouble*, 412.

⁸⁵⁴ Shaaban, *Damascus Diary*, 96.

⁸⁵⁵ “Further on al-Asad Meeting,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Television Network in Arabic, March 9, 1994.

⁸⁵⁶ “Al-Asad: U.S. Bows to Israeli Pressure,” *FBIS*, Paris AFP in English, April 6, 1994.

⁸⁵⁷ “Expectations Surrounding Christopher Visit Viewed,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, April 28, 1994.

⁸⁵⁸ Robin Wright, “Christopher, Rabin Renew Efforts for Peace with Syria,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 30, 1994, 42.

Despite Syria's measures in the terrorism issue, the State Department's statement on terrorism in April 1994 and the inclusion of Syria's name in the statement before Christopher's visit to Syria in May 1994 surprised the Syrians. State Department officials acknowledged that Syria was included in the list not for its direct support for international terrorism but for exerting pressure against the Assad regime.⁸⁵⁹ Yet, Syrian sources severely criticized the State Department's attitude. They said that Syria was a central actor in the peace talks as already admitted by the United States. Thus, such statements were creating dilemma for the United States as if it was negotiating peace with a "terrorist state."⁸⁶⁰

Although terrorism issue created tension between the two sides, senior American officials explained the United States' changing perception of Syria on many occasions during the course of 1994. To illustrate, NSA Anthony Lake did not categorize Syria as a backlash state owing to its key role in the peace process in a speech at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy on 17 May 1994. Lake said that:

"We have decided to press ahead with efforts to achieve a breakthrough to a comprehensive peace this year. A decisive Syrian-Israeli agreement would allow Jordan and Lebanon to resolve their differences with Israel in a short order. Full normalization of relations between Israel and the Arab states of the Maghreb and the Gulf would quickly follow. In short, the logjam would be broken. An Israel-Syria peace would thus shore up the agreement between Israel and the PLO and greatly advance U.S. efforts to widen the circle of peacemakers, bolster the network of Middle East moderation, and construct a bastion against backlash states. Syria plays a critical role in the wider sweep of regional peace. Historically, its alliance with Iran and support for rejectionist groups have given the forces of extremism a vital base in the Middle East. By invoking Arab nationalism, Syria has given those forces an important claim on legitimacy. Syria has used its influence both for ill, as when it rejected Sadat's peace with Israel, and for good, as when Damascus joined the Gulf War against Saddam Hussein and, most importantly, when it entered into direct bilateral negotiations with Israel."⁸⁶¹

In the same speech, Lake also hailed Syria's cooperative attitude toward the U.S.-sponsored peace talks and underlined the regional implications of the Clinton-Assad meeting visit by appreciating Assad's commitment to the Syrian-Israeli track by stating that:

"When President Assad took the significant step of announcing in Geneva with President Clinton that Syria had made, in his words, a "strategic choice for peace"

⁸⁵⁹ Stephen Zunes, "U.S. Policy towards Syria and the Triumph of Neoconservatism," *Middle East Policy* 11, No. 1 (Spring 2004): 54.

⁸⁶⁰ "Terrorism Charge on Eve of U.S. Visit Questioned," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, May 15, 1994.

⁸⁶¹ Anthony Lake, "Address to the Soref Symposium, The Washington Institute," *William J. Clinton Presidential Library*, May 17, 1994, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/10497>.

with Israel, his nation's erstwhile extremist allies quickly grew very nervous. Palestinian rejectionist leaders, fearful that they would lose their bases in Lebanon and Syria, went off to Libya in search of new havens. Hezbollah leaders argued how best to pursue an extremist agenda in an era of Israeli-Lebanese peace. Iranian officials hurriedly visited Damascus but apparently left empty-handed, and when they got home, the Iranian clergy began criticizing the leadership for failing to prevent the emerging isolation of their nation."⁸⁶²

Diplomatic contacts between Washington and Damascus continued unabated in the summer of 1994. Especially the Jordanian-Israeli peace understanding in July 1994 was the single most critical development in the Middle East peace process. Syria's attitude toward the Jordanian-Israeli understanding was a matter of concern in Washington. Yet, Syria surprisingly did not spoil the Jordanian-Israeli rapprochement and explained its expectations from the United States as a full and fair partner to do its part to exert pressure on Israel to abide by the UN resolutions and the principles of Madrid Peace Conference in the peace talks. Syria firmly underlined that it was committed to cooperation with the United States so long as it continued to respect the principles of the peace process.⁸⁶³

The Clinton administration was aware of Syria's expectations. Before Secretary of State Warren Christopher's tour of the Middle East, President Clinton called President Assad on the telephone on 15 July 1994 to reiterate the United States' commitment to comprehensive peace in the Middle East. In the conversation, President Clinton explained his expectations for a rapid progress on the peace talks on all tracks and contribution of Christopher's tour to attaining that goal. Assad underlined his commitment to peace process as well, and his respect for Jordan's decision to follow a separate path with Israel. President Clinton appreciated Assad's decision not to derail the Jordanian-Israeli peace track.⁸⁶⁴

During Christopher's shuttle diplomacy between Syria and Israel in July 1994, *al-Baath* newspaper reported that was no serious problem between Syria and the United States. Christopher had a constructive meeting with President Assad and witnessed Syria's willingness and desire to achieve a genuine peace in the region thanks to President Assad's strong messages about peace. In the newspaper, it was firmly stated that as long as the United States remained committed to peace process in accordance with the principles set before,

⁸⁶² Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace*, 145.

⁸⁶³ "U.S. Urged To 'Persuade' Israel to Withdraw From Golan," *FBIS*, London Al-Sharq al-Awsat in Arabic, June 10, 1994; "U.S. Urged To Be 'Full Partner' in Peace Process," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, July 14, 1994.

⁸⁶⁴ "Al-Asad, Clinton Discuss Christopher Tour," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, July 16, 1994; Robin Wright, "U.S. Optimistic Syria Will Join Peace Plan," *Los Angeles Times*, July 18, 1994, 7.

Washington would be close to Syria.⁸⁶⁵ As mentioned above, Christopher's diplomatic efforts in July was crucial as he told President Assad that the Rabin deposit accounted for withdrawal to the 4 June line. After Christopher's message, Syrian-Israeli negotiations resumed after a long break at ambassadors' level in Washington. While Muallem and Rabinovich were negotiating a peace document, Syria continued to hail the United States' efforts as a full partner to attain a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East as well as its appreciation of Syria's role and efforts in the peace talks.⁸⁶⁶

There were significant developments in the U.S.-Syrian relations in October 1994. In this month, both Secretary of State Christopher and President Clinton traveled to Syria. In mid-October 1994, Christopher visited Syria once again and had a four-hour meeting with President Assad. After the meeting, Christopher expressed his appreciation of the recent progress on the Syrian-Israeli peace track and seriousness on both sides to reach a comprehensive peace. Christopher also noted that President Assad explained Syria's strong support for the United States' military measures against Iraq to prevent it from repeating its 1990 invasion of Kuwait.⁸⁶⁷

Before going to Damascus, President Clinton held a news conference on 21 October 1994, at which he announced that there was progress on the Syrian-Israeli peace track and he wanted to see further progress. Clinton underlined the significance of the Syrian-Israeli peace agreement for comprehensive peace in the Middle East as follows:

“I will visit Syria because it is my judgment that the visit will further the goal of an ultimate peace agreement between Israel and Syria. And until that is done, we will never have comprehensive peace in the Middle East. There has been some progress in the negotiations, which are, as you know, candid and confidential between the two. I think there will be more progress. I want there to be more progress, and I think this visit will further it.”⁸⁶⁸

⁸⁶⁵ “Editorial View U.S. Role in Peace Talks,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, July 21, 1994.

⁸⁶⁶ “Paper View ‘Constructive U.S. Efforts’ for Peace,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, September 21, 1994.

⁸⁶⁷ Norman Kempster, “Christopher, in Damascus, Says Israel-Syria Pact Seems on Track,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 12, 1994, 4.

⁸⁶⁸ Bill Clinton, “The President’s News Conference, October 21, 1994,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of William J. Clinton, Book II* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1995), 1820.

President Clinton's decision to visit Damascus was a major step in the U.S.-Syrian relations. Despite bitter criticisms of some circles in Washington for his negligence of Syria's involvement in international terrorism, President Clinton did not step back and arrived in Damascus on 27 October 1994.⁸⁶⁹ The second Clinton-Assad meeting took place in Damascus only one day after the signing of the Jordanian-Israeli peace agreement. The summit was historic because President Clinton became the first president who visited Damascus after 20 years. The Syrian official press welcomed President Clinton's visit and underlined its contribution to improvement of the U.S.-Syrian bilateral relations.⁸⁷⁰

In his meeting with President Assad, Clinton underscored the significance of resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of Resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of land-for-peace. He also noted that peace must encapsulate security against surprise attack by any side. Despite the positive atmosphere, the philosophical divergences between Clinton and Assad surfaced in the meeting. Although Clinton said that Assad told him privately his condemnation against the current wave of terror attacks in Israel, Assad's unwillingness to decry these attacks at the press conference aroused suspicions about his intentions in Israel.⁸⁷¹

Clinton obviously did not want the terrorism issue to overshadow the peace talks. Before his visit, Clinton had already said that "*Terrorism is a serious issue, but I do not believe that we can permit it to keep us from pursuing a comprehensive peace.*"⁸⁷² That's why, he underlined the pivotal role of Syria in the Middle East peace process by stating at the news conference on 27 October 1994 that:

"A Syrian-Israeli agreement is key to achieving a comprehensive peace. Given Syria's important regional role, it will inevitably broaden the circle of Arab states willing to embrace peace, and it will build confidence throughout the area that peace will endure. My talks with President al-Asad are a sign of our mutual determination to achieve the peace of the brave, as quickly as possible. The United States will do everything possible to help make that a reality... I think the role of Syria in the security and stability of the region is absolutely critical. I don't think we can finish a

⁸⁶⁹ Robin Wright, "Clinton Takes Policy Gamble with Syria Visit," *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 1994, 1.

⁸⁷⁰ "Press Welcomes Clinton Visit to Damascus," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, October 26, 1994.

⁸⁷¹ Robert S. Greenberger, "Assad Shares Clinton Stage, But Says Little," *Wall Street Journal*, October 28, 1994, 18; Rabil, "The Ineffective Role of the US," 427; Christopher, *Chances of A Lifetime*, 223.

⁸⁷² Martin Walker, "Clinton Adds Syria to Itinerary in Hope of Securing Peace," *Guardian*, October 22, 1994, 13.

comprehensive peace or maintain peace in the region unless there is a peace between Syria and Israel.”⁸⁷³

President Assad once again reiterated Syria’s position at the press conference by stating that:

“I have reaffirmed to President Clinton the continued commitment of Syria to the peace process and her serious pursuit of a comprehensive and just peace as a strategic choice that secures Arab rights, ends the Israeli occupation of the Arab land in conformity with the Security Council Resolutions 242, 338 and 425.... I also stressed to President Clinton -emanating from the principle of full withdrawal for full peace-...the readiness of Syria to commit itself to the objective requirements of peace through the establishment of peaceful, normal relations with Israel in return for Israel’s full withdrawal from the Golan to the line of June 4, 1967, and from the south of Lebanon.”⁸⁷⁴

In his memoirs, President Clinton wrote his visit to Syria and meeting with President Assad as follows:

“I flew to Damascus, the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world, to see President Assad. No American President had been there in twenty years because of Syria’s support for terrorism and its domination of Lebanon. I wanted Assad to know that I was committed to a Syrian-Israeli peace based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338, and that, if an agreement were reached, I would work hard to improve relations with his country. I took some heat for going to Syria because of its support for Hezbollah and other violent anti-Israeli groups, but I knew there would never be security and stability in the region unless Syria and Israel were reconciled. My meeting with Assad produced no big breakthrough, but he did give me some encouraging hints about how we might move forward. It was clear that he wanted to make peace, but when I suggested that he ought to go to Israel, reach out to the Israeli citizens, and make his case in the Knesset as Anwar Sadat had done, I could tell that I was beating a dead horse. Assad was brilliant but literal-minded and extremely cautious. He enjoyed the security of his beautiful marble palace and his daily routine in Damascus, and he couldn’t imagine taking the political risk of flying to Tel Aviv. As soon as our meeting and the obligatory press conference were over, I flew to Israel to tell Rabin what I’d learned.”⁸⁷⁵

After his trip, Clinton explained his appreciation of Syria’s changing position in the peace talks as follows: “*Something is changing in Syria. Its leaders realize it is time to make peace.*”⁸⁷⁶ While Syria and Israel were on the way to the COS I and the COS II talks, the Syrian side welcomed efforts of the United States in the Syrian-Israeli peace track. Although Syrian

⁸⁷³ Bill Clinton, “President William Jefferson Clinton Statement Following Meeting with President Asad,” *William J. Clinton Presidential Library*, October 27, 1994, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/9099>; “Al-Asad, Clinton News Conference in Damascus,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Television Network in Arabic, October 27, 1994.

⁸⁷⁴ Rabil, *Syria, the United States, and the War on Terror*, 106.

⁸⁷⁵ Clinton, *My Life*, 626.

⁸⁷⁶ Pipes, *Syria Beyond the Peace Process*, 90.

officials told American ambassador that they were astonished when the Washington voted against a draft resolution on the Golan Heights at the UN General Assembly in December 1994,⁸⁷⁷ Syria did not use it as a pretext to quit the peace talks. What's more, the United States' role in the resumption of talks was continuously praised in the official Syrian media. For example, *Tishreen* wrote that "*The United States has played an important role in the resumption of Syrian-Israeli peace talks after a six-month hiatus. The U.S. Administration's assertions about the importance of Syria and about advancing the Syrian and Lebanese tracks have invigorated the climate of peace in the region.*"⁸⁷⁸

During the COS talks, the U.S.-Syrian dialog continued apace. When Muallem was asked a question about the role of Americans in the peace process, he replied by pointing to their constructive role during the COS talks. Muallem said that:

"They were facilitators, witnesses. You could consider them moderators, brokers, even partners because they made proposals to bridge gaps. For instance, when the Syrian and Israeli chiefs of staff broke off their talks in December 1994 because we were not satisfied with [Israeli chief of staff Ehud] Barak's offer, it was the Americans who drafted and pushed forward a paper called "Aims and Principles of Security Arrangements," which enabled us to resume talks in June 1995."⁸⁷⁹

After the failure of the COS I talks, Secretary of State Christopher along with Dennis Ross went to Syria in March 1995 to prod President Assad into resuming the direct negotiations. The Assad-Christopher meeting took place on 13-14 March 1995, in which Christopher conveyed President Clinton's message as to the significance of continuing peace talks to President Assad. In the meeting, Assads and Christopher discussed the obstacles and difficulties in front of progress on the Syrian-Israeli track as well as security arrangements which would be implemented if Israel withdrew from the Golan Heights.⁸⁸⁰ In the meeting, Christopher once again underlined the United States' commitment to the Middle East peace process. Assad and Christopher agreed the resumption of the talks in Washington at

⁸⁷⁷ "Damascus Reacts to U.S. Stand on Golan," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, December 17, 1994.

⁸⁷⁸ "Paper: Resumption of Talks 'Good Step Forward'," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, December 18, 1994.

⁸⁷⁹ Moualem, "Fresh Lights on the Syrian-Israeli Peace Negotiations," 83.

⁸⁸⁰ "Al-Asad Receives Delegation," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Television Network in Arabic, March 13, 1995; "Christopher Begins Talks About Golan with Assad," *New York Times*, March 14, 1995, 8.

ambassadors' level with the participation and under the auspices of the United States. Christopher also said that Ross would be sent to the region to advance the peace process.⁸⁸¹

In the post-COS I period, the Clinton administration did not cease its efforts to reinvigorate the Syrian-Israeli peace track. On 15 May 1995, President Clinton and Secretary of State Christopher met with Foreign Minister Sharaa in Washington. In the meeting, Clinton urged Sharaa to narrow the gap between Syria and Israel on the security arrangements. Syria's concession to discuss the future security arrangements on the Golan Heights favorable to Israel's principles paved the way for the COS II talks. American and Israeli officials hailed Syria's decision to give up its demand for equal security arrangements on the Golan Heights to resuscitate the Syrian-Israeli talks.⁸⁸² In this milieu, Christopher traveled to Syria and had a three-hour meeting with President Assad on 11 June 1995.⁸⁸³ Christopher defined his meeting with Assad "very productive" and announced the resumption of the stalled military talks in Washington in 27 June 1995. He hailed the resumption of the military talks as follows: "*The agreement that we have reached on this rather detailed and ambitious work plan confirms the determination of parties to seek an early peace.*"⁸⁸⁴ Syrian official newspaper *al-Thawra* described Christopher's visit as exceptionally important and underlined that Syria was ready to cooperate with the United States to make progress towards attaining a real start in the peace talks.⁸⁸⁵ Next day, State Department Spokesperson Nicholas Burns spoke to the BBC radio about the Christopher-Assad meeting. He said that Secretary of State Christopher was satisfied with his meeting with President Assad and the upcoming meeting of the military officials under the supervision of the United States in late June 1995.⁸⁸⁶

⁸⁸¹ Elaine Sciolino, "Christopher Persuades Syria and Israel to Resume Direct Talks," *New York Times*, March 15, 1995, 9; "Al-Asad, Christopher Resume Talks," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Television Network in Arabic, March 13, 1995; "Christopher: Syria-Israel Talks to Resume," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Television Network in Arabic, March 13, 1995.

⁸⁸² Steven Greenhouse, "Damascus Making A Big Concession in Talks on Golan," *New York Times*, May 25, 1995, 1.

⁸⁸³ "Radio Cites Ross on Progress Along Syrian Track," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, June 10, 1995.

⁸⁸⁴ Serge Schmemmann, "Christopher and Assad Reaffirm Syrian-Israeli Military Talks," *New York Times*, June 11, 1995, 6.

⁸⁸⁵ Christopher Walker, "Christopher Tour Spurs Hopes of Syrian Deal," *Times*, June 9, 1995, 12.

⁸⁸⁶ "Radio Cites U.S. Remarks on Meeting," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, June 11, 1995.

Although the Clinton administration exerted pressure on Syria to stop harboring anti-radical Palestinian groups in Damascus and supporting Hezbollah,⁸⁸⁷ its efforts to play the broker role in the wake of the COS I-II talks were welcomed by Syria. Sharaa went to Washington on 5 October 1995 to discuss how to end the stalemate in the Syrian-Israeli peace track after the failure of the COS talks. Following his meeting with Christopher, Sharaa spoke to reporters about the resumption of the talks and explained the significance of the broker role of the United States for the resumption of the Syrian-Israeli talks. Sharaa said that the United States promised to be an honest and active broker in the peace talks. The peace process started as an American initiative and the Madrid Peace Conference was convened thanks to this initiative. He underlined his belief that the United States would not abandon its commitment and guarantees to Syria.⁸⁸⁸ While Sharaa was in Washington, Prime Minister Rabin's remarks at the Knesset about his opposition to full withdrawal from the 4 June line and about irreversibility of the annexation of Jerusalem were interpreted as Israel's defiance of the United States' role as a full partner and honest broker in the peace talks by the Syrian media.⁸⁸⁹

President Assad also commented on the role of the United States in the peace talks after meeting with President Mubarak in Damascus on 10 October 1995. In response to a question, Assad said that the United States was the cosponsor of the peace talks and the mediator between the Arab side and Israel. Assad also underlined that Syria was satisfied with the efforts of the United States despite the lack of progress on the talks so far.⁸⁹⁰

Secretary of State Christopher went to Syria to discuss the future of the peace talks in October 1995. President Assad received Christopher at the People's Palace on 30 October 1995. Special Middle East Coordinator Dennis Ross, U.S. Ambassador to Syria Christopher Ross and Special Assistant to the U.S. President for Middle East Affairs Mark Parris were also present at the meeting. In the meeting, Assad reiterated Syria's commitment to the peace talks. Christopher also explained the Clinton administration's determination to maintain contacts

⁸⁸⁷ William Claiborne, "U.S. Presses Syria to Help Curb Violence," *Washington Post*, August 8, 1995, 10; Thomas W. Lippman, "U.S. Tells Syria It Will Be Held Responsible for Palestinian Terrorist Threat," *Washington Post*, August 30, 1995, 24.

⁸⁸⁸ "Says U.S. Talks 'Good, Constructive'," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, October 6, 1995.

⁸⁸⁹ "U.S. Role in Process Viewed, Criticized," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, October 9, 1995.

⁸⁹⁰ "News Conference Reported," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Television Network in Arabic, October 10, 1995.

with the parties to make progress on the peace talks.⁸⁹¹ On the other hand, during the meeting Christopher hinted that the Clinton administration was frustrated with Syria's time-consuming negotiation style, which surprised President Assad.⁸⁹²

After Rabin's assassination in November 1995, President Clinton sought to keep the Syrian-Israeli peace track intact. In this period, there were intensive diplomatic contacts between Syria and the United States. On 5 December 1995, an American delegation led by Dennis Ross went to Syria and to discuss the current state of the peace talks with President Assad.⁸⁹³ While President Clinton was meeting with Shimon Peres in Washington on 11 December 1995, he called President Assad on the telephone in a lunch break. In the conversation, Clinton assured Assad of the United States' concern about and commitment to the Middle East Peace process. He also said that Secretary of State Christopher would visit Syria to inform the Syrian side about the efforts of the United States to accelerate peace momentum as well as the talks between the American officials and Peres. Assad reciprocated Clinton by underlining his commitment to make progress on the peace talks and to reach an early agreement with Israel.⁸⁹⁴

Syria welcomed the United States' efforts to advance the peace process after Rabin's assassination. In this period, Syria's acceptance of the United States' mediator role could be observed in the Syrian official media channels. After Clinton's call, one of the media commentaries stated that "*The United States can accelerate the peace process, given that it is the sponsor, has international clout, and has pledged to play the role of a full, honest and fair partner. Syria demands nothing beyond its land and the implementation of Security Council resolutions and the land-for-peace principle.*"⁸⁹⁵ In mid-December 1995, Christopher went to Damascus and held almost a four-hour meeting with President Assad on 15 December 1995 to end the deadlock in the Syrian-Israeli peace track. After the meeting Christopher reported substantial progress and said that there was a different mood in Damascus to engage in the

⁸⁹¹ "Secretary of State Christopher's Visit Continues, further on al-Asad Meeting," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Television Network in Arabic, March 13, 1995.

⁸⁹² Christopher, *Chances of A Lifetime*, 224.

⁸⁹³ "Al-Asad Receives Ross, Stresses Adherence to Peace," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Television Network in Arabic, December 5, 1995.

⁸⁹⁴ Serge Schmemmann, "Clinton and Peres Reaffirm Desire for Broad Peace in Mideast," *New York Times*, December 12, 1995, 12; "Al-Asad Receives President Clinton's Phone Call," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, December 11, 1995.

⁸⁹⁵ "Radio: al-Asad-Clinton Contact 'Revitalized' Hopes," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, December 12, 1995.

peace talks with Israel.⁸⁹⁶ On 20 December 1995, Christopher announced that the Syrian-Israeli negotiations would restart at the Wye Plantation on 27 December 1995. While elaborating on the Middle East peace process, Christopher reiterated that “*The circle of peace will not be complete until Israel has peace with Syria and Lebanon.*”⁸⁹⁷

The Clinton administration’s diplomatic efforts culminated in the Wye Plantation talks in late December 1995 and early 1996. After the start of the talks, Syria strongly urged the sponsorship and active participation of the Clinton administration at the Wye Plantation talks.⁸⁹⁸ For example, *al-Ba’th* newspaper’s editorial called on the United States to play an active role in the peace process, which should exceed the mission of mailman between the parties.⁸⁹⁹ Owing to Syria’s demand, a four-member American team led by Dennis Ross participated in the Syrian-Israeli negotiations as “full partner.” Ross met with each delegation separately to prepare the talks.⁹⁰⁰ After the first round of the Wye Plantation talks, Christopher delivered a speech at Harvard University on 19 January 1996, in which said that successful achievement of a deal in the Syrian track was a key to comprehensive peace in the region.⁹⁰¹ Official Syrian newspapers *al-Bat’h* and *Tishreen* appreciated Christopher’s remarks as a sign of seriousness on the side of the United States to recognize Syria’s pivotal role in the peace process and to help achievement of comprehensive peace in the region.⁹⁰² The United States’ direct participation as a full partner and honest broker in the Wye Plantation talks was welcomed by Syria to advance the peace process.⁹⁰³

⁸⁹⁶ Serge Schmemmann, “Christopher Meets Syrian and Sees Progress on Israel Talks,” *New York Times*, December 16, 1995; Robin Wright, “Christopher Is Upbeat After Syrian Meeting,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 16, 1995, 29.

⁸⁹⁷ Christopher S. Wren, “Israel and Syria Agree to Renew Peace Talks, Secluded in Maryland under U.S. Auspices,” *New York Times*, December 21, 1995, 12.

⁸⁹⁸ Steven Erlanger, “Israel and Syria Upbeat as Early Talks Close,” *New York Times*, January 6, 1996, 5.

⁸⁹⁹ “Press on U.S. Role, Christopher’s ‘Decisive’ Tour,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, January 11, 1996.

⁹⁰⁰ Cobban, *The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks*, 129-130; Christopher S. Wren, “Israel and Syria Gingerly Reopen Peace Talks,” *New York Times*, December 28, 1995, 14.

⁹⁰¹ “Syrian Press: Christopher’s Remarks Show U.S. Wants ‘Real Peace’,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syria Times in English, January 27, 1996.

⁹⁰² “Syrian Papers Welcome Christopher Remarks, Urge ‘In-Depth’ Talks,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, January 21, 1996.

⁹⁰³ “Syrian Commentary Emphasizes Importance of U.S. Participation in Talks,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, January 22, 1996.

Secretary of State Christopher personally joined the second round of talks on 25 January 1996. He reiterated that the United States was committed to achieve a peace agreement between Syria and Israel. Christopher also urged both Syrian and Israeli delegations to make more efforts to reach a compromise.⁹⁰⁴ There was an optimism in Syria about rapid progress at the Wye Plantation talks owing to the United States' determination to perform the role of honest broker and full partner actively. Secretary of State Christopher's direct participation in the negotiations was interpreted as a sign of seriousness of the United States.⁹⁰⁵

After the end of the second round of talks at Wye Plantation on 31 January 1996, Secretary of Christopher visited Syria on 6 February 1996 with a delegation composed of Dennis Ross, Michael Ross and Mark Parris. Christopher held a meeting with President Assad for three and a half hours and gave him a letter from President Clinton in which he underlined the United States' adherence to the peace process and his personal observation of the Syrian-Israeli track to help parties reach a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. In his meetings with President Assad and Foreign Minister Sharaa, Christopher underscored the recent progress at the Wye Plantation and the need for its continuation. Christopher also explained his appreciation of bridging the gap between the parties and reiterated the United States' willingness to play honest broker role to achieve a comprehensive peace in 1996.⁹⁰⁶

When President Assad declined to attend the Terrorism Summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt in March 1996 after a series of suicide attacks in Israel, the U.S.-Syrian relations strained. President Clinton expressed his disappointment about Syria's decision to boycott the summit. The Congress reacted harshly as it regarded Syria's non-cooperation on terrorism issue as an unacceptable mistake. In a hearing before the House Committee on International Relations it was questioned whether Syria was a partner in the peace process or a rogue regime. The Chairman of the House Committee on International Relations Benjamin Gilman lambasted the Clinton administration for turning a blind eye to Syria's subversive activities such as drug trafficking and terrorism in order to keep the Syrian-Israeli peace track intact. He also pointed to Syria's collaboration with Iran, its quest for acquiring unconventional weapons and its close

⁹⁰⁴ "Damascus Radio Cites U.S. State Department on Maryland Talks," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, January 27, 1996.

⁹⁰⁵ "Syrian Media on Maryland Talks, U.S. Participation," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, January 26, 1996.

⁹⁰⁶ Warren Christopher, "Secretary Christopher's Press Briefing After Meeting With Syrian President Assad," *U.S. Department of State Archive*, February 6, 1996, https://1997-2001.state.gov/regions/nea/feb6_briefing_syria.html; "Christopher Says Syrian-Israeli Talks to Resume," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, February 6, 1996.

relations with the terrorist organizations. The anti-Syrian campaign in Washington dampened Syria's hopes for forging good relations with the United States and reduced the possibility of American financial or military rewards in case of a Syrian-Israeli peace deal. Although anti-Syrian campaign did not halt the Syrian-Israeli peace track, it engendered many obstacles. After the defeat of Shimon Peres and the election of Benjamin Netanyahu in May 1996, the anti-Syrian campaign did not lose momentum. The Congress enacted several resolutions to punish Syria and to curb the Clinton administration's relations with Damascus. To illustrate, the House of Representatives passed a resolution in 1998, which prohibited direct (credits, direct loans, insurance and guarantees of the Export-Import Bank or its agents) or indirect funding for certain countries including Syria. Despite anti-Syrian posture of the Congress, the Clinton administration continued to consider Syria as a partner in peace process and sought to improve bilateral relations after the Wye Plantation talks.⁹⁰⁷

Israel's Operation Grapes of Wrath against Hezbollah in south Lebanon on 11-27 April 1996 was another blow to the peace process. The Peres government was severely criticized by the Arab countries and the international community for its aggression against Lebanon. President Assad considered Operation Grapes of Wrath as a message to Syria. According to him, the operation was carried out to undermine Syria's influence in the Middle East and Lebanon. The Clinton administration's backing and green light to the operation was a shock to Syria as its relationship with the United States was cordial until 1996. As President Clinton demonstrated personal interest to the Syrian-Israeli, Assad sincerely thought that President Clinton was committed to a comprehensive peace in the Middle East on the basis of UN Resolutions 242 and 338 after the Geneva and Damascus summits. Yet, the Clinton administration's attitude during Operation Grapes of Wrath was totally unacceptable to Assad.⁹⁰⁸ When Secretary of State Christopher made an unscheduled visit to Damascus on 23 April 1996 to discuss the crisis with Syrian officials, President Assad snubbed Christopher by declining to receive him. It was an indication that Syria was not willing to be a part of an agreement backed by the Clinton administration.⁹⁰⁹

⁹⁰⁷ Rabil, "The Ineffective Role of the US," 429-434.

⁹⁰⁸ Nejad, "The Ineffective Role of the United States," 55; "Syria: Radio Criticizes U.S. 'Green Light,' 'Total Blas' Toward Israel," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, April 16, 1996; "Syria: Radio-Christopher's Task 'Difficult,' Visit 'Too Late'," *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, April 19, 1996.

⁹⁰⁹ "Syria: Al-Asad Reportedly 'Not Prepared' to Meet Christopher," *FBIS*, Cairo MENA in Arabic, April 23, 1996; "Syria: Christopher Departs 'Without Meeting' al-Asad," *FBIS*, Paris Radio Monte Carlo in Arabic, April 23, 1996; William Drozdiak, "Assad Snubs Christopher, Refuses to Meet on Truce," *Washington Post*, April 24, 1996, 1

Operation Grapes of Wrath had certain implications on the U.S.-Syrian-Israeli triangle. The Clinton administration lost its confidence and credibility to play the honest broker role in the peace process. Syria called on the Clinton administration to regain confidence of Syria to make progress on the peace talks.⁹¹⁰ Operation Grapes of Wrath proved Syria's influence to maintain tranquility and peace in Lebanon. The Clinton administration performed the NRC of regional stabilizer to settle the conflict and recognized Syria's pivotal and stabilizing role in Lebanon to achieve a ceasefire. After Christopher's intensive mediation between Syria and Israel, a ceasefire agreement was reached between the warring parties. Thanks to Syria's contribution to ceasefire, the Clinton administration accepted Syria's membership in the ceasefire monitoring mechanism along with the United States, France, Israel, and Lebanon.⁹¹¹

As mentioned above, the Syrian-Israeli track entered in a standstill after Netanyahu-led Likud's ascent to power in May 1996. On 1 June 1996, President Clinton sent a letter to President Assad, in which he underlined that the United States was still committed to the objective of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.⁹¹² In this period, Syria held the Netanyahu government responsible for threatening and undermining the bases of peace process instead of the United States.⁹¹³ During the Netanyahu interregnum, the Clinton administration continued to view Syria as a strategically important country for a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. In an interview with the NBC TV on 26 January 1997, new Secretary of State Madeleine Albright commented on the United States' role in the Syrian-Israeli track as follows:

“Let me say that I think it continues to be a high priority of President Clinton and, obviously, then of me, to make sure that we get a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. We have made great strides recently with the Hebron agreement. There is a dynamism in the Palestinian-Israeli track. Getting the Syrian-Israeli track back moving is also important. We want to be involved in working out a formula to make that happen. It is important for us to make sure that this moves forward, but we cannot be more serious about having that track move forward than the parties themselves. I will be involving myself very heavily in the Middle East. My travel plans will depend upon whether it is right for me to go there. I will be involved in every aspect of the

⁹¹⁰ “Syria: Press-‘New’ U.S. Stand to Have ‘Negative Effects’ on Peace,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Republic Radio Network in Arabic, May 3, 1996; “Syria: U.S. Urged to Change Stands to Regain Arabs’ Confidence,” *FBIS*, Damascus SANA in Arabic, May 11, 1996.

⁹¹¹ “Syria: al-Asad Receives Clinton Letter on Commitment to Peace,” *FBIS*, Damascus Syrian Arab Television Network in Arabic, June 1, 1996.

⁹¹² “Lebanon: ‘Grapes of Wrath’ Seen as End to ‘U.S. Monopoly’ in Middle East,” *FBIS*, London Al-Sharq al-Awsat in Arabic, April 28, 1996.

⁹¹³ “Syria: Information Minister Says Netanyahu, Not U.S., Threatening Peace,” *FBIS*, Paris Radio Monte Carlo in Arabic, July 15, 1996.

whole Middle East question. It is highly important to us that there be a comprehensive peace.”⁹¹⁴

The Clinton administration made efforts to resuscitate the Syrian-Israeli peace track with the defeat of Netanyahu-led Likud by Barak-led Labor in the May 1999 elections. Given the Barak’s eagerness for fresh peace talks, the Clinton administration assumed responsibility to put the Syrian-Israeli negotiations on track. Barak informed President Clinton that he was ready to hand over the Golan Heights to Syria if Israel’s security concerns about early-warning station on the Golan and water supplies of Lake Tiberias were satisfied.⁹¹⁵ Clinton sent a letter to President Assad, in which he encouraged Assad not to miss the opportunity of fresh peace talks with the Barak government. Clinton wrote the letter event in his memoirs as follows:

“Assad’s frailty and a stroke suffered by Foreign Minister Shara in the fall of 1999 heightened Barak’s sense of urgency. At his request, I sent Assad a letter saying I thought Barak was willing to make a deal if we could resolve the definition of the border, the control of water, and the early-warning post, and that if they did reach agreement, the United States would be prepared to establish bilateral relations with Syria, a move Barak had urged. That was a big step for us, given Syria’s past support of terrorism. Of course, Assad would have to stop supporting terrorism in order to achieve normal relations with the U.S., but if he had the Golan back, the incentive to support the Hezbollah terrorists who attacked Israel from Lebanon would evaporate.”⁹¹⁶

From mid-July 1999 to December 1999, the Clinton administration worked around the clock to restart the Syrian-Israeli negotiations. When Syria demanded start of the talks where they had interrupted in March 1996, the Barak government insisted on the resumption of the peace talks without preconditions. The Clinton administration initially adopted a posture close to that of the Barak government. It was not positive to Syria’s demand as a senior State Department official (probably Dennis Ross) said that “*Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, and there were no agreements in this area*” on 3 November 1999. After this statement, the State Department spokesman James Rubin commented on the role of the United States in the Syrian-Israeli peace talks on 5 November 1999 as follows: “*The United States only conveys, from one party to another, what we are authorized to convey. We don’t commit further than we’re authorized to commit; we don’t commit less than we’re authorized.*”⁹¹⁷

⁹¹⁴ Madeleine Albright, “Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright – Interview on NBC TV Meet the Press,” *U.S. Department of State Archive*, January 26, 1997, <https://1997-2001.state.gov/statements/970126.html>.

⁹¹⁵ Clinton, *My Life*, 883.

⁹¹⁶ *Ibid.* 884.

⁹¹⁷ Seale, “The Syria-Israel Negotiations,” 66.

After President Clinton's meeting with Prime Minister Barak, NSA Samuel Berger elaborated on the current efforts of the United States on 17 November by saying that:

"The President had a good meeting with Prime Minister Barak... They spoke about both tracks of the peace process, both the Palestinian track and the Syrian track. Once again, I was impressed by the determination and seriousness of purpose of the Prime Minister.... On the Syrian track, we continue to try to resume negotiations between the Syrians and the Israelis. We are in contact, obviously, with the Israelis, but also with the Syrians, and will continue to do so to find an avenue to get negotiations re-initiated between the two."⁹¹⁸

As mentioned above, senior American officials including Secretary of State Albright mediated between Barak and Assad in late 1999 to restart the negotiations. Given Assad's positive posture, President Clinton announced on 8 December 1999 that the talks would start where they had stopped in March 1996. Assad also declared resumption of the talks and sent Sharaa to negotiate with Barak in Washington in mid-December 1999. After the Sharaa-Barak negotiations in mid-December, Syrian and Israeli delegations held new round of talks in Shepherdstown, West Virginia on 3-10 January 2000. Following the start of Shepherdstown negotiations, President Clinton made a statement on the South Lawn of the White House on 6 January 2000. In response to a question about his satisfaction with the negotiations, Clinton said that: "*This is difficult stuff. This is very hard. But let me say, they're working hard, and they're trying to find ways to resolve their differences. And they're trying to imagine the end of the road here. It's a difficult, difficult set of negotiations, but we're working in a steady way, and I'm satisfied that everybody is working in good faith.*"⁹¹⁹

NSA Berger also noted the significance of the resumption of the negotiations between Israel and Syria. Yet, he made cautious remarks about the success of the talks on 7 January 2000 and underlined the responsibility of the parties by stating that:

"If you are hoping for an up-to-the-minute update on the Israeli-Syrian talks underway again this week in Shepherdstown, I will disappoint you by citing an old adage: When making peace in the Middle East, say nothing at all and you'll get misquoted only half the time. I will say that for the first time in several years, the parties Israel, Syria and the Palestinians -- have a common goal in sight, and the common sense to see that

⁹¹⁸ Samuel Berger, "Press Briefing by National Security Advisor Samuel Berger," *The White House Archives*, November 17, 1999, <https://clintonwhitehouse4.archives.gov/textonly/WH/New/Europe-9911/briefings/1999-11-17c.html>.

⁹¹⁹ Bill Clinton, "Remarks on the National Plan for Information Systems Protection and an Exchange with Reporters, January 7, 2000," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of William J. Clinton, Book I* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2001), 14.

they have a historic opportunity to achieve it now. The President and Secretary Albright will spare neither time nor effort to help them succeed.”⁹²⁰

Shepherdstown negotiation failed owing to Barak’s unwillingness to make territorial concessions. According to Albright, the United States along with Syria expected Barak’s fulfillment of the Rabin deposit at the Shepherdstown. She said that “*The Syrians had agreed to begin talks with only an indirect commitment from Barak on this point but had expected something explicit as soon as talks began. We had expected it too. Instead, Barak backed away.*” While the Shepherdstown talks were edging towards its end, Albright even shout at Barak: “*You humiliated us, you humiliated our President. You wasted our time. The President of the United States and all his staff sat here hour after hour and you said nothing. What are we going to say to Asad? Only you will be responsible if these negotiations become ruined.*”⁹²¹

Although the Clinton administration blamed the Barak government for the failure of the Shepherdstown talks, it did not press Israel to soften its position in the Syrian track. On the contrary, President Clinton conveyed Barak’s offer to President Assad as a reasonable solution on the Golan Heights in the Geneva meeting in March 2000. As explained above, the Geneva meeting turned out to be the last nail into the coffin of the Syrian-Israeli peace track as President Clinton’s pro-Israeli offer destroyed the United States’ honest broker role. Despite his cooperative attitude toward the Clinton administration in the peace talks throughout the 1990s, President Assad totally lost his confidence to the Clinton administration in the Geneva meeting. Farouk al-Sharaa gave an interview to Lebanese *al-Safir* after the Geneva summit and explained Syria’s disappointment by saying that President Clinton only pushed for Barak’s demands to strengthen his domestic position and expected flexibility and compromise from President Assad at the Geneva meeting. Sharaa also said that “*Assad answered the U.S. request saying Syria has not given up any of its rights in the past and would not be ready to do so tomorrow.*”⁹²²

On 29 March 2000, President Clinton also described the Geneva meeting as total failure and told reporters his disappointment with President Assad’s attitude by stating that:

⁹²⁰ Samuel Berger, “Remarks by Samuel R. Berger Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs to the National Press Club,” *The White House Archives*, January 7, 2000, <https://clintonwhitehouse4.archives.gov/WH/New/html/leadership.html>.

⁹²¹ Pressman, “Mediation, Domestic Politics, and the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations,” 370.

⁹²² Charles Babington and Howard Schneider, “U.S. Moves to Force Syria’s Hand,” *Washington Post*, March 28, 2000, 16.

“If we’re going to have a negotiation, I don’t think it’s enough to say, I don’t like your position, come back and see me when I like your position. I understand how strongly he feels about it. But if he disagrees with their territorial proposal, which is quite significant, then there should be some other proposal, I think, coming from the Syrians about how their concerns could be handled.”⁹²³

Ten weeks after the Geneva meeting, President Assad passed away on 10 June 2000. Secretary of State Albright went to Damascus to attend Assad’s funeral and welcomed Bashar al-Assad’s accession to power.⁹²⁴ Although President Clinton could not achieve peace between Syria and Israel, he mentions his feelings about Assad and his seriousness about peace in his memoirs as follows:

“Although we had our disagreements, he had always been straightforward with me, and I had believed him when he said he had made a strategic choice for peace. Circumstances, miscommunication, and psychological barriers had kept it from happening, but at least we now knew what it would take for Israel and Syria to get there once both sides were ready.”⁹²⁵

To sum up, despite ultimate failure of the Syrian-Israeli track, the U.S.-Syrian relations were marked by accommodation and cooperation under the Clinton administration. After entering the White House, President Clinton demonstrated Syria’s importance in the Middle East process by adopting the “Syria first” approach. The Clinton administration’s strategic approach to the resolution of the Syrian-Israeli conundrum seemed at first close to Syria’s term as it underlined the necessity of achieving a settlement on the basis of Resolutions 242 and 338. The Clinton administration also publicly announced that Syria was a key to comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Secretary of Christopher’s countless visits to Syria were signs of the Clinton administration’s determination to reach a *modus vivendi* with Syria and to embrace Syria as partner in the peace process. Like the Bush administration, the Clinton administration also underscored Syria’s key role in stability of the Middle East by understating the issue of terrorism for the sake of the Middle East peace process. The Clinton administration used an ambiguous language about Syria’s finger in international terrorism, which was indication of its complex stance towards Syria.⁹²⁶

⁹²³ Jim Hoagland, “A Signal From Syria?,” *Washington Post*, April 9, 2000, 7.

⁹²⁴ Raymond Hinnebusch, “Syrian Foreign Policy under Bashar al-Asad,” *Ortadoğu Etütleri* 1, No. 1 (July 2009): 15.

⁹²⁵ Clinton, *My Life*, 909-910.

⁹²⁶ Rabil, “The Ineffective Role of the US,” 427-428.

To illustrate, in the State Department's 1994 Annual Report on Terrorism, Syria's involvement in terrorist activities was explained in an ambivalent way. In the report, it was stated that:

“There is no evidence that Syrian officials have been directly involved in planning or executing terrorist attacks since 1986. Damascus is publicly committed to the Middle East peace process and has taken some steps to restrain the international activities of these groups... However, Syria continues to provide safe haven and support for several groups that engage in international terrorism... In addition, Damascus grants a wide variety of groups engaged in terrorism basing privileges or refuge in areas of Lebanon's Bekaa Valley under Syrian control.”⁹²⁷

In the State Department's 1995 report, it was underlined that “*Syria continues to use its influence to moderate Hizbollah and Palestinian rejectionist groups... It has, however, allowed Iran to resupply Hizbollah via Damascus.*” The content of the State Department's 1996 and 1997 reports on terrorism regarding Syria's involvement were encapsulating the same message and intent with slight variations. The terrorism reports issued during the Clinton administration founded Syria innocent of terrorism charges but also charged Syria with helping it. According to Rabil, the Clinton administration deliberately inserted this paradoxical language into the terrorism reports since this vague position would enable the administration to remove Syria from the terrorism list when it decided to do so. This implied that the Clinton administration would remove Syria from the list in exchange for Syria's concessions in the peace talks. In such a situation, the United States could capitalize on Syria's key role to maintain regional stability, to broaden the peacemaking efforts, to curb fundamentalist activities and to control terrorism in the region.⁹²⁸

The Clinton administration also made several gestures to Syria owing to its pivotal position in the Middle East peace process throughout his presidency from 1993 to 2001. To illustrate, Clinton removed unofficially some economic sanctions on Syria in December 1993 to encourage the Syrian-Israeli negotiations. He postponed issuing the terrorism report of 1994 due to Secretary of State Warren's ongoing Middle East trip as the report could possibly strain the U.S.-Syrian relations. These gestures were also supplemented by additional aids. For example, Syria was granted with Fulbright exchange awards covering education of Syrians in the United States and funds for Syrian professionals and government officials to visit the

⁹²⁷ Rabil, *Syria, the United States, and the War on Terror*, 101.

⁹²⁸ Rabil, “The Ineffective Role of the US,” 428.

United States. The Clinton administration also deemed Syria's acquisition of ballistic missiles for defensive purposes.⁹²⁹

How can we explain U.S. foreign policy towards Syria under the Clinton in terms of role theory? As explained above, the United States as the world's sole hegemon in the post-Cold War era performed the NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst in the Syrian-Israeli peace track under the Clinton administration. In this respect, President Clinton and senior American officials explained the United States' role as full partner and honest broker between Damascus and Tel Aviv to achieve a just, genuine, and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. President Clinton believed that it was the responsibility of the United States to resolve decades-long Arab-Israeli conundrum peacefully. According to Clinton, Syria was a key to a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. He also believed that there was no incongruence between Washington and Damascus in terms of peace as Syria sought peaceful resolution of the conflict by adopting peace as a strategic option. Although Syria sometimes pushed the Clinton administration to perform its role effectively, it usually seemed content with the NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst performed by the Clinton administration in the Syrian-Israeli peace track. So, the U.S.-Syrian relations under the Clinton administration were characterized by cooperation and accommodation because Syria did not challenge the NRCs of the United States in the Middle East peace process.

Efficiency of the United States' full partnership and honest broker role in the Syrian-Israeli peace talks has been a matter of discussion among the scholars. Rabil, Nejad and Pressman argue that the United States did not use all means at its disposal to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. Especially Pressman says that the United States as a biased mediator did not use its leverage over Israel to force it to sign a peace agreement with Syria. In hindsight, the Clinton administration can be criticized for not exerting enough pressure on Israel to make it abide by the principles of Madrid Peace Conference and the UN resolutions. Yet, the Clinton administration obviously performed NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst by making significant efforts to achieve a comprehensive peace in the Middle East, which can be observed in diplomatic initiatives of senior American officials (especially Christopher and Ross) and several U.S.-sponsored peace talks between Syria and Israel in Washington from 1993 to 2001.

More importantly, it was evident that Syria did not question the role of the United States in the Syrian-Israeli peace track throughout the 1990s and even demanded the Clinton administration's involvement in the peace talks to reach an agreement with Israel. It can be

⁹²⁹ Pipes, *Syria Beyond the Peace Process*, 96-97.

argued that President Assad continued his policy of readjustment to the U.S.-led international order under the Clinton administration. In the absence of the Soviet Union, Assad embraced the peace process to establish peaceful relations between Washington and Damascus. He also wanted the negotiations to be conducted in Washington under the aegis of American officials to reap economic benefits of his cooperation with the Clinton administration. So, Syria obviously acknowledged the United States as an essential actor in the Syrian-Israeli peace track. Israel also observed Syria's changing perception of the role of the United States as well. Israeli diplomat Joel Singer explained Syria's attitude towards the presence of American officials in the peace talks by stating that "*I realized that the Syrians always wanted to have Americans at the meetings...*"⁹³⁰

Martha Neff Kessler, who was a CIA officer and a liaison with the American negotiators throughout the Madrid peace process, elaborated on Syria's appreciation of the mediator role of the United States and underlying factors in the peace talks as follows:

"The Syrians have, indeed, rebuffed all attempts by Israel to shrink down to a bilateral negotiation between Syria and Israel what have been three-way talks that at Syria's insistence always include the United States. Damascus clearly sees Washington not just as guarantor of a peace treaty but as witness and judge of the regular, almost daily work of negotiations. Distrust of Tel Aviv drives Damascus' attitude toward the U.S. role, and so does Syria's alarm over the "poor" terms of the agreements negotiated by Palestinian and Jordanian leaders in one-on-one secret talks when the United States was not directly involved...

Asad and his colleagues see the special relationship between the United States and Israel as a positive factor that can help stabilize what Syrians see as a seriously divided and undisciplined Israeli political culture. In the years while Syrian-Israeli talks were in abeyance, Netanyahu's resistance to implementing agreements with the Palestinians already signed by Labor governments has almost certainly reinforced this view of Israel and the necessity of a broad U.S. role."⁹³¹

Syria's Ambassador to the U.S. and Chief Negotiator Walid al-Muallem also expressed Syria's perception of the role of the United States as honest broker and full partner in an interview in 1997 as follows: "*This is difficult to answer. Of course you cannot compare the Americans' relations with Syria with their relations with Israel, but at least we are satisfied with their role.*"⁹³²

⁹³⁰ Cobban, *The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks*, 131.

⁹³¹ Martha Neff Kessler, "Syria, Israel and the Middle East Peace Process: Past Success and Final Challenges," *Middle East Policy* 7, No. 2 (2000): 87.

⁹³² Moualem, "Fresh Lights on the Syrian-Israeli Peace Negotiations," 91.

In this context, it can be put forward that the alter ego aspect of the United States' NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst during the peace process was influenced by Syria's expectations from the Clinton administration. President Assad's decision to go to Geneva to meet with President Clinton ten weeks before his death was clear indication of Syria's acceptance of broker role of the Clinton administration in the peace process. Although senior Syrian officials sometimes criticized the Clinton administration for not performing its full partner and honest broker role effectively, these were mostly tactical maneuvers to push Washington to exert pressure on Tel Aviv. Both Syrian official media outlets and senior Syrian officials hailed the United States' involvement to put an end to Israel's evasion of UN resolutions and the land-for-peace formula in the Syrian-Israeli track. They also did not refrain from expressing that the U.S.-Syrian cooperation in the peace process would bring just and comprehensive to the Middle East.

4.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that U.S-Syrian relations were marked by accommodation and cooperation from 1993 to 2001 thanks to the Clinton administration's commitment to perform the role of honest broker and full partner in the Syrian-Israeli peace track. Syria's eagerness to embrace the NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst in the Middle East peace process contributed to accommodation and cooperation between the two countries as well. The Clinton administration welcomed Syria's posture on the peace process and considered Syria as a key to comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The Syrian-Israeli peace track was so central in U.S. regional policy that senior American officials often admitted that there could be no peace in the Middle East without Syria. As the Clinton administration acknowledged Syria as a key actor and sought to establish cordial relations with Syria, it understated Syria's terrorism link, which can be observed in the State Department's terrorism reports. What's more, the Clinton administration did not want to change the status quo in Lebanon based on Syria's hegemony and recognized its stabilizing role after Operation Grapes of Wrath. It also eased some economic sanctions as a gesture to Damascus. In sum, despite ups and downs, the U.S.-Syrian relations were cooperative under the Clinton administration owing to convergence of their roles in the Middle East.

CHAPTER 5

U.S. FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS SYRIA UNDER GEORGE W. BUSH (2001-2009): THE WAR ON TERROR AND BEYOND

"You are either with us or with the terrorists..."
George W. Bush

5.1. Introduction

This chapter seeks to explain U.S. foreign policy towards Syria under the Bush administration from 2001 to 2009. In the first section of the chapter, the NRCs of the United States will be analyzed to make sense of U.S. foreign policy under the Bush administration. It will be argued that while the Bush administration initially was moving towards isolationism to distance the United States from external world, 9/11 terrorist attacks triggered a change in the NRCs of the Bush administration. In this respect, the Bush administration began to perform the NRCs of hegemon, defender of the pacific union and tribune and agent of American values in the global war on terror. The neocons, who were influential in the Bush administration, shaped U.S. foreign policy in the aftermath of 9/11. Contrary to the Bush Sr. and Clinton administrations, the Bush Jr. administration enacted the NRC of hegemon in a unilateral fashion rather than working with the multinational institutions.

In the second section, the NRCs of the United States under the Bush administration in the Middle East sub-system will be elucidated. In this section, it will be noted that the Bush administration performed the NRCs of hegemon, tribune and agent of American values, and regional stabilizer in the Middle East. It will be argued that the Middle East turned out to be the canvas of the NRCs of the Bush administration in the global war on terror. The Bush administration put aside the issue of stability and adopted a more belligerent, assertive, and unilateral foreign policy in the region. The invasion of Iraq and subsequent Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI) were the manifestation of the NRCs of the United States in the Middle East. Although the Bush administration performed the NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst in the Middle East peace process, it was only limited to the Palestinian track. As the Bush administration did not view Syria as a key to comprehensive peace, it did not make the Syrian track its priority in the Middle East peace process.

In the third section, U.S. foreign policy towards Syria under the Bush administration will be scrutinized around three main issues/themes: the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the Lebanese arena, and the Middle East peace process. In this part, it will be demonstrated that the Bush administration's performance of the NRC of hegemon unilaterally strained bilateral relations. Although the Bashar al-Assad regime cooperated with Washington against al-Qaeda in the war on terror, it did not acknowledge NRCs of the United States and go along with them in the 2000s. The Assad regime was not comfortable with the unilateral invasion of Iraq, the neo-cons' plans to promote democracy in the Middle East forcefully and Washington's unwillingness to perform the NRC of peace catalyst in the Syrian-Israeli track. Thus, Syria's connection with international terrorism, its WMD capability, its ongoing hegemony over Lebanon, its relations with Iraq and more importantly its defiance of the Bush administration put the United States and Syria on a collision course. In the 2000s, the U.S.-Syrian relations were marked by overt confrontation in the Middle East owing the incongruence of role conceptions of Washington and Damascus.

5.2. The Hegemon under Fire: U.S. Foreign Policy under George W. Bush

George W. Bush, who was born in New Haven, Connecticut on 6 July 1946, was the eldest son of the former President George Herbert Walker Bush and Barbara Bush. He graduated from Yale University with B.A. degree in history and from Harvard Business School with an M.B.A. After graduation, Bush Jr. worked in oil industry in Texas, where he later served as governor from 1995 to 2000. In the 2000 controversial presidential elections, he defeated the Democratic nominee Vice President Al Gore and became the 43rd president of the United States from 2001 to 2009. Bush Jr. was less interested in foreign policy issues than his father as he had not traveled much outside of the United States and his political experience had been only limited to the governorship of Texas.⁹³³

While carrying out his presidential campaign, Bush promised to focus on domestic projects like education reform and tax cuts over foreign policy issues. He also hinted that his foreign policy strategy would follow the footsteps of his father as he argued that a president must be a realist and practical in handling foreign policy.⁹³⁴ In that regard, Bush unequivocally stressed that his administration would primarily pursue American national interests and avoid

⁹³³ Powaski, *Ideals, Interests, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 103-105; Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 640.

⁹³⁴ Lynch, *In the Shadow of the Cold War*, 104.

Wilsonian idealism, humanitarian intervention and nation-building attempts of the Clinton administration. These remarks were indicating that Bush was not willing to maintain the Clinton administration's moral standing in foreign policy.⁹³⁵

During the election process, candidate Bush also uttered his belief in unique position and special mission of the United States in world politics similar to President Clinton. Bush contended that the United States should not avoid playing its leadership role in the post-Cold War international system. In Bush's perception, American leadership should encapsulate cooperation and consent of its present and potential allies. In one of his speeches, Bush said that the United States would not do nation building and should exercise global leadership with "modesty" and "humility" by consulting and finding new states as partners not as American satellites in the international system.⁹³⁶ In this context, Bush noted that:

"If we are an arrogant nation, they [the world] will resent us.... If we are a humble nation, they will respect us as an honorable nation... I don't think our troops should be used for what's called nation building... I'm going to be judicious as to how to use the military. It needs to be in our vital interests, the mission needs to be clear and the exit strategy obvious."⁹³⁷

Despite these remarks, Bush did not refrain from assailing assertive multilateralism of the Clinton administration during the election campaign and expressing his endorsement for unilateral action based on American self-interests when it was necessary.⁹³⁸

Bush's foreign policy campaign director Condoleezza Rice also promoted unilateralism in foreign policy by dismissing international community as an illusion. According to her, multilateral institutions, and cooperation, endorsed by the United States since the end of the WWII, did not create a world embracing democratic values of American nation. Quite the contrary, multilateralism curtailed sovereignty of the United States through obligations and open-ended commitments and strengthened enemies of America.⁹³⁹

In this context, the Bush administration's policies marked a sharp break with the Bush Sr. and Clinton administrations. President Bush embraced unilateralism after 9/11 and pursued a

⁹³⁵ Ralph G. Carter, *Essentials of U.S. Foreign Policy Making* (New Jersey: Pearson, 2015), 38; Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 640-641; Powaski, *Ideals, Interests, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 108.

⁹³⁶ Bacevich, *American Empire*, 202.

⁹³⁷ Schmidt, *The Folly of War*, 350.

⁹³⁸ Hook and Spainer, *American Foreign Policy*, 284.

⁹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 266-267.

militant foreign policy by occupying Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. The driving force behind aggressive and unilateralist foreign policy was the so-called neoconservatives. Neoconservatism, which became the ideological bedrock of the Bush administration's foreign policy after 9/11, emerged as an intellectual movement against communism during the Cold War. It was based on moral superiority of American values against communism, skepticism about international institutions, belief in strong military to keep hegemony of the United States intact and to protect its vital national interests. These ideas were put forward especially by neoconservatism's two founding fathers Norman Podhoretz and Irving Kristol in their magazines *Commentary* and *The Public Interest*. After the Cold War, the second generation of the neoconservatives adopted a new vision and supported the idea of pax-Americana and the spread of exceptional American values across the globe. This dream warranted a superior American military force and avoiding constraints of international institutions, alliances, and agreements. Hence, neocons believed that soft power was not sufficient to achieve global aims of the United States in the post-Cold War international system. They also argued that American hegemony was vital for both the wellbeing of the Americans and the world as the United States had a unique role to shape world politics and preserve international peace, stability and order. Neocons' ideological zeal to maintain American supremacy at all costs, their tendency to resort to unilateral use of force and their determination to confront rivals of the United States attracted assertive nationalists within the Republican Party and gave them a political platform.⁹⁴⁰

The Project for a New American Century (PNAC), founded by Irving Kristol and Robert Kagan in 1997, was the leading neocon think-tank in Washington. The founders of PNAC were Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Francis Fukuyama, Elliott Abrams, Zalmay Khalilzad (former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq) and Robert Kagan. Besides, President Bush's brother Jeb, who was governor of Florida, Condoleezza Rice and Lewis "Scooter" Libby were other members of the organization. PNAC introduced itself by publishing a "Statement of Principles", whose main message was that the world needed the leadership of the United States as it was the only actor capable of maintaining international order. PNAC suggested that the United States as the sole hegemon could not "*avoid responsibilities of global leadership*" and it should not react to threats but shape the global scene before the emergence of threats. Even though President Bush was not a member of PNAC, he was obviously influenced by it and employed many of its members in his administration⁹⁴¹

⁹⁴⁰ Wolf, "Terrorized America?," 205-207; Schmidt, *The Folly of War*, 345-346; Migdal, *Shifting Sands*, 214.

⁹⁴¹ Migdal, *Shifting Sands*, 215-220.

After entering the White House, due to his inexperience, President Bush formed a strong and high-profile foreign policy staff including famous neocons to manage U.S. foreign policy. There were significant people in the foreign policy team of the first Bush administration. For instance, Condoleezza Rice, a well-known realist, and Bush's foreign policy campaign director, became his national security advisor.⁹⁴² Former General Colin Powell, who was known for his cautious realism and opposition to use of military force for humanitarian purposes, was appointed as new secretary of state. The real power center in foreign policy decision making during the Bush administration was two prominent neoconservatives: Vice President Dick Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. They were close friends since the Nixon years and proponents of the primacy of national security policy and American hegemony. Especially Cheney played a major role in foreign policy decisions during the Bush administration by strengthening the office of vice presidency to acquire more power in defense and foreign policy issues.⁹⁴³ VP Cheney, who was a former Defense Secretary in the Bush Sr. administration and ideological proponent of the neocon thinking, later persuaded President Bush to go to war with Iraq in 2003.⁹⁴⁴

In addition to Cheney and Rumsfeld, there were other neoconservative figures in the middle ranks of the Bush administration such as Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, Undersecretary of State John Bolton, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith, Head of the Defense Policy Board Advisory Committee Richard Perle, and VP Cheney's Chief of Staff Lewis "Scooter" Libby. Given the ideological formation of this team, it became evident that unlike that of Clinton administration, foreign policy elites of the Bush administration would conduct powerful unilateralist and belligerent foreign policy rather than collaborating with the multinational organizations such as the UN in the coming years. In fact, the neocons shaped the trajectory of the U.S. foreign policy after 9/11 by promoting the idea that America must use its enormous military power to reshape world politics in its image to attain hegemony and spread democracy and capitalism across the world.⁹⁴⁵

⁹⁴² Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, "American Foreign Policy after 9/11," in *US Foreign Policy*, ed. Michael Cox and Doug Stokes, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 378.

⁹⁴³ Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 641; Lynch, *In the Shadow of the Cold War*, 106.

⁹⁴⁴ Cameron, *US Foreign Policy after the Cold War*, 40.

⁹⁴⁵ Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 307; Kennedy-Pipe, "American Foreign Policy after 9/11," 378-379; Wolf, "Terrorized America?," 208.

As President Bush's neo-con dominated foreign policy team considered military might as an essential mean to sustain American hegemony actively, traditional concepts such as deterrence, containment, international rules and norms and multilateralism lost their importance as passive methods to maintain national security and interests of the United States. They claimed that due to changing nature of threats in the post-Soviet international environment the United States must adopt an assertive strategy. So, the Bush administration under the influence of the neocons was determined to preserve American hegemony in the post-Cold War unipolar international system through unilateralism.⁹⁴⁶

Before 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Bush administration's foreign policy was resembling isolationism. During his first nine months in office, President Bush made it clear that his main aim was to distance or keep the United States entirely out of international treaties and military obligations. Instead of international engagement, Bush preferred to focus on domestic issues such as securing major tax cuts and education reform. Concerns about Bush's indifference to international institutions and his unilateral tendency in foreign policy aroused, when he announced that the United States would not sponsor the Middle East peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, that the U.S. was planning to withdraw totally from Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) of 1972, that the U.S. would suspend the talks with North Korea sponsored by President Clinton, that the U.S. would not send new troops to the Balkans, and that the United States would not sign the Kyoto Treaty on climate change.⁹⁴⁷

Bush's initial focus on domestic issues and his isolationist and unilateralist tendency alarmed foreign policy hawks in Washington D.C. as President Bush was perceived as a reluctant president to counter China and stick with Clinton's military budget which shied away from seeking missile defense system and substantial increases in military expenditures.⁹⁴⁸ Critics, commentators, and politicians also criticized President Bush's audacity, go-it-alone approach and unilateral inclination in foreign policy as a new isolationism. Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and former NSA Sandy Berger slammed the Bush administration's divergence from the Clinton administration in terms of collaboration with international organizations and its eagerness to rely on military power excessively. Thomas Friedman of the New York Times and Jim Hoagland of the Washington Post also castigated the Bush

⁹⁴⁶ Jerel A. Rosati and James M. Scott, *The Politics of United States Foreign Policy*, 5th ed. (Boston, Wadsworth: Cengage Learning, 2011), 35.

⁹⁴⁷ Schulzinger, *U.S. Diplomacy Since 1900*, 379; Ambrose and Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism*, 470-471.

⁹⁴⁸ Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 642.

administration's unilateral approach in international affairs. According to them, Bush preferred crude power to rules and norms of the international community. They also argued that power-seeking attitude of the Bush administration spoiled the image of the United States in the eyes of other nations across the world.⁹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, senior officials of the Bush administration such as NSA Condoleezza Rice and Richard Haass, Director of Policy Planning in the State Department, rejected these accusations and claimed that the United States did not abandon multilateralism but chose to pursue new kind of multilateralism based on national interests of America.⁹⁵⁰

9/11 was a turning point which totally transformed U.S. foreign policy under the Bush administration. 19 al-Qaeda terrorists hijacked four airplanes and made them flying bombs to attack the United States on 11 September 2001. One of the planes smashed into the Pentagon, the second fell near Pennsylvania, and the other two crashed into the World Trade Center in New York. More than 3200 innocent people were brutally killed because of heinous 9/11 terrorist attacks.⁹⁵¹ This was a huge shock for the American people and the Bush administration as the world's sole hegemon was struck at home by a bunch of terrorists and it felt so vulnerable for the first time in its modern history since the Pearl Harbor assault in the Second World War. On the night of 9/11, President Bush delivered a televised address to the nation and declared that terrorist attacks were an act of war against America. He vowed to fight against not only the terrorists who committed this atrocity but also against the state sponsors of terrorism.⁹⁵² President Bush announced that "*We will make no distinctions between the terrorists who committed these acts and those harbor them.*" According to him, the war on terror was different from other wars in U.S. history and he was determined to go after and punish the terrorists without working with UN and NATO.⁹⁵³

Before 9/11, there was a contest between Secretary of State Powell and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld who were representing two different visions to direct U.S. foreign policy. While Powell was supporting restraint in foreign policy, Rumsfeld was urging an assertive foreign policy. After 9/11, Powell's cautious realism was superseded by Cheney's and Rumsfeld's

⁹⁴⁹ Fraser Cameron, "Utilitarian Multilateralism: The Implications of 11 September 2001 for US Foreign Policy," *Politics* 22, No. 2 (2002): 69-70; Powaski, *Ideals, Interests, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 109.

⁹⁵⁰ Cameron, *US Foreign Policy after the Cold War*, 29-30.

⁹⁵¹ Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 561.

⁹⁵² Hook and Spainer, *American Foreign Policy*, 276.

⁹⁵³ Ambrose and Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism*, 474.

assertive unilateralism. The neoconservative ideas gained acceptance not only in the government and but also in the broader American public. The nation was under threat, and it must be countered. President Bush tilted towards neoconservatism to make sense of the world and the role of the United States in the aftermath of 9/11.⁹⁵⁴

In this context, 9/11 changed the Bush administration's perception of the international system. It can be argued that 9/11 triggered a role change in U.S. foreign policy under the Bush administration. Before 9/11, the Bush administration was pursuing an isolationist foreign policy to preserve narrowly defined American interests by avoiding military commitments, alliances, and interventions, yet after 9/11 terrorist attacks NRCs of hegemon, defender of pacific union and tribune and agent of American values came to the forefront. 9/11 accentuated the Bush administration's unilateral tendency as the world's sole superpower and strengthened its determination to resort to use of force and to shape the contours of international order actively.⁹⁵⁵

The Bush administration's response to terrorist attacks was firm and forceful. In a joint session of the Congress on 20 September 2001, President Bush delivered a powerful speech and declared the war on terror to get rid of the world of evil.⁹⁵⁶ Bush declared that "*Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.*"⁹⁵⁷ President Bush also vowed to crush the enemies of America and called on the American public to rally around the flag. The Congress promptly granted President Bush limitless power to find and punish those who attacked the United States and those who helped them carry out these nefarious attacks. So, President Bush founded a suitable domestic environment to fulfill the new mission of the United States after 9/11.⁹⁵⁸

In his first address to the Congress in the wake of 9/11 events, President Bush also announced the United States' leadership role in the war on terror as follows:

"The hour is coming when America will act, and you will make us proud. This is not, however, just America's fight. And what is at stake is not just America's freedom. This is the world's fight. This is civilization's fight. This is the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom. We ask every nation

⁹⁵⁴ Migdal, *Shifting Sands*, 222.

⁹⁵⁵ Wolf, "Terrorized America?," 204-205.

⁹⁵⁶ Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 644.

⁹⁵⁷ Hook and Spainer, *American Foreign Policy*, 277.

⁹⁵⁸ Powaski, *Ideals, Interests, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 109-110; Wolf, "Terrorized America?," 204.

to join us. We will ask and we will need the help of police forces, intelligence service and banking systems around the world. The United States is grateful that many nations and many international organizations have already responded with sympathy and with support-nations from Latin America to Asia to Africa to Europe to the Islamic world...

Our nation, this generation, will lift the dark threat of violence from our people and our future. We will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage. We will not tire, we will not falter and we will not fail.”⁹⁵⁹

President Bush’s address was the manifestation of his determination to perform the NRC of hegemon encapsulating the notion of world policeman as well as guarantor of international peace. As mentioned above, the Bush administration’s unilateral tendency materialized in the wake of 9/11. It began to disregard international treaties and institutions as they were perceived as limiting the United States’ freedom in the international arena. Hence, the Bush administration withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, refused to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), and rejected international efforts to enforce the Biological Weapons Convention. It also declared withdrawal of its support from the International Criminal Court (ICC) and dismissed any jurisdiction over the American citizens by the ICC. Although the Bush administration included submissive friendly nations to the coalitions during the Afghanistan and Iraq operations, it deliberately opted for keeping international influence on decisions given by the United States limited.⁹⁶⁰

9/11 drastically altered the Bush administration’s threat perception as well. The United States now faced a worldwide and borderless terrorism threat similar to international communism during the heyday of the Cold War. After 9/11, NSA Rice said that “*there is no longer any doubt that today America faces an existential threat to our security—a threat as great as any we faced during the Civil War, World War II, or the Cold War.*”⁹⁶¹ In order to eliminate terrorism threat to the United States, the Bush administration undertook duty of cleaning the world from the terrorists and the states harboring them. In this context, the first target of the Bush administration in the war on terror was the Taliban regime of Afghanistan, which was providing shelter for al-Qaeda on its soil for a long time. In his address to the Congress on 20 September 2001, President Bush had demanded that the Taliban regime surrender al-Qaeda

⁹⁵⁹ “Text: President Bush Addresses the Nation,” *Washington Post*, September 20, 2001, https://www.washingtonpost.com/wpsrv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress_092001.htm 1.

⁹⁶⁰ Neta C. Crawford, “The Road to Global Empire: The Logic of U.S. Foreign Policy After 9/11,” *Orbis* 48, No. 4 (Fall 2004): 691; Wolf, “Terrorized America?,” 198-199.

⁹⁶¹ Melvyn P. Leffler, “9/11 and the Past and Future of American Foreign Policy,” *International Affairs* 79, No. 5 (Oct., 2003): 1049.

members in Afghanistan, yet the Taliban regime refused President Bush's demand as a sign of aggression against Afghanistan's sovereignty. In response, the Bush administration started out the war on terror in Afghanistan to topple the Taliban regime, to uproot al-Qaeda from Afghanistan and to give a message to other states providing safe haven to terrorists.⁹⁶²

The military operation against the Taliban regime started on 22 September 2001 with the Northern Alliance Forces' initial attacks on the Taliban positions. The United States commenced its operation along with its twenty-five allies by bombing the Taliban government's and al-Qaeda's bases with high-tech weapons and missiles on 7 October 2001.⁹⁶³ The Afghanistan war did not seem tough at the beginning as the Taliban forces could not resist the intense air strikes of the U.S.-led coalition. The speedy success of the coalition's military operation was stunning as Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan, fell on 12 November 2001. The United States and its allies were able to topple the Taliban regime only after two months of military campaign. However, Osama bin Laden and the Taliban leaders could not be captured by the American troops as they were able to escape to Pakistan. In the wake of the operation, NATO forces were deployed to Afghanistan and a friendly Afghan government led by Hamid Karzai was installed by the United States.⁹⁶⁴

The Afghanistan Operation manifested that the Bush administration adopted a new policy of toppling non-democratic regimes in the post-9/11 international order. In his State of the Union address on 29 January 2002, Bush announced that the United States' counter-terrorism strategy was shifting from going after al-Qaeda to punishing the state sponsors of terrorism. In this speech, he mentioned the famous "axis of evil" composed of Iraq, Iran, and North Korea, which was seeking WMDs. Bush claimed that members of axis of evil might share WMDs with terrorists against the United States and its allies. Bush also said that "*states like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world.*" Bush asserted that axis of evil along with the terrorists was conspiring to destroy the United States and the free world. According to him, the primary task before the nation was beyond capturing Osama bin Laden, a global war on terror against evil forces must be fought at all

⁹⁶² Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 561-562.

⁹⁶³ Lynch, *In the Shadow of the Cold War*, 112-113; Hook and Spainer, *American Foreign Policy*, 294.

⁹⁶⁴ Powaski, *Ideals, Interests, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 111; Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 645.

fronts. In the same speech, Bush pointed to Iraq as the primary target of the United States in the war on terror.⁹⁶⁵

President Bush's new strategy after the Afghanistan Operation was encapsulating supremacy of American power, surveillance of the rogue states and the need for preemptive action against threats, which was reflecting his administration's unilateral and hegemonic role conception.⁹⁶⁶ According to Wolf, Bush mixed the terrorist threat and the threat of nuclear proliferation with Clinton's rogue state discourse in his axis of evil speech, which led to a proactive role conception for the United States to shape the world order.⁹⁶⁷

The Bush administration was contemplating how to shape the world in the image of the United States and spread democracy and freedom across the world in the war on terror. While the Afghanistan war was going on, the Bush administration was planning to construct a new national security doctrine for the United States, which later came to be known as the Bush Doctrine, outlined in the National Security Strategy (NSS) document published in September 2002. The essence of the U.S. national security strategy was explained as follows: "*The U.S. national security strategy will be based on a distinctly American internationalism that reflects the fusion of our values and our national interests. The aim of this strategy is to help make the world not just safer but better.*"⁹⁶⁸

There were three major components of the Bush Doctrine: preemptive war, unilateral action, and democracy promotion (or changing non-democratic regimes into democracies).⁹⁶⁹ According to the NSS document, the nature of threats to the U.S. national security changed substantially after 9/11. In face of spread of WMDs and proliferation violent non-state actors, the Bush administration considered international law's traditional justification of the use of force for self-defense inadequate. That's why, the first aspect of the new security doctrine was designed as preemptive action/war strategy. President Bush had already pointed to this strategy while delivering a commencement speech at West Point, NY on 1 June 2002. In this speech,

⁹⁶⁵ Hook and Spainer, *American Foreign Policy*, 286; Powaski, *Ideals, Interests, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 112.

⁹⁶⁶ Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 120.

⁹⁶⁷ Wolf, "Terrorized America?," 198.

⁹⁶⁸ Crawford, "The Road to Global Empire," 692.

⁹⁶⁹ Lynch, *In the Shadow of the Cold War*, 114.

Bush had underlined the necessity of preemptive action in the post-9/11 international environment to protect the United States against unforeseen threats. He had also decried the concepts of the Cold War such as containment and deterrence and claimed that preemption was a legitimate action before threats were realized. Bush had announced that “*We will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively. If we wait for security threats to materialize, we will have waited too long. We cannot let our enemies strike first.*”⁹⁷⁰

President Bush believed that retaliation after the first attack was inconceivable as such an attack would destroy an American city entirely and kill thousands of fellow citizens. Therefore, the idea that the United States should carry out preemptive strike against threats and should not wait for the first attack was legitimate.⁹⁷¹ In the NSS document, preemptive war was conceptualized as a wider doctrine to deter threats posed by rogue states and foes of civilization as follows:

“Given the goals of rogue states and terrorists, the United States can no longer rely on a reactive posture as we have in the past. The inability to deter a potential attacker, the immediacy of today’s threats, and the magnitude of potential harm that could be caused by our adversaries’ choice of weapons, do not permit that option. We cannot let our enemies strike first... To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively.”⁹⁷²

The second pillar of the Bush Doctrine, which was closely connected to the first, was unilateralism, that is the United States’ right to act outside of formal alliances when its interests were at stake. This policy was directly related to the hegemon role conception of the United States. Washington would act on its own or would build up coalitions as broad as possible from states able and willing to promote balance of power that helps freedom. Bush called this kind of coalitions as “coalitions of willing”, composed of volunteer nations. This policy was also dubbed “utilitarian multilateralism.”⁹⁷³ In the NSS document, it was clearly stated that American military would be “*strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States.*”⁹⁷⁴

⁹⁷⁰ Powaski, *Ideals, Interests, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 112.

⁹⁷¹ Carter, *Essentials of U.S. Foreign Policy Making*, 41.

⁹⁷² Crawford, “The Road to Global Empire,” 695.

⁹⁷³ Cameron, “Utilitarian Multilateralism,” 68-69.

⁹⁷⁴ Schmidt, “Theories of US Foreign Policy,” 16-17.

Although Bush did not practically refuse international cooperation or forming alliances with states supporting the war on terror, U.S. foreign policy was obviously guided by unilateralism. The United States was not acting as a partner but as a dominant leader in the post 9/11 international order. If its leadership was castigated by others, it was ready to play an imperial role in several parts of the world to protect vital American interests. What's more, coalitions of willing were not formal and were not formed within the legitimate framework proposed by the United Nations.⁹⁷⁵ Vice President Dick Cheney formulated unilateralism by saying that "*the mission determines the coalition*", not vice versa.⁹⁷⁶ While the notion of unilateralism was on rise in the United States, legitimacy and effectiveness of the international institutions, military alliances and common leadership with partner states were understated by American officials. In the NSS document, it was underlined that "*While the United States will constantly strive to enlist support of the international community, we will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary.*"⁹⁷⁷

The third aspect of the Bush Doctrine was regime change and freedom agenda, which was resonating NRCs of hegemon, defender of the pacific union and tribune and agent of American values. The Bush administration was committed to overthrowing the regimes hostile to the United States and the free world as the world's sole hegemonic power. It fulfilled this commitment by toppling the Taliban and the Saddam regimes. There was a close relationship between the Bush administration's quest for regime change and promotion of democracy and freedom across the world. According to the Bush administration, changing autocratic regimes seeking WMDs was not enough, they had to be rebuilt in tandem with democratic ideals and principles as well.⁹⁷⁸

In the NSS document, dedication of the United States to spreading democracy through use of American power was clearly underlined. It was stated that the only way to national success was promotion of freedom, democracy, and free enterprise across the world. The Bush administration vowed to "*use this moment of opportunity to extend the benefits of freedom across the globe.*" The NSS document also emphasized the role of the United States to "*defend liberty and justice because these principles are right and true for all peoples everywhere.*" In

⁹⁷⁵ Lynch, *In the Shadow of the Cold War*, 116-117.

⁹⁷⁶ Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment Revisited," *The National Interest* No. 70 (Winter 2002/03): 10.

⁹⁷⁷ Migdal, *Shifting Sands*, 224.

⁹⁷⁸ Lynch, *In the Shadow of the Cold War*, 118-120.

that regard, it was noted that the United States should cooperate with allies but must act unilaterally when its interests and unique responsibility require.⁹⁷⁹

In sum, the Bush Doctrine was encapsulating the NRCs of hegemon, defender of the pacific union and tribune and agent of American values as guiding principles of American foreign policy after 9/11. The Bush Doctrine was designed to sustain supremacy and hegemonic position of the United States to restructure the international system through military preeminence. In this respect, the Bush administration sought to dissuade potential rivals from building up their militaries to match or surpass power of the United States.⁹⁸⁰ The Bush Doctrine as the new grand strategy of the United States hinged on preemptive, preventive, and unilateral use of force, if possible, supported by coalitions of willing, without constraints of international rules and norms. According to Ikenberry, the new pillars of the Bush Doctrine “form a neoimperial vision in which the United States arrogates to itself the global role of setting standards, determining threats, using force, and meting out justice.”⁹⁸¹

The Bush Doctrine was resonating the ideas expressed earlier in the PNAC seminars and policy papers. It was also encapsulating some elements in Wolfowitz’s and Libby’s Defense Policy Guidance (DPG) document.⁹⁸² It can be observed that the neocon vision of U.S. foreign policy rendered theoretical and policy content of the Bush Doctrine, which justified the decision to invade Iraq and topple Saddam Hussein in 2003.⁹⁸³ The main objective of the new doctrine was to protect domestic security of the United States from potential threats and remake the world order around principles of the neocon ideology.⁹⁸⁴ The Bush Doctrine promoted the notion that the United States as the world’s sole superpower should keep its hegemonic position for an indefinite future.⁹⁸⁵

⁹⁷⁹ Robert Jervis, “Understanding the Bush Doctrine,” *Political Science Quarterly* 118, No. 3 (2003): 366; Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 647.

⁹⁸⁰ Crawford, “The Road to Global Empire,” 693; Hook and Spainer, *American Foreign Policy*, 286.

⁹⁸¹ G. John Ikenberry, “America’s Imperial Ambition,” *Foreign Affairs* 81:5 (2002): 44.

⁹⁸² Migdal, *Shifting Sands*, 223-224.

⁹⁸³ Brian C. Schmidt & Michael C. Williams, “The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War: Neoconservatives Versus Realists,” *Security Studies* 17, No. 2 (2008) 194.

⁹⁸⁴ Bledar Prifti, *US Foreign Policy in the Middle East: The Case for Continuity* (New York: Springer, 2017), 92.

⁹⁸⁵ Schmidt & Williams, “The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War,” 195.

The Bush Doctrine was first practiced during the invasion of Iraq in 2003. President Bush feared that al-Qaeda might seek biological and nuclear weapons to attack the United States and Saddam Hussein, who had allegedly acquired these weapons, might hand over them to the terrorists.⁹⁸⁶ In addition to the elimination of a national security threat, it was supposed that toppling the Saddam dictatorship would liberate the Iraqi people from oppression and bring democracy to the Middle East. That's why, going to war with Iraq became a priority of Bush and his neocon associates to achieve the goals associated with the NRCs of the United States in the war on terror. On the other hand, the invasion of Iraq as the performance of NRC of hegemon ironically delegitimized the United States' hegemonic position in the world. After the invasion, the image of the United States as the world's sole hegemon soared in world public opinion, anti-American sentiments increased across the world and the level of acceptance of the United States' hegemony decreased considerably.⁹⁸⁷

In the 2004 presidential election, President Bush defeated the Democratic nominee John Kerry and was elected for the second time. In his second term, President Bush was determined to leave a legacy beyond the invasion of Iraq. That's why, he made some changes in his foreign policy team but no change in the essence of his foreign policy. Colin Powell resigned at the end of the first term and Condoleezza Rice became the new secretary of state. Stephen Hadley was appointed as national security advisor. Donald Rumsfeld left the office and Robert Gates was named as the new secretary of defense.⁹⁸⁸

Especially, Rice emerged as a key player in the second Bush administration thanks to her close relations with President Bush. Rice and Gates mostly collaborated and worked in a good spirit during the second term. Even though Vice President Cheney persisted his attitude as a hard-liner on most foreign policy issues, he was sidelined by the others. Rice declared that Bush's second term would be a time of diplomacy and made an olive branch tour of Europe to mend fences with the allies.⁹⁸⁹ These remarks were interpreted as declining influence of the neocons in Washington after the occupation of Iraq and the return of the traditional realist figures.⁹⁹⁰

⁹⁸⁶ Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 648.

⁹⁸⁷ Wolf, "Terrorized America?," 195.

⁹⁸⁸ Lynch, *In the Shadow of the Cold War*, 139-140.

⁹⁸⁹ Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 666-667.

⁹⁹⁰ Wolf, "Terrorized America?," 209.

Nonetheless, the rise of new elites in foreign policymaking did not bring substantial changes in the essence of U.S. foreign policy during the second Bush administration. What differentiated them from the hawkish figures were their moderate style and fondness of diplomacy. The new elites already played a role in the execution of U.S. foreign policy during the first Bush administration. Thus, U.S. foreign policy was still guided by NRCs of hegemon, defender of the pacific union and tribune and agent of American values during the second Bush administration. In his second inaugural speech in 2005, Bush announced the leadership role of the United States in advancing freedom agenda and democracy promotion across the world as follows:

“The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world... Advancing these ideas is the mission that created our Nation. It is the honorable achievement of our fathers. Now it is the urgent requirement of our nation’s security, and the calling of our time. So it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.”⁹⁹¹

In this context, promotion of democracy in Eastern European countries, which were the former satellites of Russia, became the priority of the Bush administration during the second term. President Bush supported Romania’s, Slovakia’s and Slovenia’s membership to NATO in 2004. He deemed expansion of NATO in the Baltic region would promote democracy among the Baltic countries. Similarly, President Bush was keen to integrate Georgia and Ukraine into NATO alliance after the Orange Revolution in 2005 to advance his freedom agenda. However, some of the senior officials such as Rice and Gated urged caution as to the inclusion of these countries to NATO. When a war broke out between Russia and Georgia, the United States did not step in to help Mikhail Saakashvili against Russia in order not to provoke a military confrontation between the two countries. The Georgia crisis was clear indication of the limits of the freedom agenda of President Bush.⁹⁹²

Iraq continued to dominate U.S. foreign policy during the second term of the Bush administration. Despite criticisms, President Bush decided to upgrade American presence in 2007 by sending tens of thousands of new troops to Iraq. The new strategy of the Bush administration was dubbed the “surge”. In so doing, Bush was planning to protect the Iraqi people and promote democracy in the heart of the Middle East. However, Bush’s Iraq policy

⁹⁹¹ Hook and Spainer, *American Foreign Policy*, 17.

⁹⁹² Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 668.

crumbled, and it eventually led to his downfall in the 2009 presidential elections against Barack Obama.⁹⁹³

How can we make sense of U.S. foreign policy under George W. Bush in terms of role theory? As mentioned above, there were three major NRCs of the United States under the Bush administration: hegemon, defender of the pacific union and tribune and agent of American values. These three role conceptions, couched in the Bush Doctrine, were highly interrelated. The United States was supposed to protect the free world and spread democracy and free market in different parts of the world as the world's sole hegemon. So, the Bush administration's NRC of hegemon was encapsulating the notion of preserving world peace and freedom as well. In his foreword to the 2000 NSS document, Bush underlined the unique position and supremacy of the United States in the international system and its mission as the world's only superpower to protect freedom as follows:

“Today, the US enjoys a position of unparalleled military strength and great economic and political influence... we do not use our military strength to press for unilateral advantage. We seek instead to create a balance of power that favors human freedom... By making the world safer, we allow the people of the world to make their own lives better. We will defend this Just Peace against terrorists and tyrants. We will preserve the peace by building good relations among the great powers. We will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent.”⁹⁹⁴

Secretary of State Powell also expressed the relationship between supremacy of the United States and the goal of freedom and free world as follows:

“There is no country on earth that is not touched by America... We are attached by a thousand cords to the world at large, to its teeming cities, to its remotest regions, to its oldest civilizations, to its newest cries for freedom. This means that we have an interest in every place on this earth; that we need to lead, to guide, to help in every country that has a desire to be free, open and prosperous.”⁹⁹⁵

The NRC of hegemon was guiding U.S. foreign policy under the Bush administration. It shaped how President Bush and his foreign policy team perceived the position of the United States and how it should act in the international system in the post-Cold War era. During the election campaign, Bush had already uttered his belief in American leadership in the international system “*shaped by American courage, power and wisdom now echoes with*

⁹⁹³ Lynch, *In the Shadow of the Cold War*, 141-142.

⁹⁹⁴ Patricia L. Dunmire, “‘9/11 changed everything’: on intertextual analysis of the Bush Doctrine,” *Discourse & Society* 20, No. 2 (March, 2009): 199-200; Luiza Bialasiewicz et al., “Performing Security: The Imaginative Geographies of Current US Strategy,” *Political Geography* 26, No. 4 (2007): 417.

⁹⁹⁵ Bacevich, *American Empire*, 216.

*American ideals.*⁹⁹⁶ In his commencement speech at West Point, NY on 1 June 2002, Bush underlined his strategy to maintain hegemony of the United States and keep it at the top of the great power order as follows: “*Competition between great nations is inevitable, but armed conflict in our world is not... America has, and intends to keep, military strengths beyond challenge... making the destabilizing arms races of other eras pointless, and limiting rivalries to trade and other pursuits of peace.*”⁹⁹⁷

In his State of the Union Address on 31 January 2006, President Bush emphasized the leadership role of the United States by stating that:

“In a complex and challenging time, the road of isolationism and protectionism may seem broad and inviting — yet it ends in danger and decline. The only way to protect our people, the only way to secure the peace, the only way to control our destiny is by our leadership — so the United States of America will continue to lead.”⁹⁹⁸

Unlike the Bush Sr. and Clinton administrations, the Bush administration performed the NRC of hegemon unilaterally. President Bush underscored his administrations’ unilateral tendency while performing the leadership role in the Afghanistan war when a European leader suggested him consultation with other actors. Bush said that “*That’s very interesting. Because my belief is the best way that we hold this coalition together is to be clear on our objectives and to be clear that we are determined to achieve them. You hold a coalition together by strong leadership and that’s why what we intend to provide.*”⁹⁹⁹

The Bush administration was not fond of working with the UN and even tried to undermine it. There were heated debates within the Republican Party about the United States’ withdrawal from the UN during Bush’s presidency. One of the prominent conservatives of the Bush administration, Richard Perle wrote an article entitled “Thank God for the Death of the UN” in which he slammed the UN as follows:

“Saddam Hussein’s reign of terror is about to end. He will go quickly, but not alone: in a parting irony, he will take the UN down with him.... What will die is the fantasy of the UN as the foundation of a New World order. As we sift the debris, it will be important to preserve, the better to understand, the intellectual wreckage of the liberal

⁹⁹⁶ Ibid., 203.

⁹⁹⁷ Lind, *The American Way of Strategy*, 128-129; Jervis, “Understanding the Bush Doctrine,” 376.

⁹⁹⁸ George W. Bush, “State of the Union Address to the 109th Congress, January 31, 2006,” in *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001-2008*, The White House Archives, https://georgewbushwhitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Selected_Speeches_George_W_Bush.pdf, 335-336.

⁹⁹⁹ Daalder and Lindsay, *America Unbound*, 81.

concept of safety through international law administered by international institutions.”¹⁰⁰⁰

Similar to President Clinton, President Bush believed that the United States’ global hegemony in different parts of the world depends not only on the appeal of American values but also on its unprecedented military power. President Bush expressed the necessity of use of force to sustain American hegemony by stating that “*the advance of freedom depends on American strength.*”¹⁰⁰¹ In this context, one of the top priorities of the Bush administration was to prevent the rise of potential hegemon capable of challenging the dominance of the United States and stability of the international system. Condoleezza Rice said that one of the major objectives the United States in the international system was to thwart appearance of alternative power centers seeking hegemony, which would undermine stability of the world.¹⁰⁰² In the NSS document, it was stated that the world order can be sustained only by a hegemonic power, that is the United States. It was also noted that the United States was in such a unique position that other countries could not or must not act in the way the United States did to maintain stability of the world order.¹⁰⁰³

The performance of the NRC of hegemon unilaterally was clear in the minds of the senior Bush administration officials. The neocons were promoting global hegemony of the United States and its military dominance even before gaining weight in the Bush administration. The PNAC, the platform of the neocons, had contended that the United States must increase its defense spending and utilize its military power by deploying troops abroad to demonstrate America’s status as global hegemon and the guarantor of peace, stability and liberty. It had also argued that the United States should disregard multilateralism as collective defense and military alliances were useless.¹⁰⁰⁴

After Bush’s axis of evil speech, VP Cheney expressed the United States’ responsibility as the world’s sole hegemon to counter terrorism threat in a gathering at the Council on Foreign Relations. He also explained domestic sources of the NRC of hegemon by stating that:

¹⁰⁰⁰ Schmidt, *The Folly of War*, 341.

¹⁰⁰¹ Bacevich, *American Empire*, 219.

¹⁰⁰² *Ibid.*, 220.

¹⁰⁰³ Jervis, “Understanding the Bush Doctrine,” 376.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Bialasiewicz et al., “Performing Security,” 410; Ambrose and Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism*, 479.

“America has friends and allies in this cause, but only we can lead it. Only we can rally the world in a task of this complexity, against an enemy so elusive and so resourceful. The United States, and only the United States, can see this effort through to victory. This responsibility did not come to us by chance. We are in a unique position because of our unique assets -because of the character of our people, the strength of our ideals, the might of our military, and the enormous economy that supports it.”¹⁰⁰⁵

Richard Haass also had already prepared a document entitled “Imperial America” in November 2000 to outline how the United States would succeed in its objective of global preeminence in the post-Cold War era. According to Haass, the United States must change its role from a traditional nation-state to an imperial power to achieve its goals. Although Haass did not use the word imperialism to define the role of America, he was calling for an imperial role to broaden American control either formally or informally across the world because the United States as the sole superpower was wielding unprecedented power after the demise of the Soviet Union. Haass underlined the need for leadership role of the United States by stating that “*to advocate an imperial foreign policy is to call for a foreign policy that attempts to organize the world along certain principles affecting relations between states and conditions within them. The U.S. role would resemble 19th century Great Britain.*”¹⁰⁰⁶

According to John Ikenberry, the new unilateral grand strategy of the Bush administration deviated from the multilateral international order established by Bush the older and Clinton administrations after the demise of the Soviet Union. He succinctly underlines the centrality of the hegemon role conception of the United States in the Bush Doctrine as follows:

“This new grand strategy has seven elements. It begins with a fundamental commitment to maintaining a unipolar world in which the United States has no peer competitor. No coalition of great powers without the United States will be allowed to achieve hegemony. Bush made this point the centerpiece of American security policy in his West Point commencement address in June: “America has, and intends to keep, military strengths beyond challenges—thereby making the destabilizing arms races of other eras pointless, and limiting rivalries to trade and other pursuits of peace.” The United States will not seek security through the more modest realist strategy of operating within a global system of power balancing, nor will it pursue a liberal strategy in which institutions, democracy, and integrated markets reduce the importance of power politics altogether. America will be so much more powerful than other major states that strategic rivalries and security competition among the great powers will disappear, leaving everyone—not just the United States—better off.”¹⁰⁰⁷

¹⁰⁰⁵ Daalder and Lindsay, *America Unbound*, 121.

¹⁰⁰⁶ John Bellamy Foster, *Naked Imperialism: The U.S. Pursuit of Global Dominance* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2006), 97-98.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Ikenberry, “America’s Imperial Ambition,” 49-50.

Another NRC of the United States under the Bush administration was defender of the Pacific Union, which aimed to defend not only the United States but also the free (or civilized) world against threat of international terrorism and rogue states after 9/11. According to the Bush administration, American values, and principles such as democracy, freedom and free enterprise could be promoted after the elimination of terrorism threat.¹⁰⁰⁸ On the night of 9/11, President Bush expressed his perception of the terrorist attacks as follows: “*Freedom itself was attacked this morning by faceless coward... We go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in the world.*”¹⁰⁰⁹ He also assured the nation that the United States “*would go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world.*”¹⁰¹⁰

Bush’s early reaction to 9/11 was dominated by religious motives as he spoke about launching a crusade against the perpetrators of terrorist attacks. In the autumn of 2001, Bush publicly stated his administration’s motivation as follows “*we wage a war to save civilization itself. We did not seek it, but we must fight it and we will prevail.*”¹⁰¹¹ President Bush as a devout Christian adopted wholeheartedly neoconservative outlook, which deemed the fight against radical Islam as a part of civilizational or cultural conflict between East and West, as it provided his administration with proactive strategy to defeat international terrorism after 9/11. Neoconservative preoccupation with defending and spreading democracy (especially in the Middle East) provided President Bush with a messianic mission encapsulating the fight between good and evil. That’s why, Bush conceived of the war on terror in terms of not only preserving United States’ national interests but also protecting the global values of the Western civilization such as liberty and freedom as well as Christianity against its enemies.¹⁰¹² In this respect, he expressed in his 2003 State of Union address that “*Americans are a free people, who know that freedom is the right of every person and the future of every nation. The liberty we prize is not America’s gift to the world, it is God’s gift to humanity.*”¹⁰¹³

¹⁰⁰⁸ Daalder and Lindsay, *America Unbound*, 125.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Schmidt, *The Folly of War*, 326.

¹⁰¹⁰ Steve A. Yetiv, “The Iraq War of 2003: Why Did the United States Decide to Invade?,” in *The Middle East and the United States: History Politics*, ed. David W. Lesch and Mark L. Haas, 5th ed. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2014), 348.

¹⁰¹¹ Kennedy-Pipe, “American Foreign Policy after 9/11,” 381-382.

¹⁰¹² Powaski, *Ideals, Interests, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 147; Schmidt, “Theories of US Foreign Policy,” 13.

¹⁰¹³ Daalder and Lindsay, *America Unbound*, 125.

The Bush administration also performed the NRC of tribune and agent of American values by promoting democracy across the globe. In his first inaugural speech on 20 January 2001, President Bush expressed traditional American exceptionalism, in which the United States was considered as a shining city on a hill, divinely blessed by God to show other nations the way to democracy and greater personal freedom. Promotion of democracy and freedom abroad was deemed eternal mission of the United States.¹⁰¹⁴ In his inaugural speech, Bush underlined this mission by stating that:

“We have a place, all of us, in a long story—a story we continue, but whose end we will not see. It is the story of a new world that became a friend and liberator of the old, a story of a slave-holding society that became a servant of freedom, the story of a power that went into the world to protect but not possess, to defend but not to conquer. It is the American story...”¹⁰¹⁵

Bush told one of his advisors one week after the 9/11 that “*we have an opportunity to restructure the world toward freedom, and we have to get it right.*” In February 2002, he responded to a question about France’s criticisms of his administration’s policies by stating that “*history has given us a unique opportunity to defend freedom. And we’re going to seize the moment, and do it.*” In March 2003, Bush announced that “*We understand history has called us into action, and we are not going to miss that opportunity to make the world more peaceful and more free.*”¹⁰¹⁶ These remarks can be interpreted as the adoption of a new proactive role for the United States in which primacy of American security is blended with spread of democracy and freedom to the world.¹⁰¹⁷

At a press conference in April 2004, Bush also reiterated the United States’ role to spread freedom across the world as follows: “*I also have this belief, strong belief that freedom is not this country’s gift to the world. Freedom is the Almighty’s gift to every man and woman in this world. And as the greatest power on the face of the earth we have an obligation to help the spread of freedom.*”¹⁰¹⁸ In his second inaugural address in 2005, President Bush talked about worldwide spread of democracy as “*the calling of our time*” and expressed the United States’

¹⁰¹⁴ Rieffer and Mercer, “US Democracy Promotion,” 396.

¹⁰¹⁵ George W. Bush, “President George W. Bush’s Inaugural Address,” *The White House Archives*, January 29, 2001, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/inaugural-address.html>.

¹⁰¹⁶ Jervis, “Understanding the Bush Doctrine,” 368.

¹⁰¹⁷ Wolf, “Terrorized America?,” 197-198.

¹⁰¹⁸ Crawford, “The Road to Global Empire,” 692.

support for democratic actors “*in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.*”¹⁰¹⁹

As mentioned above, we can observe a change in the NRCs of the United States after 9/11. The Bush administration was initially moving towards isolationism by adopting a narrow foreign policy agenda focusing on American interests and domestic issues. But isolationism was put aside after al-Qaeda attacks, and it began to pursue an assertive foreign policy entailing both the struggle for security and the export of American values. What explains the role change in U.S. foreign policy in this period even though the structure of the international environment was still characterized by unipolarity? According to Raimund Wolf, the role change under the Bush administration can be explained through a change in ideational preference representation. Wolf argues that the alter ego part cannot explain the change in the NRCs of the United States after 9/11 as there was no change in the nature of the international system and hegemony of the United States continued to remain unchallenged. Moreover, domestic explanations cannot account for the change in U.S. foreign policy as there was no coincidence between the foreign policy change and either election results or a shift in the foreign policy preferences of the American public. The polls reflecting the American public opinion of that time clearly indicated that despite the immediate outrage American people did not change their conception of the United States in world politics. Most of the people did not approve unilateral action against terrorism and using military means to attain foreign policy objectives. That’s why, the reason for this change was not the public opinion.¹⁰²⁰

Wolf says that 9/11 did not cause a change in foreign policy role of the United States but just triggered it. The reason for change in American foreign policy after 9/11 was the rise of a coalition of assertive nationalist and neoconservative cabal in the Bush administration. This group manipulated the domestic audience, influenced the foreign policy executive bodies, and implemented their world views through American foreign policy. According to Wolf, domestic context, within which the compliance of the public opinion and the Congress was with the executive branch, contributed to reformulation of the NRC of the United States after 9/11 attacks.¹⁰²¹ So, in addition to the rise of the neocons at the domestic level, it can be argued that the United States’ enormous military and economic capability and the idea of American exceptionalism affected the NRCs of the Bush administration. The unipolar international

¹⁰¹⁹ Migdal, *Shifting Sands*, 223.

¹⁰²⁰ Wolf, “Terrorized America?,” 200-202.

¹⁰²¹ *Ibid.*, 194-195.

system and international terrorism threat, which triggered the war on terror, also shaped the NRCs of the Bush administration at the external front. President Bush and his foreign policy team assessed these factors, formulated the NRCs of the United States, and executed them accordingly during the first term. The neocons lost their weight in the second Bush administration and were replaced by realist foreign policy elites. However, the coming of the realist figures brought about only stylistic change in U.S. foreign policy and the NRCs continued to be same.

Regarding change and/or continuity between the Clinton administration and the Bush administration in terms of NRCs, we can say that although the Bush administration pursued unilateralist foreign policy and diverted from Clinton's multilateralist tide, NRCs of the United States from the Clinton to Bush administrations were resilient. According to Bacevich, both Clinton and Bush administrations believed in American hegemony and considered the United States as vanguard of history, capable of transforming the global order and by doing so maintaining its dominance in the international system.¹⁰²²

5.3. The Middle East as a Canvas of the Bush Administration's NRCs

George W. Bush assumed power eight months before the 9/11 terrorist attacks without a clear-cut strategy for the Middle East. President Bush's earlier policy towards the region was based on two main principles: preserving the status quo in the region and promoting any peace deal with Israel by cultivating strong regional leaders. Contrary to President Clinton, President Bush was not eager at first to engage heavily with Middle East. However, 9/11 terrorist attacks led to a profound change in the Bush administration's perception of the region. Along with its changing global strategy, the Bush administration was compelled to reassess its foreign policy towards the Middle East after 9/11. As the United States became an unconstrained hegemon in the post-9/11 international order, its active, unilateralist, preemptive and belligerent policies towards the region came to the forefront. In the war on terror, the Bush administration's main objectives were to defeat international terrorism, to uproot (as in the case of Afghanistan and Iraq), and to contain (as in the case of Iran and Syria) its supporters, or the so-called rogue states. It also sought to import democracy to the Middle East to eliminate the root cause of terrorism, which was the biggest threat to U.S. national interests in the wake of 9/11. Hence, the Bush administration put the issue of stability aside, which marked a radical break with decades-long U.S. policy emphasizing stability of regimes regardless of the degree of their democratization. Furthermore, the Bush administration initially dismissed the Middle East

¹⁰²² Bacevich, *American Empire*, 216.

peace as an objective and thus strong regional leaders were no longer needed to resuscitate the peace process. The Bush administration's policy towards the region was thoroughly shaped within the strategic objectives of the war on terror and "constructive instability" became the new formula of its actions to shape the regional environment in favor of the United States and Israel.¹⁰²³

President Bush enunciated his administration's difference from the previous administrations in a speech in London in November 2003 by stating that "*We must shake off decades of failed policy in the Middle East. Your nation and mine, in the past, have been willing to make a bargain, to tolerate oppression for the sake of stability. Long-standing ties often led us to overlook the faults of local elites.*"¹⁰²⁴ Condoleezza Rice also criticized previous administration's policy favoring stability at the expense of democracy in Cairo in February 2005 by saying that "*For 60 years, my country pursued stability at the expense of democracy in this region – her, in the Middle East – and we achieved neither. Now, we are taking a different course. We are supporting the democratic aspirations of all people.*"¹⁰²⁵

The neocons, who dominated foreign policy decision making mechanism in the Bush administration, became the engine of U.S. policy towards the Middle East in the aftermath of 9/11. The rise of neocons, who had been representatives of radical ideas about transforming the region for a long time, had dramatic implications for the Middle East regional system in comparison to other parts of the world. The neocons believed that the United States' global hegemony and its military might could move the region towards freedom and democracy by eliminating terrorism threat and the dictatorial regimes. Although President Bush was skeptical of the neocons' foreign policy vision at the beginning, he adopted their ideas and followed them as guiding principles of his administration's policies after 9/11.¹⁰²⁶ Therefore, it can be argued that the Middle East turned out to be the canvas the Bush administration's NRCs, which

¹⁰²³ Dona J. Stewart, "The Greater Middle East and Reform in the Bush Administration's Ideological Imagination," *The Geographical Review* 95, No. 3 (2006): 400; Marwan J. Kabalan, "Syrian Foreign Policy between Domestic Needs and the External Environment," in *Syrian Foreign Policy and the United States from Bush to Obama* (Scotland: The University of St Andrews Center for Syrian Studies, 2010), 29, 35.

¹⁰²⁴ Timothy J. Lynch and Robert S. Singh, *After Bush: The Case for Continuity in American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 197.

¹⁰²⁵ "Condoleezza Rice 'Given our history, the US has no cause for false pride'," *Independent*, June 22, 2005, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/condoleezza-rice-given-our-history-the-us-has-no-cause-for-false-pride-294058.html>.

¹⁰²⁶ William B. Quandt, "New US Policies for a New Middle East," in *The Middle East and the United States: History Politics*, ed. David W. Lesch and Mark L. Haas, 5th ed. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2014), 490; Migdal, *Shifting Sands*, 212-213.

were couched in the Bush Doctrine. The Bush administration performed NRCs of hegemon, defender of the pacific union, tribune and agent of American values, regional stabilizer, and balancer in the Middle East from 2001 to 2009. These NRCs were actively enacted by the Bush administration in two major instances: the invasion of Iraq and the Middle East peace process.

The Bush administration began to shift its focus of interest towards the Middle East under the influence of the neocons after the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. As mentioned above, President Bush announced in his annual State of the Union address to the Congress on 29 January 2002 that he was changing counter-terrorism strategy from going after terrorists to punishing state sponsors of terrorism. In the same address, Bush noted that there were two enemies of the United States, namely the terrorists who perpetrated 9/11 attacks and states harboring them. He specifically pointed to the threats to U.S. national security emanating from rogue states and specifically from the “axis of evil” (Iraq, Iran, North Korea). Except from North Korea, two members of the axis of evil were Middle Eastern states. According to Bush, rogue states might provide nuclear weapons and other WMDs to terrorist organizations including al-Qaeda. That’s why, the policy of containing and eliminating the Middle Eastern rogue states became an essential dimension of global war on terror by 2002.¹⁰²⁷

In this milieu, President Bush decided to topple the Saddam regime after the Afghanistan Operation. Even though Bush as a candidate had announced that the United States would not do nation building, he implemented policy of regime change and promotion of democracy in a forceful way in the Middle East with the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The Bush administration performed the NRCs of hegemon, defender of the pacific union, tribune and agent of American values and balancer during the invasion of Iraq. Although the United States formed a coalition to bring down the Saddam regime, it was the unquestionable leader of the coalition as other partners were just expected to bow to its directives. So, new unilateralism in U.S. foreign policy, which was stemming from the NRC of hegemon, was first executed during the invasion of Iraq. In addition to the NRC of hegemon, the Bush administration performed the NRCs of defender of the pacific union and balancer in Iraq as it undertook duty of protecting the free world against purported threats in the war on terror and Iraq was one of the sources of these threats that must be balanced.¹⁰²⁸ The third NRC performed in Iraq was tribune and agent of American values. The Bush administration, particularly the neocons, viewed the invasion of

¹⁰²⁷ Dodge, “US Foreign Policy in the Middle East,” 202; Lind, *The American Way of Strategy*, 140-141.

¹⁰²⁸ Hook and Spainer, *American Foreign Policy*, 300.

Iraq as a chance to shape the Middle East in the image of the United States by spreading free market economy, freedom, and democracy.

The Bush administration's NRCs of hegemon, tribune and agent of American values and defender of pacific union could be observed in the Greater Middle East Partnership Initiative (GMEI) as well.¹⁰²⁹ The Bush administration decided to develop a new rationale for the Middle East after the invasion of Iraq as it was understood that its pretexts of invasion -WMD claim and Iraq's link with al-Qaeda- were sham. The Bush administration claimed that undemocratic nature of the Middle Eastern regimes was the root cause of international terrorism and thus bringing democracy to the Middle East was the best way to fight and eliminate terrorism threat.¹⁰³⁰ In this context, the United States as the world's sole hegemon embarked on a new duty to promote democracy in the Middle East by changing non-democratic regimes into democracies through force. The GMEI was designed to forge global leadership of the United States in the Middle East arena by integrating rogue states forcefully into the modern world.¹⁰³¹

The idea of GMEI can be seen in President Bush's speeches after the invasion of Iraq. At the 20th anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) on 6 November 2003, President Bush announced that the United States was dedicated to achieving the goal of promoting liberal democracy and free-market economic reforms not only in Iraq but also across the Middle East. He explained his ideas about the future of democracy and freedom in the Middle East as follows:

“Our commitment to democracy is tested in the Middle East, which is my focus today, and must be a focus of American policy for decades to come... In many nations of the Middle East, democracy has not yet taken root. And the question arise: Are peoples of the Middle East somehow beyond the reach of liberty? I, for one, do not believe it. I believe every person has the ability and the right to be free.”¹⁰³²

In the same speech, Bush reiterated the United States' determination to pursue freedom agenda by stating that Washington adopted a “*forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East*.”¹⁰³³ He

¹⁰²⁹ “The Greater Middle East Initiative,” *Al Jazeera*, May 20, 2004, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2004/5/20/the-greater-middle-east-initiative>.

¹⁰³⁰ Quandt, “New US Policies for a New Middle East,” 493.

¹⁰³¹ Aylin Güney and Fulya Gökcan, “The ‘Greater Middle East’ as a ‘Modern’ Geopolitical Imagination in American Foreign Policy,” *Geopolitics* 15, No. 22 (2010): 31.

¹⁰³² “The Greater Middle East Initiative.”

¹⁰³³ Gary C. Gambill, “Jumpstarting Arab Reform: The Bush Administration's Greater Middle East Initiative,” *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin* 6, No. 6-7 (June/July 2004), https://www.meforum.org/meib/articles/0407_me2.htm.

also underlined that his administration would fall into the trap of choosing stability at the expense of liberty by saying that “*Sixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe, because in the long run stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty.*”¹⁰³⁴

In February 2004, President Bush likened his administration’s democratization drive in the Middle East to Winston Churchill’s struggle against expansion of communism in the post-Second World War international environment. By underlining assertive nature of this policy, Bush announced that:

“We’re challenging the enemies of reform, confronting the allies of terror, and expecting a higher standard from our friends. For too long, American policy looked away while men and women were oppressed, their rights ignored and their hopes stifled. That era is over, and we can be confident. As in Germany, and Japan, and Eastern Europe, liberty will overcome oppression in the Middle East.”¹⁰³⁵

Democracy promotion continued to be the cornerstone of Bush administration’s policy towards the region till the end of his presidency. In his address to the Knesset on 15 May 2008, President Bush elaborated on the issue of democracy promotion in the Middle East as follows:

“The fundamental insight, that freedom yields peace, is the great lesson of the 20th century. Now our task is to apply it to the 21st. Nowhere is this work more urgent than here in the Middle East... That future will be a dramatic departure from the Middle East of today... Israel will be celebrating the 120th anniversary as one of the world’s great democracies, a secure and flourishing homeland for the Jewish people... From Cairo to Riyadh to Baghdad and Beirut, people will live in free and independent societies, where a desire for peace is reinforced by ties of diplomacy and tourism and trade. Iran and Syria will be peaceful nations, with today’s oppression a distant memory and where people are free to speak their minds and develop their God-given talents.”¹⁰³⁶

Expectedly, the intellectual mind behind this strategy was the neocons, whose ideas about democracy promotion acquired a wider strategic framework via the GMEI. They put forward the idea that there was a linkage between democracy promotion and the United States’ security and supremacy in the world. They claimed that democracy promotion in the Middle East was the mission of the United States as the world’s sole hegemon, which would boost its security

¹⁰³⁴ “Bush pushes Middle East Democracy,” *CNN*, November 6, 2003, <https://edition.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/11/06/bush.democracy/index.html>.

¹⁰³⁵ Stewart, “The Greater Middle East and Reform,” 410.

¹⁰³⁶ George W. Bush, “Address to the Members of the Knesset, May 15, 2008,” in *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001-2008*, The White House Archives, https://georgewbush.whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Selected_Speeches_George_W_Bush.pdf, 561-562.

and preeminence in the international system. According to the neocons, Washington was supposed to reshape the region in its image, which would automatically contribute to the resolution of the long-lasting problems, chiefly international terrorism. Hence, they deemed democracy as a panacea for nearly everything creating trouble and its pursuit was directly associated with high American interests in the Middle East.¹⁰³⁷

The GMEI was encapsulating projects for promoting liberal political reforms such as civil society, women's rights and human rights, free market economy, free media, and independent judiciary. Yet, its most controversial aspect was the concept of democracy promotion, which was perceived as a pretext of regime change in the Middle East. Democracy promotion was designed to be applied not only enemies of the United States but also its regional friends including Saudi Arabia and Egypt. In this respect, it was expected that success of regime change, and democratization in Iraq would spill over into other parts of the Muslim world.¹⁰³⁸ Politics of regime change in Iraq was also defined as "reverse domino theory" as the Bush administration calculated that the fall of Saddam regime would cause a domino effect and bring the end of other dictators and tyrants in the Middle East and beyond.¹⁰³⁹

In sum, the Bush Jr. administration gave up the Bush Sr. and Clinton administrations' policies to preserve status quo and pursued an assertive interventionist, belligerent and unilateral policy in the Middle East. The driving force behind this policy was the neocons, who pushed the United States as world's sole hegemon to actively engage in the Middle East to promote free market economy, freedom, and democracy. The neocons hailed and justified hawkish policies of the Bush administration with the concept of manifest destiny which assigned a moral mission to the United States and with the principles of realist international politics. However, the GMEI turned out to be a failed project as it was understood that transforming internal structures of the failed states of the Middle East was a mission impossible.¹⁰⁴⁰

Another NRC performed by the United States was regional stabilizer/peace catalyst, which could be observed in the Bush administration's efforts to reinvigorate the Palestinian-Israeli

¹⁰³⁷ Katerina Dalacoura, "US Foreign Policy and Democracy Promotion in the Middle East: Theoretical Perspectives and Policy Recommendations," *Ortadoğu Etütleri* 2, No. 3 (July 2010): 61-62.

¹⁰³⁸ Philip Robins, "The War for Regime Change," in *International Relations of the Middle East*, ed. Louise Fawcett, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 306; Rieffer and Mercer, "US Democracy Promotion," 404.

¹⁰³⁹ Migdal, *Shifting Sands*, 236.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Hudson, "The United States in the Middle East," 336-337.

peace track. Unlike Bush Sr. and Clinton, Bush Jr. was not eager to perform the NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst at the beginning of his first term. Although he faced escalation of violence between Israel and the Palestinians after taking the oath of office due to ongoing al-Aqsa intifada, he was reluctant to mediate between the two sides. Because President Bush believed that animosity between Israel and the Palestinians grew on account of the collapse of the Oslo peace process sponsored by the Clinton administration. He thought that the Clinton administration's peace efforts proved futile and thus he did not want to follow the path of his predecessor in the Middle East peace process.¹⁰⁴¹

Why was President Bush initially so reluctant to address the Palestinian Question? Because he did not want to jeopardize his political capital and to alienate the Israel lobby after a narrow victory in the elections. He told one of his advisors that "*I only have so much political capital and I'm going to use it carefully and I'm not going to do what my predecessors have done; I've seen several of them squander their political capital.*"¹⁰⁴² For this reason, he preferred to focus on more promising domestic initiatives such as tax cuts to consolidate his domestic base of support. Given these factors, President Bush did not appoint a new special Middle East coordinator when Dennis Ross resigned in January 2001. While the Bush administration was distancing itself from the Middle East peace process and the ongoing al-Aqsa intifada, it promptly developed close and warm relations with Israel's new Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. President Bush was evidently much more pro-Israeli than his predecessors. On 30 January 2001, he told his top advisors that "*We're going to correct the imbalances of the previous administration on the Mideast... We're going to tilt it back toward Israel.*"¹⁰⁴³

In early 2001, Secretary of State Colin Powell also spoke to AIPAC and expressed the administration's outright support for Israel. Powell stated that the peace talks could be reinvigorated if violence was ended by the Palestinians. He also clarified the Bush administration's reluctant attitude in the peace talks as follows: "*The US stands ready to assist, not insist. Peace arrived at voluntarily by the partners themselves is likely to prove more robust... than a peace widely as developed by others, or worse yet imposed.*"¹⁰⁴⁴

¹⁰⁴¹ Little, *American Orientalism*, 305; Hudson, "The United States in the Middle East," 335.

¹⁰⁴² Tyler, *A World of Trouble*, 530.

¹⁰⁴³ Little, *American Orientalism*, 314.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Robert O. Freedman, "George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," in *The Middle East and the United States: History Politics*, ed. David W. Lesch and Mark L. Haas, 5th ed. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2014), 263.

As mentioned above, 9/11 terrorist attacks triggered a role change in U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. This change could also be observed in the Middle East peace process. The Bush administration began to perform NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst actively following 9/11 to build a coalition of Muslim states against al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. In October 2001, President Bush announced that the United States was ready to endorse a Palestinian state if it recognized Israel and renounced terrorism. He publicly declared that “*I believe there ought to be a Palestinian state... [that] recognizes the right of Israel to exist.*” By endorsing an independent Palestinian state, the main goal of the Bush administration was to obtain support of the Arab world in the war on terror.¹⁰⁴⁵ To prove his sincerity, President Bush also exerted pressure on Sharon to allow a meeting between Israel’s Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and PLO leader Yasser Arafat to achieve a ceasefire.¹⁰⁴⁶

Nevertheless, it should be noted that unlike Bush Sr. and Clinton administrations, the Bush Jr. administration performed the NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst in the Middle East peace process for practical reasons in order not to alienate the Arab world in the war on terror and invasion of Iraq. Besides, the Bush administration made the Israeli-Palestinian track its priority rather than the Syrian-Israeli peace track in the peace process. What’s more, it should be mentioned that it engaged in the peace talks on the level of envoy, not at the level of ambassador. Thus, the Bush administration performed the role of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst in the Arab-Israeli conflict but it was not its priority in the region unlike the Bush Sr. and Clinton administrations. As rightly explained by Migdal, in comparison to previous administrations, President Bush did not make much effort to advance the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations in the first seven years of his administration.¹⁰⁴⁷

Bush’s efforts to reinvigorate the Middle East peace process intensified after the military victory in Afghanistan. European states and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak called for an active American role to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict and to end the ongoing violence in the al-Aqsa intifada. In November 2001, President Bush made a speech at the United Nations, in which he announced that “*We are working for the day when two states-Israel and Palestine-live peacefully together within secure and recognized borders.*” He also said that peace would be possible when violence and terrorism stopped and there was no such thing as good terrorist. Secretary of State Powell also explained the view of the United States for the resolution of the

¹⁰⁴⁵ Little, *American Orientalism*, 305.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Freedman, “George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict,” 264.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Migdal, *Shifting Sands*, 245.

Arab-Israeli conflict. In his speech, Powell denounced the Palestinian's violent methods and called al-Aqsa intifada as a "*self-defeating violence*". He stated that the Bush administration believed that there should be a two-state solution to the conflict, Israel and the Palestinians should live side by side peacefully with mutually recognized borders. He underlined that the Palestinians must stop terrorism, engage in diplomacy and recognize Jewish nature of the state of Israel. While reiterating the United States' unswerving commitment to Israel's security, Powell underscored that Israel had to make concessions as well. He said that Israel must stop expansion of settlements and end occupation in the West Bank and Gaza. Finally, Powell noted that the United States was ready to do everything to facilitate the Middle East peace process, but in the end, it was not the responsibility of the United States but the parties to make peace a peace deal.¹⁰⁴⁸

After the invasion of Iraq, President Bush announced the so-called Road Map for Israeli-Palestinian peace process in the spring of 2003 in response to pressures of British Prime Minister Tony Blair. The primary goal of the Road Map was to calm down the Arab peoples, agitated by the invasion of Iraq, by curbing Ariel Sharon's harsh and uncompromising policies. The Road Map called on the Palestinians to stop violence against Israel, demanded Israel that it stop settlement activities in Palestine and outlined a series of steps that would result in the establishment of a Palestinian state with temporary borders in future. However, the Road Map initiative could not lead to a breakthrough in the Israeli-Palestinian deadlock owing to lack of mechanisms to implement its provisions. The Palestinians argued that they could not give security assurances without seeing Israel's determination to end invasion and settlements. On the other hand, Israel said that it could not take steps while the Palestinian violence was continuing apace. The death of Yasser Arafat in 2004, election of Mahmoud Abbas as the new chairman of PLO in 2005 and victory of Hamas in the 2006 elections complicated the scene in the Arab-Israeli peace process for the United States.¹⁰⁴⁹

In his second term, President Bush surprisingly launched a new initiative to restart the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations. Reconfiguration of Bush's new foreign policy team and the rise of Condoleezza Rice as the new secretary of state ushered in a new American posture on the Middle East peace process. The driving motivation behind this move was that President Bush and Secretary of State Rice sought to leave a legacy for world peace beyond Iraq. In addition, the changing regional dynamics after the invasion of Iraq forced them to reformulate American policy towards the region. The rise of Iran as a major regional power and its ties with

¹⁰⁴⁸ Freedman, "George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," 265.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Quandt, "New US Policies for a New Middle East," 496-498.

Hezbollah and Hamas frightened Saudi Arabia as well as Sunni states. As a result of Rice's diplomatic efforts, the Bush administration was able to summon a conference for the Middle East peace in Annapolis, Maryland in November 2007. The Arab League including Syria sent representatives to the conference. Yet, the Annapolis Conference did not yield any tangible result. President Bush continued to express his commitment to a Palestine state until leaving the office in 2009. Middle East peace process with the participation of Syria continued during 2007-2008, which collapsed when Israel invaded Hamas-controlled Gaza with the pretext of rocket attacks in December 2008.¹⁰⁵⁰

It was obvious that the Bush administration's policy towards the Middle East was not resembling the previous administrations. President Bush deviated from traditional policies of American presidents from Harry Truman to Bill Clinton by inventing a new Islamic threat, by attempting to export democracy to the region through military force and by replacing the Cold War's containment doctrine with preventive war strategy, couched in the Bush Doctrine.¹⁰⁵¹ The Bush administration's policies in the first term were shaped by the ideas of the neocons in the administration. Under the influence of the neocons, the Bush administration sought to forge an unchallenged American hegemony in the Middle East in alliance with Israel. It invaded Iraq to demonstrate American military muscle and pursued democracy promotion to shape the Middle East in the image of the United States.¹⁰⁵² Thus, the Bush administration wanted to achieve a total makeover in the Middle East and objectives of previous administrations -regional stability and Arab-Israeli peace- were deemed insufficient to address the new challenges in the war on terror. The Bush administration's overall approach to the Middle East hinged on unilateral use of force, regime change, spread of democracy and freedom as explained within the framework of the GMEI.¹⁰⁵³

To sum up, despite its initial unwillingness, the Bush administration was compelled to engaged in the Middle East actively by performing the NRCs of hegemon, defender of the pacific union, tribune and agent of American values, regional stabilizer, and balancer in the wake of 9/11. These NRCs were enacted during the invasion of Iraq and in the Palestinian-Israeli peace track. According to President Bush, it was the responsibility of the United States as the sole hegemon

¹⁰⁵⁰ Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 669; Freedman, "George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," 279-280.

¹⁰⁵¹ Little, *American Orientalism*, 309.

¹⁰⁵² Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 249.

¹⁰⁵³ Quandt, "New US Policies for a New Middle East," 500.

to eliminate the threats of international terrorism and rogue states against the free world. He also believed that the root cause of terrorism was lack of democracy in the Middle East. So, he launched the GMEI to promote American values such as democracy and freedom in the region to eliminate terrorism threat. It should be noted that although the Bush administration played the NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst in the Palestinian-Israeli peace track, it did not embrace the Clinton administration's multi-track and comprehensive peace vision. Unlike the Clinton administration, the Bush administration did not consider achievement of a Syrian-Israeli peace as a key to comprehensive peace or a part of its containment strategy of Iraq and Iran. Thus, its only mediated between Israel and the Palestinians in the Middle East peace process and mediator role did not encapsulate the Syrian track.

5.4. From Cooperation to Animosity: U.S. Foreign Policy towards Syria under the Bush Administration

5.4.1. A Controversial Partnership: The U.S.-Syrian Relations Prior to the Invasion of Iraq (2001-2003)

The trajectory of the U.S.-Syrian relations was not clear at the beginning of the 2000s as new leaders came to power both in Washington and Damascus. Bashar al-Assad, who became Syria's new president in July 2000, initially hinted change in future orientation of Syrian foreign policy. Bashar, who was known as an open-minded and reformist leader, was familiar with Western ideas and institutions thanks to his Western-style education and openness to technological developments such as internet and computer. What's more, like King Abdullah II of Jordan and King Muhammad V of Morocco, he was viewed as a representative of the new generation of Arab leaders having a vision of modernization encapsulating economic liberalization, transparency, and accountability. Thus, Bashar's rise to power was welcomed both inside and outside of Syria as he was expected to remove iron-curtain on Syria by doing substantial reforms and moving Syrian foreign policy towards a pro-Western orientation.¹⁰⁵⁴

Before 9/11, President Assad maintained his late father's course by adopting a policy of cautious maneuvering between the East and the West to attain Syria's strategic interests. While preserving Syria's cordial relations with Iran and strengthening its strategic ties with Iraq, he sought to initiate political dialog with the European countries, the United States, and the moderate Arab states.¹⁰⁵⁵ In this context, Assad demonstrated his willingness to realign with

¹⁰⁵⁴ Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 130; Raymond Hinnebusch, "Globalization and Generational Change: Syrian Foreign Policy between Regional Conflict and European Partnership," *The Review of International Affairs* 3, No. 2 (Winter 2003): 194-197.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 132.

Washington after his swearing-in ceremony as a part of his long-term domestic reform strategy. Yet, it was not an easy objective to achieve because Assad Jr. had fewer assets than his father in dealing with Washington in the absence of the Syrian-Israeli peace track.¹⁰⁵⁶

Furthermore, Assad as an inexperienced leader faced an increasingly deteriorating external environment due to the collapse of the Syrian-Israeli peace track in March 2000, Israel's withdrawal from south Lebanon in May 2000, the outburst of the second Palestinian or al-Aqsa intifada in September 2000, the election of George W. Bush as new American president and the rise of the right-wing Sharon government in early 2001.¹⁰⁵⁷ In this milieu, Syria was not able to repair its relations with Washington and obtain economic investment from the West it desperately needed to stabilize its economy especially after the collapse of the Syrian-Israeli peace track and the outbreak of the al-Aqsa intifada. Because Assad challenged moderate Arab states and supported the militant Palestinian groups and Hezbollah by adopting a radical nationalist posture during the intifada.¹⁰⁵⁸

As Assad's primary objective was to resolve perennial economic problems of Syria, he endeavored to balance unfavorable external factors by deepening Syria's diplomatic and economic engagement with the Saddam regime, which had been initiated by Hafez al-Assad in 1997. Bashar met with Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz to discuss Syrian-Iraqi relations in October 2000. After the meeting, he sent a plane of humanitarian aid to Iraq. He also assured the Saddam regime that Syria was determined to stand with Baghdad against unjust Western embargo in reference to the UN Oil-for-Food program. In the same month, Assad rejected American demands for ceasing flights to Iraq and restraining Hezbollah in a meeting with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. More importantly, he ordered reopening of the Kirkuk-Banias oil pipeline in late 2000, which had been closed by Syria in 1982 owing to its dispute with Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War. Although Syria violated the UN sanction regime by breaking Baghdad's isolation, Assad wanted to reap economic benefits of exporting Iraqi oil. After the opening of the pipeline, 150,000-200,000 barrels of oil began to pass through Syrian territories per day. Indeed, oil trade provided Syria with cheap oil and rendered \$1 billion revenue annually, almost 5 percent of its GDP. Assad considered the export of Iraqi oil a real cure for Syria's suffocating economy.¹⁰⁵⁹

¹⁰⁵⁶ Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 134.

¹⁰⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Hinnebusch, "Syrian Foreign Policy under Bashar al-Asad," 11.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Hinnebusch, "Defying the Hegemon," 376; Hinnebusch, "Globalization and Generational Change," 200-202.

George W. Bush's taking office in Washington in January 2001 aroused hopes in many Arab capitals including Damascus as he was expected to follow footsteps of George H. W. Bush. However, it was soon understood that Middle East vision of Bush Jr., who employed the neocons in his administration, was totally different from that of his father and President Clinton.¹⁰⁶⁰ In this context, Syria's economic and diplomatic engagement with Iraq and its violation of the UN sanction regime immediately turned out to be a bone of contention between the two countries. Contrary to Syria's policy of breaking economic and diplomatic isolation of Iraq, the Bush administration's goal was to contain and ultimately unseat the Saddam regime. Hence, the Bush administration was concerned that newly opened Kirkuk-Banias pipeline might serve Saddam Hussein's plans to develop sophisticated WMDs by receiving revenues from oil trade with Syria. In addition, it was seriously worried about Syria's alleged shipment of military and dual-use items to the Saddam regime.¹⁰⁶¹

Nonetheless, the Bush administration considered Syria a strategic country, which could help the United States contain the Saddam regime as it was sharing a long border with Iraq. That's why, Syria was added to the list of countries in Secretary of State Colin Powell's regional tour in February 2001. Before going to Damascus, Powell underlined Syria's regional importance in an interview with CBS's Face the Nation program on 11 February 2001 by stating that "*Syria is an important nation in the region, an important player in this whole process, and so I thought it was very, very appropriate for me as part of this quick trip through the Middle East, my first trip, to also stop in Syria for just a few hours.*"¹⁰⁶²

Powell arrived in Damascus on 26 February 2001 to prod President Assad into channeling oil revenues going to Iraq into a UN escrow account within the framework of UN Oil-for-Food program.¹⁰⁶³ In the meeting, President Assad claimed that the flow of Iraqi oil was done for testing the old pipeline, which had been closed for two decades, and when testing was completed oil flow would be ceased. Assad also agreed to integrate the new pipeline, which was under construction at that moment, into the UN Oil-for-Food program, but he did not precisely pledge to revoke Syria's ongoing engagement with Baghdad. After the meeting,

¹⁰⁶⁰ Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 102.

¹⁰⁶¹ Thomas H. Henriksen, *America and the Rogue States* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 164-165; Rabil, "The Ineffective Role of the US," 436-437; Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 134.

¹⁰⁶² Colin Powell, "Interview on CBS's 'Face the Nation'," *U.S. Department of State Archive*, February 11, 2001, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2001/549.htm>.

¹⁰⁶³ "US urges Syria to be tougher on Iraq," *Guardian*, February 27 2001, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/feb/27/iraq.brianwhitaker>.

Powell announced that he settled a major issue with Syria by getting a commitment from President Assad on the oil issue.¹⁰⁶⁴ While returning from Damascus, Powell explained his satisfaction with Assad's pledge by stating that:

“We talked quite extensively about Iraq. As you know, Syria has had a position for some time that said we should modify the sanctions regime; they've been on the record for some time now. We talked about that... Candidly, we discussed the Iraqi-Syrian pipeline. Of course, as you know, the Syrians want to stay within the context of the UN Security Council resolutions to play their role and they have been on record with that. The President said to me in response to my query that it is their plan to bring that pipeline, and what is going through that pipeline and the revenues generated in that pipeline, to be under the same kind of control as other elements of the sanctions regime. I found that to be a very important statement on his part, and we have passed that information to President Bush; he has been informed of that, and he also was pleased.”¹⁰⁶⁵

After the Assad-Powell meeting, the New York Times wrote that the “*the commitment from the Syrian was so firm-Mr. Assad stated it three times during the meeting, General Powell said-that the Secretary said he had telephoned President Bush to tell him.*”¹⁰⁶⁶ However, it was soon understood that in the meeting Powell misconceived President Assad, who did not promise to stop oil flow through the old Kirkuk-Banias pipeline. Assad did not want to give up the oil card immediately, because he wanted to see the Bush administration's posture on the Middle East peace process before changing his policy towards Iraq in tandem with the United States.¹⁰⁶⁷ When Powell learned that Syria would not put the main pipeline under the UN scheme, he assessed this event as one in which President Assad lied to him. Later, the Powell-Assad meeting in February made the violation of UN sanctions a controversial issue between Washington and Damascus.¹⁰⁶⁸

A couple of weeks after Powell's visit, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon traveled to Washington to discuss regional and defense issues with President Bush. Just before Sharon's visit, Bush called Assad on the phone to discuss the current state of regional affairs. The Syrian sources

¹⁰⁶⁴ Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 133; Fred H. Lawson, *Global Security Watch – Syria* (Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2013), 156.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Colin Powell, “Briefing for the Press Abord Aircraft En Route Brussels,” *U.S. Department of State Archive*, February 26, 2001, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2001/953.htm>.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Jane Perlez, “Powell Proposes Easing Sanctions on Iraqi Civilians,” *New York Times*, February 27, 2001, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/02/27/world/powell-proposes-easing-sanctions-on-iraqi-civilians.html>.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Volker Perthes, “Syrian Regional Policy under Bashar al-Asad: Realignment or Economic Rationalization,” *Middle East Report* No. 220 (Autumn 2001): 40.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 135.

commented on the contact between two presidents by stating that both leaders “*discussed bilateral ties and the need to improve them for the benefit of regional security and stability.*” According to Rabil, the Bush-Assad conversation could be interpreted as the Bush administration’s recognition of Syria’s key role in the Middle East and the fact that reinforcing sanctions on Iraq without Syria’s cooperation was impossible.¹⁰⁶⁹

As mentioned above, 9/11 terrorist attacks totally changed the scene not only in the international system but also in the Middle East sub-system. More importantly, it altered the Bush administration’s NRCs in the Middle East. While it was pursuing isolationist and status quo policies before 9/11, it decided to reassert American hegemony in a unilateral fashion after 9/11 by eliminating threats emanating from terrorist organizations and rogue states. 9/11 and subsequent war on terror had serious repercussions for the U.S.-Syrian relations in the long run. Because Syria was in the State Department’s list of states sponsoring terrorism for decades and was allegedly pursuing WMDs, which would put the Assad regime at odds with the Bush administration in the war on terror.¹⁰⁷⁰

When President Bush announced on the evening of 9/11 that the United States would not make distinction between the terrorists and those harboring them, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld interpreted this statement as a message to Syria as well. He wrote in his memoirs that:

“From the Oval Office at 8:30 that evening, President Bush delivered his first formal remarks after the attack to the nation. “We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them,” he announced, setting out a new declaratory policy. This was a crucial element of our strategy to do everything we reasonably could to prevent follow-on attacks... Afghanistan’s Taliban regime, Syria’s Bashar al-Assad, Iraq’s Saddam Hussein, and the clerical rulers of Iran were now on notice: Bush had announced that the costs for state support of terrorism had just gone up.”¹⁰⁷¹

Against this backdrop, President Assad faced a critical dilemma in face of the Bush administration’s determination to strike states harboring terrorists declared in his famous dictum: “*either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.*” Despite its linkage with the militant Palestinian groups and Hezbollah as well as its enlistment as a state sponsor of terrorism, Syria sought to avoid American wrath in the war on terror by portraying itself as one of the earlier victims of Islamic terror with reference to the Muslim Brotherhood’s uprising in early 1980s. President Assad immediately offered cooperation after the terrorist attacks by

¹⁰⁶⁹ Rabil, “The Ineffective Role of the US,” 437.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 102.

¹⁰⁷¹ Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York: Sentinel, 2011), 346.

sending a letter of condolence to President Bush, in which he called for “*international cooperation to uproot terror at its base, and determined activity to protect the human right to live in peace and security.*” In so doing, he wanted to convince President Bush that the war on terror was a shared interest of the United States and Syria, and he was ready to cooperate with him sincerely in his fight against al-Qaeda terrorism.¹⁰⁷²

From 9/11 to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003, Syria’s intelligence cooperation against al-Qaeda and the Bush administration’s need for allies and support in the Muslim world in the war on terror led to a thaw in relations between Washington and Damascus. The Bush administration initially signaled that it would distance itself from Israel and establish close relations with the Arab states including Syria.¹⁰⁷³ In this context, having strong intelligence networks in the Middle East, Syria helped the Bush administration in numerous ways such as supplying information about al-Qaeda cells, assisting in arrest of al-Qaeda terrorists, and foiling attacks against American targets. Upon Bashar’s call, FBI agents went to Syria in early 2002 to probe some al-Qaeda members, who had maintained ties with Syrian citizens.¹⁰⁷⁴

In June 2002, it was reported that Syria submitted information obtained from the interrogation of one of the perpetrators of 9/11 Muhammad Hayder Zammar, who was a German citizen of Syrian origin, to the Bush administration. President Bush appreciated Syria’s cooperation in the war on terror and called President Assad to thank him for Syria’s assistance in the fight against terrorism along with the United States. Senior Bush administration officials also said that Syria’s help was crucial in saving lives of many Americans and preventing attacks against American targets in the Middle East. On 18 June 2002, Assistant Secretary of State William Burns told in a congressional panel that “*the cooperation the Syrians have provided in their self-interest on al-Qaida has saved American lives.*”¹⁰⁷⁵ CIA Director George Tenet even described Syria’s assistance as “first-rate intelligence” on al-Qaeda.¹⁰⁷⁶ The Bush

¹⁰⁷² Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria’s Waiting Game*, 55; Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 134.

¹⁰⁷³ David W. Lesch, *Missed Opportunities: Cooperation and Confrontation in the U.S.-Syrian Relationship*, A Century Foundation Report (Washington D.C., The Century Foundation, 2007), 7.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Eyal Zisser, “Bashar al-Assad: In or Out of the New World Order?,” *The Washington Quarterly* 7, No. 2 (2005): 123; Carsten Wieland, *Syria at Bay: Secularism, Islamism and ‘Pax Americana’* (London: Hurst&Company, 2006), 124; al-Baidhani, *The United States and Syria*, 56.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Eyal Zisser, “Syria and the War in War Iraq,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 7, No. 2 (June 2003): 47-48; Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 102.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Hazem Kandil, “The Challenge of Restructuring: Syrian Foreign Policy,” in *The Foreign Policies of Arab States*, ed. Bahgat Korany and Ali E. Hillal Dessouki (New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 436.

administration officials also publicly acknowledged that the CIA received help from the Syrian Military Intelligence against al-Qaeda via an intelligence channel, which was not active since the Gulf crisis.¹⁰⁷⁷

President Bush rewarded Syria's intelligence sharing by giving a tacit approval for Syria's election to the UN Security Council as a non-permanent member on 8 October 2001 despite pressures of the pro-Israeli congressmen. Especially, the State Department launched a public relations campaign about Syria's assistance in saving American lives after 9/11 attacks. The State Department, traditionally eager to improve relations with Syria, also wanted to obtain support of the Assad regime to contain the Saddam regime. The State Department's compromising attitude even convinced President Assad that Syria's violation of the UN Oil-for-Food program would go with impunity. Assad's belief was consolidated when President Bush did not categorize Syria as a rogue state or include Damascus in the axis of evil in his State of the Union address in January 2002. Bush's remarks were clear indication that the United States was willing to preserve its cooperation with Syria in the war on terror. In addition, Washington turned a blind eye to Syria's hegemony over Lebanon and in the official documents Syria was not cited as an obstacle to peace and instability in the Middle East. The Bush administration seemed optimistic about Assad's reformist agenda and his intention to recalibrate Syrian foreign policy towards the West. Thus, it initially signaled that it would continue previous administration's policy of engagement with Syria.¹⁰⁷⁸

Despite Syria's intelligence cooperation, mixed signals were coming from the United States owing contending approaches of different policymaking circles towards Syria in Washington. The neocons supported the use of force against Syria to change its attitude especially towards the terrorist groups. The neocons, who were influential in the Pentagon and in the Office of Vice President, had serious doubts about engaging with Syria due to its connection with the militant Palestinian groups and Hezbollah, its WMD capability and its military presence in Lebanon. They opposed to Syria's help in the war on terror because they feared that it might lead to indebtedness and undermine Washington's struggle with states sponsoring terrorism.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 142. Also see Howard Schneider, "Syria Evolves as Anti-Terror Ally," *Washington Post*, July 25, 2002, 18 and James Risen and Tim Weiner, "C.I.A. Is Said to Have Sought Help From Syria," *New York Times*, October 30, 2001, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/10/30/world/a-nation-challenged-collaboration-cia-is-said-to-have-sought-help-from-syria.html>.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Max Abrahms, "When Rogues Defy Reason: Bashar's Syria," *Middle East Quarterly* (Fall 1993, <https://www.meforum.org/562/when-rogues-defy-reason-bashars-syria>); Gary C. Gambill, "The American-Syrian Crisis and the End of Constructive Engagement," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin* 5, No. 4 (April 2003), https://www.meforum.org/meib/articles/0304_s1.htm.

The Pentagon and the Congress especially contended that cooperating with Syria would damage coherence of global war on terror. They claimed that no benefit could be reaped from entente with Syria.¹⁰⁷⁹

On the other hand, President Bush and the State Department preferred to accommodate Syria in the war on terror given its intelligence support and sought to change its behavior by exerting pressure rather than force. President Bush was not indifferent to Syria's connections with terrorist groups. For example, while preparing for the Afghanistan Operation in September 2001, President Bush said that "*We want to signal this is a change from the past. We want to cause other countries like Syria and Iran to change their views.*"¹⁰⁸⁰

Following Syria's election to the UN Security Council, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage surprisingly announced on 11 October 2001 that he did not consider Syria as a part of the anti-terrorism coalition. He also said that Washington did not disregard the possibility of resorting to military force against Syria due to its ongoing support for terrorist organizations.¹⁰⁸¹ Syria promptly protested Armitage's remarks and summoned the American ambassador in Damascus and informed him of the objection to these remarks. The tension deescalated when President Bush told at a news conference on the same day that "*The Syrians have talked to us about how they can help in the war against terrorism. We take that seriously and we'll give them an opportunity to do it.*"¹⁰⁸²

Although President Bush gave positive messages to Syria, NSA Condoleezza Rice warned Damascus of cutting ties with terrorism in interview with *Al-Jazeera* on 16 October 2001 as follows: "*There are not a lot of discussions with Syria, but we have had discussions with Syria that suggests: get out of the business of sponsoring terrorism. We're asking that of every state of the world. You cannot be neutral in this fight; you are either for terrorism or against it.*"¹⁰⁸³

¹⁰⁷⁹ Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 142-143.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Daalder and Lindsay, *America Unbound*, 105.

¹⁰⁸¹ Zisser, "Syria and the War in Iraq," 48; "Intelligence Briefs: Syria," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin* 3, No. 10 (October 2001), https://www.meforum.org/meib/articles/0110_sb.htm.

¹⁰⁸² Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, 88. Also see George W. Bush, "President Holds Prime Time News Conference," *The White House Archives*, October 11, 2001, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/10/20011011-7.html>.

¹⁰⁸³ Condoleezza Rice, "National Security Advisor Interview with Al Jazeera TV," *The White House Archives*, October 16, 2001, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/10/text/20011016-3.html>.

President Assad did not want to go on a collision course with the Bush administration in the global war on terror, yet he did not bow to every demand of Washington to change Syria's foreign policy orientation. Thus, he hinted that Syria could not go along with and commit itself to the United States' post-9/11 NRCs in the Middle East. Especially, President Assad's views on terrorism and resistance were totally different from that of the Bush administration. Having been aware of Israel's strategy to equate Palestinian and Lebanese resistance groups with al-Qaeda in the war on terror, Assad strongly underscored the difference between resistance organizations and terrorist groups. Although Syria urged the resistance movements to take a break after 9/11, this did not mean that Syria categorized them as terrorists at Washington's behest. In November 2001, Assad announced at the press conference with British Prime Minister Tony Blair that Syria was "*the most able to determine the nature of the organizations existing in Syria.*" He reiterated this position in his meetings with several congressional delegations visiting Syria in late 2001 and early 2002.¹⁰⁸⁴

President Assad elaborated on Syria's attitude toward the terrorism issue at the summit of Arab leaders in Beirut in March 2002 by saying that "*there is difference between terrorism and resistance...the difference between one who has a right and the other who usurps this right.*"¹⁰⁸⁵ President Assad also clarified Syria's position by criticizing Washington's patronizing attitude and unilateral tendency in the war on terror at the summit as follows:

"As a result of the September 11 events, fear prevailed everywhere and the Arabs were not immune to this though without any justification.... [The Americans] have asked us to commit ourselves to combat terrorism. We did it and so did all the Arabs in general. But it seems that all our experience in combating and all the statements issued before and after September 11 are not enough to prove that Arabs are against terrorism and that they are the first people to combat terrorism.... The [Americans] forgot that they were the ones who prepared the ground of terrorism... But now they start to decide who is the terrorist among us, and which is the terrorist state. They decide for us and we have to keep silent and abide and convince ourselves with what they say. They even seem to think that they know us better than we know ourselves."¹⁰⁸⁶

Despite Syria's intelligence cooperation against al-Qaeda in the war on terror, the Bush administration exerted pressure on Syria throughout 2002 to stop development of WMDs, to limit its relations with other members of the Axis of Evil – North Korea, Iran, Iraq, to shut down facilities of militant Palestinian groups, to deport their leaders, to assist in curbing

¹⁰⁸⁴ Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria's Waiting Game*, 86; Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, 89.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 102.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 135.

Hezbollah's activities in Lebanon and to stop shipment of Iranian supplies to it.¹⁰⁸⁷ Especially, Syria's support for the militant Palestinian organizations and Hezbollah in the ongoing al-Aqsa intifada and its rejection of categorizing them as terrorists deteriorated the U.S.-Syrian relations. VP Cheney raised the issue of Hezbollah with President Assad when it intensified its attacks during Israel's Operation Defensive Shield in the West Bank in March 2002. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld also accused Syria, Iran, and Iraq of supporting and inspiring terrorism against Israel on 1 April 2002.¹⁰⁸⁸ President Bush slammed Syria in a speech on 4 April 2002 by saying that "*Syria has spoken out against al-Qaeda. We expect it to act against Hamas and Hezbollah as well. It is time for Iran to focus on meeting its own people's aspirations for freedom, and for Syria to decide which side of the war against terror it is on.*"¹⁰⁸⁹

While Hezbollah was escalating its attacks along Israel's northern border during the intifada, Colin Powell went to Syria to discuss Hezbollah's attacks with President Assad on 15 April 2002. In the meeting, Powell pressed Assad to restrain Hezbollah's activities as it was creating a risk for wider war in the Middle East.¹⁰⁹⁰ On his way back to Israel after visiting Syria, Powell answered a question about Assad's posture on Hezbollah's activities by saying that "*He recognized that it would not be in anyone's interest at this point to not try to restrain Hezbollah. That's what he said. He said he would talk to them, and I expect that he will do that.*"¹⁰⁹¹ On the other hand, Assad considered Washington's posture on resistance groups as an indication of its weakness, continued abetting Hezbollah, and ignored American demands for restraining it during the second intifada.¹⁰⁹²

¹⁰⁸⁷ Lesch, *Missed Opportunities*, 8.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Eyal Zisser, "Syria and the United States: Bad Habits Die Hard," *Middle East Quarterly* 10, No. 3 (2003): 33; Vernon Loeb, "Countries Tied to Attacks on Israel," *Washington Post*, April 2, 2002, 11.

¹⁰⁸⁹ George W. Bush, "Remarks on the Situation in the Middle East, April 4, 2002," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of George W. Bush, Book I* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2003), 548.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Todd S. Purdum, "Powell Appeals to Syria and Lebanon," *New York Times*, April 15, 2002, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/04/15/international/powell-appeals-to-syria-and-lebanon-for-a-crackdown.html>.

¹⁰⁹¹ Colin Powell, "Remarks on Board Plane En Route Tel Aviv, Israel," *U.S. Department of State Archive*, April 15, 2002, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2002/9394.htm>.

¹⁰⁹² Zisser, "Syria and the United States," 33.

In this period, the neocons, whose influence was on rise in Washington after 9/11, portrayed Syria as a threat to the United States owing to its WMD capability and support for the terrorist organizations. The neocons, having close relations with the Likud Party, wanted to change traditional U.S. foreign policy towards the Arab states (including Syria) in the post-9/11 international environment. They supported the idea that ousting the Saddam regime would give the United States a free hand to establish a pro-Israeli regional pax-Americana. As the Bush administration did not prioritize the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, they argued that there was no need for Syria's partnership in the war on terror and the peace process. According to the neocons, Syria was as a dire threat to Israel's security, and it was the biggest stumbling block to politics of regime change in Iraq. That's why, the neocons such as Douglas Feith, John Bolton, Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz, and David Wurmser, who had advised Benjamin Netanyahu previously to attack Syria, became a leading political force in Washington and advocated punishment of Syria by means of American military power. So, 9/11 rendered the neocons unique opportunity to pursue their agenda in the Middle East against Syria.¹⁰⁹³

Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security John Bolton publicly criticized Syria's WMD capability and its relationship with Hezbollah. Bolton elaborated on Bush's axis of evil and added three states -Cuba, Libya, and Syria- to this group in a speech entitled "Beyond Axis of Evil" at the Heritage Foundation on 6 May 2002. Bolton argued that these states were "*state sponsors of terrorism that are pursuing or who have the potential to pursue weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or have the capability to do so in violation of their treaty obligations.*"¹⁰⁹⁴ Bolton pointed to the danger of Syria's WMD capability as follows:

"The United States also knows that Syria has long had a chemical warfare program. It has a stockpile of the nerve agent sarin and is engaged in research and development of the more toxic and persistent nerve agent VX. Although Damascus currently is dependent on foreign sources for key elements of its chemical warfare program, including precursor chemicals and key production equipment, we are concerned about Syrian advances in its indigenous CW infrastructure which would significantly increase the independence of its CW program. We think that Syria has a variety of aerial bombs and SCUD warheads, which are potential means of delivery of deadly agents capable of striking neighboring countries."¹⁰⁹⁵

¹⁰⁹³ Raymond Hinnebusch, "Syria under Bashar: Between Economic Reform and Nationalist Realpolitik," in *Syrian Foreign Policy and the United States from Bush to Obama* (Scotland: The University of St Andrews Center for Syrian Studies, 2010), 13; Hinnebusch, "Defying the Hegemon," 377; Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 151.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Migdal, *Shifting Sands*, 234; Gambill, "The American-Syrian Crisis."

¹⁰⁹⁵ John Bolton, "Beyond the Axis of Evil: Additional Threats from Weapons of Mass Destruction," The Heritage Foundation, May 6 2002, <https://www.heritage.org/defense/report/beyond-the-axis-evil-additional-threats-weapons-mass-destruction-0>.

In the State Department's "Patterns of Global Terror 2001" report, which was released on 21 May 2002, Syria was charged with supporting various terrorist groups. On the same day, Rumsfeld also noted Syria's WMD capability (along with Iraq, Iran, North Korea and Libya) and claimed that terrorists might acquire these weapons from the countries having links with terrorists.¹⁰⁹⁶ On 24 June 2002, President Bush once again pointed to Syria's connection with terrorism by stating that "*Syria must choose the right side in the war on terror by closing terrorist camps and expelling terrorist organizations.*"¹⁰⁹⁷ These remarks were later used by the supporters of the Syria Accountability Act in Congress to persuade President Bush to sign the act. The difference between Hamas/Hezbollah and al-Qaeda in Syria's perception made no sense for the Bush administration.¹⁰⁹⁸

In October 2002, Assistant Secretary of State William Burns went to Syria to discuss the contentious issues between Washington and Damascus. In his meeting with President Assad, he conveyed President Bush's letter outlining Washington's demands from Syria. Burns expected that he could get assurances from Assad to exert pressure on Hezbollah or to assist the Bush administration in capturing its most wanted men in Lebanon. Although Syria was directing Imad Mughniyeh and others in Lebanon, President Assad declined to give information about their whereabouts when asked by Burns.¹⁰⁹⁹ In the winter of 2002, the Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee Bill Graham visited Syria to discuss regional issues with President Assad. Upon his return to Washington, Graham said that despite Syria's cooperation in the war on terror, it was creating several problems regarding international terrorism.¹¹⁰⁰

Anti-Syrian mood was nurtured by some officials in the Pentagon, pressure groups such as American evangelicals, neoconservative think-tanks and Christian Lebanese and Syrian exiles. They tried to convince the Bush administration that Syria was a part of axis of evil -Iran, Iraq, and North Korea- and state sponsor of terrorism backing Hezbollah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Peter Slevin and Alan Sprress, "Iran, Iraq, Syria Continue to Aid Terrorists," *Washington Post*, May 22, 2002, 27.

¹⁰⁹⁷ George W. Bush, "Middle East Peace Process, June 24, 2002," in *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001-2008*, The White House Archives, https://georgewbush.whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Selected_Speeches_George_W_Bush.pdf, 136.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Lesch, *Missed Opportunities*, 10; Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 102.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Zisser, "Syria and the United States," 32-33; Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 143.

¹¹⁰⁰ Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 136.

Unlike Congress and pressure groups, the State Department, the CIA, and some officials in the Bush administration believed that Syria's assistance was crucial in fighting al-Qaeda and garnering support in the Arab world to attack Iraq as Syria was a rotating member in the UNSC at that time.¹¹⁰¹ This was an overt dilemma. While Syria was a partner in the fight against al-Qaeda, it was opposing categorizing Hezbollah and the Palestinian militant groups in the same group. This dilemma caused an ambiguity in Washington's policy towards Syria prior to the invasion of Iraq.¹¹⁰²

The perplexing policy of the United States towards Syria can be seen in the issue of the Syria Accountability Act. Under the pressure of AIPAC and anti-Syrian Christian Lebanese lobby, some members of Congress brought Syrian Accountability draft law and pressed the Bush administration to endorse it in September 2002.¹¹⁰³ Majority leader and republican senator Dick Arney announced in the testimony before the House Committee on International Relations in September 2002 that:

“Our inaction on holding Syria accountable for its dangerous activities could seriously diminish our efforts on the war on terrorism and brokering a viable peace in the Middle East... Syria should be held accountable for its record of harboring and supporting terrorist groups; stockpiling illegal weapons in an effort to develop weapons of mass destruction; and transferring weapons and oil back and forth through Iraq.”¹¹⁰⁴

On the other hand, President Bush sent a letter to Congress, in which he stated his concern that this act would “*limit our options and restrict our ability to deal with a difficult and dangerous regional situation at a particularly critical juncture.*” Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Satterfield uttered the same ideas at a press conference in September 2002 by stating that:

“The imposition of new sanctions on Syria would severely limit our ability to address a range of important issues directly with the highest levels of the Syrian government. It would also render more difficult our efforts to change Syrian behaviour and avoid a dangerous escalation of violence in the region ... Imposing the new sanctions regime envisioned by the Syria Accountability Act would limit our options and restrict our

¹¹⁰¹ Lesch, *Missed Opportunities*, 8-9. Also see Clifford Krauss, “U.S. Welcomes Thaw in Relations With ‘Pragmatic’ Syria,” *New York Times*, January 2, 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/02/world/threats-responses-arabs-us-welcomes-thaw-relations-with-pragmatic-syria.html>.

¹¹⁰² Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria's Waiting Game*, 57.

¹¹⁰³ Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 138.

¹¹⁰⁴ Lesch, *Missed Opportunities*, 8.

ability to deal with a difficult and dangerous regional situation at a particularly critical time.”¹¹⁰⁵

How can we explain U.S. foreign policy towards Syria before the invasion of Iraq from role theory’s angle? It can be argued that even though the Bush administration considered Syria’s intelligence cooperation against al-Qaeda after 9/11 valuable, it demanded that Syria act in accordance with its NRCs. Yet, several contentious issues, which the Bush administration perceived Syria’s challenge to its NRCs, influenced U.S. foreign policy towards Syria negatively on the way to the invasion of Iraq such as Syria’s patronage of the militant Palestinian groups and Hezbollah, its WMD capability and its dictatorial regime. Furthermore, President Assad’s engagement with Iraq and its quest for assuming leadership in the Arab world by using a militant rhetoric against Israel and pro-American states such as Egypt and Jordan after the outbreak of the second intifada in September 2000 spoiled his image as a reformist leader in Washington. More importantly, the United States’ perception of Syria’s role in the Middle East changed under the Bush administration. Even though Syria was conceived of a pivotal country and a partner in the Middle East peace process, the failure of the Syrian-Israeli track in 2000 put an end to this approach.¹¹⁰⁶

According to Hinnebusch, despite Syria’s cooperation with the United States against al-Qaeda in the war on terror, it did not refrain from supporting the radical militant groups against Israel during the intifada. Syria considered these groups as useful cards in its struggle with Israel and sought to extract nationalist legitimacy while Israel was pursuing brutal policies in the occupied territories. President Assad also personally told American officials that the United States’ operation in Afghanistan was revenge and the war on terror could only succeed by dealing with the injustice that feeds it, most notably Israel’s occupation of Palestine. Syria’s non-cooperative posture on terrorism coincided with the Bush Doctrine which designated a state with WMDs and terrorism link as an immediate threat to the United States and legitimized preventive strike against such states. Even though some moderate voices in the State Department and CIA were against such an aggressive policy against Syria while it was headed by a reformist leader and a useful ally in the war on terror, neo-cons and the Pentagon were determined to reshape the U.S.-Syrian relations.¹¹⁰⁷

¹¹⁰⁵ International Crisis Group, *Syria under Bashar (I): Foreign Policy Challenges* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2004), 3; Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria’s Waiting Game*, 61.

¹¹⁰⁶ Moshe Ma’oz, *Syria’s Role in the Region: Mediator, Peacemaker, or Aggressor?*, A Century Foundation Report (New York: The Century Foundation, 2007), 12.

¹¹⁰⁷ Hinnebusch, “Defying the Hegemon,” 378.

Zisser also underlines the same point and explains that Syria tried to play a dual game with the United States in the war on terror. Despite its positive engagement with the Bush administration to fight against al-Qaeda, President Assad maintained his nationalist, anti-American, nationalist, pan-Arab and anti-Western attitude. He pursued policies in contradiction with the United States such as improving its relations with the members of the axis of evil, spoiling the Arab-Israeli peace process, supporting Hezbollah's attacks against Israel, and finally sabotaging the United States' efforts to install a pro-Western regime in Iraq.¹¹⁰⁸

In this context, it can be argued Syria misread the recalibration of the NRCs of the United States, couched in the Bush Doctrine. Syrian officials thought that the game was still played with the old rules. On the other hand, new rules were being written in the Pentagon, Congress, neocon think tanks which perceived Syria and its Baathist regime as a source of problem rather than a partner in the post-9/11 international order. The Bush Doctrine recalibrated the NRCs of the United States by putting the issues of preemptive strike, changing undemocratic regimes, punishing states sponsoring terrorism and spreading of democracy into the center of American foreign policy. The balance of power ultimately tilted towards the Pentagon and the neocons in the war on terror, which caused a more bellicose tone in U.S. foreign policy towards Syria. Owing to its long-lasting connection with terrorist organizations, Syria was put into the category of rogue states. The State Department's cooperative attitude toward Syria in the war on terror did not have weight in U.S. foreign policy-making mechanism.¹¹⁰⁹

In sum, the U.S.-Syrian relations can be defined as a "controversial partnership" prior to the invasion of Iraq because Syria did not go along with the NRCs of the United States in the war on terror. Although the Assad regime cooperated with the Bush administration against al-Qaeda, it did not fully comply with its NRCs by continuously rejecting demands for changing its posture especially on the terrorism issue. Because Syria was uncomfortable with the Bush administration's performance of the NRC of hegemon unilaterally and the NRC of tribunal and agent of American values, which warranted democracy promotion in the Middle East under the influence of the neo-cons. For this reason, both moderate and hawkish groups in Washington exerted pressure on the Assad regime to compel it to readjust to the U.S.-led international order after 9/11, but to no avail. Controversial partnership in the U.S.-Syrian relations transformed into overt confrontation during the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003.

¹¹⁰⁸ Zisser, "Bashar al-Assad: In or Out of the New World Order?," 123.

¹¹⁰⁹ Lesch, *Missed Opportunities*, 9-10.

The next section was devoted to explaining the U.S. invasion of Iraq and how conflicting role conceptions of Washington and Damascus strained bilateral relations.

5.4.2. Overt Confrontation: The U.S.-Syrian Relations during the Invasion of Iraq

5.4.2.1. The U.S. Invasion of Iraq: Causes, Consequences, Implications

Why did the United States invade Iraq in 2003? Several reasons were mentioned in the literature to account for the Bush administration's decision to go to war with Iraq. The first was the Washington's concern about Iraq's WMD stockpiles, which was a source of friction between the United States and Iraq since the Gulf War. The Saddam regime did not comply with sixteen UN Security Council resolutions between 1991 and 2002, starting with the well-known Resolution 687, which mandated the destruction of its chemical and biological weapons stockpiles and missiles designed to launch them.¹¹¹⁰ Given Iraq's non-compliance, the United States commenced imposing crippling economic sanctions on Iraq in 1990 until Saddam totally complied with the Resolution 687. Since the Gulf War onwards, the United States claimed that Iraq maintained its undiscovered WMDs, and it would capitalize on its oil resources to acquire more WMDs and threaten American interests in the Gulf if sanctions were removed. Although the United Nations Special Commission on Disarmament (UNSCOM) was established in 1990 to monitor disarmament of Iraq, it could not function effectively due to tension between Washington and Baghdad.¹¹¹¹

In the war on terror, President Bush considered Iraq's WMD stockpiles as a dire threat to national security of America, which he recalled in his memoirs entitled *Decision Points* as follows:

“9/11 hit, and we had to take a fresh look at every threat in the world. There were state sponsors of terror. There were sworn enemies of America. There were hostile governments that threatened their neighbors. There were nations that violated international demands. There were dictators who repressed their own people. And there were regimes that pursued WMD. Iraq combined all those threats.”¹¹¹²

Second, the Saddam regime's purported links with terrorism was another reason for the U.S. invasion of Iraq. The Bush administration was excessively worried that terrorist organizations might acquire WMDs from anti-American states in the wake of 9/11. Hence, it feared that Saddam Hussein, who was an arch enemy of the United States having WMD stockpiles, would

¹¹¹⁰ Yetiv, “The Iraq War of 2003,” 342.

¹¹¹¹ Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 560; Prifti, *US Foreign Policy in the Middle East*, 103.

¹¹¹² George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2010), 228.

support al-Qaeda's further terrorist attacks on the United States. So, the Bush administration constructed Iraq as an imminent threat to the United States by deliberately linking the Saddam regime with al-Qaeda's terrorist activities. Although the Bush administration was aware that Iraq was not a big threat as its WMDs could not hit the United States, it consciously exaggerated unreliable intelligence reports about Iraq's link with terrorism to legitimize the invasion of Iraq.¹¹¹³

Third, the issue of oil paved the way for the invasion of Iraq. The United States invaded Iraq to maintain its hegemony over the oil market and oil security in the Middle East. The United States' dependence on oil was on rise over the last years since it was an oil importing country. The Bush administration was concerned that the balance of power in the market was tilting towards oil producers, which would make the United States much more vulnerable to oil shocks. Thus, Iraq was deemed solution to such shocks as it had the second largest oil reserves in the world and very low production costs. But Iraq's oil could not be used for American interests if Saddam Hussein remained in power.¹¹¹⁴ In addition, it was speculated that the United States went to Iraq for oil owing to President Bush's and VP Cheney's close relations with oil industry. American firms such as Halliburton having close relations with the Bush administration were hungry for contracts for rebuilding Iraq's oil infrastructure, refining the crude oil and selling it to the market.¹¹¹⁵

Fourth, the Bush administration's regional calculations played a role in the invasion of Iraq. The United States had been seeking permanent bases in the Gulf area for a long time and conquering Iraq would enable Washington to establish these bases. The Bush administration also thought that it could contain radical states such as Iran and Syria and impose a pro-Israeli pax-Americana in the region by using Iraq as a base for future policies. What's more, it anticipated that conquering Iraq would bring about a domino effect, which would weaken autocratic regimes and non-democratic ideologies hostile to American values and facilitate spread of liberal ideas and principles in the Middle East.¹¹¹⁶

¹¹¹³ Raymond Hinnebusch, "The American Invasion of Iraq: Causes and Consequences," *Perceptions* 12, No. 1 (2007): 11.

¹¹¹⁴ Lynch, *In the Shadow of the Cold War*, 123; Hinnebusch, "The American Invasion of Iraq," 11-12.

¹¹¹⁵ Hook and Spainer, *American Foreign Policy*, 302.

¹¹¹⁶ Hinnebusch, "The American Invasion of Iraq," 13-14.

Finally, idiosyncratic and ideological factors were also influential in the U.S. invasion of Iraq. President Bush as a devout Christian was believing in the missionary spirit of evangelical Christianity. He was categorizing the world into two - good and evil - and the United States was the only force to protect goodness. He strongly believed that he had a divine mission to keep America safe and to extend “God’s gift of liberty” to everyone living in this world. In Bush’s mind, waging a war against Iraq would enhance security of the United States and destroy a big force for evil.¹¹¹⁷

In addition to President Bush, the neocon cabal, composed of Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Libby, Feith and Bolton, had philosophical and practical concerns for going to war with Iraq. They were simply hating Saddam Hussein and promoting the idea that overthrowing his regime was necessary to create pax-Americana and to bolster the security of Israel for a long time. For this reason, they had sent a letter to President Clinton in 1998 as PNAC and called for an assertive American foreign policy towards Iraq by urging him to oust the Saddam regime.¹¹¹⁸ They believed that it was the moral duty of the United States as the world’s sole hegemon to oppose to tyrannical regimes and to sponsor spread of democracy across the world. They thought that Saddam was the mastermind of international terrorism and was seeking more WMD stockpiles. They argued that bringing democracy to Iraq would affect political structure across the Middle East, which would eliminate the root-cause of international terrorism. They found a suitable environment with the coming of the Bush administration to achieve their objectives in Iraq especially after 9/11 terrorist attacks.¹¹¹⁹

After the invasion of Afghanistan, the Bush administration shifted its focus from al-Qaeda to Iraq as the source terrorism threatening the United States and the world by early 2002. In his State of the Union address on 29 January 2002, President Bush categorized Iraq in the axis of evil against which preemptive strike might be carried out. Thus, drawing on the alleged linkage between Iraq and 9/11 attacks, President Bush and his foreign policy team began to consider preemptive strike against Iraq.¹¹²⁰ Even though the Bush administration was determined to oust Saddam Hussein, it initially bowed the pressures and adopted a multilateral approach to handle the problem. Secretary of State Powell maintained that the United States should receive

¹¹¹⁷ Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 650.

¹¹¹⁸ Schmidt, *The Folly of War*, 345-346; Migdal, *Shifting Sands*, 235.

¹¹¹⁹ Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 649.

¹¹²⁰ Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 563; Yetiv, “The Iraq War of 2003,” 346.

approval of the UN Security Council for military operation against Iraq. Powell claimed that American invasion without UNSC approval would undermine the legitimacy of the operation and turn world opinion against Washington. President Bush concurred with this idea reluctantly and gave Saddam Hussein a last chance to destroy his WMD stockpiles. In October 2002, the Congress passed a resolution within days with overwhelming majority (77-23 in the Senate and 296-133 in the House) allowing the Bush administration to resort to military force against Iraq with or without UN approval.¹¹²¹

Despite objections of the international community, the Bush administration launched the Operation Iraqi Freedom on 20 March 2003 without UN authorization. The United States was backed by only 26 nations including Britain as its chief ally. However, other NATO allies France, Germany and Turkey refused to participate in the invasion of Iraq. The operation was started by American and British troops from the southern front via Kuwait. The U.S.-led coalition carried out massive air attacks with its high-tech weapons and destroyed communication infrastructure and military installations of the Iraqi army. Contrary to expectations of many observers, it was not a tough battle as the U.S.-led coalition forces reached Baghdad within three weeks and toppled a statue of Saddam Hussein on 7 April 2003. Even though Saddam could not be captured until December 2003, Iraq's all major cities were brought under the control of the coalition forces. The Operation Iraqi Freedom proved the supremacy of American military power. President Bush, dressed in a pilot jumpsuit, declared victory on 1 May 2003 by proclaiming that "*mission accomplished*" and the main operation in Iraq was over.¹¹²²

The Saddam era in Iraq ended with a swift victory of the coalition forces, but this was not the end of the story but an inauspicious beginning. Iraq's infrastructure was badly damaged, municipal services totally collapsed, and looting was pervasive after the war. The lack of political planning for post-Saddam period was evident as the U.S.-led coalition did not send enough troops to maintain public security and to protect public buildings and government offices from looters. Retired General Jay Garner was appointed in April 2003 as the first administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), but he did not have neither budget nor cadre to rule Iraq. He planned to hand over power to a provisional government but failed to achieve this.¹¹²³

¹¹²¹ Hook and Spainer, *American Foreign Policy*, 303-304.

¹¹²² Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 656; Powaski, *Ideals, Interests, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 116.

¹¹²³ Tyler, *A World of Trouble*, 542-543.

It was soon understood that restoration of political order in the post-invasion period and rebuilding Iraqi cities were not an easy task to achieve in a short period. The grim reality on the ground was that the new era in Iraq would be smacked of instability, chaos and growing domestic discontent. President Bush selected Paul L. Bremer III, who was expected to oversee the reconstruction of Iraq in the post-invasion period, to lead CPA in May 2003. Bremer established the Iraq Governing Council, composed of regional leaders who were opponents of Saddam Hussein, in July 2003 to diminish instability and chaos. Even though the council was a power-sharing mechanism among different groups to rule Iraq, Bremer was the ultimate decision-maker in critical issues pertaining to the future of the country. This gave a colonialist appearance to American authority in Iraq.¹¹²⁴

De-Baathification of Iraq's bureaucracy with the dismantling of police force and the army by Bremer in May 2003 catalyzed mayhem in the post-invasion Iraq. Furthermore, the neocons' plans for restructuring Iraq's economy along with free market economy and privatization undermined economic infrastructure, which was based on a socialist web of relations during the Saddam era. Drawing on the neocons' ideas, Bremer sought to reshape the Iraqi economy along free market principles, which were deemed essential for a democratic system. This economic experiment brought about inflation and unemployment which further estranged the Iraqi people. Hence, opposition and insurgency against occupation surfaced by the fall of 2003 and grew day by day. Frustrated with the dissolution of the old order, Baathists and Sunni groups organized an insurgency, which was joined by disaffected Shiites as well as jihadists from across the world. The U.S. army responded ruthlessly to insurgency by carrying out air and ground bombardments which resulted in heavy civilian casualties. Infuriated by the heavy-handed response of the United States, insurgency gained momentum across Iraq.¹¹²⁵

The Bush administration's dependence on the Kurds against the Arabs and on the Shiites against the Sunnis accentuated and institutionalized ethnic and sectarian divisions in the post-invasion period. Elections were mere reflection of sub-state identities to seize power in the country. The federalist nature of the new constitution partitioned state authority into cantons, which led to a struggle among different communities to control oil resources.¹¹²⁶ In sum, Iraq

¹¹²⁴ Hook and Spainer, *American Foreign Policy*, 308; Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 565-566; Quandt, "New US Policies for a New Middle East," 494.

¹¹²⁵ Ali R. Abootalebi, "What Went Wrong in Iraq?," in *The Middle East and the United States: History Politics*, ed. David W. Lesch and Mark L. Haas, 5th ed. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2014), 368; Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 659-660; Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 660.

¹¹²⁶ Hinnebusch, "The American Invasion of Iraq," 19-20.

turned out to be a weak state lacking national identity, which was fragmented by ethnic and religious lines after the invasion. That's why, owing the strengthening of various sub-state identities as well as armed centrifugal forces in the post-invasion period, Iraq became "Lebanonized."¹¹²⁷

There were serious implications of the U.S. invasion of Iraq regarding its role in the post-Cold War era. After the invasion it was proved that the Bush administration's WMD allegations were sham. This undermined credibility of the United States as the world's sole hegemon in the eyes of world public opinion as its main reason for invasion was Saddam's possession of WMDs. In fact, non-existence of WMDs was not important for the Bush administration as it was the only pretext that could be sold to the world to topple the Saddam regime. Later Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld mocked the world by saying that "*The absence of evidence is not evidence of absence [of weapons]*."¹¹²⁸

In addition to the bogus tale of WMDs, the invasion of Iraq tarnished the United States' image in world public when the pictures of American soldiers abusing and torturing Iraqi prisoners at Abu Gharib Prison were broadcasted on TVs across the world. Human rights' violations in prisons undermined the United States' justification for the invasion of Iraq. When the number of killed and wounded American soldiers climbed, President Bush's popularity and credibility soured in domestic politics as well. This led to victory of the Democrats in both houses of the Congress in the 2006 elections. Iraq was in a total mess after the invasion due to the inability of the United States to contain violence in the country and to build a stable and accountable government. The war also costed the U.S. treasury more than two trillion dollars, which was paid via borrowing. This cost contributed to a dramatic increase in the U.S. national debt.¹¹²⁹

5.4.2.2. Hegemon Goes to Baghdad: the NRCs of the U.S. and the Invasion of Iraq

As mentioned above, the Bush administration performed the NRCs of hegemon, defender of the pacific union, and tribune and agent of American values during the invasion of Iraq, which were couched in the NSS document or the so-called Bush Doctrine. While explaining the invasion of Iraq, many scholars argue that the United States' decision to go to war with Iraq could be attributed to the Bush doctrine. For example, Hinnebusch, Schmidt and Jervis contend

¹¹²⁷ Robins, "The War for Regime Change," 318.

¹¹²⁸ Schmidt, *The Folly of War*, 338.

¹¹²⁹ Ambrose and Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism*, 495-496; Powaski, *Ideals, Interests, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 117.

that the U.S. invasion of Iraq was an outright extension of the Bush Doctrine, whose three pillars were preemptive war, unilateralism, and freedom agenda. In the Bush doctrine, it was stressed that American supremacy and unilateral leadership must be sustained through military means in different parts of the world. This notion warranted carrying out preemptive strikes to exterminate threats and disregarding international norms and values of the United Nations. In this context, Iraq became the laboratory of the Bush Doctrine in the Middle East. The Bush administration considered the Saddam regime's alleged WMD stockpiles and its link with al-Qaeda as a threat to the United States and his allies in the free world. Thus, it contended that preemptive and unilateral action against Iraq was legitimate and necessary in the war on terror. In addition to its unilateral action, the United States sought to export democracy, liberty, and freedom to Iraq through forceful regime change and nation-building in line with the objectives set in the Bush Doctrine.¹¹³⁰

The Bush administration had been planning to target Iraq even before 9/11 terrorist attacks as the Saddam regime was perceived as a dire threat to security of the United States. Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz had already prepared some plans to attack Iraq and to eliminate the Saddam regime after coming to office. So, it can be put forward that 9/11 rendered the Bush administration a pretext to realize its plans to invade Iraq. The day after 9/11, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld announced that not only al-Qaeda but also Iraq must be punished.¹¹³¹ After the Afghanistan Operation, the Bush administration under the influence of the neocons began to focus on eliminating the Iraqi threat. Given the objections of the international community, President Bush adopted a unilateral approach to exercise American leadership on the way to Iraq by stating that "*At some point we may be the only ones left. That's okay with me. We are Americans.*"¹¹³²

It can be observed in the official statements and remarks of President Bush and senior administration officials that the invasion of Iraq was closely related to the NRCs of hegemon and defender of the Pacific Union. According to the Bush administration, it was the responsibility of the United States as the world's sole hegemon to protect the free world against threats of terrorism and rogue states in the post-9/11 period. That's why, President Bush gave strong messages to Iraq in his State of the Union address on 29 January 2002 by designing it

¹¹³⁰ Schmidt, *The Folly of War*, 339-342; Jervis, "Understanding the Bush Doctrine," 365; Hinnebusch, "The American Invasion of Iraq," 9.

¹¹³¹ Little, *American Orientalism*, 326-328.

¹¹³² Schmidt, *The Folly of War*, 333-334.

as a member of the “axis of evil” along with Iran and North Korea. In Bush mind’s, there was no difference between Iraq and Nazi Germany and between Saddam Hussein and Adolf Hitler in terms of threats they posed to the world. Bush said that “*States like these and their terrorist allies constitute an axis of evil, aiming to threaten the peace of the world.*”¹¹³³ In the same speech, he directly targeted Iraq by stating that “*Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror. The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax and nerve gas and nuclear weapons for over a decade.*”¹¹³⁴ Bush also said that “*The Iraqi dictator must not be permitted to threaten America and the world with horrible poisons and diseases and gasses and atomic weapons.*”¹¹³⁵

In addition to Bush, other senior officials were alarmed by the Iraqi threat to the free world. To illustrate, VP Cheney told in a speech to war veterans on 26 August 2002 that “*Simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction. There is no doubt he is amassing them to use against our friends, against our allies, and against us.*”¹¹³⁶ In the same speech, he cited Iraq’s alleged WMD stockpiles and argued that “*Iraq could directly threaten America’s friends throughout the region and subject the United States or any other nation to nuclear blackmail.*”¹¹³⁷

In his address to the UN General Assembly on 12 September 2002, Bush demanded that Saddam promptly comply with the previous sixteen UN resolutions and underlined that Iraq’s ongoing efforts to acquire WMDs was threatening both the United States and international security. Bush contended that Saddam’s defiance was undermining credibility of the UN by stating that “*All the world faces a test, and the United Nations a difficult and defining moment. Are Security Council resolutions to be honored and enforced, or cast aside without consequence? Will the United Nations serve the purposes of its founding, or will it be irrelevant?*”¹¹³⁸ Finally, Bush noted that the United States was determined to act unilaterally if the danger continued to grow by saying that “*The purposes of the United States should not*

¹¹³³ Ibid., 334.

¹¹³⁴ Ambrose and Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism*, 483.

¹¹³⁵ Schmidt, *The Folly of War*, 336.

¹¹³⁶ Hook and Spainer, *American Foreign Policy*, 301.

¹¹³⁷ Schmidt, *The Folly of War*, 336.

¹¹³⁸ Yetiv, “The Iraq War of 2003,” 342-343.

be doubted. The Security Council resolutions will be enforced... and the regime that has lost its legitimacy will also lose its power."¹¹³⁹

On 7 October 2002, Bush spoke in Cincinnati where he tried to legitimize preemptive action against the Saddam regime after 9/11.¹¹⁴⁰ Bush said that there was a "grave threat", Saddam had provided "shelter and support to terrorism" and forewarned that the "Iraqi regime... possesses and produces chemical and biological weapons." Furthermore, Bush claimed that Saddam was seeking nuclear weapons and reiterated his determination to eliminate his threat by saying that "for the world to wait for the final proof, the smoking gun that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud."¹¹⁴¹

After the Operation Iraqi Freedom, President Bush announced the elimination of Saddam's threat to the free world on the flight deck of USS Abraham Lincoln on 1 May 2003 as follows:

"In the images of falling statues, we have witnessed the arrival of a new era. The liberation of Iraq is a crucial advance in the campaign against terror. Any outlaw regime that has ties to terrorist groups and seeks or possesses weapons of mass destruction is a grave danger to the civilized world – and will be confronted... We will leave, and we will leave behind a free Iraq."¹¹⁴²

In his State of the Union Address on 31 January 2006, President Bush underlined the leadership role of the United States in connection with the success of the Operation Iraqi Freedom and other issues as follows:

"In all these areas — from the disruption of terror networks, to victory in Iraq, to the spread of freedom and hope in troubled regions — we need the support of our friends and allies. To draw that support, we must always be clear in our principles and willing to act. The only alternative to American leadership is a dramatically more dangerous and anxious world. Yet we also choose to lead because it is a privilege to serve the values that gave us birth."¹¹⁴³

In addition to the NRCs of hegemon and defender of the Pacific Union, the Bush administration performed the NRC of Tribune and Agent of American Values during the invasion of Iraq as one of its motivations was to promote the freedom and democracy agenda in the Middle East.

¹¹³⁹ Tyler, *A World of Trouble*, 541.

¹¹⁴⁰ Yetiv, "The Iraq War of 2003," 349.

¹¹⁴¹ Herring, *The American Century & Beyond*, 651-652; Ambrose and Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism*, 489.

¹¹⁴² Little, *American Orientalism*, 308.

¹¹⁴³ Bush, "State of the Union Address to the 109th Congress, January 31, 2006," 341-342.

Replacing Saddam's dictatorship with a fair democracy system based on the will of Iraqi people was deemed an obligation and right of the United States.¹¹⁴⁴ The Bush administration believed that the fall of Saddam Hussein regime would usher in an era of democracy and freedom and cause reverse domino effect in the Middle East. In this context, Bush underlined wider repercussions of the regime change in Iraq within the framework of the freedom agenda in his State of the Union speech on 28 January 2003 as follows: "*All people have a right to choose their own government, and determine their own destiny-and the United States supports their aspirations to live in freedom.*"¹¹⁴⁵ In April 2003, Bush uttered his belief that regime change in Iraq would democratize the Middle East by saying that "*a free Iraq can be an example of reform and progress to all the Middle East.*"¹¹⁴⁶ He also reiterated this idea in a speech delivered at Army War College in Carlisle, PA on 24 May 2004 by stating that "*The rise of a free and self-governing Iraq will deny terrorists a base of operations, discredit their narrow ideology and give momentum to reformers across the region.*"¹¹⁴⁷

The neoconservatives' drive for exporting American values mainly secular democracy and free market capitalism to Iraq in particular and the Middle East in general encouraged the Bush administration to invade Iraq.¹¹⁴⁸ Thus, the ideological force behind the politics of regime change and democracy promotion in Iraq was the neocons. They believed that the United States must capitalize on its enormous military force to democratize Iraq, which would bring a democratic spillover effect across the Middle East.¹¹⁴⁹ To illustrate, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Feith pointed to the spillover impact of Iraq by saying that a democratic government in Iraq "*might be inspirational for people throughout the Middle East to try to increase the amount of freedom that they have.*"¹¹⁵⁰ Even after the invasion, President Bush claimed on 10 January 2007 that "*Victory in Iraq will bring something new in the Arab world-a functioning democracy.*"¹¹⁵¹

¹¹⁴⁴ Ambrose and Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism*, 490.

¹¹⁴⁵ Migdal, *Shifting Sands*, 236-237.

¹¹⁴⁶ Jervis, "Understanding the Bush Doctrine," 368.

¹¹⁴⁷ Rieffer and Mercer, "US Democracy Promotion," 404.

¹¹⁴⁸ Abootalebi, "What Went Wrong in Iraq?," 362.

¹¹⁴⁹ John Mearsheimer, "Hans Morgenthau and the Iraq War: Realism versus Neo-Conservatism," *OpenDemocracy*, May 18, 2005, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/morgenthau_2522jsp/.

¹¹⁵⁰ Hook and Spainer, *American Foreign Policy*, 290.

¹¹⁵¹ Ambrose and Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism*, 508.

The Bush administration also performed NRC of balancer during the invasion of Iraq, which was closely associated with the NRC of hegemon. According to Prifti, one of the objectives of the Bush administration was to sustain American influence in the Middle East by thwarting the emergence of Iraq as an anti-American regional hegemon. In the absence of a potential regional power capable of containing Iraq, the Bush administration decided to balance Iraq and to contain the threats emanating from it by means of its unprecedented military power. Thus, the United States sought to maintain its regional hegemony in the Middle East by eliminating hegemonic aspirations of Saddam Hussein.¹¹⁵²

As to the sources of the NRCs performed by the United States during the invasion of Iraq, it can be argued that they were originated from the domestic environment. Especially the idea of American exceptionalism, which was the basis of American political culture, shaped President Bush's and his neocon associates' perceptions of the unique role of the United States as a hegemonic power in the post-9/11 environment. Bush's fervent dedication to evangelical creed and the neocons' apocalyptic thinking profoundly shaped NRCs of the United States during the invasion of Iraq. According to Bush, the war on terror as a crusade and a battle between good and evil, and the United States was representing and protecting goodness. To illustrate, while asking support from the American public for preemptive strike against Iraq, Bush underlined the divinely-ordained leadership role of the United States by saying that "*the call of history had come to the right country. The liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world; it is God's gift to humanity.*"¹¹⁵³

If we compare the Gulf War in 1991 and the invasion of Iraq in 2003, we can say that what differentiated the latter from the former was the unilateral American leadership. During the Gulf War, the Bush Sr. administration sought to cultivate UN authorization and to capitalize on the support of allies to share economic and military burden of the war rather than adopting a going-it-alone approach. On the other hand, the Bush Jr. administration did not consider UN approval and contributions of strategic partners necessary. Even though the Bush Jr. administration wanted participation of countries such as Britain, Italy, and Poland in the Afghanistan operation and the invasion of Iraq, their involvement was much more limited than the involvement of the allies in the Gulf War. Unlike his father's administration, the Bush Jr.

¹¹⁵² Prifti, *US Foreign Policy in the Middle East*, 95-96.

¹¹⁵³ Schmidt, *The Folly of War*, 351; Yetiv, "The Iraq War of 2003," 354-355.

accentuated unilateral American leadership in the post-Cold War era. The Bush Jr. administration's multilateralism was a symbolic posture rather than being strategic.¹¹⁵⁴

5.4.2.3. Defying the Hegemon: Syria's Posture on the U.S. Invasion of Iraq

Although Washington and Damascus cooperated in the aftermath of the 9/11 against al-Qaeda, Syria's economic, diplomatic, and military engagement with Iraq, its violation of the UN Oil-for-Food program by pumping Iraqi oil, its support for the militant Palestinian groups and Hezbollah during the second intifada, its WMD program and its radical posture on Israel and moderate Arab states were source of tension between the two countries. President Assad rejected the Bush administration's demands for ending its relations with Iraq and cutting ties with the militant groups as it would deprive Assad of its cards to attain its domestic and regional objectives. Thus, President Assad was determined to limit Syria's cooperation with the Bush administration to al-Qaeda in the war on terror. Despite objections of the neocons, President Bush, the State Department, and moderate elements in the CIA did not want to lose Syria in the war on terror. That's why, the U.S.-Syrian relations entered in a period which can be called controversial partnership before the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

When it became evident that the Bush administration was determined to invade Iraq after the fall of the Taliban regime, Syria demonstrated that it would not embrace the NRCs of the United States in the post-9/11 era. In this context, the Assad regime began to castigate the United States for pursuing a hidden agenda to establish a new U.S.-dominated system in the Middle East for its interests and on behalf of Israel.¹¹⁵⁵ In this respect, Syrian Vice President Abd al-Halim Khaddam criticized American plans to occupy Iraq in an interview on 6 September 2002 by saying that:

“The American attack on Iraq is designed to bring about the partition of that country, which is a strategic objective of Israel's. In fact it is part of the long-standing Zionist aim of breaking up the national fabric of the countries of the region... We are defending Iraq, which is an Arab country, and the fate of all the Arabs is bound up with its fate. We are not Finland and therefore we cannot relate to Iraq's fate with equanimity. Iraq is a strategic hinterland for Syria in its conflict with Israel. We

¹¹⁵⁴ Migdal, *Shifting Sands*, 244.

¹¹⁵⁵ Eyal Zisser, “Syria, the United States, and Iraq—Two Years After the Downfall of Saddam Hussein,” *Middle East Journal of International Affairs* 9, No. 3 (September 2005), <http://www.mafhoum.com/press9/252P6.htm>.

supported Kuwait when Iraq invaded its territory, but today Iraq is under attack and therefore we are standing at its side.”¹¹⁵⁶

While cooperating with the Bush administration in the war on terror, President Assad declared in October 2002 that the United States’ plans for invasion of Iraq was unlawful by saying that:

“You cannot change the regime without killing millions of Iraqis. Our concern is about entering the unknown. Even the United States does not know how a war in Iraq is going to end. There is no justification for a U.S. war on Iraq, it would kill millions of people and plunge the whole Middle East into uncertainty... the political effects are impossible to predict. I believe this kind of division would affect the whole region... The whole region has similar religious and ethnic divisions.”¹¹⁵⁷

Throughout 2002, Syria as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council strived to build a coalition to foil the Bush administration’s efforts to garner international support for invasion of Iraq. For this reason, Syria collaborated with Russia, France, and Germany to thwart the Bush administration’s war plan. On the other hand, Syria reluctantly voted for Resolution 1441, mandating Iraq to readmit UN weapon inspectors or bear the consequences of its defiance, on 8 November 2002. Syria’s vote was crucial as it was the only Arab member in the UN Security Council. Syria’s Ambassador to the UN Faisal Miqdad claimed that Syria endorsed the draft in favor of “*international unanimity*” after taking assurances from the United States, Russia, France, and Britain that “*the resolution would not be used as a pretext to strike Iraq and does not constitute a basis for any automatic strikes against Iraq.*”¹¹⁵⁸

French President Jacques Chirac called President Assad before the vote and told him that the resolution did not authorize use of force against Iraq without another resolution. Secretary of State Powell also wrote a letter and assured Assad that the resolution was aiming the peaceful resolution of Iraq’s WMD problem. President Assad defended Syria’s yes vote by claiming that Syria aimed at finding a peaceful solution to the Iraq crisis through return of UN weapon inspectors to Iraq. President Assad thought that giving weapon inspectors more time would eliminate the pretext of the Bush administration as he was sure that there was no WMDs in

¹¹⁵⁶ Eyal Zisser, “Bashar al-Assad: Between East and West,” in *Middle Eastern Societies and the West: Accommodation or Clash of Civilizations?*, ed. Meir Litvak (Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 2006), 74.

¹¹⁵⁷ Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 191.

¹¹⁵⁸ James Bone, “Bush and Blair Win Crucial Syria Vote,” *Times*, 9 November 2002, 19.

Iraq. Assad also said that the Bush administration was not happy with the return of inspectors and was in rush to going to war with Iraq.¹¹⁵⁹

In addition to its efforts at the international level, Syria also intensified its diplomatic efforts in the Arab League to thwart the Bush administration's plans to garner Arab support for regime change in Iraq. Syria strived to invoke the Arab Collective Security Pact and propagated that war could be prevented if Arab states did not allow the United States to use their territories as Turkey did and impressed the Arab public opinion. Syria played a leading role in the preparation of the final communique of the Arab League Foreign Ministers' Summit in Cairo on 15-16 February 2003, in which Arab states were called on "refraining from offering any assistance or facilities to any military operation that might threaten the security, safety and territorial integrity of Iraq." Furthermore, Syria and Lebanon foiled plans of the Arab League ministerial committee to convince Saddam Hussein to go into exile couple of weeks before the invasion. In the end, despite Syria's warnings, pro-American Arab states let stationing of the American forces and the Arab states could not unify.¹¹⁶⁰

Having seen the Bush administration's determination to occupy Iraq, President Assad wanted to assume the leadership role in the Arab world against the U.S.-led coalition on the eve of the invasion. On 1 March 2003, he delivered a powerful speech at the Arab Summit in Sharm al-Sheikh, Egypt and severely criticized the Bush administration. He accused the Arab states of not supporting Iraq against the American aggression. He claimed that Washington was only interested in Iraq's oil and remaking the Middle East map in its image. Assad noted that the United States was a historical threat to the Arab peoples by saying that "*in the past we did not sense the danger closing in on us in the face of fateful developments including the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the Balfour Declaration, the establishment of the State of Israel, but the danger to the Arabs inherent in the war in Iraq is no less than any of those.*" In the same speech, Assad warned that the United States' friendship was "*more fatal than its hostility.*"¹¹⁶¹

¹¹⁵⁹ Kabalan, "Syrian Foreign Policy," 31-32; Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 136; Zisser, "Syria and the United States: Bad Habits Die Hard," 34.

¹¹⁶⁰ Raymond Hinnebusch and Neil Quillam, "Contrary Siblings: Syria, Jordan and the Iraq War," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 19, No. 3 (2006): 521; Gambill, "The American-Syrian Crisis." Also see, Ben Wedeman, "Arab League split over stance on Iraq," *BBC*, February 17, 2003, <https://edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/meast/02/16/sprj.iraq.arab.league/index.html?iref=allsearc>.

¹¹⁶¹ Zisser, "Syria and the War in War Iraq," 51-52.

President Assad firmly opposed to the American invasion of Iraq as he thought that it would turn out to be a new Vietnam for the United States. In face of looming war, Assad took some action to prepare Iraq for a future stalemate and to reduce the possibility of American military action against Syria after Iraq. For this reason, Syria continued shipment of military and dual-use items to Iraq until the outbreak of the war. Furthermore, Syria facilitated influx of foreign fighters into Iraq in early 2003 and even during the first week of the war in March 2003.¹¹⁶²

After the start of the Operation Iraqi Freedom on 20 March 2003, Syria enhanced its criticisms levelled at the Bush administration and positioned itself in the anti-U.S. camp of Iran and Hezbollah.¹¹⁶³ The Assad regime publicly called on Arabs to fight alongside Iraq against the U.S.-led coalition. On 26 March, Syrian Vice President Muhammad Zuhayr Mashariqah condemned the invasion as a “*savage aggression*”, called on people to stand by Iraq and hailed “*steadfastness of the Iraqi people and their efforts to repel the invaders.*”¹¹⁶⁴ On 31 March 2003, Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa announced before the Foreign Affairs Committee of the People’s Assembly that “*We want Iraq’s victory.*” Then, he compared the United States to Nazi Germany and President Bush to Adolf Hitler.¹¹⁶⁵

President Assad gave his famous interview to Lebanese newspaper *al-Safir* on 27 March 2003 and became the first Arab leader who publicly expressed his wishes for the defeat of the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq. Assad claimed that the United States as a super-power could conquer a small country like Iraq, but it was incapable of controlling it. He said that “*The United States and Britain will not be able to control all of Iraq...There will be much tougher resistance... If the American-British designs succeed-and we hope they do not succeed and we doubt that they will-there will be Arab popular resistance, and this has begun.*”¹¹⁶⁶ President Assad uttered his belief in the resistance of the Iraqi army against the U.S.-led forces by stating that that it was stronger than the resistance in Lebanon and occupied Palestine against Israel. He was expecting at least a six-month resistance from the Saddam regime and heavy American casualties. He also underlined that Syria would be the next target of the Bush administration, but it would respond to the United States by force in such a scenario. The Bush administration

¹¹⁶² Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 137.

¹¹⁶³ Ma’oz, *Syria’s Role in the Region*, 13.

¹¹⁶⁴ Gambill, “The American-Syrian Crisis.”

¹¹⁶⁵ Zisser, “Bashar al-Assad: Between East and West,” 75.

¹¹⁶⁶ Anders Strindberg, “Syria under Pressure,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 33, No. 4 (Summer 2004): 55.

considered President Assad's interview as Syria's decision to be on the wrong side of "with us or against us" formula in the war on terror.¹¹⁶⁷

On the day of Assad's interview with *al-Safir*, Grand Mufti of Syria Ahmad Kaftaru issued a fatwa and called on Muslims to carry out martyrdom attacks to defeat American, British, and Zionist occupation of Iraq. He said that "*I call on Muslims everywhere to use all means possible to thwart the aggression, including martyr operations against the belligerent American, British and Zionist invaders. Resistance to the belligerent invaders is an obligation for all Muslims.*"¹¹⁶⁸

The Assad regime also mobilized people to took to streets of Damascus and other cities across Syria to protest the U.S.-led invasion of a brother country. The United States was criticized for violating international law and basic human rights in the official Syrian media outlets as well. They pointed to the active role of the pro-Israeli groups (the neocons) in the Bush administration to launch the invasion of Iraq. It was claimed that American policy in the region was shaped by Israel's interests.¹¹⁶⁹ State-controlled Radio Damascus announced that "*Our experience proves that the interests of Israel are controlling American policy and not the interests of the United States; after all it was the supporters of the Likud among the Zionists in the corridors of the American administration who led to the attack on Iraq.*"¹¹⁷⁰

Although Syria did not become a party in the war, it continued to supply military aids to the Saddam regime clandestinely. Baathist security barons purportedly helped sophisticated weapon sales to Iraq, which offended Washington and strengthened the neocons against the moderates. More importantly, Syria covertly allowed the flow of volunteers pouring into Iraq to join resistance forces. Thousands of volunteers from across the Arab world gathered in Damascus and they were transferred to Iraq with convoys of busses after Syrian officials' calls for non-Iraqi Arabs to fight the U.S.-led coalition. Although Syria denied its involvement in organizing resistance, the Lebanese branch of the Baath Party and other Syria-supported

¹¹⁶⁷ Bassel F. Salloukh, "Demystifying Syrian Foreign Policy under Bashar al-Asad," in *Demystifying Syria*, ed. Fred H. Lawson, 2nd ed. (London: Saqi, 2009), 163; Hinnebusch, "Defying the Hegemon," 379.

¹¹⁶⁸ Gambill, "The American-Syrian Crisis."

¹¹⁶⁹ Zisser, "Syria and the War in War Iraq," 51.

¹¹⁷⁰ Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 140.

radical groups galvanized into action after Syria's call for resistance. Northern Syrian tribes, which had historical ties with Iraq, also supported insurgency along Syria-Iraq border.¹¹⁷¹

Quite the contrary to the expectations of the Assad regime, the U.S.-led coalition swiftly defeated the Iraqi army and conquered Baghdad on 7 April 2003. This was a huge shock because Assad underestimated American power to reach Baghdad in a short time and exaggerated the Iraqi army's resistance capability. Syria expected Iraqis to show a fierce resistance, which would force the Bush administration and its neocons associates to think twice before deciding to extend the Bush doctrine in other parts of the Middle East, namely Iran and Syria.¹¹⁷² When the U.S.-led coalition's victory became evident, Syria promptly stopped its support for the foreign fighters crossing the Syrian Iraqi border.¹¹⁷³ However, Syria turned out to be the last outpost of the Baath Party on earth with the fall of the Saddam regime. Syria lost access to cheap oil, a market for exports and its one of the strategic partners against Israel in the Middle East. As admitted by Foreign Minister Sharaa, the world's sole superpower became Syria's eastern neighbor with 130,000 troops.¹¹⁷⁴

Owing to growing pressure by the Bush administration, Syria was in a desperate position how to react to the Bush administration's demands after the fall of Baghdad. Although Syria initially declined to recognize the occupation regime despite demands of the Bush administration, it retreated from its position owing to pressures and demonstrated its willingness to stabilize Iraq if Washington was ready to cooperate with Damascus. On 22 May 2003, Syria reluctantly voted for the UN Security Council Resolution 1483, recognizing American presence in Iraq as legal and allowing the United States to use Iraq's oil money. President Assad thought that Syria's vital interests could be preserved by reaching an understanding with moderate elements in Washington. On the other hand, veterans of the Baath Party argued that Syria could do nothing to placate the United States as it was captured by the neocons.¹¹⁷⁵

¹¹⁷¹ Hinnebusch, "Defying the Hegemon," 379; Gambill, "The American-Syrian Crisis,"; Abrahms, "When Rogues Defy Reason: Bashar's Syria,"; Zisser, "Syria, the United States, and Iraq."

¹¹⁷² Zisser, "Bashar al-Assad: Between East and West," 76; Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 183.

¹¹⁷³ Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 137.

¹¹⁷⁴ Steven Simon and Jonathan Stevenson, "The Road to Damascus," *Foreign Affairs* 83, No. 3 (May-Jun. 2004): 114.

¹¹⁷⁵ Hinnebusch, "Defying the Hegemon," 383-385; Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, 94.

By the summer of 2003, the U.S.-Syrian relations began to exacerbate owing to Syria's defiance of the United States. In July 2003, Foreign Minister Sharaa described the Bush administration as "*exceptional*" and said that "*Perhaps there have been similar administrations in the past, but never one at the same level of violence and stupidity.*"¹¹⁷⁶ Syria's Chief Staff Hasan Turkmani said in September 2003 that "*We must stand up against the enemies of occupation in Palestine and in Iraq, who are part of an attempt to create a new American order in the region.*"¹¹⁷⁷

Syria defied the United States in Iraq as it expected that the Bush administration's growing problems in Iraq would force it to adopt a cooperative attitude toward Syria to stabilize the country. President Assad believed that Syria had several bargaining cards to maintain its balancing policy, namely its pivotal position in the Arab-Israeli peace process and regional stability, its sway over Lebanon and Hezbollah which was capable of hurting Israel as well as its intelligence capability to assist the United States in the war on terror. He also thought that Syria was not levied international sanctions and did not face the isolation that the Saddam regime suffered. He also believed that Syria's political system incorporating several communities and its struggle against Islamic fundamentalism at home made it a partner of the Bush administration, which wanted to sustain regional stability.¹¹⁷⁸

The Bush administration punished Syria's defiant posture during the invasion of Iraq by approving the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act (SALSA) in late 2003, which institutionalized the U.S.-Syrian conflict in the post-invasion period. While it was widely speculated that Syria would be the next target of the Bush administration, President Assad said that the United States would not attack Syria because it was not Iraq. He believed that the Bush administration would seek a dialog with Syria because while Washington approved SALSA, it appointed a new ambassador to Damascus.¹¹⁷⁹

By 2004, the issues of border security, Iraq's assets in Syria, infiltration of foreign volunteers into Iraq, Syria's support for the Palestinian groups and Hezbollah dominated the agenda in the U.S.-Syrian relations. Although Syria took some security measures along the border,

¹¹⁷⁶ Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria's Waiting Game*, 58.

¹¹⁷⁷ Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 141-142.

¹¹⁷⁸ Hinnebusch, "Defying the Hegemon," 382-383; Hinnebusch and Quillam, "Contrary Siblings: Syria, Jordan and the Iraq War," 523.

¹¹⁷⁹ Hinnebusch, "Defying the Hegemon," 382; Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 143.

allowed American officials to visit Syria to investigate Syria's banking system as to alleged money of Saddam Hussein, and announced that it was willing to collaborate with the interim Iraqi administration, the U.S.-Syrian relations were characterized by overt confrontation.¹¹⁸⁰

After President Bush's decision to implement SALSA sanctions in May 2004, President Assad demonstrated that Syria was uncomfortable with the Bush administration's performance of the NRC of hegemon in the post-9/11 international system. He told in an interview with Syria expert David Lesch that:

“It [9/11] was a very important lesson. The position of the United States in the world is a leading one, but you cannot live without the world. You cannot lead in peace if the world doesn't believe in you. The oceans do not protect countries anymore unless you want to live apart from the rest of the world, but you cannot, and I will tell you that Syria was one of the first to deal with this type of thing with the Muslim Brethren in 1982. 9/11 place security at the top of the policy agenda, so the United States sees everything through security-that's normal, but it is not correct...”¹¹⁸¹

In 2005, the Bush administration's Greater Middle East Initiative to spread democracy in the Middle East became a major issue in the U.S.-Syrian relations. The Assad regime defied the Bush administration's NRC of tribune and agent of American values as Syria's response to GMEI was not positive along with most of Middle Eastern states. To illustrate, Hosni Mubarak argued that the United States should act as a partner not enforcer of reforms. President Assad also slammed the GMEI owing to its political masters: the neocons who prepared the ground for the invasion of Iraq.¹¹⁸²

President Assad's radical nationalist rhetoric and anti-American posture continued for a long time after the invasion of Iraq. For example, he stressed in a speech before the Arab Lawyers' Conference in Damascus on 21 January 2006 that American policy was designed to “*undermine the region's identity and reshape it under different names that finally meet Israel's ambitions to dominate the region.*” He also said that targeting the Arabs is “*part of a big conspiracy...starting from the Sykes-Picot Agreements, to the occupation of Palestine in 1948, to the invasion of Lebanon in 1982, and the occupation of Iraq, and the intervening events and*

¹¹⁸⁰ Imad Moustapha, “U.S.-Syrian Relations: The Untold Story and the Road Ahead,” Washington Report on Middle East Affairs (April 2007), <https://www.wrmea.org/007-april/u.s.-syrian-relations-the-untold-story-and-the-road-ahead.html>; Zisser, “Bashar al-Assad: In or Out of the New World Order?,” 124.

¹¹⁸¹ Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 123.

¹¹⁸² Stewart, “The Greater Middle East and Reform,” 411; The Greater Middle East Initiative.”

what is happening now with Syria and Iraq...”¹¹⁸³ With these remarks, President Assad plainly demonstrated that Syria was against the new designs and policies of the United States stemming from NRCs and would challenge it at all costs.

In sum, contrary to Hafez al-Assad’s cooperative attitude during the Gulf crisis, Bashar al-Assad strongly rejected cooperation with the United States during invasion of Iraq. Assad Sr. allied with the Bush Sr. administration during the Gulf Crisis as he did not refrain from accepting the hegemonic position of the United States after the collapse of the Soviet Union. His primary objective was to socialize Syria within the U.S.-led new world order. On the other hand, Assad Jr. defied the United States during the invasion of Iraq because he perceived the NRCs of the Bush administration, especially the enactment of the NRC of hegemon in a unilateral fashion in the war on terror and the agenda of democracy promotion in a forceful way, as a dire threat to strategic objectives of Syria in the Middle East. For this reason, Assad adopted a rejectionist posture on the invasion of Iraq and positioned Syria firmly in the anti-American camp because he believed that the Bush administration was manipulated by the neocons, who sought to remake the Middle East map for the sake of Israel.

5.4.2.4. Punishing Damascus: U.S. Foreign Policy towards Syria during the Invasion of Iraq

As mentioned above, despite the Bush administration’s plans to isolate and bring down the Saddam regime, Syria was intensifying its diplomatic, economic, and military engagement with Iraq by late 2000. After 9/11, Syria’s engagement with Iraq became source of tension between Washington and Damascus. Nevertheless, there was divergence of opinion on U.S. policy towards Syria between the hawkish and moderate factions within the Bush administration thanks to its intelligence cooperation against al-Qaeda. Although the moderates in the State Department, the White House and the CIA argued that Washington should change Syria’s foreign policy orientation after 9/11 through engagement and pressure, the hawks in the Pentagon and the Congress sought to resort to sanctions and use of force against Syria. The neocons, who had no stake in the Syrian-Israeli peace track owing to their link with Likud, was the driving force of the hawks. In the war on terror, they portrayed Syria’s link with the militant groups and its WMD stockpiles as a threat to the United States. In this respect, they

¹¹⁸³ Eyal Zisser, “What Does the Future Hold for Syria,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 10, No. 2 (June 2006): 94-95; Kandil, “The Challenge of Restructuring: Syrian Foreign Policy,” 430-431.

sought regime change in Syria to eliminate its threat to the United States and Israeli national interests.¹¹⁸⁴

After the Afghanistan Operation, they explained their desire to see regime change not only in Iraq but also in Syria. In an interview with the New York Times in September 2002, Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz, who was a prominent neocon, uttered his belief in the democratic domino effect in the Middle East after Iraq by stating that:

“I don’t think it’s unreasonable to think that Iraq, properly managed -- and it’s going to take a lot of attention, and the stakes are enormous, much higher than Afghanistan -- that it really could turn out to be, I hesitate to say it, the first Arab democracy, or at least the first one except for Lebanon’s brief history... And I think if it’s significant for Iraq, it’s going to cast a very large shadow, starting with Syria and Iran, but across the whole Arab world.”¹¹⁸⁵

In this milieu, in addition to its violation of the UN’s Oil-for-Food regime, the Bush administration was monitoring closely illegal arms smuggling between Syria and Iraq during the two years preceding Saddam’s downfall. According to the Department of Defense officials, arms trade was crucial for Syria as President Assad’s older sister, his brother-in-law Assaf Shawqat as well as Shawqat’s two brothers involved in the smuggling.¹¹⁸⁶

The American intelligence confirmed as early as 2002 that Syria was shipping military equipment to Iraq illegally. Lebanese *al-Nahar* newspaper reported that American officials warned the Syrians of the arms transfer to Iraq by showing satellite photographs of the shipment. The Bush administration conveyed its displeasure to President Assad via private channels. For example, Assistant Secretary of State William Burns visited Syria in January 2003 and presented President Assad with “*precise and documented details concerning ground transportation of military equipment and ammunition sent from Syria to Iraq.*” The names of Syrian officials and ministries got involved in the arms smuggling were also given to him. Yet, Assad thought that the Bush administration would turn blind eye to Syria’s engagement with Iraq owing to Syria’s cooperation with the United States in the war on terror. Disagreement

¹¹⁸⁴ Hinnebusch and Quillam, “Contrary Siblings: Syria, Jordan and the Iraq War,” 521.

¹¹⁸⁵ Bill Keller, “The Sunshine Warrior,” *New York Times*, September 22, 2002, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/22/magazine/the-sunshine-warrior.html>; Saul Landau & Farrah Hassen, “Axis of Evil Defeats Neocons,” *CounterPunch*, August 28, 2008, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2008/08/28/axis-of-evil-defeats-neocons/>.

¹¹⁸⁶ Lee Kass, “Syria After Lebanon: The Growing Syrian Missile Threat,” *Middle East Quarterly* (Fall 2005), <https://www.meforum.org/755/syria-after-lebanon-the-growing-syrian-missile>; Hinnebusch and Quillam, “Contrary Siblings: Syria, Jordan and the Iraq War,” 521.

between Washington and Damascus about the Saddam regime before the invasion of Iraq could not be overcome. Assad's ongoing diplomatic efforts in the international arena to obstruct the invasion in 2002-2003 and especially its opposition to the visit of the Arab League's committee on 12 March 2003 led to a crisis between the two countries. The Bush administration accused Syria of backing the Saddam regime and defying the United States. Secretary of State Powell who was known as a moderate announced that the United States was monitoring Syria's WMD program and its support for Hezbollah during the intifada.¹¹⁸⁷ He told in February 2003 while testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that:

“We are keeping an eye on Syria's interest in weapons of mass destruction and we are following the support it is giving to Hizballah. Its cooperation in the war against terrorism does not mean that we are retracting our criticism of it for supporting terrorist organizations. They assisted us and we appreciate it, but this will not prevent us from arguing with and criticizing them.”¹¹⁸⁸

After the start of the Operation Iraqi Freedom on 20 March 2003, the tension between Washington and Damascus escalated owing to Syria's ongoing support for Iraq by letting thousands of volunteers cross the border and by transferring arms and weapons, which were used against the U.S.-led coalition forces in Iraq. After President Assad's interview with *al-Safir*, in which he publicly defied the United States, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld issued a stern warning to Syria. He accused Syria of smuggling weapons into Iraq at a press briefing at the Pentagon on 28 March 2003 by stating that:

“We have information that shipments of military supplies have been crossing the border from Syria into Iraq, including night-vision goggles... These deliveries pose a direct threat to the lives of coalition forces... We consider such trafficking as hostile acts and will hold the Syrian government accountable for such shipments.”¹¹⁸⁹

Even though President Bush fully backed Rumsfeld's statements, the State Department officials sought to undermine it by commenting to the press. An administration official implied in a statement to Associated Press that the Assad regime was not aware of the illegal shipment of military equipment, and they were cooperating with the Americans to stop it. However, the Bush administration strongly underlined that the Assad regime was responsible for military shipments to Iraq and illegal crossing of foreign fighters along the Syrian-Iraqi border two days after Rumsfeld's remarks.¹¹⁹⁰

¹¹⁸⁷ Gambill, “The American-Syrian Crisis,”; Zisser, “Syria and the War in War Iraq,” 48.

¹¹⁸⁸ Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 137.

¹¹⁸⁹ Peter Slevin, “U.S. Warns of Interference in Iraq,” *Washington Post*, March 29, 2003, 19; Abrahms, “When Rogues Defy Reason: Bashar's Syria.”

¹¹⁹⁰ Gambill, “The American-Syrian Crisis,”; Daalder and Lindsay, *America Unbound*, 173

On 30 March 2003, Secretary of State Powell severely criticized Syria at Annual Policy Conference of the AIPAC. Powell said that “*Syria faces a critical choice*” and “*Syria can continue direct support for terrorist groups and the dying regime of Saddam Hussein, or it can embark on a different and a more hopeful course. Either way, Syria bears the responsibility for its choices, and for the consequences.*” Yet, Syria rejected accusations of the Bush administration by declaring that it already sided with the Iraqi people against an illegal and unjustified invasion.¹¹⁹¹

By April 2003, the U.S.-Syrian relations deteriorated owing to President Assad’s uncompromising attitude to the United States and the Bush administration’s determination to isolate Syria. In this period, it was widely discussed that the United States was edging towards confrontation with Syria owing to its involvement in jihadist trafficking, harboring senior Baathist military officers, an active WMD capability and its link with international terrorism.¹¹⁹² What’s more, the UN and American officials also talked about the transfer of Iraq’s missing chemical or biological weapons to Syria after the invasion.¹¹⁹³

While Syria was harshly criticizing the invasion after the fall of Baghdad, the neocons were consolidating their position in Washington thanks to initial military success of the coalition forces. Besides, the escalation of insurgency in Iraq tilted the balance to the neocons, who supported the idea of military action against Syria to change its regime. The neocons did not care about stability in the Middle East, which had been offered by Syria for a long time, as their regional perspective hinged on creative destruction for the sake of Israel. Along with Israel, the Pentagon and the neocons propagated that Washington should not make concessions to rogue states like Syria to change their behavior. In this milieu, renowned neocons such as Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Bolton and Feith embarked on a campaign of accusations against Damascus, which was interpreted as a sign of the Bush administration’s determination to attack and change the regime in Syria after Iraq.¹¹⁹⁴ For example, on 5 April 2003, Undersecretary of State John Bolton pointed to Syria’s WMD capability and underlined that

¹¹⁹¹ Peter Slevin, “Powell Warns Syria, Iran Not to Aid Terrorists,” *Washington Post*, March 31, 2003, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2003/03/31/powell-warns-syria-iran-not-to-aid-terrorists/2f61ea30-08d1-4d99-b97e-e3a06f9363f2/>; Richard Lloyd Parry, “Syria Accuses Allies of ‘Illegal Invasion’,” *Times*, April 1, 2003, 10.

¹¹⁹² “The Road to Damascus,” *New York Times*, April 15, 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/15/opinion/the-road-to-damascus.html>).

¹¹⁹³ Kass, “Syria After Lebanon.”

¹¹⁹⁴ Hinnebusch, “Defying the Hegemon,” 379-383.

invasion of Iraq was a clear and strong message to Damascus by saying that “*the cost of their pursuit of weapons of mass destruction is potentially quite high...[and] the determination of the United States...to keep these incredibly dangerous weapons out of the hands of very dangerous people should not be underestimated.*”¹¹⁹⁵ Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld defined Syria as “*perennial irritant in the Middle East*” and told President Bush that “*we need to keep up the pressure.*”¹¹⁹⁶

The neocons also sought to punish Syria economically as a part of their isolation strategy. In this context, the Bush administration took several steps to harm Syria’s economy such as stopping the smuggling of Iraqi oil via Syria. By 2003, Syrian economy was deprived of \$3 billion oil revenue due to the Bush administration’s punitive attitude to Damascus.¹¹⁹⁷ According to Zunes, the Bush administration’s anti-Syrian stance aimed at punishing and demonizing the Assad regime, which refused to support the Bush administration’s foreign policy agenda in the Middle East.¹¹⁹⁸

Nonetheless, there was still moderate voices in Washington that sought to change Syria’s behavior without resorting to use of force. On the day of Bolton’s speech, Secretary of State Powell told in an interview with London-based *al-Hayat* that “*Nobody in the American administration (has) talked about invading Iran or Syria.*”¹¹⁹⁹ Despite Powell’s remarks, Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz issued a serious warning to Syria on Iraq on 6 April 2003. Wolfowitz announced on NBC’s Meet the Press program that the Syrians “*are doing some things they shouldn’t be doing, and the sooner they stop, the better it will be for them.*” As Washington focused now on winning the war in Iraq, he added that “*I think the Syrians need to know, though, that what they do now... they’ll be held accountable for.*” He also associated the invasion of Iraq with democracy promotion and domino theory in the Middle East and said that “*there’s got to be a change in Syria.*”¹²⁰⁰ Wolfowitz also stated that “*I think*

¹¹⁹⁵ Paul Kerr, “Top U.S. Officials Voice Concern About Syria’s WMD Capability,” *Arms Control Today* 33, No. 4 (May 2003): 32.

¹¹⁹⁶ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 494.

¹¹⁹⁷ Zisser, “Syria, the United States, and Iraq.”

¹¹⁹⁸ Zunes, “U.S. Policy towards Syria,” 53.

¹¹⁹⁹ Walter Pincus, “US ‘Intent on Regime Change in Syria’,” *Arab News*, April 9, 2003, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/230449>.

¹²⁰⁰ Robert D. Novak, “Colin Powell’s Burden,” *Washington Post*, April 10, 2003, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/2003/04/10/colin-powells-burden/9b5f6272-14e8-4d96-b69b-9b0dd67b19ca/>; Bradley A. Thayer, *The Pax Americana and the Middle East: U.S. Grand*

*a lot of countries, including Syria, will eventually get the message from this (Iraq war) that it's much better to come to terms peacefully with the international community not to acquire these weapons of mass destruction, to not use terrorism as an instrument of national policy.”*¹²⁰¹

On 9 April 2003, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld accused Syria of assisting Iraq by smuggling high-tech equipment into Iraq as well as letting Arab volunteers to cross into Iraq to fight American troops. Rumsfeld said that “*We consider such trafficking as hostile acts and will hold the Syrian Government accountable for such shipments.*” He also claimed that they had intelligence scraps indicating that Syria was providing shelter for senior Iraqi officials and was allowing Iraqi leaders to escape from Iraq via its soil.¹²⁰²

On 10 April 2003, Wolfowitz once again threatened Syria with use of force in a hearing before the Senate Committee on Armed Services by saying that “*The Syrians are behaving badly. They need to be reminded of that, and if they continue, then we need to think about what our policy is with respect to a country that harbors terrorists or harbors war criminals or was in recent times shipping things to Iraq.*” He also said that the United States was closely monitoring Syria and hoping change in its behavior. In response to a question, Wolfowitz also stated that he did not have information about plans to send American forces to Syria. Regarding the role of Syria in post-Saddam Iraq, he said that “*The concern we're raising about Syria is that in recent days, the Syrians have been shipping killers into Iraq to try to kill Americans. We don't welcome that, [and] we have stopped it when we have found those people, so it is a problem. I think it is important that Iraq's neighbors not meddle with Iraq.*”¹²⁰³

On 11 April 2003, another neocon Ricard Perle slammed Syria's involvement in terrorist activities by claiming that:

Strategic Interests in the Region After September 11, Mideast Security and Policy Studies, No. 56 (Ramat Gan: The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2003), 34.

¹²⁰¹ Pincus, “US ‘Intent on Regime Change in Syria.’”

¹²⁰² Nicholas Watt, “Charges against Damascus,” *Guardian*, April 15, 2003, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/apr/15/iraq.syria>; “US warns Syria over Iraq,” *BBC*, April 9, 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2934287.stm; Salloukh, “Demystifying Syrian Foreign Policy,” 164.

¹²⁰³ “US Lawmakers Upset Over Possible Syrian Support for Saddam Holdouts – 2003-04-10,” *VOA News*, October 27, 2009, <https://www.voanews.com/a/a-13-a-2003-04-10-60-us-66848852/375704.html> ; Daalder and Lindsay, *America Unbound*, 173.

“You can take a cab from the airport in Damascus and if you say to the driver, take me to this or that terrorist organization – there are half a dozen of them – and he knows exactly where to take you. That’s unacceptable, that’s intolerable. I hope we can talk to the Syrians out of that without ever having to resort to, or even think about the use of force.”¹²⁰⁴

Amid criticism of his foreign policy team levelled against Syria owing to its role in the influx of fighters and weapons into Iraq, President Bush himself gave strong and threatening messages to Syria on 11 April 2003 by saying that Syria the United States were expecting full cooperation in finding Saddam Hussein and other Baathist fugitives. By pointing to Syria’s alleged involvement in protecting Iraqi political leadership in its territories, Bush warned Syria by stating that:

“We strongly urge them not to allow for Baath Party members or Saddam’s families or generals on the run to seek safe haven and find safe haven there... We expect them to do everything they can to prevent people who should be held to account from escaping in their country. And if they are in their country, we expect the Syrian authorities to turn them over to the proper folks.”¹²⁰⁵

On 12 April 2003, Secretary of State Powell slammed Syria in an interview with BBC by saying that:

“Syria has been a concern for a long period of time. We have designated Syria for years as a state that sponsors terrorism and we have discussed this with the Syrians on many occasions. We know that they have been interested in weapons of mass destruction and we are concerned that materials have flowed through Syria to the Iraqi regime over the years, and we have called this to the Syrians’ attention.

And now that the regime is gone in Baghdad, we hope that Syria will understand there is an opportunity for a better way for them if they would stop supporting terrorist activities and make sure that they are not a source of weaponry of mass destruction, weapons of mass destruction, for terrorist organizations or anyone else.”¹²⁰⁶

On 13 April, Rumsfeld castigated Syria by stating that “*busloads of Syrian fighters entered Iraq with hundreds of thousands of dollars. And leaflets offering rewards for dead American*

¹²⁰⁴ Nathan Guttman, “Some Senior U.S. Figures Say Syria Has Crossed the Red Line,” *Haaretz*, April 14, 2003, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.4765682>.

¹²⁰⁵ Mike Allen, “President Gives Syria A Warning on Iraq,” *Washington Post*, April 13, 2003, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2003/04/13/president-gives-syria-a-warning-on-iraq/f045a16f-b1f8-459c-bb91-036577fbb9a6/>; “Bush Heralds Iraqi freedom from ‘grip of fear’,” *CNN*, April 11, 2003, <https://edition.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/04/11/sprj.irq.bush.war/index.html?iref>; Daalder and Lindsay, *America Unbound*, 174.

¹²⁰⁶ Colin Powell, “Interview by Sir David Frost of BBC,” *U.S. Department of State Archive*, April 12, 2003, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2003/19581.htm>; Also see Dan Collins, “U.S. Turns Up Heat On Syria,” *CBS News*, April 14, 2003, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/us-turns-up-heat-on-syria/>.

soldiers.” He also claimed that senior members of the Saddam regime fled to Syria.¹²⁰⁷ In the aftermath of the fall of Baghdad, it was reported that Rumsfeld ordered reviewing contingency plans for going to war with Syria. The Pentagon’s two hawks Policy Chief Douglas Feith and his Middle East aide William Luti were given the task of preparing a briefing paper elaborating on a war against Syria, explaining Syria’s role in providing weapons for the Saddam regime, its connection with terrorist groups in the Middle East and its WMD program. These two neocons were significant as they convinced the White House to attack Iraq.¹²⁰⁸

On 13 April, President Bush accused Syria of harboring Iraqi officials and more importantly of having chemical weapons. Bush said that “*we believe there are chemical weapons in Syria.*” This was a serious warning as the United States invaded Iraq for possessing such weapons. He also underlined that “*Syria just needs to cooperate with us.*” Bush once again reiterated that Syria should not provide shelter for Iraqi Baathist fugitives “*who need to be held to account for their tenure*” in Iraq. Yet, Bush carefully did not mention any plan to use military force against Damascus.¹²⁰⁹ When he was asked a question about whether American forces would invade Syria, Bush also said that “*Each situation require a different response, first things first, we expect cooperation from Syria.*”¹²¹⁰

On 14 April, Bush’s spokesman Ari Fleischer warned Syria of not sheltering Iraqi leaders, pointed to Syria’s efforts to acquire chemical and biological weapons, and underlined that Syria had long been listed on the states sponsoring terrorism. Fleischer also categorized Syria as a rogue state by saying that “*Syria is indeed a rogue nation...Syria needs to seriously ponder the implications of their actions.*”¹²¹¹ An administration official said that although previous administrations neglected Syria’s misbehaviors such as WMD program and sponsoring

¹²⁰⁷ “Syria, U.S. exchange charges on weapons,” *CNN*, April 14, 2003, <https://edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/meast/04/13/sprj.irq.bush.syria/>; Kandil, “The Challenge of Restructuring: Syrian Foreign Policy,” 436; Zunes, “U.S. Policy towards Syria,” 64.

¹²⁰⁸ Julian Borger et al., “Bush vetoes Syria war plan,” *Guardian*, April 15, 2003, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/apr/15/syria.usa#>; Daalder and Lindsay, *America Unbound*, 174.

¹²⁰⁹ Brian Knowlton, “Bush Accuses Syria of Harboring Senior Iraqis,” *New York Times*, April 13, 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/13/international/worldspecial/bush-accuses-syria-of-harboring-senior-iraqis.html>; Tim Reld, “US Tells Syria to Co-Operate or Risk Conflict,” *Times*, April 14, 2003, 1.

¹²¹⁰ Philip H. Gordon, “After Iraq: Is Syria Next?,” Brookings Institution, April 25, 2003, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/after-iraq-is-syria-next/>.

¹²¹¹ Gambill, “The American-Syrian Crisis,”; Daalder and Lindsay, *America Unbound*, 174; Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 115.

terrorism, this decades-long wisdom of engaging Syria was no longer valid in Washington after the invasion of Iraq. Syria was helping the enemy of the United States in time of a war by harboring Baathist officials and President Bush was really disturbed by Syria's attitude. Another source of concern was Syria's role as a conduit for missile guidance systems going to North Korea. Official underlined that Syria could improve its relations with the United States providing that it was determined to fix these two problems.¹²¹²

Undersecretary of State Bolton explained the United States' concern about Syria's nuclear weapons program in an interview on 16 April 2003.¹²¹³ He also stressed possible repercussions of the domino impact for Syria by stating that "*We are hoping that the elimination of the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein... would [provide] important lessons to other countries in the region, particularly Syria, Libya, and Iran.*"¹²¹⁴

CIA issued a report in April 2003, in which the United States' concern about Syria's nuclear program in cooperation with Russia was stated as follows: "*Russia and Syria have approved a draft cooperative program on...civil nuclear power*" that "*[i]n principal [sic]...provides opportunities for Syria to expand its indigenous capabilities, should it decide to pursue nuclear programs.*" The report also claimed that it "*is highly probable that Syria...is continuing to develop an offensive [biological weapons] capability.*"¹²¹⁵

President Assad responded accusations of the Bush administration by contending that Syria had good relations with the rest of the world and the United States' claims did not make Syria a rogue state.¹²¹⁶ Although the Syrian officials continuously rejected the accusations of the Bush administration, they were closely following the messages given by the United States. It seemed that having seen the success of the U.S.-led coalition, President Assad decided to comply with the demands of the Bush administration. Although the United States and Syria were on collusion course after the invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration seemed ready to engage with Syria if Damascus showed some flexibility. In fact, the Bush administration

¹²¹² Michael Kramer, "Behind Bush's Rocket to Syria," *New York Daily News*, April 15, 2003, 6.

¹²¹³ Kerr, "Top U.S. Officials Voice Concern About Syria's WMD Capability," 32.

¹²¹⁴ Abrahms, "When Rogues Defy Reason: Bashar's Syria."

¹²¹⁵ Kerr, "Top U.S. Officials Voice Concern About Syria's WMD Capability," 32.

¹²¹⁶ Lesch, *Missed Opportunities*, 13.

exerted pressure on Syria to change its behavior such as hosting terrorist groups and welcoming Iraqi officials on its soil not to launch an invasion.¹²¹⁷

This fact was understood when President Bush, facing re-election in 2004 while dealing with two nation-building projects in Afghanistan and Iran, reportedly put an end to discussions among his foreign policy team about extending the war on terror to Syria. An intelligence source told the Guardian that “*The talk about Syria didn’t go anywhere. Basically, the White House shut down the discussion.*” British PM Tony Blair also publicly announced that President Bush never talked about attacking Syria in their regular meetings. An unnamed American official also underlined that “*They’ve not taken any actions that we can see so far that would justify military action.*” Nonetheless, the Bush administration was determined to enhance diplomatic and economic pressures to resolve the long-lasting problems between the two countries such as Syria’s support for the militant Palestinian groups and Hezbollah as well as its WMD program.¹²¹⁸

In this context, despite his harsh rhetoric towards Syria in his BBC interview on 15 April, Secretary of State Powell announced that the United States was not planning an attack on Syria in a press briefing on 15 April 2003. In response to a question about the next target of the Bush administration, Powell stated that:

“We have concerns about Syria. We have let Syria let know of our concerns. We also have concerns about some of the policies of Iran. We have made the Iranians fully aware of our concerns. But there is no list. There is no war plan right now to go attack someone else, either for the purpose of overthrowing their leadership or for the purpose of imposing democratic values.”¹²¹⁹

Powell reiterated the United States’ posture on Syria in an interview with a TV program on 17 April by saying that “*There is no war plan on anyone’s desk right now to go marching on Syria.*”¹²²⁰ On 20 April, two US congressmen Nick J. Rahall and Darrell Issa went to Damascus to meet with President Assad. In the meeting, Assad assured the congressmen that Syria would not harbor Iraqi political leaders in Syria. On the same day, President Bush toned down his rhetoric and welcomed Syria’s compliance with American demand for not providing shelter

¹²¹⁷ Zisser, “Syria and the War in War Iraq,” 53.

¹²¹⁸ Borger et al., “Bush vetoes Syria war plan.”

¹²¹⁹ Colin Powell, “Foreign Press Center Briefing,” *U.S. Department of State Archive*, April 15, 2003, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2003/19662.htm>.

¹²²⁰ Colin Powell, “Interview On the NewsHour with Jim Lehrer,” *U.S. Department of State Archive*, April 17, 2003, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2003/19734.htm>.

for senior Iraqi officials. Bush said that “*They’re getting the message that they should not harbor Baath Party officials. I’m confident that the Syrian government has heard us. And I believe it when they say they want to cooperate with us.*”¹²²¹ After Bush’s remarks, Secretary of State Powell included Syria in his first tour in the Middle East after the war and offered Syria another chance if it desired American friendship or confrontation with the United States.¹²²²

On 24 April, President Bush told magazine reporters in a meeting that he did not have any plans for another military operation. In response to a question about his plan for attacks on Iran and Syria, Bush underlined said that:

“We just expect them to cooperate, and we will work with the world to encourage them to cooperate. We have no military plans. Just like I said about Syria... We made it clear to the Syrians we expect them to cooperate... They’re doing a better job. The borders look like they’re tighter. As we find people that have escaped into Syria, we’re giving the Syrian Government the names of the people, and they appear to want to be helpful.”¹²²³

On 30 April 2003, the State Department published its annual Report on Global Terrorism. In the report it was stated that Syria was not directly involved in terrorist activities since 1986 despite its support for several terrorist groups. In the report, Syria’s contribution to fighting terrorism was also cited as follows:

“The Syrian government has repeatedly assured the United States that it will take every possible measure to protect U.S. citizens and facilities from terrorists in Syria. In times of increased threat, it has increased police protection around the US Embassy. During the past five years, there have been no acts of terrorism against U.S. citizens in Syria. The government of Syria has cooperated significantly with the United States and other foreign governments against al-Qaeda, the Taliban and other terrorist organizations and individuals. It also has discouraged any signs of public support for al- Qaeda, including in the media and at mosques.”¹²²⁴

¹²²¹ John Tierney, “Bush Hails Signs That Syria Is Starting to Cooperate on Iraq,” *New York Times*, April 20, 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/20/international/worldspecial/bush-hails-signs-that-syria-is-starting-to.html>; Mike Allen and Daniel Williams, “President Praises Efforts by Syria,” *Washington Post*, April 21, 2003, 1.

¹²²² Gambill, “The American-Syrian Crisis,” Daalder and Lindsay, *America Unbound*, 175.

¹²²³ George W. Bush, “Interview with Tom Brokaw of NBC News, April 24, 2003,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of George W. Bush, Book I- January 1 to June 30, 2003* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2004), 377; Daalder and Lindsay, *America Unbound*, 174.

¹²²⁴ United States Department of State, “Overview of State Sponsored Terrorism,” in *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2002* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2003) <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/20117.pdf>; Saul Landau & Farrah Hassen, “The “Noble Liars” Attack Syria,” *Canadian Dimension* 39, No. 3 (May/June 2005): 15.

By late April 2003, President Assad ordered closing of four official border gates with Iraq to prevent infiltrators, some senior Iraqi officials, who fled to Syria, were handed over to American officials. Bashar al-Assad regime gave placating messages to the Bush administration by assuring it of Syria's readiness to renew dialog with the United States and softening its opposition to a new peace process sponsored by the Bush administration between Israel and the Palestinians. He closed some offices of resistance groups in Damascus and gave up his anti-American rhetoric that he adopted prior to the invasion of Iraq. When the UN Security Council issued a resolution recognizing American authority in Iraq in May 2003, Syrian officials did not join the session instead of casting no vote.¹²²⁵

Secretary of State Powell started a Middle East tour and arrived in Damascus on 3 May 2003. Syrians welcomed Powell's visit as a sign of reestablishment of political dialog with the Bush administration. Yet Powell's agenda was replete with contentious issues.¹²²⁶ In his meeting with President Assad, Powell submitted a list of demands to him: expulsion of Palestinian resistance groups PFLP-GC, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, withdrawal of all Syrian troops from Lebanon, dissolution of Hezbollah and evacuation of its rocket batteries in southern Lebanon, full cooperation with the United States in the war on terror in Iraq, strict monitoring of the border to thwart flow of foreign volunteers into Iraq, blocking money laundering and the repatriation of Iraqi funds from Syrian banks. President Assad listened Powell's demands carefully and promised to close the camps of Palestinian resistance organizations in Damascus. Although Assad instructed closure of the camps, he continued to allow their activities in practice and thus he did not keep his promise.¹²²⁷

In fact, Powell's demands were unacceptable to Syria as they were designed to deprive Syria of its most vital cards to recover the Golan Heights, its sphere of influence in the Levant and its Arab nationalist posture in the Middle East. Syria could only give up them in case of an imminent threat. The Bush administration's unilateral conception of hegemony and its patronizing attitude fueled the feelings of resistance in Syria. The State Department had issued a briefing before Powell's visit and had said that there were no carrots to be given to Damascus. Spokesperson of Syria's Foreign Ministry Bouthiana Shaaban responded that Damascus was ready to contribute to regional solutions but against dictates of the Bush administration. She

¹²²⁵ Zisser, "Bashar al-Assad: In or Out of the New World Order?," 124; Zisser, "Syria, the United States, and Iraq."

¹²²⁶ Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria's Waiting Game*, 59.

¹²²⁷ Salloukh, "Demystifying Syrian Foreign Policy," 164; Hinnebusch and Quillam, "Contrary Siblings: Syria, Jordan and the Iraq War," 522; al-Baidhani, *The United States and Syria*, 39.

said that Syria would cooperate if it saw “*real engagement on a parity of dignity.*” It was reported that Syrian diplomats believed that the Bush administration was seeking to humiliate Syria for its posture on the invasion of Iraq.¹²²⁸

In June 2003, the tension between Washington and Damascus escalated. On 18 June 2003, American special forces in Iraq crossed the border to capture a convoy allegedly transporting Iraqi political leaders. American forces clashed with and captured injured Syrian soldiers in the assault and many Syrian civilians lost their lives. The death toll was nearly 80 people. But it was understood that the convoy was carrying gasoline not Iraqi fugitives. Although Syria did not make propaganda of the event, it diminished intelligence cooperation to a minimum level with the Americans.¹²²⁹

Meanwhile, Syria began to take small steps to show its desire to cooperate with the Bush administration. For example, it withdrew a limited number of soldiers from Lebanon, announced its willingness to restart peace negotiations with Israel and diminishing support for terrorism. Despite these positive steps, Secretary of State Powell announced in a joint press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Sharon on 20 June 2003 that he was not satisfied with Syria’s limited steps.¹²³⁰ Powell said that:

“They took some limited steps, those limited steps are totally inadequate. We have gone back to the Syrians to let them know that we find their actions inadequate. We will continue to press them. We will work with our colleagues in the international community to put pressure on Syria. We are going to make it clear to Syria that until they move in this more positive direction that we have outlined for them, there will not be a better relationship with the United States, and ultimately it will affect their interests.”¹²³¹

While the violence was escalating in Iraq in the summer of 2003, the Bush administration officials expressed their disappointment about the level of Syria’s cooperation in the war on terror and its non-compliance with the promises given to the United States. White House spokesman Scott McClellan said that Syria and Iran “*are continuing to do things that are unhelpful.*” Another official indicated that neither country “*has made the fundamental,*

¹²²⁸ Hinnebusch, “Defying the Hegemon,” 380; Hinnebusch, “Syrian Foreign Policy under Bashar al-Asad,” 19.

¹²²⁹ Rabil, *Syria, the United States, and the War on Terror*, 141-142; Lawson, *Global Security Watch – Syria*, 156; Wieland, *Syria at Bay*, 120.

¹²³⁰ Abrahms, “When Rogues Defy Reason: Bashar’s Syria.”

¹²³¹ Colin Powell, “Joint Press Conference with Israeli Prime Minister Sharon,” *U.S. Department of State Archive*, June 20, 2003, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2003/21779.htm>.

irrevocable choice of which side they are going to be in the war on terror.” President Bush also issued a stern warning to Syria regarding its connection with terrorism in a press conference with Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi on 21 July 2003. Bush said that *“Syria and Iran continue to harbor and assist terrorists. This behavior is completely unacceptable, and states that support terror will be held accountable.”* Bush also underlined that giving assistance and providing shelter to terrorists was undermining a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.¹²³²

On 30 July 2003, Secretary of State Powell gave an interview to an Israeli daily and said that the Syria did not keep its promise to the United States as to the Palestinian resistance groups in Damascus. He underlined that although Syria shut down their offices, their leaders were still in Syria and were not expelled by Syrian authorities. Powell also stressed that Washington was observing Syria’s compliance with the demands submitted to Syria in his visit in May.¹²³³

In the fall of 2003, the issue of border security dominated the agenda in the U.S.-Syrian relations. On 16 September 2003, Under Secretary of State Bolton defined Syria as a security concern owing to its terrorism linkage and its WMD capability including chemical weapons.¹²³⁴ He also underscored Syria’s hostile attitude towards the U.S.-led coalition forces in Iraq in a speech at the House of Representatives by stating that:

“We have seen Syria take a series of hostile actions toward Coalition forces in Iraq. Syria allowed military equipment to flow into Iraq on the eve of and during the war. Syria permitted volunteers to pass into Iraq to attack and kill our service members during the war, and is still doing so. Syria continues to provide safe haven and political cover to Hizballah in Lebanon, which has killed hundreds of Americans in the past. Although Damascus has increased its cooperation regarding Iraq since the fall of the Iraqi regime, its behavior during Operation Iraqi Freedom underscores the importance of taking seriously reports and information on Syria's WMD capabilities.”¹²³⁵

¹²³² Mike Allen, “Bush Warns Syria, Iran on Terrorism,” *Washington Post*, July 22, 2003, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2003/07/22/bush-warns-syria-iran-on-terrorism/0a41ad6e-b906-4b2f-be9a-168b6ccf4757/>; Thomas M. DeFrank, “W Warns Syria, Iran on Terror,” *New York Daily News*, July 22, 2003, 8.

¹²³³ Colin Powell, “Interview by Hemi Shalev of Ma’ariv Newspaper,” *U.S. Department of State Archive*, July 30, 2003, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2003/22965.htm>.

¹²³⁴ “Bolton Criticizes Syria,” *Washington Post*, September 17, 2003, 28.

¹²³⁵ John R. Bolton, “Syria’s Weapons of Mass Destruction and Missile Development Programs,” *U.S. Department of State Archive*, September 16, 2003, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/t/us/rm/24135.htm>.

On 25 September 2003, Paul Bremer, Administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq, said that Syrians were the largest group among the 278 nationals captured by coalition forces in Iraq.¹²³⁶

The Bush administration's bitterness owing to Syria's sponsorship of the militant Palestinian groups was coupled with the concept of preemptive strike in the war on terror and paved the way for Israeli strikes against Syria. The Bush administration gave green light to Israel's bombardment of an alleged training base of Islamic Jihad in a Palestinian camp near Damascus in early October 2003. Syria called for an emergency meeting at the UN Security Council. During the session, Israel's UN Ambassador Dan Gillerman tried to legitimize the attack as an act of self-defense against Islamic Jihad's suicide attack in Haifa. Syria sought to achieve condemnation of the attack at the Security Council because it was a clear violation of 1974 Disengagement Pact. However, the United States vetoed Syria's draft resolution. At the UN Security Council, the American Ambassador also said that Syria was on the wrong side in the war on terror.¹²³⁷

President Bush publicly defended Israel's attack by telling reporters on 6 October 2003 that he had told Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon that "*Israel's got a right to defend herself; that Israel must not feel constrained in terms of defending the homeland.*" White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan also said that "*Syria knows our concerns*" about its connection with terrorism and "*We've made it very clear that they will be held accountable for those actions.*"¹²³⁸

In this milieu, Bolton continued to criticize Syria and to designate it as a rogue state. Speaking at U.S. Embassy in London in October 2003, Bolton announced that Syria, Libya and Cuba were to become new members of the axis of evil because they were developing WMDs, and they were posing a dire threat to the United States and its allies. Bolton indicated that the axis of evil was expanding, and the United States would focus on Iran, Syria, Libya, and Cuba after Iraq. He also said that the United States was not satisfied with Syria's cooperation in Iraq and the Congress would vote for imposing sanctions on Damascus. On the other hand, Syria's charge d'affaires in Washington Imad Mustapha said that this attitude was a double standard

¹²³⁶ "Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003," Congress.Gov, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/108th-congress/house-bill/1828>.

¹²³⁷ Strindberg, "Syria under Pressure," 60; Zunes, "U.S. Policy towards Syria," 55.

¹²³⁸ Glenn Kessler, "Bush: Israel Must Defend Itself," *Washington Post*, October 7, 2003, 19.

while the American troops were in Iraq and Israeli jets just bombed Syrian territory with tacit approval of the Bush administration.¹²³⁹

The Bush administration adopted a tough position vis-à-vis Syria. Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs William J. Burns elaborated on the problematic issues between Washington and Damascus such as the issue of border security, Iraqi assets in Syria, Syria's support for militant Palestinian groups, Syria's destabilizing efforts in Lebanon via Hezbollah, and Syria's WMD program, in a hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 30 October 2003. Burns said that although Syria decided to collaborate with the United States in some areas such as increasing border controls, it was still at odds with Washington on several key issues. Burns stated that:

“It seems that Syria harbors the illusion that cosmetic steps will be enough to defuse our concerns. In others, there seems to be a misplaced belief in Damascus that U.S. engagement in Iraq and with the Israelis and Palestinians will prevent us from pursuing a robust agenda with Syria. Both judgements are ill-considered and fail to grasp the depth of our concerns, and those of the international community. Until Syria shows itself committed to comprehensive peace in the region through concrete actions, it will continue to find itself at odds with the United States and increasingly isolated internationally.”¹²⁴⁰

On the other hand, the commanders of American forces who were responsible for monitoring the Syrian-Iraqi border began to engage with Syria on the border issue by the fall of 2003. They said that there was no evidence proving passage of huge numbers of volunteers from Syria to Iraq. To illustrate, Major General David Petraeus, who was commander of the 101st Airborne Division responsible for monitoring the northern parts of the border, told in November 2003 that only 20 fighters were captured while trying to cross into Iraq from Syria since May 2003. In exchange for reestablishment of Syrian businessmen's trade relations in Iraq, local Syrian authorities agreed with Petraeus to coordinate border control and supply daily electricity to northern Iraq.¹²⁴¹

Major General Charles H. Swannac Jr., who was the commander of the 82nd Airborne Division patrolling Iraq's western borders with Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, supported the views of General Petraeus on Syria. He explained that attacks on American forces were carried out by

¹²³⁹ Michael Evans and Richard Beeston, “US Extends Axis of Evil to Syria, Libya and Cuba,” *Times*, October 30, 2003, 23.

¹²⁴⁰ William J. Burns, “U.S.-Syrian Relations,” *U.S. Department of State Archive*, October 30, 2003, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/nea/rls/rm/25772.htm>; Hinnebusch, “Defying the Hegemon,” 384.

¹²⁴¹ Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 139. Also see Vernon Loeb, “Commanders Doubt Syria is Entry Point,” *Washington Post*, October 29, 2003, 19; International Crisis Group, *Syria under Bashar (I)*, 6.

the loyalists of the Saddam regime and other Iraqi groups not by foreign fighters. He also explained that foreign incursions into Iraq was limited thanks to the intensification of border patrols and new technologies.¹²⁴² After reviewing evidence given to him, Senator Robert Byrd also announced in November 2003 that “*I have not seen any evidence that would lead me to believe it is the government of Syria that is responsible for the attacks against our troops.*”¹²⁴³ On the other hand, the U.S.-Syrian border cooperation did not last long because the Pentagon rejected proposals to cooperate with Syria in a sustainable way to monitor the Syrian-Iraqi border throughout 2003.¹²⁴⁴

In the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration’s determination to promote democracy in the Middle East in a unilateral fashion affected its perception of Syria as well. President Bush’s one of the targets in democracy promotion was Syria in the Middle East. On 6 November 2003, Bush delivered a speech on the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy and said that: “*Iraqi democracy will succeed--and that success will send forth the news, from Damascus to Tehran--that freedom can be the future of every nation. The establishment of a free Iraq at the heart of the Middle East will be a watershed event in the global democratic revolution.*”¹²⁴⁵ Hawks in the Bush administration also expected that the invasion of Iraq might create chaos in Syria, which would end up with the overthrow of the Baath regime and establishment of a democratic Syria.¹²⁴⁶

In late 2003, the Bush administration was also preoccupied with Syria’s connection with the militant Palestinian groups and Hezbollah. In an interview with London-based *al-Sharq al-Awsat* on 19 November 2003, President Bush underscored Syria’s terrorism linkage and his expectations as to Iraq by stating that:

“We have talked to Syria before, and we still feel very strongly about the same thing, that they need to shut down the Hezbollah offices in their country... Hezbollah and JI, absolutely; Hamas, if there are such offices there. And they need to do a better job on their border to stop any infiltration going from Syria into Iraq with weapons and

¹²⁴² Joel Brinkley, “U.S. Officers in Iraq Find Few Signs of Infiltration by Foreign Fighters,” *New York Times*, November 19, 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/19/world/us-officers-in-iraq-find-few-signs-of-infiltration-by-foreign-fighters.html>.

¹²⁴³ Zunes, “U.S. Policy towards Syria,” 64.

¹²⁴⁴ Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 139.

¹²⁴⁵ Dana Milbank and Mike Allen, “Bush Urges Commitment to Transform Mideast,” *Washington Post*, November 7, 2003, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2003/11/07/bush-urges-commitment-to-transform-mideast/86985003-e99f-40ab-91d4-64601bf9300f/>; Stewart, “The Greater Middle East and Reform,” 410.

¹²⁴⁶ Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 114.

terrorists and jihadists. A peaceful Iraq is in Syria's interest. A free and peaceful Iraq is in the interest of the neighborhood. And we would hope that Syria would be cooperative in the development of a free and peaceful Iraq and not turn away from any infiltrations that might be taking place—that are taking place—from Syria into Iraq.”¹²⁴⁷

In December 2003, there were plenty of reports in the American press showing evidence of President Assad's involvement in arms shipment to Saddam Hussein before the invasion. The New York Times published documents obtained from Saddam Hussein's inner circle indicating that senior Iraqi officials went to Syria to meet with representatives of North Korea and negotiate missile technology purchase. The Los Angeles Times also revealed that Iraq bought military equipment from Syrian companies owned by Assad's relatives. The Bush administration also discovered evidence allegedly showing that the Assad regime let transportation of Iraq's WMD material to Syria before the invasion. David Kay, who was the head of Iraq Survey Group, investigating Iraq's WMDs, said that “*We are not talking about a large stockpile of weapons, but we know from some of the interrogations of former Iraqi officials that a lot of material went to Syria before the war, including some components of Saddam's WMD programme. Precisely what went to Syria, and what has happened to it, is a major issue that needs to be resolved.*”¹²⁴⁸

In this context, President Bush let the Congress to pass the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act (SALSA).¹²⁴⁹ Eliot Engel, who was a congressman of New York and having close relations with the Israel lobby, introduced the SALSA. It was overwhelmingly passed by the House of Representatives on 15 October 2003 and then by the Senate on 11 November 2003. President Bush signed the SALSA into law on 12 December 2003. SALSA aimed to “halt Syrian support for terrorism, end its occupation of Lebanon, stop its development of weapons of mass destruction, cease its illegal importation of Iraqi oil and illegal shipments of weapons and other military items to Iraq, and by so doing hold Syria accountable for the serious international security problems it has caused in the Middle East, and for other purposes.”¹²⁵⁰

¹²⁴⁷ George W. Bush, “Interview with Abdul Rahman Al-Rashed of Al-Sharq Al-Awsat in London, November 19, 2003,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of George W. Bush, Book II-July 1 to December 31, 2003* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2004), 1596.

¹²⁴⁸ Gambill, “Assad's Desperate Diplomacy.”

¹²⁴⁹ Kabalan, “Syrian Foreign Policy,” 30.

¹²⁵⁰ Tom Barry, “On the Road to Damascus?,” CounterPunch, March 8, 2004, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2004/03/08/neo-cons-target-syria/>.

Despite earlier reports on the border issue, the SALSA urged the Assad regime that:

“Syria should immediately and unconditionally stop facilitating transit from Syria to Iraq of individuals, military equipment, and all lethal items, except as authorized by the Coalition Provisional Authority or a representative, internationally recognized Iraqi government; cease its support for “volunteers” and terrorists who are traveling from and through Syria into Iraq to launch attacks; undertake concrete, verifiable steps to deter such behavior and control the use of territory under Syrian control.¹²⁵¹

According to the SALSA, Syria would be held accountable for attacks of Hezbollah and other terrorist organizations having offices, training camps and other installations in Syria or bases in areas of Lebanon controlled by Syria. In so doing, Congress gave green light to the United States, Israel, or any other country to attack Syria within the context of war on terror.¹²⁵²

In addition to the SALSA, the appointment of David Wurmser, who was a prominent neocon served as an advisor to Likud governments and an ardent advocate of joint American-Israeli effort and military operation to eliminate the Syrian government, as the national security staff of VP Cheney in September 2003 was interpreted as the Bush administration’s new aggressive posture and its intention to attack Syria.¹²⁵³ The Bush administration also began to fund anti-regime groups in exile via the State Department’s Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and the American-based National Endowment for Democracy.¹²⁵⁴

As fighting terrorism was one of the top priorities of the Bush administration in the war on terror, Syria’s policy of providing shelter for the militant Palestinian groups continued to be a source of tension between Washington and Damascus. In a testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 12 February 2004, Secretary of State Powell said that “*Syria has not done what we demanded of it with respect to the closing permanently of these offices [inhabited by radical Palestinian organizations] and getting those individuals out of Damascus.*”¹²⁵⁵

¹²⁵¹ “Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003.”

¹²⁵² Zunes, “U.S. Policy towards Syria,” 56.

¹²⁵³ Barry, “On the Road to Damascus?”; Zunes, “U.S. Policy towards Syria,” 53.

¹²⁵⁴ Kandil, “The Challenge of Restructuring: Syrian Foreign Policy,” 437.

¹²⁵⁵ Alfred B. Prados and Jeremy M. Sharp, *Syria: Political Conditions and Relations with the United States After the Iraq War*, CRS Report for Congress (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2005), 17.

In this period, officials of the Bush administration raised problematic issues between the two countries frequently. In so doing, the Bush administration sought to change Syria's behavior without resorting to use of force. To illustrate, The White House spokesman McClellan told reporters at a press briefing on 30 April 2004 that the United States was moving forward on implementing the SALSA to change Syria's behavior. McClellan noted the problematic issues between the two countries as follows:

“We have concerns about Syria's harboring and supporting of terrorism. We have concerns about the border along the Iraq-Syria border, and their ability to control those borders and who's crossing those borders. We have concerns about the situation in Lebanon when it comes to Syria. And we certainly have concerns about Syria's continued development of weapons of mass destruction... We are moving forward on the Syria Accountability Act, and we will probably be having more to say on that soon. But those concerns need to be addressed. Syria needs to take them seriously and work to address those concerns.”¹²⁵⁶

The situation in Iraq deteriorated in the spring of 2004 owing to growing attacks against American troops and increasing number of American casualties. Senior Bush administration officials held Syria responsible for these attacks, voiced their criticisms once again on the border security issue and demanded more from Damascus.¹²⁵⁷ President Bush told in an interview with *al Arabiya* on 5 May 2004 that he did not have a plan to attack Syria to bring democracy.¹²⁵⁸ In another interview with Egypt's *al-Ahram* newspaper on 7 May 2004, he said that Washington was imposing sanctions because Damascus “*will not fight terror and they don't join us in fighting terror.*”¹²⁵⁹ President Bush eventually ordered the implementation of first set of SALSA sanctions on 11 May 2004.

According to SALSA, export of military and dual-use items was prohibited, the export and re-export of certain American goods (except for food and medicine) was banned, assets and properties of senior Syrian officials were frozen, American businesses were prohibited to invest or operate in Syria, the movement of Syrian officials were severely restricted and commercial air services between the United States and Syria was cancelled. In SALSA, the state-owned Commercial Bank of Syria was also designated as a money-laundering channel,

¹²⁵⁶ Scott McClellan, “Press Briefing by Scott McClellan,” *The White House Archives*, April 30, 2004, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2004/04/text/20040430-4.html>.

¹²⁵⁷ Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 139.

¹²⁵⁸ George W. Bush, “Interview with Al Arabiya Television, May 5, 2004,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of George W. Bush, Book I-January 1 to June 30, 2004* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2005), 772.

¹²⁵⁹ Strindberg, “Syria under Pressure,” 61.

which aimed at isolating Syria's banking system globally. President Bush, who had been unwilling to sign the bill in order not to alienate Syria in the war on terror, changed his attitude when Syria opposed to the invasion of Iraq and senior Baathists sent weapons to Saddam Hussein.¹²⁶⁰

Even though the Bush administration did not apply all-encompassing sanctions, they had crippling effects on Syria's already fragile economy as they prevented it from integrating into the global economy. Export of all American products except for food and medicine to Syria were banned. Sanctioning Syria's largest and the most significant bank -the Syrian Trade Bank- were a serious blow to Syria as it deprived it of executing financial transactions with the international banking systems and investors left the country. Flights between the two countries were cancelled as well. The SALSA turned out to be a screw to tighten the noose around Syria as it was designed as an ongoing process to check the degree of Syria's compliance with the United States' demands regularly. President Bush said that "*The Syrian government must understand that its conduct alone will determine the duration of the sanctions.*" He also claimed that Syria's actions "*constitute an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States.*"¹²⁶¹

By implementing SALSA sanctions, President Bush demonstrated that he was considering Syria as a destabilizing actor in the Middle East. That's why, Bush pointed to hurdles between the two countries on the day of implementation by saying that:

"If the Syrian Government demonstrates a genuine intention to seek true peace by confronting terror and violence, ending its pursuit and development of weapons of mass destruction, and respecting the sovereignty and independence of Lebanon, the United States will respond positively. Similarly, I urge the Syrian Government to offer its full support to the goal of a stable and sovereign Iraq, beginning with redoubled efforts along the border to prevent the movement of foreign fighters into Iraq. The Syrian Government has taken some steps in this regard but must do more, given that individuals bent on sowing terror continue to cross into Iraq from Syria."¹²⁶²

¹²⁶⁰ Hinnebusch, "Defying the Hegemon," 379-380; Zunes, "U.S. Policy towards Syria," 52; Also see Christopher Marquis, "Bush Imposes Sanctions on Syria, Citing Ties to Terrorism," *New York Times*, May 12, 2004, 10; Gary C. Gambill, "American Sanctions on Syria: A Diplomatic Masterstroke?," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin* 6, No. 5 (May 2004), https://www.meforum.org/meib/articles/0405_s1.htm.

¹²⁶¹ Zisser, "Bashar al-Assad: In or Out of the New World Order?," 126; "U.S. hits Syria with sanctions," *CNN*, May 12, 2004, <https://edition.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/meast/05/11/us.syria/>; "American Sanctions on Syria," *Times*, 12 May 2004, 14.

¹²⁶² George W. Bush, "Statement on Signing the Executive Order Blocking Property of Certain Persons and Prohibiting the Export of Certain Goods to Syria, May 11, 2004," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of George W. Bush, Book I-January 1 to June 30, 2004* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2005), 852.

President Bush also underlined incongruency between the roles of Washington and Damascus by calling on Syria to relinquish its current role in the Middle East and switch to the camp of the pro-democracy forces led by the United States as follows:

“This is a momentous time in the Middle East. I call upon the Syrian government to join the ranks of those nations that have committed themselves to political and economic reform, a decision that would benefit -- first and foremost -- the people of Syria. I sincerely hope that the Syrian government will conclude that its interests are best served by joining efforts to build a Middle East that is stable, secure, and free from terror and violence.”¹²⁶³

In the fall of 2004, the U.S.-Syrian relations deteriorated owing to the Lahoud crisis in Lebanon and the passing of the UN Resolution 1559. In this context, President Assad began to demonstrate his willingness to cooperate with the United States on the border issue by sealing off the Syrian-Iraqi border. On 11 September 2004, Assistant Secretary of State William Burns and Assistant Secretary of Defense Peter Rodman went to Syria along with some officials from the CIA to discuss how the security situation along the Syrian-Iraqi border could be improved. Burns and Rodman met with President Assad more than two hours. It was reported that the meeting was productive and both sides agreed on the issue of border security. Participants of the meeting conveyed the message that the Bush administration wanted to broaden military cooperation along the Syrian-Iraqi border by means of new monitoring equipment and joint patrols of American, Iraqi, and Syrian troops.¹²⁶⁴ It was also reported that the American delegation gave President Assad a list of eight names, who were allegedly organizing Iraqi insurgents in Syria. The Bush administration wanted Syria to hand over these names to American and/or Iraqi authorities to measure Syria’s sincerity in dealing with the Iraqi insurgency. Syria accepted cooperation with the Bush administration on finding these names. President Assad described his meeting with Burn very positive and said that Syria would support the 30 June elections in Iraq as it was closely associated with Syria’s national interest.¹²⁶⁵

Secretary of State Powell also met with his counterpart Sharaa at the UN General Assembly on 22 September 2004. Powell defined the meeting as “*a good, open and candid*” and “*rather positive discussion*.” In the meeting, they talked about Syria’s policy in Iraq, political situation

¹²⁶³ George W. Bush, “Sanctions on Syria: President’s Statement on Implementation,” *U.S. Department of State Archive*, May 11, 2004, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/nea/rls/rm/32393.htm>.

¹²⁶⁴ Scott Wilson, “U.S. Pressing Syria on Iraqi Border Security,” *Washington Post*, September 20, 2004, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2004/09/20/us-pressing-syria-on-iraqi-border-security/db9666ac-4f42-40c5-878c-2a2e537aa7cd/>; Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 139-140.

¹²⁶⁵ Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 194.

in Lebanon and Syria's support for terrorist organizations. Sharaa reassured Powell that Syria was determined to control the Syrian-Iraqi border and to thwart flow of money to the insurgency. Powell said that Syria was willing to do more. More crucially, Powell praised Syria's efforts to seal off its border with Iraq to prevent illegal crossings of insurgents and redeployment of its 3000-4000 troops in Lebanon away from their positions in south Beirut.¹²⁶⁶ On 29 September 2004, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher announced that Syria agreed to tighten the border by stating that:

“The Syrians did agree to take specific actions in coordination with Iraqi and multinational forces. These steps are designed to close Syria's border to individuals seeking to foment violence and destabilize Iraq. It is essential now that these steps be translated into action on the ground, and we will measure the Syrian commitment to the stability of Iraq by the concrete steps that it takes.”¹²⁶⁷

Syria's cooperation on the border issue led to a thaw in the relations between Washington and Damascus. Secretary of State Powell met with Sharaa again at the International Ministerial Meeting of the Countries Neighboring Iraq on 23 November 2004. Foreign ministers of Iraq's neighbors, G-8 countries, China, the European Union, the United Nations, and the Arab League came together to discuss several issues pertaining to the future of Iraq. The conference was the first attempt to organize international policy on Iraq after the fall of the Saddam regime. Participation of Syria and Iran as well as the meeting between Powell and Sharaa were significant as it was an indication that the Bush administration needed assistance from neighbors in stabilizing Iraq.¹²⁶⁸ The main theme of the Powell-Sharaa meeting was the border issue. At the press conference, Powell answered a question about the border issue by stating that:

“In my conversations with Mr. Shara of Syria, we discussed a variety of issues, our desire to see more done on the border to prevent the flow of terrorists and weapons and finances across the border. Yes, we discussed that rather directly. The Syrians have taken some steps recently, but we think there is a lot more they can do, and we're looking for greater opportunities to work with the Syrians. And I know that the Iraqis will be in regular consultation, more intensive consultation, with the Syrians about what they can do, and we will try to provide as much information to the Syrians about the activity that is taking place in Syria that they really need to get on top of and do something about.”¹²⁶⁹

¹²⁶⁶ “Powell Praises Syria,” SyriaComment.com, September 23, 2004, <http://joshualandis.oucreate.com/syriablog/2004/09/powell-praises-syria.htm>; Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 140.

¹²⁶⁷ Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 190.

¹²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹²⁶⁹ Colin Powell, “Press Conference Following the International Ministerial Meeting of the Countries Neighboring Iraq, the G-8 and China,” *U.S. Department of State Archive*, November 23, 2004, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/38666.htm>.

On the other hand, American military intelligence reported in late 2004 that the Iraqi insurgency was still being organized to a greater degree than previously acknowledged out of Syria. When the American forces attacked Fallujah in November 2004, the stronghold of insurgent forces of al-Qaeda leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, they seized a global signal receiver in a bomb factory showing waypoints originating in Western Syria. After the Fallujah operation, American officials announced that Syria's involvement in the Iraqi insurgency was evident as insurgents were obviously coming from Syria and former Iraqi Baathists were coordinating insurgency out of Syria by establishing training camps as well as carrying out fundraising activities in Saudi Arabia and Europe. After the incident, Iraq's President Ghazi Yawar blamed Syria for harboring Baathist to destabilize Iraq.¹²⁷⁰

In December 2004, after a big terrorist attack Najaf's Police Chief said that one of the perpetrators admitted that he was trained in Syria. In the American media, criticisms were voiced against the Bush administration and especially the State Department for its passive policy towards Syria. For this reason, it was speculated that the Pentagon was preparing for military strike on Syria.¹²⁷¹

By late 2004, mixed signals were coming from the United States regarding Syria's cooperation on the border issue. On 10 December 2004, senior military officials told the Wall Street Journal that Syria was making serious efforts to prevent the flow of fighters and arrested a senior Iraqi Baathist official financing and coordinating the insurgency. General John Abizaid, who was the top commander of American forces in the Middle East, said that "*The Syrians have made an effort to control the borders better. We believe that they have moved to a certain extent against some of the foreign fighter networks.*" Abizaid also said that "*It's clear they're doing more on the border. We can see it.... But are they doing enough? In my mind no, not yet.*" Another military officer praised Syria's effort to tighten up the border by increasing the number of troops as well as checkpoints and arresting hundreds of volunteers across the border. On the other hand, the Pentagon considered these measures as cosmetic and argued that Syria was continuing its support for Iraqi Baathists coordinating insurgency by allowing their meeting in Lebanon. Hence, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld accused Syria of playing a role in the killing of Americans in Iraq. He said that "*damage [Syria and Iran] are doing inside*

¹²⁷⁰ Thomas E. Ricks, "Rebels Aided Allies in Syria, U.S. Says," *Washington Post*, 8 December 2004, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2004/12/08/rebels-aided-allies-in-syria-us-says/d43c9f63-578a-4607-b3ad-7e93a100710d/>.

¹²⁷¹ Zisser, "Bashar al-Assad: In or Out of the New World Order?," 126; Zisser, "Syria, the United States, and Iraq."

of Iraq is killing Americans."¹²⁷² Similar to Rumsfeld, U.S. Commander in Iraq General George Casey said on 17 December 2004 that the Iraqi insurgency was being directed from within Syria. He stated that Syria was harboring senior Baathist officials who were "*operating out of Syria with impunity and providing direction for and financing the insurgency. That needs to stop.*"¹²⁷³

In December 2004, it was reported that the Bush administration was considering imposing additional sanctions under the SALSA owing to Syria's failure to prevent financial and logistical support for Iraqi insurgency in Syria as well as its ongoing presence in Lebanon. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage warned Syria that the administration was preparing additional sanctions if Syria did not prevent fugitives of the Baath regime to fund insurgency in Iraq and end its occupation in Lebanon.¹²⁷⁴

By early 2005, Syria was no longer able to play its cat-and-mouse game with the United States. The Bush administration forced Syria to evacuate Lebanon after the assassination of former prime minister Rafiq Hariri. It stepped up its pressure on Syria to change its posture on American designs in the Middle East. In this period, the Bush administration accused Syria of allowing the passage of insurgents from Syria to Iraq, supporting the militant Palestinian and Lebanese groups and becoming an obstacle to the U.S.-dominated New Middle East. Not only its regional policies but also the nature of its regime violating basic democratic principles made Syria a target of the Bush administration. In this milieu, it was speculated that the Bush administration's plan was to change the Baath regime by means of internal and external pressure. The Bush administration began to back anti-regime Syrian opposition and potential dissatisfied members of the Baath regime.¹²⁷⁵

Deputy Secretary of State Armitage traveled to Damascus on 2 January 2005 to discuss Syria's ongoing involvement in the Iraqi insurgency. In the meetings, Armitage warned Syrian officials about back-and-forth travels of Saddam's relatives and senior Iraqi official Izzat

¹²⁷² Carla Anne Robins and Greg Jaffe, "U.S. Sees Efforts By Syria to Control Border With Iraq," *Wall Street Journal*, December 10, 2004, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB110263508272396238>.

¹²⁷³ Thomas E. Ricks, "General: Iraqi Insurgents Directed From Syria," *Washington Post*, December 17, 2004, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2004/12/17/general-iraqi-insurgents-directed-from-syria/0d7b9428-08f4-4a00-82f6-6912bf800766/>.

¹²⁷⁴ "US Warns Syria It Is Willing to Impose New Sanctions," *Arab News*, December 23, 2004, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/259952>; "US considers new Syria sanctions," *Al Jazeera*, January 6, 2005, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2005/1/6/us-considers-new-syria-sanctions>.

¹²⁷⁵ Lesch, *Missed Opportunities*, 13; Kaban, "Syrian Foreign Policy," 36.

Ibrahim between Syria and Iraq.¹²⁷⁶ Armitage also pledged to observe the Iraqi government's efforts to accelerate military cooperation between Syria and Iraq along the border.¹²⁷⁷ Armitage held a press conference in Damascus after his meetings with Assad and Sharaa, in which he explained his satisfaction with the visit. Armitage appreciated Syria's cooperation on the border issue as follows:

“We had a series of very candid, realistic and thorough discussions with the President and with the Foreign Minister... We all need to do a lot on border security, and Syria has made some real improvements in recent months on border security, but we all need to do more, particularly on the question of foreign regime elements participating in activities in Iraq, going back and forth from Syria.”¹²⁷⁸

Condoleezza Rice, who became the new secretary of state in the second term, did not include Syria in a list of six “outpost of tyranny” in her nomination on 18 January 2005. Her remarks were interpreted as a positive sign for Syria.¹²⁷⁹ However, Rice later changed her discourse toward Syria during her European tour in early February 2005. She publicly uttered the administration's discontent with Syria by stating that Syria's policies were straining long-term relations between the United States and Syria. Rice expressed that “*It is time for Syria to demonstrate that it does not want to be isolated, that it does not want to have bad relations with the United States. Syria has been unhelpful in a number of ways.*”¹²⁸⁰

In his State of the Union Address on 2 February 2005, President Bush also specifically expressed Syria's connection to terrorism by stating that:

“To promote peace in the broader Middle East, we must confront regimes that continue to harbor terrorists and pursue weapons of mass murder. Syria still allows its territory, and parts of Lebanon, to be used by terrorists who seek to destroy every chance of peace in the region. You have passed, and we are applying, the Syrian Accountability Act — and we expect the Syrian government to end all support for terror and open the door to freedom.”¹²⁸¹

¹²⁷⁶ Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 193.

¹²⁷⁷ Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 140.

¹²⁷⁸ Richard Armitage, “Remarks Following Meetings With Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shara,” *U.S. Department of State Archive*, January 2, 2005, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/s/d/former/armitage/remarks/2005/40351.htm>.

¹²⁷⁹ Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 125.

¹²⁸⁰ Zisser, “Syria, the United States, and Iraq,”; Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 125.

¹²⁸¹ George W. Bush, “State of the Union Address to the 109th Congress, February 2, 2005,” in *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001-2008*, The White House Archives, https://georgewbush.whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Selected_Speeches_George_W_Bush.pdf, 289.

Meanwhile, Imad Mustapha informed senior American officials at the NSC, the Pentagon and the State Department that Syria's cooperation would continue providing that the Bush administration stopped its criticisms levelled at Damascus. It meant that security cooperation would only be possible with political engagement. However, the Bush administration was not interested in such an offer, withdrew its ambassador from Syria after the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri in February 2005 and escalated the pressure on Damascus.¹²⁸² Despite the Bush administration's uncompromising attitude, Syria continued its cooperation in terms of insurgency issue after the Hariri assassination. In February 2005, Syria handed over Saddam's half-brother Sabawi Ibrahim al-Hassan al-Tikriti and a dozen of the Saddam regime fugitives to Iraqi authorities. Sabawi was allegedly one of the chief organizers and financiers of Iraqi insurgency in Syria. In early 2005, Syria was also reported to have closed two al-Qaeda facilities in Aleppo and Homs. On the other hand, the Bush administration was not satisfied with the level of Syria's cooperation.¹²⁸³

On 1 March 2005, General John Abizaid, mildly praised Syria's efforts to control the border. Before the Senate Armed Services Committee, he testified that low-level cooperation began between American and Syrian troops along the border to prevent flow of insurgents. He also stated that Syria increased the number of patrols along the border and was open to coordinate with Iraq and the coalition forces. Nevertheless, Abizaid underlined that these measures were not good enough and Syria was trying to do better.¹²⁸⁴ Syria ceased intelligence cooperation with the United States in April 2005 owing to the Bush administration's disinterest in receiving such information from Damascus.¹²⁸⁵

The U.S.-Syrian relations reached the bottom rock after the Hariri assassination. On 18 April 2005, President Bush elaborated on the state of the current U.S.-Syrian relations in an interview with Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation. Bush expressed his dissatisfaction with Syria's non-compliance with the demands of the United States by stating that:

“We have made it very clear that—what we expect, in order to be able to have relations with us...One is to stop supporting Ba'athists in Iraq, stop those people in Syria who are funneling money and helping smuggle people and arms into Iraq... And secondly, of course, is to completely withdraw from Lebanon. Syria must shut down Hizballah

¹²⁸² Moustapha, “U.S.-Syrian Relations.”

¹²⁸³ Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 132.

¹²⁸⁴ Richard Sisk, “U.S. Plaudits, Wrath for Syria,” *New York Daily News*, March 2, 2005, 22; Kass, “Syria After Lebanon.”

¹²⁸⁵ Moustapha, “U.S.-Syrian Relations,”; Wieland, *Syria at Bay*, 124.

offices. Hizballah not only is trying to destabilize the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, but Hizballah, as you know, is a dangerous organization.”¹²⁸⁶

Owing to Syria’s defiant posture on Iraq, Rice tried to convince Syria’s neighbors to exert pressure on Damascus regarding the border issue. On 20 May 2005, she warned Syria that Washington was concerned “*about Syrian behavior on its own border, about the support for terrorists that appears to be taking place from Syrian territory, about perhaps financial support that is coming from Syrian territory.*” Despite Syria’s overtures for impairing bilateral relations, the State Department excluded Imad Mustapha from a meeting with Arab ambassadors to demonstrate its uneasy relations with Syria.¹²⁸⁷

U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad announced in September 2005 that “*our patience is running out with Syria*” and “*all options are on the table.*”¹²⁸⁸ President Bush endorsed Khalilzad’s remarks at a news conference with Iraq’s President Jalal Talabani on 13 September 2005. President Bush warned Syria of the flow of into Iraq and consequences of his lack of action in this issue. He underlined that Syria would be more isolated owing to its non-cooperation with the Iraqi government to secure the border as well as it’s not being transparent about their actions in Lebanon. President Bush, who was critical of Syria’s long-lasting hegemony over Lebanon, considered Syria as a stumbling block to development of democracy in the Middle East and Lebanon. At the news conference with Talabani, Bush said that his administration would work with allies to focus on Syria to change its behavior regarding democracy and obliterating development of democracy in the Middle East.¹²⁸⁹

While the chaos was continuing apace in Iraq in the second half of 2000s, there were some unofficial diplomatic contacts between the United States and Syria to settle the contentious issues such as Syria’s border control, influx of jihadists to Iraq and Syria’s support for Iraqi Baathist officials. The Iraq Study Group (ISG), which was co-chaired by former Secretary of State James Baker, held meetings with Syrian officials, and some American senators traveled

¹²⁸⁶ George W. Bush, “Interview with the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation, April 18, 2005,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of George W. Bush, Book I-January 1 to June 30, 2005* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006), 624.

¹²⁸⁷ Saul Landau & Farrah Hassen, “Meddling in the Internal Politics of Syria,” June 28, 2005, CounterPunch, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2005/06/28/meddling-in-the-internal-politics-of-syria/>.

¹²⁸⁸ Wieland, *Syria at Bay*, 139.

¹²⁸⁹ George W. Bush, “The President’s News Conference with President Jalal Talabani of the Iraqi Transitional Government, September 13, 2005,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of George W. Bush, Book II-July 1 to December 31, 2005* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006), 1425.

to Syria and met with President Assad in December 2006.¹²⁹⁰ The Iraq Study Group announced their recommendations with a report in the same month and urged the Bush administration to adopt a new approach towards Syria. The group claimed that Syria could influence the events in Iraq and preventing chaos. The report called on the Bush administration to initiate a dialog with Syria to resolve problematic issues between the two sides such as the flow of insurgents and funding into Iraq. Renewal of Washington's commitment to the Middle East peace process including the Syrian-Israeli peace track was another suggestion. Yet, the Bush administration refused to follow the Iraq Study Group's recommendations.¹²⁹¹

VP Cheney expressed his disappointment about the Iraq Study Groups' recommendations to engage with Syria and Iran and initiate an open dialog with them. Contrary to the groups' assumption that Syria and Iraq would stabilize Iraq, Cheney believed that these countries were working for the opposite.¹²⁹² Secretary of State Rice initially embraced the idea of embracing Syria, but later she stepped back. Rice expressed her ideas about the Iraq Study Group Report as follows:

“I returned to Washington in time for the release of the Iraq Study Group report, confining my own reaction to the suggestion in the report of a “diplomatic offensive” toward the Israeli-Palestine negotiations and high-level talks with Iran and Syria. We were deeply engaged in the first, so I eagerly embraced that idea. But as to Tehran and Damascus, I made it clear that it was a nonstarter. “If they have an interest in a stable Iraq, they will do it anyway.” My own view was that it was worth probing them - particularly Syria- but I was not going to petition these hostile regimes on bended knee to help us in Iraq.”¹²⁹³

Quite the contrary to the suggestions of the ISG's report, President Bush was still viewing Syria as a destabilizing force working against the United States' objectives in Iraq. In an address to the nation on Iraq on 10 January 2007, Bush said that:

“Succeeding in Iraq also requires defending its territorial integrity and stabilizing the region in the face of extremist challenges. This begins with addressing Iran and Syria. These two regimes are allowing terrorists and insurgents to use their territory to move

¹²⁹⁰ Lesch, *Missed Opportunities*, 26.

¹²⁹¹ Itamar Rabinovich, *Damascus, Jerusalem, and Washington: The Syrian-Israeli Relationship as a U.S. Policy Issue*, Analysis Paper Number 19 (Washington D.C., The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, 2009): 15; Mir H. Sadat and Daniel B. Jones, “U.S. Foreign Policy toward Syria: Balancing Ideology and National Interests,” *Middle East Policy* 16, No. 2 (Summer 2009): 98.

¹²⁹² Dick Cheney&Liz Cheney, *In My Time: A Personal and Political Memoir* (New York, Threshold Editions, 2011), 447.

¹²⁹³ Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2011), 544.

in and out of Iraq. Iran is providing material support for attacks on American troops. We will disrupt the attacks on our forces. We'll interrupt the flow of support from Iran and Syria. And we will seek out and destroy the networks providing advanced weaponry and training to our enemies in Iraq."¹²⁹⁴

Despite its criticisms, the Bush administration decided to participate in a high-level conference in Baghdad with Iraq's neighbors including Syria and Iran to discuss Iraq's security, economy, and reconciliation process in March 2007.¹²⁹⁵ In the conference, American and Western diplomats held meetings with representatives of Syria and Iran to discuss the current state of Iraq on 10 March 2007. The participant countries agreed on establishment of three working groups on security, refugees, and energy. In mid-March 2007, the Bush administration also removed its two-year boycott on high-level visits to Syria due to exacerbating refugee crisis in the region. Washington sent Assistant Secretary of State for Refugee Affairs Ellen Sauerbrey to Syria within a delegation of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to discuss the refugee issue with Syria.¹²⁹⁶ On the other hand, these contacts did not yield any tangible result as Secretary of State Rice noted that "*the Syrian regime was not cooperative.*"¹²⁹⁷

After the Democrats' victory in mid-term elections in November 2006, the House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Damascus with a bipartisan delegation and met with President Assad on 4 April 2007. Pelosi's main aim was to indicate that the Bush administration did not enjoy monopoly over the conduct of American foreign policy. Pelosi's efforts to realize the Iraq Study Group's suggestions for initiating the U.S.-Syrian diplomatic dialogue was interpreted as a victory for Damascus as it revealed the failure of the Bush administration's policy to isolate the Assad regime. It was also a clear divergence from the hostile attitude of Congress towards Syria during the passing the SALSA. While the Bush administration criticized Pelosi's diplomatic contact with the Assad regime, the visit was

¹²⁹⁴ George W. Bush, "Address to the Nation on Iraq, January 10, 2007," in *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001-2008*, The White House Archives, https://georgewbushwhitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Selected_Speeches_George_W_Bush.pdf, 451-452.

¹²⁹⁵ Kenneth R. Bazinet, "Bush, In About-Face, Agrees on War Talks with Iran, Syria," *New York Daily News*, February 28, 2007, 10; Ned Parker, "US Talks to Iran and Syria over Iraq Insurgency," *Times*, March 10, 2007, 53.

¹²⁹⁶ Mona Yacoubian, "Syria's Relations with Iraq," United States Institute for Peace, April 1, 2007, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2007/04/syrias-relations-iraq>; Lesch, *Missed Opportunities*, 26.

¹²⁹⁷ Rice, *No Higher Honor*, 394.

interpreted as a sign of new approach adopted by the Democrat-controlled Congress towards Damascus.¹²⁹⁸

According to President Bush, Pelosi's visit was a bad idea and would send mixed signals to Assad. He uttered his criticisms by underlining that he did not view Syria as a part of the U.S.-led international community. In Bush's mind, there was an incongruity between the NRCs of the United States and Syria. According to him, Syria was sponsor of terrorism, which was also destabilizing Lebanese democracy. He elaborated on Syria's role in the Middle East as follows:

“We have made it clear to high-ranking officials, whether they be Republicans or Democrats, that going to Syria sends mixed signals – signals in the region and of course, mixed signals to President Assad. And by that, I mean, photo opportunities and/or meetings with President Assad lead the Assad government to believe they're part of the mainstream of the international community, when, in fact, they're a state sponsor of terror; when, in fact, they're helping expedite – or at least not stopping the movement of foreign fighters from Syria into Iraq; when, in fact, they have done little to nothing to rein in militant Hamas and Hezbollah and when, in fact, they destabilize the Lebanese democracy.”¹²⁹⁹

Despite President Bush's criticisms, the State Department continued its dialog with Syria to stabilize Iraq throughout 2007. Secretary of State Rice met with her counterpart Walid al-Muallem at the Expanded Iraq Neighbors Ministerial Conference in Sharm al-Sheikh, Egypt on 3 May 2007. This was the first high-level diplomatic contact between the United States and Syria since the cutting of diplomatic relations in 2005.¹³⁰⁰ The meeting was interpreted as opening of a new page in the U.S.-Syrian relations as the bilateral relations were overshadowed by the border security issue and the Hariri assassination for a long time. Muallem defined the meeting as constructive and frank and said that they discussed how to achieve stability in Iraq.¹³⁰¹ On the other hand, the meeting was not productive from Rice's angle. In the meeting, Rice raised the issues of Syria's interference in Lebanon and its failure to prevent volunteers'

¹²⁹⁸ Lesch, *Missed Opportunities*, 27; Rabinovich, “The Bush Administration, Israel and Syria,” 349; Rabinovich, *Damascus, Jerusalem and Washington*, 15.

¹²⁹⁹ George W. Bush, “President Bush Makes Remarks on the Emergency Supplemental,” *The White House Archives*, April 3, 2007, <https://georgewbushwhitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/04/20070403.html>. See also Tom Baldwin, “Bush Fury as Pelosi Takes Her Own Road to Damascus,” *Times*, April 5, 2007, 52; “Pelosi tours Damascus, rebuffing criticism,” *NBC News*, April 3, 2007, <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna17930075>.

¹³⁰⁰ Rabinovich, “The Bush Administration, Israel and Syria,” 350.

¹³⁰¹ Tom Baldwin and Richard Beeston, “Progress as Rice Talks to Syria and Chats with Iran,” *Times*, May 4, 2007, 46.

border crossing. When Muallem replied that it was nearly impossible to stop them, Rice said that they were coming from Damascus airport. The meeting consolidated Rice's negative perception of Syria. She wrote in her memoirs that "*I decided then and there that cooperation with Damascus was a one-way street. The siren song of engagement with the Syrians has attracted many U.S. diplomats. I lost my appetite for any such effort that day in Sharm after talking to Muallem.*"¹³⁰²

Rice also met with Syrian officials in Ankara on the eve of the Annapolis Conference in November 2007. It was speculated that the meeting was reflection of the State Department's appreciation of Syria's efforts to seal off the border in this period. Despite rumors about upgrading in the U.S.-Syrian relations, the Pentagon and the White House rejected change in U.S. foreign policy towards Syria. Even Pentagon announced that Rice did not speak for the overall foreign policy of the Bush administration. The confusing American foreign policy made the Syrians believe that the Bush administration was not serious about engaging with it. President Assad thought that hostility of the United States against Syria could end only when Washington reopened its embassy in Damascus.¹³⁰³

Former Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld criticized the futility of the State Department's engagement with Syria in the second half of 2000s as follows:

"This policy of engagement, combined with our worsening difficulties in Iraq that were at least partly the result of Syria's actions, sent a signal of weakness to Assad that he was quick to exploit. He reverted to his earlier policies of greater hostility toward America and our interests. Yet even in 2007, the State Department invited Syria back to the negotiating table in pursuit of Middle East peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Seeing that the United States was again the supplicant, and with the ill feelings about their assassination of a democratic Lebanese leader seemingly having been forgotten, if not forgiven, the Syrians reverted to their tried-and-true ways: obfuscation and delay at the negotiating table and active support for terrorism and covert pursuit of illegal weapons programs. Proof enough of their true intentions came with the discovery—and later destruction by Israeli aircraft—of a curious facility in eastern Syria: an illegal nuclear reactor nearly identical to one in North Korea. Regrettably, U.S. diplomatic efforts may have emboldened, rather than deterred, one of the world's most dangerous regimes."¹³⁰⁴

In 2008, Syria's support for Iraqi resistance by allowing flow of insurgents, arms and money continued to be a source of problem between the United States and Syria. On 26 October 2008, American special forces raided a Syrian village which was six miles away from the border and

¹³⁰² Rice, *No Higher Honor*, 561.

¹³⁰³ Lesch, *Missed Opportunities*, 27-28; Sadat and Jones, "U.S. Foreign Policy toward Syria," 98.

¹³⁰⁴ Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 641.

eliminated a leader of the insurgent center who was smuggling arms to al-Qaeda in Iraq. The Bush administration announced that the operation was not different from the previous ones conducted in Pakistan and Afghanistan and it was carried out to protect American and allied forces in Iraq. Even though the Assad regime did not retaliate against the American raid, it did not take extra measures to tighten the border. By carrying out this operation and violating Syria's sovereignty, the Bush administration sought to prove that Syria was center of terrorists and insurgents in Iraq.¹³⁰⁵ However, Syria was able to weather the storm and cope with the United States' campaign. President Assad outlived his two enemies, Bush and Chirac and even their successors Nicholas Sarkozy and Barack Obama.¹³⁰⁶

To sum up, the U.S.-Syrian relations were characterized by overt confrontation during and after the invasion of Iraq. In this period, U.S. policy towards Syria can be defined as "opposition through isolation" rather than constructive engagement as succinctly explained by one of the top American officials.¹³⁰⁷ It can be contended that the Bush administration's policy towards Syria obviously differed from the previous administrations. Neither Bush Sr. administration nor Clinton administration pursued such an isolationist and hostile policy towards Syria and considered it as a partner to achieve American interests in the Middle East. The Bush Jr. administration did not embrace Syria and punished it through sanctions because it did not comply with the NRCs during and after the invasion of Iraq. Syria obviously opposed to the Bush administration's performance of the NRCs of hegemon, defender of the pacific union and tribune and agent of American values. Given Syria's criticisms against the United States' unilateral hegemony, its use of force to protect itself and the free world as well as its strategy of democracy promotion in the Middle East, the Bush administration mainly pursued a hostile policy towards Damascus. Except for some State Department officials, the Bush administration viewed Syria as a member of anti-American rogue states in the Middle East.

5.4.3. Lebanon: The Playground of the U.S.-Syrian Strife

5.4.3.1. The Syrian-Israeli Arm-Wrestling in Lebanon in early 2000s

Syria's military presence in Lebanon came into spotlight even before the coming of the Bush administration owing to three major developments in 2000: the failure of the U.S.-mediated

¹³⁰⁵ Henriksen, *America and the Rogue States*, 166; Sadat and Jones, "U.S. Foreign Policy toward Syria," 93.

¹³⁰⁶ Hinnebusch, "Syrian Foreign Policy under Bashar al-Asad," 24.

¹³⁰⁷ Sadat and Jones, "U.S. Foreign Policy toward Syria," 96.

Syrian-Israeli peace talks in March 2000, Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000, and the death of Hafez al-Assad in June 2000.¹³⁰⁸ Among these factors, Israel's total withdrawal from the security zone (except for the Shebaa Farms or *Mazari' Shib'a*) in south Lebanon shortly before Hafez al-Assad's death became a watershed in Syrian-Lebanese relations.

Hezbollah's guerilla style military campaign in the 1990s made south Lebanon a quagmire for Israel and finally led to the collapse of the security zone, which was controlled by Israel's proxy force General Antoine Lahad's SLA, in late 1990s. Hezbollah's victory was psychological rather than military as Israeli society was exhausted by the ongoing conflict claiming lives of Israeli soldiers in south Lebanon. In this milieu, Ehud Barak promised during his election campaign in March 1999 to withdraw Israeli troops totally and unilaterally from Lebanon within a year. After his victory in the May 1999 elections, Barak also sought to conclude a peace deal with Syria in a short time as a part of his withdrawal plan. In so doing, he wanted to settle the Lebanon issue comprehensively by attaining peace and tranquility along Israel's northern border with Syria's guarantee. Barak anticipated that an Israeli-Syrian peace deal would deprive Syria of the Hezbollah card as it no longer need Hezbollah to exert pressure on Israel. Besides, he thought that he could cover Israel's defeat in south Lebanon with a peace deal with Syria and satisfy both Israel's security needs and his domestic audience. Although Barak failed to reach an agreement with Damascus, he had to keep his promise of withdrawal to the Israeli public. Hence, he ordered withdrawal of Israeli troops from south Lebanon on 24 May 2000.¹³⁰⁹

After Israel's withdrawal, contrary to the expectations of the United States and Israel, the Lebanese army could not impose its authority in south Lebanon and along the Lebanese-Israeli border. Syria blocked the Lebanese army's entrance to the former security zone evacuated by Israel and allowed Hezbollah to fill the vacuum immediately. The Lebanese government could not block Syria's move owing to lack of an alternative to Hezbollah. In this context, Hezbollah was able to deepen its military presence by stationing reconnaissance and surveillance systems along with its military forces across south Lebanon. Israel was concerned about Hezbollah's increasing military build-up backed by Iran via Syria as its Katyusha missiles and Iran-made al-Fajr rockets could reach inner Israel with a range of up to 75 kilometers.¹³¹⁰

¹³⁰⁸ Gary C. Gambill, "Is Syria Losing Control of Lebanon," *Middle East Quarterly* (Spring 2001), <https://www.meforum.org/28/is-syria-losing-control-of-Lebanon>.

¹³⁰⁹ Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 180-181; Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 153.

¹³¹⁰ Deeb, *Syria's Terrorist War on Lebanon*, 217; Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 160.

Owing to Israel's presence in the Shebaa Farms, Syria found a pretext for future conflicts with Israel by claiming that the area belonged to Lebanon and Israel continued to be an occupier in Lebanese territories. On the other hand, Israel insisted that the area was a part of the Golan Heights and thus it was Syrian territory.¹³¹¹ According to Barak, Israel kept its promise and Syria lost its sole bargaining chip (Hezbollah's operations against Israeli troops in south Lebanon) after the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the security zone. Syria tried to sabotage the withdrawal by encouraging some Palestinian militant groups to carry out attacks against Israeli forces because it did not want to miss the pretext. Yet, Israel's total withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000 turned out to be a watershed in Syrian-Lebanese relations as the public attention in Lebanon, in the Middle East and in the international arena shifted from Israel's occupation to Syria's hegemony over Lebanon.¹³¹²

Against this backdrop, a spirit of national unity emerged among many segments of Lebanese society even before the death of Hafez al-Assad, and anti-Syrian voices began to be heard from the representatives of different groups from Muslims to Christians and from conservatives to leftists. They publicly expressed their discontent with Syria's ongoing occupation in Lebanon by May 2000. Opposition figures such as Patriarch of Maronite Church Butrus Nasrallah Sfeir, Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, Sunni parliamentarian Umar Karami, and senior Shiite politician and the former parliament speaker Husayn al-Husayni castigated Syria's military presence in Lebanon, called for reassessment of Syria's hegemonic role, and demanded withdrawal of the Syrian army and a more independent Lebanon. Broad anti-Syrian public protests broke out especially after Hafez al-Assad's death and the general elections in the summer of 2000. Students organized huge anti-Syria demonstrations and called for Syria's withdrawal. Besides, human rights groups as well as journalists voiced their criticisms against Syria's suffocating human rights violations carried out by General Ghazi Kanaan, who was the chief of Syria's intelligence service in Lebanon. During the demonstrations, Syrian flags were burned, the late President Hafez al-Assad's and Bashar al-Assad's pictures were attacked by angry mobs.¹³¹³

In this period, UN Security Council Resolution 520, which was adopted in September 1982, became the banner of all anti-Syrian groups because the resolution was urging the withdrawal

¹³¹¹ Baylouny, "US foreign policy in Lebanon," 319; Deeb, *Syria's Terrorist War on Lebanon*, 213.

¹³¹² Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 181-183.

¹³¹³ Deeb, *Syria's Terrorist War on Lebanon*, 217-218; For more information about anti-Syrian move in Lebanese politics, see Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 185-189.

of all non-Lebanese forces. When Secretary of State Madeleine Albright made a comment on Syria's presence in Lebanon on 7 June 2000, her remarks were extensively discussed in the Lebanese press. She said that she "would hope very much that the Lebanese army would begin to move into southern Lebanon and that the Lebanese would take control over their own territory and all foreign forces would depart."¹³¹⁴

Bashar al-Assad, who was given the responsibility for running the Lebanon file since mid-1990s, was quite familiar with the Lebanese politics. When he assumed power in July 2000, anti-Syrian forces (especially Christian Maronite community) were gaining ground and Syria's role and military presence in Lebanon was the most debated topic since the signing of the Taif Agreement in 1989.¹³¹⁵ Although Bashar's ascent to power aroused hopes for a new relationship between Syria and Lebanon, he demonstrated his unwillingness to withdraw from Lebanon by using a tough nationalist language in his inaugural speech. By citing Lebanon's linkage with the Syrian-Israeli dynamic, Assad indicated that he was determined to maintain Syria's hegemony in Lebanon.¹³¹⁶

In his inaugural speech, Bashar explained the nature of Syrian-Lebanese relations as follows:

"We consider our relationship with Lebanon an example of a relationship that should exist between two brotherly countries. But this example is not perfect yet and it still needs great efforts in order to be ideal and to achieve the joint interests of both countries in a way that responds to the ambitions of both countries... Nonetheless, the Syrian-Lebanese solidarity during the past few years has achieved a great deal which would have been impossible to achieve had each country worked on its own and in isolation of the other. Ending the civil war in Lebanon, establishing national reconciliation in addition to the defeat of the Israelis in the eighties and nineties and finally their worst defeat lately in the month of May are a clear evidence of the importance of this solidarity."¹³¹⁷

Following the outbreak of the second intifada in September 2000, Syria allowed Hezbollah to carry out cross-border attacks along the Lebanese-Israeli border despite objections of the United States and Israel. On 7 October 2000, Hezbollah launched its first guerilla operation after the withdrawal of Israel and captured three Israeli soldiers. Syria supported Hezbollah's operations against Israeli forces in the Shebaa Farms. The Assad regime claimed that it belonged to Lebanon and should have been evicted during Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon

¹³¹⁴ Gambill, "Is Syria Losing Control of Lebanon,"

¹³¹⁵ Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 183; Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 107.

¹³¹⁶ Lesch, *Missed Opportunities*, 6.

¹³¹⁷ "President Bashar al-Assad: inaugural address," *al-bab.com*, <https://al-bab.com/documents-section/president-bashar-al-assad-inaugural-address>.

in May 2000. On 11 October 2000, President Assad said that “*Mazari’ Shib’a is a Lebanese territory occupied by Israel, and it is the right of resistance (al-Muqawamah) to struggle against the occupier.*” In this period, Syria and Iran maintained their close cooperation and organized Hezbollah’s campaign against Israel.¹³¹⁸

Amid intensifying campaign of anti-Syrian groups against Syria’s military presence in Lebanon, Lebanese *Daily Star*’s editorial commented that the Hezbollah operations “*could have been triggered mainly by a desire to shift attention from the issue of Syria’s presence*” after Israel’s withdrawal.¹³¹⁹

In addition to Hezbollah, Syria actively endorsed the attacks of the militant Palestinian groups during the second intifada as a “strategic deterrent” against Israel.¹³²⁰ On 26 January 2001, the first major PFLP-GC attack against Israeli forces took place when its militants tried to cross into the Shebaa Farms. In the event, two PFLP-GC militants were killed and third of them were wounded. After this incidence, Lebanese President Emile Lahoud asked Assad to curb Palestinian attacks. On 2 February 2001, London-based *al-Hayat* newspaper reported that the Assad regime warned PFLP-GC’s leader Ahmad Jibril of not carrying out attacks in southern Lebanon.¹³²¹

While the attacks of the militant groups were continuing apace, Israel carried out air strikes on Syrian military sites in Lebanon twice in April and July 2001 to show that the old rules of game in Lebanon were no longer valid. Despite Israel’s aggression, Syria did not retaliate and demonstrated that it did not want to transform Lebanon arena into a field of region-wide confrontation.¹³²² In response to terrorism charges of the United States, President Assad explained in an interview with *Der Spiegel* in July 2001 that it was not duty of Syria to curb Hezbollah’s operations against Israel by saying that:

“It is not the Syrian army’s task to prevent [Hizballah from acting against Israel]. Fundamentally, Syria is convinced that Hizballah is doing the right thing and that it constitutes resistance aimed at bringing about the restoration of the occupied lands. With this, we keep explaining that we do not direct or control Hizballah activity, and make no decisions whatsoever in these matters. It is Hizballah that makes this type of

¹³¹⁸ Deeb, *Syria’s Terrorist War on Lebanon*; 216; Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 132.

¹³¹⁹ Gambill, “Is Syria Losing Control of Lebanon.”

¹³²⁰ Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 113.

¹³²¹ Gambill, “Sponsoring Terrorism: Syria and the PFLP-GC.”

¹³²² Perthes, “Syrian Regional Policy under Bashar al-Asad,” 38; Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 114-115.

decision, which also means that we have no responsibility for any activity it carries out. Hizballah is a Lebanese resistance organization, although we stand by it politically and morally, and in any event it is not in need of material assistance from us.”¹³²³

In March 2002, the tension escalated owing to Hezbollah’s and the Palestinian militants’ coordinated attacks (especially with Katyusha rockets) in northern Israel. The Sharon government responded rocket attacks by launching Operation Defensive Shield, in which the IDF went deep into the West Bank and occupied major Palestinian cities. Syria-backed Hezbollah responded Israel’s invasion by a series of operations in the Shebaa Farms. Israel retaliated Hezbollah with artillery fires in south Lebanon.¹³²⁴

In this period, despite his support for the resistance groups during the intifada, President Assad could not put up with the pressures of the Arab and Western countries as well as the Lebanese opposition groups and finally decided to redeploy some of the Syrian army in Lebanon. In this context, the redeployment of Syrian troops, which started in June 2000 by diminishing the number of checkpoints in Lebanon’s roads, continued with evacuation of most of Beirut and other cities. Assad ultimately understood that the root cause of the souring relations between Syria and Lebanon was Syria’s military presence. He admitted on 25 November 2000 that “*if Syrian military forces were deployed in the streets of Damascus for a prolonged period, this would evoke objection and revulsion toward their presence in the Syrian public too, as has occurred in Lebanon.*” Redeployment process was completed in April 2002, which was followed by withdrawal of additional troops from northern Lebanon in January 2003. So, while there only 40,000 Syrian soldiers in early 2000, only 10,000-15,000 troops were left in Lebanon in 2003. Syria portrayed the withdrawal from Beirut and other cities as fulfillment of the requirements of the Taif agreement, which mandated redeployment of the Syrian troops in Beirut and other cities to Beqaa region. In so doing, President Assad sought to prevent military confrontation with Israel owing to the tension along the Lebanese-Israeli border and to avoid to be a target of the Bush administration. Nevertheless, redeployment of the Syrian troops was a symbolic move after Israel’s withdrawal aiming at bolstering Syria’s presence in Lebanon rather than granting Lebanon a genuine independence.¹³²⁵

¹³²³ Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 160.

¹³²⁴ Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 115-116.

¹³²⁵ Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, 84; Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 190; Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria’s Waiting Game*, 126.

5.4.3.2. The U.S.-Syrian Discord in Lebanon before the Hariri Assassination

At the beginning of his first term, President Bush did not want to confront with Syria in Lebanon owing to its preoccupation with the growing Iraqi threat in the Middle East. When Patriarch Sfeir, who was a fervent critic of Syria's hegemony over Lebanon, visited the United States in February-March 2001, President Bush and Secretary of State Powell declined to meet with him in order not to alienate Syria.¹³²⁶

Yet, 9/11 changed the Bush administration's threat perception and heightened its sensitivity to the activities of militant groups in the Middle East. Although the Bush administration appreciated Syria's intelligence cooperation against al-Qaeda, under the influence of pro-Israeli lobbies and the neocons it began to blame the Assad regime for the escalation in the second intifada owing to its support for the militant Palestinian groups and Hezbollah in Lebanon. While Syria differentiated resistance forces from terrorist groups, it did not make sense for the Bush administration, which considered all of them a threat to U.S. national security in the aftermath of 9/11. The Bush administration's demands for cutting ties between Damascus and the militant groups strained the U.S.-Syrian cooperation in the war on terror. President Bush announced on 4 April 2002 that Secretary of State Powell would start a Middle East tour on 12 April 2002 encapsulating Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Jordan, and Israel to find a solution to the ongoing conflict. Syria was deliberately excluded from Powell's itinerary. Nevertheless, Powell decided to extend his diplomatic mission to Syria and Lebanon after starting his Middle East tour. Powell arrived in Damascus on 15 April 2002 and held a meeting with President Assad. In the meeting, Powell was able to persuade Assad to restrain Hezbollah's ongoing attacks against Israel by citing potential repercussions of a region-wide conflict for Syria's interests. After Powell's meeting with President Assad, Hezbollah stopped its attacks against Israeli forces.¹³²⁷

During 2002, the Bush administration ratcheted up its pressures on Syria owing to its connection with Hezbollah because Washington's sole aim was to punish terrorists and states harboring them in the war on terror. In this context, Deputy Secretary of State Armitage categorized Syria-backed Hezbollah as "*the A-team of terrorists*" in September 2002 and threatened it by stating that "*they're on the list and their time will come. There is no question*

¹³²⁶ Deeb, *Syria's Terrorist War on Lebanon*, 219.

¹³²⁷ Gambill, "Sponsoring Terrorism: Syria and the PFLP-GC,"; also see "Powell to take peace mission to Lebanon, Syria," *CBC News*, April 14, 2002, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/powell-to-take-peace-mission-to-lebanon-syria-1.350905>.

about it. They have a blood debt to us... and we're not going to forget it, and it's all in good time. We're going to go after these problems just like a high school wrestler goes after a match: We're going to take them down one at a time." Hence, Syria's influence over Hezbollah turned out to be evidence of its connection with international terrorism rather than a bargaining chip in dealing with the Bush administration in the war on terror.¹³²⁸

The Congress intensified its activities against Syria by promoting the SALSAs in September 2002, demanding total withdrawal of the Syrian forces from Lebanon and sanctions on Damascus due to its involvement in international terrorism. As mentioned above, the Congress attributed the SALSAs to President Bush's remarks at a joint session of Congress on 20 September 2001 that "[F]rom this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime." The SALSAs had direct connection with the international activities of the anti-Syrian Christian Lebanese opposition. Maronites organized a world Maronite conference in Los Angeles in June 2002 and then united their forces with the Israel lobby in Washington (the AIPAC) to promote the SALSAs in the Congress. On the other hand, the Bush administration was not ready to alienate Syria in the war on terror. Hence, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs David Satterfield voiced the administration's opposition to the SALSAs in September 2002 by stating that "we do not believe this is the right time for legislative initiatives that could complicate or even undermine our efforts."¹³²⁹

The Lebanese arena turned out to be a playground of conflicting roles of the United States and Syria on the way to the invasion of Iraq. In addition to Syria's unwillingness to readjust to the NRCs of the United States, the impact of the neocons on the Bush administration deteriorated the U.S.-Syrian relations. In the 1990s, the neocons were critical of the Clinton administration's engagement with the Assad regime and were planning to confront Syria in Lebanon to protect Israel's interests in the Levant. In 1996, Jerusalem-based Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies prepared a six-page report entitled "*A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm*". The most significant aspect of the report was that it was prepared for Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu after his election victory in 1996 and outlined policy recommendations on the Middle East strategy. The report was drawn from discussions of the Study Group on a New Israeli Strategy Toward 2000, which was composed of famous neocons such as Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, David Wurmser and his wife Meyray

¹³²⁸ Zisser, "Syria and the United States: Bad Habits Die Hard," 32-33; Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria's Waiting Game*, 136.

¹³²⁹ Deeb, *Syria's Terrorist War on Lebanon*; 221; Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 192.

Wurmser, who was born in Israel. These names later held significant posts in the Bush administration or in the groups having close relations with the administration. By using the phrase “securing the realm”, the report pointed to Syria’s dire threat to Israel’s security. In the report, it was suggested that Netanyahu confront Syria militarily in Lebanon instead of seeking a comprehensive peace agreement and land-for-peace formula on the Golan Heights. Neocons also urged Netanyahu to contain Syria by allying with its neighbors Turkey and Jordan. They also contented that Syria’s WMD capability must be exposed and destroyed.¹³³⁰

The neocons gathered under the umbrella of pro-Israeli research group, the Middle East Forum (MEF) along with the United States Committee for a Free Lebanon (USCFL) in May 2000 to announce a study report titled “*Ending Syria’s Occupation of Lebanon: The U.S. Role?*”. The report was prepared by the “Lebanon Study Group” co-chaired by Daniel Pipes and Ziad Abdelnour. The document posited that diplomatic engagement with Syria was futile to end its occupation in Lebanon. It called for an aggressive American policy towards Syria such as recalling the ambassador, freezing diplomatic relations, suspending trade between the two countries, isolating Syria in the international system, and calling for an international conference to liberate Lebanon and so on. Citing the 1998 crisis between Turkey and Syria, the document even urged the United States to use military force to settle its problems with Syria, i.e., its WMD program, its occupation in Lebanon and its support for terrorist groups. The document was signed by Richard Perle, David Wurmser, Eliot Engel, Douglas Feith, Michael Rubin, Frank Gaffney, and Elliot Abrams, who were closely associated with the Bush administration. Although this group was discredited owing to disaster in Iraq, their hostile attitude toward Syria institutionalized in the Bush administration and differed its policy towards Damascus from previous administrations.¹³³¹

The U.S.-Syrian tension during the invasion of Iraq spilled over into the Lebanese arena. As the Bush administration performed the NRCs of hegemon and tribune and agent of American values in this period, it began to perceive Syria’s dictatorial regime and its support for militant groups as a dire threat to Lebanon’s democratic political system. Owing to Syria’s growing challenge to the United States before the invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration intensified its pressures on Syria to force it to evacuate Lebanon. On 3 March 2003, Secretary of State

¹³³⁰ Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 106-108; Lesch, *Missed Opportunities*, 11.

¹³³¹ Daniel Pipes and Ziad Abdelnour, *Ending Syria’s Occupation of Lebanon: The U.S. Role*, Report of the Lebanon Study Group (Philadelphia: Middle East Forum, 2000).

Powell said that it was one of the primary objectives of the United States to “*let Lebanon be ruled by the Lebanese people without the presence of [the Syrian] occupation army.*”¹³³²

After the invasion of Iraq, Lebanon turned out to be Syria’s Achilles’ heel. The Bush administration began to exert pressure on Syria to recognize Lebanon’s sovereignty. Especially, the neocons in the Pentagon and in the Office of Vice President were advocate of using the Lebanon card to punish Syria’s defiance in Iraq. The Bush administration’s most serious step against Syria’s hegemony over Lebanon came with its approval of the SALSA in December 2003. In the section 4 of the Act, it was clearly stated that Lebanon was closely associated with the interests of the United States as follows: “*the full restoration of Lebanon’s sovereignty, political independence, and territorial integrity is in the U.S. national security interests.*” It was also underlined that Syria’s occupation in Lebanon was illegal by citing the Resolution 520 as follows:

“Syria is in violation of Security Council Resolution 520 (September 17, 1982) through its continued occupation of Lebanese territory and its encroachment upon its political independence; Syria’s obligation to withdraw from Lebanon is not conditioned upon progress in the Israeli-Syrian or Israeli-Lebanese peace process but derives from Syria’s obligation under Security Council Resolution 520.”¹³³³

In April 2004, State Department spokesman Nabeel Khoury told the *Marhaba Lebanon* radio in Austria that Syria’s rationale in Lebanon “*is outdated and no longer valid. It is an ancient military rhetoric that does not stand to reason nowadays.*” Syrians were angered by these remarks and a senior commander slammed Khoury by stating that his remarks were “*complete nonsense... clearly coming from some - one with no knowledge of what is involved in defending a country. Was he sleeping when Israel attacked us last year?... What does it mean - ‘outdated’ - just after the Israelis break the Golan Heights pact for the first time in thirty years?*”¹³³⁴

When President Bush ordered the imposition of first set of sanctions on Syria on 11 May 2004, he told the Congress that “*Despite many months of diplomatic efforts to convince the Government of Syria to change its behavior, Syria has not taken significant steps to address the full range of U.S. concerns.*”¹³³⁵ According to the Assad regime, the Bush administration was not sincere in its claims on Syria’s position in Lebanon because it turned blind eye to

¹³³² “Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003.”

¹³³³ Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 144.

¹³³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³³⁵ Michael Nguyen, “U.S. Sanctions Syria,” *Arms Control Today* 34, No. 5 (June 2004): 42.

Israel's occupation in south Lebanon for a long time. The United States was not pushing for implementation of UN Security Council resolutions when they were threatening national interests of Israel. When the House of International Relations Committee hosted Syria's arch enemy Michel Aoun to testify about the role of Syria in Lebanon during the SALSA talks, the Syrian side understood the intention of the Bush administration.¹³³⁶

Against this backdrop, despite the calls of the Bush administration for withdrawal, Syrian officials maintained that Syrian troops went to Lebanon at the request of Lebanon while also recognizing the fact that it aimed to protect Syria's southern flank against Israeli aggression. A Baath Party official explained this point as follows:

“What they call the Syrian occupation of Lebanon, which guarantees stability and calm, is being punished by sanctions, while the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, which has cost the lives of some three and a half thousand civilians in the last three and a half years, is being rewarded with loan guarantees and aid.”¹³³⁷

Events in the second half of 2004 turned dramatic for Syria's long-lasting presence in Lebanon owing to its deteriorating relationship with the United States. Despite their disagreements during the invasion of Iraq, France and the United States decided to unite their forces for the first time to put an end to Syria's hegemony over Lebanon.¹³³⁸ Bush and Chirac held a meeting at the 60th anniversary of the Normandy landings in June 2004, in which Chirac tried to overcome his disagreement with Bush over Iraq and offered collaboration on Lebanon against Syria. President Bush recalls the meeting in his memoirs as follows:

“He described Lebanon's suffering under the occupation of Syria, which had tens of thousands of troops in the country, siphoned money from the economy, and strangled attempts to expand democracy. He suggested that we work together to stop Syria from dominating Lebanon. I immediately agreed. We decided to look for an opportunity to introduce a UN resolution.”¹³³⁹

In August 2004, Chirac's advisor Maurice Gourdault-Montagne secretly went to Washington as a follow-up meeting of Bush and Chirac in June 2004. Montagne met with NSA Condoleezza Rice. They discussed the regional issues and agreed to coordinate their policies in Lebanon. In this context, the United States and France crafted the Resolution 1559 at the UN Security Council in early September 2004 to force Syria to withdraw from Lebanon.

¹³³⁶ Zunes, “U.S. Policy towards Syria,” 58.

¹³³⁷ Strindberg, “Syria under Pressure,” 60.

¹³³⁸ Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 193; Zisser, “Syria, the United States, and Iraq.”

¹³³⁹ Bush, *Decision Points*, 411.

President Assad felt that policies of great powers were changing in Lebanon. Thus, he decided to challenge them by extending the tenure of his ally President Emile Lahoud.¹³⁴⁰

Political crisis broke out in Lebanon in September 2004 when Syria pushed for reelection of pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud before his six-year presidential term came to an end in November 2004. Under pressure from Syria, the Lebanese parliament passed an amendment to the constitution on 3 September 2004 to extend Lahoud's term extra-constitutionally for another three years. Even though Syria's influence in Lebanon was not a secret, it was expected that Assad would not coerce the Lebanese factions into accepting an extended term for his ally Lahoud. Assad was supposed to find a new president by bargaining with the Lebanese factions and by indirectly consulting with France and, if possible, with the United States. On the other hand, Assad decided to back Lahoud unconditionally whose power and popularity substantially diminished in domestic politics.¹³⁴¹

The Assad regime's misjudgment put him on a collision course with Druze leader Walid Jumblatt and Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, who was close to Saudi Arabia and Western countries. After the constitutional amendment, frustrated Hariri decided to resign as prime minister and was replaced by pro-Syrian Sunni politician Omar Karami. Interestingly, the constitutional amendment was approved by the Lebanese parliament one day after the passing of the U.S.-French sponsored Resolution 1559, urging respect for Lebanon's sovereignty and constitution, disbanding all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, extension of the control of the Government of Lebanon across all its territory and withdrawal of all foreign troops from Lebanon, on 2 September 2004. The United States and France interpreted constitutional amendment backed by Syria and its allies as a challenge to the international consensus to protect Lebanon's sovereignty and democracy. They also thought that Syria was determined to preserve its hegemony over Lebanon.¹³⁴²

From Syria's angle, Resolution 1559 was prepared by Bush and Chirac when they met in June 2004. Until the promulgation of Resolution 1559, President Assad was against the extension of Lahoud's tenure and was considering election of pro-Syrian Maronite politician Jean Obeid. Yet, Assad perceived the Resolution 1559 as a signal that United States, France, and the

¹³⁴⁰ Kabalan, "Syrian Foreign Policy," 33-34.

¹³⁴¹ Zisser, "Bashar al-Assad: In or Out of the New World Order?," 126-127; Salloukh, "Syria and Lebanon," 20-21.

¹³⁴² Salloukh, "Demystifying Syrian Foreign Policy," 166; Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 111.

European Union would target Syria after Iraq. He also considered the Resolution 1559 as a reflection of an organized international effort to push Syria out of Lebanon, undermine its regional stature and threaten the survival of the Baath regime. In Assad's mind, external forces led by the United States were aiming at depriving Syria of its geopolitical cards in the Middle East: its alliance with Iran, its influence over Hezbollah, and its obstructionist attitude in the Middle East peace process via Islamic Jihad and Hamas. In the end, Assad anticipated that their aim was to force Syria to accept the United States' hegemony in the Middle East and exterminate the axis of resistance. Thus, he decided to press for Lahoud's reelection to counter this challenge at any cost.¹³⁴³

In this milieu, Assistant Secretary of State William Burns went to Damascus along with the Pentagon and the CIA officials on 11 September 2004 to discuss the situation in Iraq, Syria's presence in Lebanon, and its relations with the militant groups. In the meeting, Burns told Assad that Syria must end its occupation in Lebanon and stop the activities of the militant Palestinian groups based in Syria. Burns also underlined that the U.S.-Syrian relations would change in a positive manner if Assad accepted the Bush administration's demands. After the talks in Damascus, Burns told reporters that "*Syria must end its interference in Lebanese internal affairs, withdraw its forces from Lebanon and allow the Lebanese armed forces and government to establish their authority throughout Lebanon.*"¹³⁴⁴

While pressures of the United States and France were mounting, President Assad spoke at the conference of Syrian expatriates in Damascus in October 2004 and expressed his opposition to the Resolution 1559. To defend extension of Lahoud's term, Assad claimed that every state had right to change its constitution and Lebanon was no exception to this basic principle.¹³⁴⁵ Assad firmly rejected Syria's hegemonic aspirations over Lebanon by stating that:

"The Americans spoke of Syrian hegemony over Lebanon. When a country wants to create hegemony it should have hidden or declared goals. Did we in Syria aspire for money? Are there natural resources in Lebanon for us to seek? Is there oil in Lebanon that we want to appropriate? Did we take Lebanese electricity, Lebanese water? No. We took nothing from Lebanon, but we gave blood. Had we wanted hegemony over Lebanon, we would have withdrawn our forces in stages from Lebanon in the last five years up to the last withdrawal."¹³⁴⁶

¹³⁴³ Salloukh, "Demystifying Syrian Foreign Policy," 167.

¹³⁴⁴ "US Tells Syria to Withdraw from Lebanon," *Arab News*, September 12, 2004, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/255155>.

¹³⁴⁵ Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria's Waiting Game*, 134.

¹³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 130.

5.4.3.3. The U.S.-Syrian Confrontation in Lebanon after the Hariri Assassination

President Assad's insistence on reinstating Lahoud was a serious mistake, which unfolded a series of events culminated in Syria's expulsion from Lebanon. While political turmoil was continuing apace after Lahoud's reelection, Rafiq al-Hariri, who was former prime minister, wealthy businessman and anti-Syrian politician, was assassinated in a car bombing in Beirut on 14 February 2005. Syria was the usual suspect as Hariri was known as an opponent of Lahoud and Assad in Lebanon. He offended Damascus owing to his efforts to consolidate Sunni bloc behind his leadership in the 2000 Lebanese parliamentary elections as well as his efforts to find a solution to Lebanon's public debt crisis by convening international donor conferences, last of which was held in Paris in 2002. It also was rumored that Hariri reached the inner circles of the Baath regime by engaging with senior Sunni officials such as Vice President Abd al-Halim Khaddam, Chief of Staff General Hikmat al-Shihabi, and Syria's Intelligence Director in Lebanon General Ghazi Kanaan. Owing to Hariri's role in crafting the U.S.-French sponsored Resolution 1559, the Lebanese opposition directly blamed Syria for his assassination. Because President Assad verbally attacked the Resolution 1559 as an attempt to undermine Syria's regional role and as a tool of the U.S.-French bloc to change Lebanon's geopolitical camp, and as a plot to force Syria to disarm Hezbollah in exchange for a staged withdrawal from Lebanon.¹³⁴⁷

Although Syria immediately denied any involvement in the Hariri assassination and condemned the murder, this tragic event sparked a public outrage in Lebanon. Spontaneous anti-Syrian demonstrations broke out in Beirut and other cities accusing Syria and its allies of killing Hariri given the professionalism of the murderers. Two days after the event, nearly 200,000 people gathered in Beirut for Hariri's funeral procession. The anti-Syrian mob chanted "Syria Out!", "No to the hegemony of the Syrian regime and its agents", "It's obvious, no?". Druze leader Walid Jumblatt became the spokesman of the opposition groups and pointed to involvement of Syria and its "collaborationist regime" in Beirut. Jumblatt and his friends called for total withdrawal of Syrian troops and even supported the idea of foreign protection force in Lebanon. Jumblatt's anti-Syrian campaign attracted support from different segments of the Lebanese people including the Maronites, the Druze, and Sunnis, who were fed up with Syria's hegemony and viewed the Hariri assassination as a chance to dismiss Syria

¹³⁴⁷ Dennis Ross, "U.S. Policy toward a Weak Assad," *The Washington Quarterly* 28, No. 3 (Summer 2005): 92; Salloukh, "Demystifying Syrian Foreign Policy," 168; Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria's Waiting Game*, 136.

from their territories. In late February pro-Syrian Prime Minister Umar Karami resigned amid mass anti-Syrian demonstrations organized by the opposition factions.¹³⁴⁸

The anti-Syrian mood in Lebanon was emboldened by the international reaction to the Hariri assassination. The UN convened an extraordinary session on the day of the murder and called for full implementation of the Resolution 1559.¹³⁴⁹ Although the Bush administration did not accuse Syria directly of perpetrating the event, it held Syria responsible indirectly as it was the ultimate power broker in Lebanon. President Bush recalled American Ambassador to Syria Margaret Scobey for urgent consultations on 15 February 2005. The State Department's chief spokesman Richard Boucher said that Scobey conveyed a message to Syria before leaving Damascus expressing Washington's "*deep concerns as well as our profound outrage over this heinous act of terrorism.*" Boucher also asserted that the Bush administration did not consider Syria as a stabilizing force in Lebanon. He said that "*It has not provided internal security for Lebanon. And therefore, in light of that kind of event, we need to look at the whole range of issues that we've had, including Syrian presence in Lebanon.*"¹³⁵⁰

The White House spokesman McClellan also said they did not have concrete evidence of Syria's finger in the assassination of Hariri. Yet, he stated that "*We condemn this brutal attack in the strongest possible terms*" and added that the assassination of Hariri was "*a terrible reminder that the Lebanese people must be able to pursue their aspirations and determine their own political future from violence and intimidation and free from Syrian occupation.*" An anonymous senior State Department official spoke to the New York Times and hinted a change in the Bush administration's policy towards Syria in Lebanon as follows: "*We're going to turn up the heat on Syria, that's for sure. It's been a pretty steady progression of pressure up to now, but I think it's going to spike in the wake of this event. Even though there's no evidence to link it to Syria, Syria has, by negligence or design, allowed Lebanon to become destabilized.*"¹³⁵¹

¹³⁴⁸ Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 195-196; Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 126.

¹³⁴⁹ Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria's Waiting Game*, 138; Lesch, *Missed Opportunities*, 16.

¹³⁵⁰ "U.S. Recalls Envoy to Syria Following Blast in Lebanon," *New York Times*, February 15, 2005, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/02/15/international/middleeast/us-recalls-envoy-to-syria-following-blast-in.html>.

¹³⁵¹ Steven R. Weisman, "U.S. Seems Sure of the Hand of Syria, Hinting at Penalties," *New York Times*, February 15, 2005, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/02/15/world/middleeast/us-seems-sure-of-the-hand-of-syria-hinting-at-penalties.html>.

An unnamed senior State Department official also talked to the Washington Post about the role of Syria in the Hariri event and underlined Syria's disruptive role in the Middle East by stating that "*The assassination is a sign of how badly messed up Lebanon is, and for that Syria is responsible... On a host of issues, Syria has been largely unresponsive and it's coming to a head with movement on Mideast peace, the continuation of [Iraq's] insurgency after the elections, and now the assassination.*"¹³⁵²

After meeting with Egyptian Foreign Minister in Washington on 15 February, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice commented on the assassination of Hariri and withdrawal of U.S. ambassador from Syria as follows:

"The withdrawal of the ambassador... relates to, unfortunately, the fact that the relationship has been for some time not moving in a positive direction. But this event in Lebanon, of course, is the proximate cause of the withdrawal... We're not laying blame. It needs to be investigated. That's the important point. However... Syria is in interference in the affairs of Lebanon. There are Syrian forces in Lebanon. Syria operates out of Lebanon."¹³⁵³

Rice also uttered the Bush administration's expectation from Syria regarding the murder as follows:

"When something happens in Lebanon, Syria needs to help to find accountability for what has happened there. There is a part of the destabilization that takes place when you have the kind of conditions that you do now in Lebanon thanks to Syrian interference. So we are united with the rest of the world in wanting a full investigation into what happened here."¹³⁵⁴

On 16 February 2005 Secretary of State Rice, called on American allies to escalate the pressure on Syria before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee by stating that: "*If they can send the Syrians a message that this kind of behavior in which they're engaged is not acceptable, then perhaps the Syrians will start to worry more about their isolation... politically and economically, not just from us but from others as well.*"¹³⁵⁵ On the same day, Rice told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that Syria was indirectly responsible for assassination of

¹³⁵² Robin Wright, "U.S. and U.N. Step Up Pressure on Damascus," *Washington Post*, February 16, 2005, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2005/02/16/us-and-un-step-up-pressure-on-damascus/249facea-372c-4fb7-b7a2-190485f4cc3d/>.

¹³⁵³ Megan K. Stack and Rania Abouzeid, "U.S. Recalls Ambassador to Syria as Suspicions Over Bomb Grow," *Los Angeles Times*, February 16, 2005, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2005-feb-16-fg-syria16-story.html>.

¹³⁵⁴ Wright, "U.S. and U.N. Step Up Pressure on Damascus."

¹³⁵⁵ Robin Wright and Peter Baker, "U.S.-Syria Tension Escalate," *NBC News*, February 17, 2005, <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna6983106>.

Hariri owing to its ongoing interference in Lebanese affairs. In the same speech, Rice also outlined hurdles between Washington and Damascus such as Syria's aid to guerilla attacks against American troops in Iraq, its cooperation with terrorist groups against Israel and its ongoing presence in Lebanon. Rice also accused Syria of destabilizing Lebanon's democratic process and promised to enhance pressure on Damascus.¹³⁵⁶

Assistant Secretary of State William Burns, who represented the United States at Hariri's funeral on 16 February, also said that "*Mr. Hariri's death should give-in fact it must give renewed impetus to achieving a free, independent and sovereign Lebanon. And what that means is the complete and immediate withdrawal by Syria of all of its forces in Lebanon.*"¹³⁵⁷

On 17 February 2005, President Bush held a news conference in which he elaborated on the Hariri assassination and withdrawal of American ambassador from Syria. At the news conference Bush touched upon the ongoing contentious issues between the two countries such as Syria's support for former Iraqi Baathists and terrorist groups, Washington's expectation from Syria to expel Iraqi fugitives, to abide by the UN Resolution 1559, urging withdrawal of Syria's troops from Lebanon and to help free and fair elections in Lebanon. In response to a question about the Hariri assassination, Bush did not blame Syria directly but pointed to its threats to development of democracy in the region as follows:

"We support the international investigation that is—will be going on to determine the killers of Mr. Hariri. We've recalled our Ambassador, which indicates that the relationship is not moving forward, that Syria is out of step with the progress being made in a greater Middle East, that democracy is on the move, and this is a country that isn't moving with the democratic movement."¹³⁵⁸

NSA Stephen Hadley elaborated on the United States policy towards Syria at a press briefing on 17 February 2005. Hadley mentioned problematic areas between the United States and Syria and positioned Syria in the opposite camp of the United States in Lebanon and in the Middle East by saying that:

"I think there are a lot of things that will put Syria on the agenda. And what Syria needs to do is pretty clear. They need to stop letting their territory be used to support

¹³⁵⁶ Joel Brinkley, "Rice Says Syria Is At least Indirectly Responsible for the Blast," *New York Times*, February 17, 2005, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/02/17/world/middleeast/rice-says-syria-is-at-least-indirectly-responsible-for-the.html>.

¹³⁵⁷ Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 127.

¹³⁵⁸ George W. Bush, "The President's News Conference, February 17, 2005," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of George W. Bush, Book I-January 1 to June 30, 2005* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006), 243.

terrorists, not only in Iraq, but also in the Middle East. They need to facilitate a free and fair election in Lebanon. They need to take seriously the requirements of 1559 and restore sovereignty to Lebanon.

So the things Syria needs to do are clear. And I think one of the things the United States and Europe need to do is to send a clear message to Syria that the winds of change are blowing in the Middle East in the direction of fighting terror and greater freedom. And Syria is... in some sense, an outlier, and it's time for Syria to take the right decisions and get in step with the positive trends that are happening in the region."¹³⁵⁹

These messages were clearly indicating that the NRCs of the United States were shaping its relations with Syria. In this context, the United States and France united their forces to eject Syria from Lebanon. Bush and Chirac met in Brussels on 20 February 2005 and issued a joint statement, urging the implementation of Resolution 1559 and immediate evacuation of all Syrian troops and intelligence personnel in Lebanon.¹³⁶⁰ At a news conference with German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder on 23 February 2005, Bush reiterated the United States position on Syria's presence in Lebanon and called for withdrawal of its troops as well as security services from Lebanon.¹³⁶¹

The Hariri event ushered in the death knell of Syria's almost 30-year hegemony over Lebanon. President Assad spoke to the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* on 28 February 2005 and said that Syria was planning to withdraw from Lebanon by the end of 2005, but he attributed the evacuation to a peace deal with Tel Aviv. Assad stated that "*From a technical viewpoint, the repatriation [of Syrian forces] could happen by the end of the year. But from strategic viewpoint, it will only happen if we get serious guarantees. In a word, peace.*"¹³⁶²

Although President Assad had reduced Syrian troops in Lebanon over 50 percent since his ascent to power, he faced pressures of the United States and France for an immediate timetable for withdrawal after the interview. While demonstrations were going on in Lebanon, Secretary of State Rice, and French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier held a joint news conference on 1

¹³⁵⁹ Stephen Hadley, "Press Briefing by National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley on the President's Trip to Europe," *The White House Archives*, February 17, 2005, <https://georgewbushwhitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2005/02/20050217-11.html>.

¹³⁶⁰ "Bush, Chirac Tell Syria to Leave Lebanon," *Washington Times*, February 21, 2005, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2005/feb/21/20050221-115002-1382r/>.

¹³⁶¹ George W. Bush, "The President's News Conference with Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany in Mainz, February 23, 2005," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of George W. Bush, Book I-January 1 to June 30, 2005* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006), 298.

¹³⁶² Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 127.

March 2005 and underscored their will to observe the May elections in Lebanon and to enforce the Resolution 1559 mandating Syria's withdrawal.¹³⁶³

President Bush also spoke at a news conference about the issue of Syria's evacuation of Lebanon on 2 March 2005. By referring to Rice and Barnier, he said that "*Both of them stood up and said loud and clear to Syria, 'You get your troops and your secret services out of Lebanon so that good democracy has a chance to flourish.'*"¹³⁶⁴ The next day, President Bush reiterated the administration's insistence of Syria's withdrawal and told that Syria's troops were impediment to democratic development in Lebanon. Bush said that that this was contradicting with the American ideal to promote democracy all over the world including Lebanon.¹³⁶⁵

Having seen determination of the Bush administration, President Assad eventually announced the withdrawal of all Syrian troops from Lebanon in a special session of the People's Assembly on 5 March 2005. In his speech, President Assad stated that Syria had already reduced the number of its troops from 40,000 to only 14,000 in Lebanon. He said that evacuation would be gradual and there would be a pull back to Beqaa Valley by March 2005. Assad underlined that Syria complied with the Taif Accord and the requirements of the Resolution 1559 by taking the decision of withdrawal from Lebanon. He sought to portray the evacuation as a voluntary decision and completion of a successful mission in Lebanon. He also said that this was an independent decision of Damascus serving interests of both Lebanon and Syria.¹³⁶⁶ On the other hand, Assad's announcement did not satisfy the United States and France. White House spokesman McClellan criticized Assad's remarks on 6 March 2005 and said that "*We want to see the complete and immediate withdrawal of all Syrian military forces and*

¹³⁶³ Condoleezza Rice, "Remarks With French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier," *U.S. Department of State Archive*, March 1, 2005, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/42841.htm>; Joel Brinkley and Alan Cowell, "U.S. and France Join to Urge Syria to Pull Out of Lebanon," *New York Times*, March 2, 2005, 3.

¹³⁶⁴ George W. Bush, "Remarks in Discussion on Job Training in Arnold, Maryland, March 2, 2005," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of George W. Bush, Book I-January 1 to June 30, 2005* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006), 336.

¹³⁶⁵ George W. Bush, "Remarks at the Central Intelligence Agency and an Exchange with Reporters in Langley, Virginia, March 3, 2005," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of George W. Bush, Book I-January 1 to June 30, 2005* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006), 355.

¹³⁶⁶ Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 172; Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 136-137.

intelligence services in Lebanon.” France also issued a similar statement and underlined its expectation for immediate and full withdrawal.¹³⁶⁷

On 7 March 2005, President Assad gave an interview to Time Magazine, in which he said that Syria paid a huge price for not thwarting the assassination and was the biggest loser. He also asked the United States to pursue diplomatic means and not to seek confrontation with Syria. Having adopted a defensive posture after Hariri’s killing, Assad claimed that he was not Saddam and he wanted to cooperate with Washington. As the Lebanese elections were scheduled for May, White House Counselor Dan Bartlett told CNN that Syria must withdraw all of its troops and intelligence services from Lebanon to guarantee a real, fair and free elections in the country.¹³⁶⁸ After Assad’s conciliatory remarks, President Bush told news reporters on 9 March that Syria must withdraw not only its troops but also its intelligence services and underlined that Washington would collaborate with its allies to accomplish total enforcement of Resolution 1559.¹³⁶⁹

As mentioned above, the Hariri assassination polarized Lebanese politics as Syria still had allies in Lebanon. After President Assad’s withdrawal speech, pro-Syria demonstrators organized a mass rally under the leadership of Hezbollah in Riyad al-Sulh Square in Beirut on 8 March 2005 to declare their support for Syria’s military presence. There were nearly 500,000 pro-Syrian demonstrators in the square. But larger counter-demonstration, participated by approximately 1 million people, were organized by the Sunni, Druze and the main components of the Maronite community with the backing of the United States and France on 14 March 2005. This event was called the Cedar Revolution, which ushered in a new era in Lebanese politics as anti-Syrian the March 14 Alliance won the May-June 2005 elections and Fouad Siniora formed the new government.¹³⁷⁰

Although Syria completed the withdrawal process on 26 April 2005, it continued to face pressures to comply with other obligations of the resolution. In this context, the Bush

¹³⁶⁷ Kenneth R. Bazinet, “U.S. to Syria: Get Out,” *New York Daily News*, March 8, 2005, 21.

¹³⁶⁸ James Gordon, “I’m No Saddam,’ Says Conciliatory Syria Prez,” *New York Daily News*, March 7, 2005, 6.

¹³⁶⁹ George W. Bush, “Remarks Following Discussions with President Traian Basescu of Romania and an Exchange with Reporters, March 9, 2005,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of George W. Bush, Book I-January 1 to June 30, 2005* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006), 388.

¹³⁷⁰ Rabinovich, “The Bush Administration, Israel and Syria,” 347; Baylouny, “US foreign policy in Lebanon,” 310; Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 138.

administration pressed Syria to disarm Hezbollah by using its intelligence services. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan also said that Syria could not be seen fulfilled UN Resolution 1559 without disarmament of Hezbollah.¹³⁷¹ President Bush extended economic sanctions against Syria by citing Syria's destabilizing activities in Iraq and Lebanon, its support for international terrorism, and its WMD program in May 2005.¹³⁷² After Bush's decision, the Department of Treasury took an important step on 30 June 2005 and designated top two senior Syrian officials (Ghazi Kanaan and Rustum Ghazaleh) as "specially designated nationals" and froze their assets owing to their threat to U.S. national security.¹³⁷³ The most prominent of these names was Ghazi Kanaan, who had good relations with the American intelligence and helped the Americans to rescue hostages in Lebanon, he was held responsible for Hariri's murder by the Bush administration. Kanaan's suspicious death in October 2005 caused speculations about Syrian intelligence's involvement in the Hariri assassination.¹³⁷⁴

The Bush administration also urged its European allies to sever relations with Syria within the context of Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. When some European countries wanted to reward Syria after the withdrawal, the Bush administration discouraged the EU from signing the association agreement with Syria due to ongoing investigation into the Hariri assassination. In so doing, the Bush administration successfully created an environment to isolate Syria by driving a wedge between Syria and the European countries. The Bush administration's aggressive policy pushed the Assad regime more to the Russia-China-Iran axis.¹³⁷⁵ In this milieu, Syria's sought to obtain SS-X-26 or Iskander-E surface-to-surface missiles from Russia, which was criticized by the United States and Israel. An American official said that "*We don't think that state sponsors of terrorism should be sold weapons of any kind.*" Israel also declared its concern that militant Palestinian groups might acquire these weapons. Amid tension of ballistic missile, the State Department designated Syria as a state sponsor of terrorism such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the PFLP-GC in the Patterns of Global Terrorism document published in 2005.¹³⁷⁶

¹³⁷¹ Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, 111; Henriksen, *America and the Rogue States*, 167.

¹³⁷² Lawson, *Global Security Watch – Syria*, 157-158.

¹³⁷³ Rabil, *Syria, the United States, and the War on Terror*, 186.

¹³⁷⁴ Wieland, *Syria at Bay*, 131-132.

¹³⁷⁵ Hinnebusch, "Defying the Hegemon," 384-385; Hinnebusch, "Syrian Foreign Policy under Bashar al-Asad," 21-22.

¹³⁷⁶ Kass, "Syria After Lebanon."

International repercussions of the Hariri assassination in international arena continued for a long time. Immediately after the assassination, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan sent a UN fact-finding team to investigate the causes and consequences of the Hariri assassination with the backing of the United States and France. The UN team was led by Patrick Fitzgerald, who was a deputy police commissioner from Ireland. The Fitzgerald report was published on 24 March 2005. In the report, Syria was not blamed directly for Hariri's assassination but the tension and polarization in Lebanon preceding the event was attributed to Syria's presence in the country.¹³⁷⁷

On 7 April 2005, UN Security Council passed the Resolution 1595 to help Lebanese authorities investigate Hariri's assassination by forming the United Nations International Independent Investigation Commission (UNIIC), based in Lebanon. The UN team headed by former German prosecutor Detlev Mehlis arrived in the region to find out the perpetrators of the event.¹³⁷⁸ Mehlis focused on 19 Syrian and Lebanese intelligence officers and sought to uncover the chain of command into the Syrian regime. Syria underwent substantial pressure by the international community. Mehlis submitted his preliminary report to the UN Security Council in October 2005 and indicated Syria's finger in the murder of Hariri. The report pointed to involvement of the head of Syrian intelligence and Assad's brother-in-law Asaf Shawkat as well as Assad's younger brother Maher al-Assad. In the report, Syria was also blamed for creating a tense atmosphere in Lebanon before the assassination of Hariri and Assad's threat to Hariri in their last meeting in the summer of 2004. Mehlis contended Syria's evident role in the assassination in an interview with al-Sharq al-Awsat by saying that Syrian authorities were involved in the event, but he did not directly accuse President Assad of the murder.¹³⁷⁹

Following the publication of the first Mehlis report, President Bush said that the report was serious, and Syria's involvement was implicated in the report. He threatened Syria by categorizing it as a hostile regime to the free world as follows: "*This Mehlis report...had*

¹³⁷⁷ Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 131.

¹³⁷⁸ Jeremy Sharp, *Syria: Background and U.S. Relations*, CRS Report for Congress (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2008), 11-12.

¹³⁷⁹ Lesch, *Missed Opportunities*, 16-17; James Bone, "Detain Hariri Suspects or Face Sanctions Syria Told," *Times*, October 26, 2005, 40.

*serious implications for Syria, and the Syrian Government must take the demands of the free world seriously.*¹³⁸⁰

Immediately after the hearing of the Mehlis report, UNSC passed the Resolution 1636 unanimously on 31 October 2005 calling for Syria to cooperate with the UNIIC unconditionally and warning of severe and comprehensive sanctions in case of non-cooperation.¹³⁸¹ Secretary of State Rice announced that Washington would resort to use of force against Syria in case of a threat to world peace. Rice elaborated on the Resolution 1636 by stating that:

“With our decision today, we show that Syria has isolated itself from the international community through its false statements, its support for terrorism, its interference in the affairs of its neighbors, and its destabilizing behavior in the Middle East... Now the Syrian Government needs to make a strategic decision to fundamentally change its behavior. Until that day comes, however, we in the international community must remain united and we must remain resolute in our pursuit of truth, our defense of justice, and our support of liberty for the brave and courageous Lebanese people.”¹³⁸²

The UN Security Council issued the Resolution 1644 unanimously after the second report of Mehlis on 15 December 2005, urging Syria to cooperate with the UNIIC. But the second Mehlis report was not as coercive as the interim report issued in October 2005. Owing to the tone of the second report, Lebanese critics doubted a secret deal between Syria and the international community including the United States. International pressure on Syria decreased owing to efforts of Saudi Arabia and Egypt to convince the United States, France and Britain of giving Syria time to respond to demands of the international community. In this period, British PM Tony Blair announced that he was ready to start dialog with Damascus if Syria agreed to cooperate. Surprisingly, Israel changed its attitude toward Syria radically at the end of 2005 by discouraging the Bush administration from imposing further sanctions despite the findings of the Mehlis report. In January 2006, Mehlis was replaced upon his request by Serge Brammertz as the new head of the UNIIC.¹³⁸³

¹³⁸⁰ George W. Bush, “Interview with Al Arabiya, October 24, 2005,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of George W. Bush, Book II-July 1 to December 31, 2005* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006), 1580.

¹³⁸¹ “This Time, Bush Gets Serious,” *New York Daily News*, November 1, 2005, 36.

¹³⁸² “Syria, the Usual Suspect,” *Washington Times*, November 3, 2005, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2005/nov/3/20051103-081012-2151r/>.

¹³⁸³ Wieland, *Syria at Bay*, 136.

In early 2006, Syria faced an enormous pressure from the United States and the UN Security Council to comply with the resolutions on Lebanon. On 11 January 2006, Secretary of State Rice commented on Syria's refusal to comply with the resolutions by saying that the United States was concerned about Syria's destabilizing behavior, its support for terrorism and its non-compliance with several Security Council resolutions. Rice accused Syria of obliterating the Hariri investigation and of non-cooperation with the UNIIIC. She also called on Syria to abide by the provisions of the Resolution 1559, including disarmament of Hezbollah and other militias. She urged Syria to stop arms transfer to Hezbollah and other Palestinian groups, which she claimed destabilizing Lebanon, fueling terrorist attacks and thwarting full implementation of the resolutions. Finally, Rice warned Syria of stopping its interference in Lebanon's internal affairs through assassination and intimidation of anti-Syrian figures.¹³⁸⁴

On 23 January 2006, UN Security Council President Augustine P. Magiha of Tanzania issued a statement about the situation in the Middle East and called on Syria to implement provisions of resolution 1559. In the statement, Magiha noted that despite the progress made in the implementation of resolution 1559 in terms of Syria's withdrawal and holding of free elections in May-June 2005, other provisions of resolutions were not implemented yet such as disarmament of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, extension of Lebanese government's control across Lebanon and free and fair presidential elections without influence or interference of foreign countries. Magiha called on Syria to cooperate fully to fulfill provisions of resolution 1559 and urged Syria to bloc flow of movements of arms and people into Lebanon. He also denounced terrorist attacks in Lebanon and underlined that perpetrators of terrorism and destabilizing efforts in Lebanon would be held accountable by the UN Security Council.¹³⁸⁵

On the day of Magiha's statement, Bolton told reporters in New York that the Bush administration was pleased with the Presidential Statement as it plainly indicated Syria's non-compliance with many provisions of resolution 1559. U.S. Ambassador to UN John Bolton used a threatening language and called on Syria to take seriously demands of the Security Council as follows:

¹³⁸⁴ Condoleezza Rice, "Syria's Continuing Refusal to Comply with Security Council Resolutions," *U.S. Department of State Archive*, January 11, 2006, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/58925.htm>.

¹³⁸⁵ "Statement by the President of the Security Council," United Nations Security Council, January 23, 2006, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/218/09/PDF/N0621809.pdf?OpenElement>.

“I think there is not an infinite amount of patience here with the Syrians to comply with the unambiguous provisions of 1559 or, while we are on the subject, 1595 and subsequent resolutions. Syrians have a lot of things that they are obligated to do by the terms of these resolutions and that’s why the Security Council has returned, in this case, to their non-compliance with 1559. I think that’s what seriousness means. This is a responsibility of the Security Council, to send messages to the governments involved, particularly the non-compliant governments, particularly the government of Syria. That’s why we undertook this step. That’s why we think it is so important.”¹³⁸⁶

On 17 May 2006, UN Security Council passed the Resolution 1680 endorsed by 13 states while Russia and China abstained from voting. The resolution was about the nature of Syrian-Lebanese relations as it called on Syria to delineate common borders and to establish diplomatic relations with Lebanon to attain Lebanon’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Syria responded harshly to the new resolution. The Syrian Foreign Ministry attacked the resolution as “*an unprecedented procedure*” and “*interference in the internal and bilateral affairs of sovereign states, who are members of the United Nations. It is a provocative move which will only make the situation more complicated.*” Foreign Minister Walid Muallem blamed Washington and Paris for the resolution and claimed that their ability “*is too limited to affect the Syrian-Lebanese relationship.*”¹³⁸⁷

While Syria was objecting to the Resolution 1680, the Bush administration fully backed it and called on Syria to abide by its provisions. Bolton spoke on 17 May 2006 in New York and said that:

“The United States is very pleased with the passage of Resolution 1680... It makes clear that the burden is now on Syria to respond to Lebanon’s request for border delineation and the full exchange of diplomatic relations. It clearly says to Syria that it needs to do more to stop the flow of weapons across the Syrian/Lebanese border. And it makes it clear that all the further disarming of all militias inside Lebanon is an important priority... I think this is a clear message by the Security Council to Syria that we expect them to respond to the offers that the government of Lebanon has very responsibly made. We’ll give Syria some period of time to do that then in consultation with the government of Lebanon we’ll decide what to do next.”¹³⁸⁸

While Syria was under pressure by the UN investigation and some members of the international community led by the United States, Walid Muallem elaborated on the rift between the United States and Syria in Lebanon in a written statement to the People’s

¹³⁸⁶ John Bolton, “Remarks on Syria/Lebanon,” *U.S. Department of State Archive*, January 23, 2006, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/io/rls/rm/59644.htm>.

¹³⁸⁷ Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, 112.

¹³⁸⁸ John Bolton, “Remarks on Iran, Syria, and Lebanon,” *U.S. Department of State Archive*, May 17, 2006, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/io/rls/rm/66417.htm>.

Assembly in June 2006 by pointing to Syria's challenge to the NRCs of the United States namely hegemon and tribune and agent of American values in the Middle East as follows:

“Syria is subject to the Americans because of its national position, its objection to the war on Iraq and its resistance to foreign interference and predominance... the American project is critical and unsuccessful because of the courageous resistance of the Iraqi people and because of the exposure of the false justifications that were invented for the purpose of invading this country. The project of the larger Middle East got caught in the Iraqi mud.

In the light of this American failure, and for the purpose of increasing pressures on Syria and the attempt to intensify the blockade against it, the American–French coordination of action with regard to Lebanon came into being ... [despite] the differences in American and French interests and objectives in some aspects and their concurrence in others.”¹³⁸⁹

In the summer of 2006, the tension escalated in Lebanon owing to the Israel-Hezbollah War, which broke out on 12 July 2006 after Hezbollah's kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers. Israel considered Hezbollah's action as *casus belli* and launched a full-scale war by invading Lebanon. During the war, the Bush administration fully backed Israel and endorsed its actions to disarm Hezbollah.¹³⁹⁰ After the start of the war, the Bush administration blamed Syria, Iran and Hezbollah for the escalation in the Middle East. On 13 July 2006, Secretary of State Rice held a press conference with NSA Hadley to explain the Bush administration policy. Rice said that:

“Let me say that it is obviously extremely important that regional states play a positive, not a negative role... I would like to highlight the very positive role that Egypt and a number of other countries have played in trying to diffuse the crisis... But on the other hand, I don't think that there is any doubt that Syria and Iran have been very much in the opposite direction, encouraging and, indeed, in the case of Syria, sheltering the people who are perpetrating these acts.”¹³⁹¹

Following the outbreak of the war, Syria accused Israel of escalating the tension in the region and announced Syria's unswerving support for Hezbollah. Farouk al-Sharaa said that “*the resistance will continue as long as the occupation continues.*” Walid Muallem said that Syria was ready to retaliate in case of Israeli aggression. He underlined that Syria was ready for a regional war and well-prepared. Muallem also added that “*I'm ready to be a soldier under the leadership of Hasan Nasr Allah.*” On the other hand, the Bush administration blamed for Syria

¹³⁸⁹ Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, 113.

¹³⁹⁰ Baylouny, “US foreign policy in Lebanon,” 319.

¹³⁹¹ Condoleezza Rice and Stephen Hadley, “Press Briefing by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and National Security Advisor Steve Hadley,” *The White House Archives*, July 13, 2006, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/07/20060713-8.html>.

for the escalation in the region. To illustrate, the National Security Council spokesman Frederick Jones said that “*We charge Syria and Iran who [sic] support Hezbollah with the responsibility for the attack and the violence which followed it.*” On 14 July, President Bush threatened Syria owing to its position in the war by saying that “*Syria has to be brought to account for its misdeeds.*”¹³⁹²

According to the Bush administration, Iran and Syria were striving to destabilize Lebanon by providing weapons for Hezbollah. In that regard, they were the enemies of Lebanon’s sovereignty and democracy. In a news conference with British Prime Minister Tony Blair on 16 July 2006, President Bush pointed to Syria’s role in the current conflict by stating that:

“One of the interesting things about this recent flareup is that it helps clarify a root cause of instability in the Middle East, and that’s Hizballah and Hizballah’s relationship with Syria and Hizballah’s relationship to Iran and Syria’s relationship to Iran. Therefore, in order to solve this problem, it’s really important for the world to address the root cause.”¹³⁹³

President Bush considered the Israel-Hezbollah War as a part of Syria’s strategy to reestablish its hegemony over Lebanon. After meeting with congressional leaders on 18 July 2006, President Bush told reporters that:

“Syria is trying to get back into Lebanon—it looks like to me. We passed United Nations Resolution 1559, and finally this young democracy—or this democracy became whole—by getting Syria out. And there’s suspicions that the instability created by the Hizballian attacks will cause some in Lebanon to invite Syria back in, and it’s against the United Nations policy, and it’s against the U.S. policy.”¹³⁹⁴

Meanwhile, the Bush administration exerted pressure on Syria via Saudi Arabia and Egypt to wedge it away from Iran and Hezbollah. The Bush administration officials told reporters that Syria could only contribute to the resolution of the conflict providing that it relinquished its alliance with Iran and Hezbollah. Furthermore, President Bush continued to castigate Damascus publicly. In a radio address on 22 July 2006, he noted that “*For many years, Syria*

¹³⁹² Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, 114-117.

¹³⁹³ George W. Bush, “Remarks Following Discussions with Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom and Exchange with Reporters in Strelna, July 16, 2006,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of George W. Bush, Book II-July 1 to December 31, 2006* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2007), 1406.

¹³⁹⁴ George W. Bush, “Remarks Following a Meeting with Congressional Leaders and an Exchange with Reporters, July 18, 2006,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of George W. Bush, Book II-July 1 to December 31, 2006* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2007), 1418.

has been a primary sponsor of Hezbollah and it has helped provide Hezbollah with shipments of Iranian-made weapons."¹³⁹⁵

Although Syria sought to play a role to end the fighting by facilitating communication with Hezbollah, its offer was rejected by the United States.¹³⁹⁶ As the Bush administration held Syria along with Iran responsible for the crisis, Secretary of State Rice did not invite Syria to emergency talks participated by European and Arab foreign ministers in July 2006. Syria's Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Miqdad announced that Syria was ready to initiate dialog with the United States based on mutual respect and interests on 23 July 2006. Yet, John Bolton firmly rejected Miqdad's offer as useless. The Bush administration did not consider Syria as an actor to put an end to the crisis and sought resolution by forging an umbrella of Arab nations against Hezbollah and Shiite militancy fueled by Iran.¹³⁹⁷

In his memoirs, President Bush explains that he encouraged Israel to strike Syria during the Hezbollah-Israel War as follows:

"The Israelis had a chance to deliver a major blow against Hezbollah and their sponsors in Iran and Syria. Unfortunately, they mishandled their opportunity...To compound matters, Prime Minister Olmert announced that Syria would not be a target. I thought it was a mistake. Removing the threat of retaliation let Syria off the hook and emboldened them to continue their support for Hezbollah.

As the violence continued into its second week, many of the g-8 leaders who started out supportive of Israel and called for a ceasefire. I didn't join...I wanted to buy time for Israel to weaken Hezbollah's forces. I also wanted to send a message to Iran and Syria: They would not be allowed to use terrorist organizations as proxy armies to attack democracies with impunity."¹³⁹⁸

In August 2006, international efforts intensified to end the war with the first draft of American-French Security Council resolution 1701, demanding cessation of hostilities, disarmament of Lebanese militias, and deployment of a UN multinational force in south Lebanon to curb Hezbollah's activities. Syria slammed the resolution as a recipe for a new civil war in Lebanon and claimed that the resolution would cause further instability if it did not reconcile all political forces in the country. Syria initially rejected the resolution as it feared deployment of an

¹³⁹⁵ Helene Cooper and David Sanger, "U.S. Plan Seeks to Wedge Syria Away From Iran," *New York Times*, July 23, 2006, 1.

¹³⁹⁶ Neil MacFarquhar, "U.S. Must Deal with Damascus and Hezbollah the Ease Mideast Crisis, Syrian Says," *New York Times*, July 24, 2006, 9.

¹³⁹⁷ Michael Binyon and Tim Reid, "Syria Wants to Have Its Say, But US is Determined not to Listen," *Times*, July 24, 2006, 6.

¹³⁹⁸ Bush, *Decision Points*, 413-414.

international force in south Lebanon and disarmament of Hezbollah. When the Secretary of State Rice began to talk about a new Middle East, Syria suspected that the Bush administration was planning something to undermine its interests in Lebanon. Thus, Syria rejected the first draft of the resolution owing to its preoccupation with keeping the resistance capability of Hezbollah intact. Before the voting of the UN Security Council Resolution 1701, Prime Minister Olmert took a bold decision and ordered a ground attack in southern Lebanon to destroy all Hezbollah bases across south of Litani River. Yet, Hezbollah defeated the Israeli forces decisively and inflicted heavy losses on it. On 11 August 2006, the Resolution 1701 was approved at the UN Security Council unanimously. Syria welcomed the resolution as it did not call for disarmament of Hezbollah and declared it as a historical victory for Lebanese resistance.¹³⁹⁹

After the passing of the Resolution 1701, President Bush continued to blame the Iran-Syria axis as state sponsor of terrorism and their proxy Hezbollah for sparking the war. On 12 August 2006, Bush said that:

“The loss of innocent life in both Lebanon and Israel has been a great tragedy. Hizballah and its Iranian and Syrian sponsors have brought an unwanted war to the people of Lebanon and Israel, and millions have suffered as a result. I now urge the international community to turn words into action and make every effort to bring lasting peace to the region.”¹⁴⁰⁰

Hezbollah’s victory led to a public euphoria across the Middle East and popularity of the so-called axis of resistance increased. President Assad consolidated his grip on power in domestic politics and even improved his regional stature owing to Hezbollah’s success in the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War.¹⁴⁰¹ Following the victory of Hezbollah, the United States began to interfere in Lebanon’s domestic issues directly. For example, the Bush administration approved an executive order stipulating that the assets of people participating in anti-democratic actions in Lebanon should be frozen. The order was designed to target Syria’s interference as well as any members of opposition breaching its stipulations.¹⁴⁰²

¹³⁹⁹ Kabalan, “Syrian Foreign Policy,” 40; Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, 117-120.

¹⁴⁰⁰ George W. Bush, “Statement on the United Nations Security Council Resolution on the Situation in the Middle East, August 12, 2006,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of George W. Bush, Book II-July 1 to December 31, 2006* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2007), 1507.

¹⁴⁰¹ Lesch, *Missed Opportunities*, 20.

¹⁴⁰² Baylouny, “US foreign policy in Lebanon,” 320.

Throughout 2007, the UN Security Council continued to exert pressure on Syria owing to the Hariri assassination. On 30 May 2007, it passed the Resolution 1757, mandating the formation of a tribunal outside Lebanon to try people responsible for the killing of Hariri. Syria firmly rejected the legality of the tribunal and announced that if evidence was found against its citizens involved in the event, it would prosecute them at home. Regarding the new UN investigation team, Serge Brammertz's findings were less specific than that of Mehlis. Brammertz mentioned on many occasions that Syria cooperated with his investigation and did not give any name of suspects. That's why, Mehlis criticized Brammertz for lack of progress on revealing the assassination. In late 2007, Brammertz was replaced by Canadian Prosecutor Daniel Bellemare, and it appeared that Syria successfully weathered the storm after the Hariri assassination.¹⁴⁰³

A new crisis broke out in Lebanon in 2007 owing to election of the new president before the end of President Lahoud's term in November 2007. Rival political groups could not agree on a new president as the country was polarized between the pro-Syrian March 8 Alliance and the anti-Syrian March 14 Alliance. There was a disagreement between two blocs on the Hariri assassination and the formation of the international tribunal. The tension immediately acquired a sectarian clout that would plunge Lebanon into a new civil war. In this milieu, the Bush administration backed the March 14 Alliance to curb influence of Iran and Syria in Lebanon.¹⁴⁰⁴

As the presidential election deadlock in Lebanon continued in early 2008, President Bush decided to warn Syria against its destabilizing activities and obstructionist role in the selection of new president. On 4 January 2008, Bush uttered his support for the March 14 Alliance and accused Syria of destabilizing Lebanon by stating that:

“There needs to be a clear message to the Syrians from all us that you will continue to be isolated, you will continue to be viewed as a nation that is thwarting the will of the Lebanese people. There needs to be a focused voice, and so our efforts

¹⁴⁰³ Sharp, *Syria: Background and U.S. Relations*, 12-13.

¹⁴⁰⁴ Paul Salem, “The Presidential Crisis in Lebanon Demands Urgent Attention,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Web Commentary, November 16, 2007, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/salem_wcomm.pdf; Thanassis Cambanis, “Political Crisis Deepens in Lebanon as Presidential Election is Postponed,” *New York Times*, November 23, 2007, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/23/world/africa/23iht-23leb.8452708.html>.

diplomatically are to convince others that they must continue to pressure Syria so that the Lebanese process can go forward.”¹⁴⁰⁵

Against this backdrop, Syria sought to reclaim its regional role after the Hezbollah-Israel War by adopting an uncompromising policy against the March 14 Alliance as well as its regional and international supporters. President Assad decided to reassert Syria’s influence in Lebanon by playing his cards effectively especially Hezbollah, which claimed a larger role in domestic politics during the election crisis.¹⁴⁰⁶ In response, President Bush signed Executive Order 13460, which expanded sanctions against Syria, on 13 February 2008. The executive order blocked senior Syrian officials and their associates who were responsible for public corruption. In his message to the Congress,¹⁴⁰⁷ President Bush said that Syria was undermining efforts of the United States to stabilize Iraq and was playing a destabilizing role in Lebanon by carrying out subversive activities and undermining Lebanon’s democracy. In the same month, U.S. Treasury Department designated President Assad’s cousin Rami Maklouf who had “*benefited from the public corruption of senior officials of the Syrian regime*” by depending on the same order.¹⁴⁰⁸

In early May 2008, the tension spiraled out of control and fierce clashes broke out between pro-government forces of Fouad Siniora and Hezbollah. Hezbollah immediately outmatched the government forces and their supporters and took to streets of Beirut on 9 May 2008. Hezbollah’s victory was a blow to the Bush administration’s objectives in Lebanon as the U.S.-backed government of Siniora was defeated. The Bush administration severely condemned Hezbollah for undermining the legitimate government of Lebanon.¹⁴⁰⁹ The Lebanon crisis was finally resolved with the signing of the Doha Agreement on 21 May 2008, in which Syria played a major role. The Doha Agreement, which gave Syria’s chief ally

¹⁴⁰⁵ George W. Bush, “Interview with Foreign Print Media, January 4, 2008,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of George W. Bush, Book I-January 1 to June 30, 2008* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2009), 10.

¹⁴⁰⁶ Hinnebusch, “Syrian Foreign Policy under Bashar al-Asad,” 22; Salloukh, “Demystifying Syrian Foreign Policy,” 171.

¹⁴⁰⁷ George W. Bush, “Message to the Congress Transmitting an Executive Order Blocking Property of Additional Persons in Connection with the National Emergency with Respect to Syria, February 13, 2008,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of George W. Bush, Book I- January 1 to June 30, 2008* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2009), 181; “Bush Approves New Sanctions on Syria,” *Times*, February 14, 2008, 42.

¹⁴⁰⁸ Sadat and Jones, “U.S. Foreign Policy toward Syria,” 97.

¹⁴⁰⁹ Robert F. Worth and Nada Bakri, “Hezbollah Seizes Swath of Beirut from U.S.-Backed Lebanon Government,” *New York Times*, May 10, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/10/world/middleeast/10lebanon.html>.

Hezbollah a balancing third party role in the national unity government, was followed by the election of army commander General Michel Suleiman as president, who was sensitive to Syria's security interests in Lebanon.¹⁴¹⁰

According to Rabinovich, although President Bush firmly refused the idea of negotiating with terrorists, he recognized Qatar-brokered Doha Agreement, encapsulating many of Hezbollah's demands.¹⁴¹¹ On 21 May 2008, Secretary of State Rice publicly announced that Washington welcomed the agreement as a positive step to end the crisis in Lebanon.¹⁴¹² On the same day, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Welch held a press briefing on the current situation in the Middle East and Lebanon. In response to a question about Syria's and Iran's appreciation of Doha Agreement, Welch said that "*If Syria and Iran have supported that, then perhaps they will continue to exercise a more constructive role in Lebanon. We would like to see that. It would come as a bit of a surprise to us, but the results are what counts.*"¹⁴¹³

Until the last days of the Bush administration, the U.S.-Syrian relations were not amicable. On 5 December 2008, President Bush gave an interview to MBC TV, in which he summed up the bilateral relations since his coming to office in January 2001 by stating that:

"We have engaged Syria early in my administration with Secretary Colin Powell and others. And our message was, if you'd like to have better relations with us, stop housing Hamas, violent Hamas, stop destabilizing the democracy of Lebanon, stop facilitating the flow of terrorists into Iraq, be a constructive neighbor to countries, and we can have better relations. And they have, thus far, chosen to do that."¹⁴¹⁴

In sum, although there was harmony between Washington and Damascus to maintain stability in Lebanon in the 1990s, *modus vivendi* ended under the Bush administration. As rightly argued by Rabinovich, transition from the Clinton administration to the Bush administration brought a substantial change in Washington's perception of Syria's role in Lebanon. While the Clinton administration acknowledged Syria's hegemony, the Bush administration supported

¹⁴¹⁰ Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, 121-123.

¹⁴¹¹ Rabinovich, *Damascus, Jerusalem and Washington*, 19.

¹⁴¹² Condoleezza Rice, "United States Welcomes the Doha Agreement on Lebanon," *U.S. Department of State Archive*, May 21, 2008, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2008/05/105067.htm>.

¹⁴¹³ C. David Welch, "Briefing on Lebanon and Other Middle East Issues," *U.S. Department of State Archive*, May 21, 2008, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/nea/rls/rm/105104.htm>.

¹⁴¹⁴ George W. Bush, "Interview with Nadia Bilbassy Charters of MBC TV, December 5, 2008," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of George W. Bush, Book II-July 1 to January 20, 2009* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2009), 1430.

Lebanon's independence and democracy as one of the main objectives of the United States in the Middle East.¹⁴¹⁵ In this respect, it can be argued that changing NRCs of the United States under the Bush administration shaped its policy towards Syria in Lebanon. As the Bush administration performed the NRC of hegemon unilaterally and the NRC of tribune and agent of American values by exporting democracy forcefully in the Middle East, Syria's hegemony over Lebanon sharpened its imagination of democracy-dictatorship dichotomy. It began to view Lebanon as an arena of its struggle for democracy promotion after Iraq as Lebanon was perceived as a victim of Syria's dictatorial regime's radical and subversive activities undermining its democratic pluralist system.

In this respect, the United States capitalized on the Hariri assassination to punish Syria in Lebanon as the Assad regime did not comply with the NRCs of hegemon and tribune and agent of American values. The neocons, who were devoted to confronting Syria in Lebanon to create pro-Israeli pax-Americana in the region for a long time, was the driving force behind this policy. The Bush administration's quest to spread democracy in the Middle East and in Lebanon clashed with the role performed by the Assad regime in the 2000s.

I think President Bush's speech entitled "The Ideological Struggle of the 21st Century" in August 2006, explains his perception of Syria's role in Lebanon in terms of democracy-dictatorship dichotomy. In this speech, Bush said that:

"In Lebanon, we saw a sovereign nation occupied by the Syrian dictatorship. We also saw the courageous people of Lebanon take to the streets to demand their independence. So we worked to enforce a United Nations resolution that required Syria to end its occupation of the country. The Syrians withdrew their armed forces, and the Lebanese people elected a democratic government that began to reclaim their country."¹⁴¹⁶

5.4.4. Impossible Peace: The Syrian-Israeli Track under the Bush Administration

5.4.4.1. Bashar al-Assad and the Syrian-Israeli Peace Talks: Back to Pan-Arabism

President Clinton's failure to achieve a Syrian-Israeli peace agreement at the Geneva summit with President Assad in March 2000 marked the end of the peace talks between Damascus and Tel Aviv. Given the divergences of opinion between the two sides, it seemed that only a radical

¹⁴¹⁵ Rabinovich, "The Bush Administration, Israel and Syria," 346.

¹⁴¹⁶ George W. Bush, "Address to American Legion National Convention: The Ideological Struggle of the 21st Century, August 31, 2006," in *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001-2008*, The White House Archives, https://georgewbushwhitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Selected_Speeches_George_W_Bush.pdf, 383.

turn in Syria or Israel would rescue the peace talks from the impasse they reached. The death of Hafez al-Assad in June 2000 was deemed such a breaking point because he was conceived of an obstacle to peace in Israel and in the West owing to his personality and generation which was dedicated to eradicating Israel from the map in the 1950s and 1960s. Bashar al-Assad's ascent to power in July 2000 aroused hopes for the future of the Syrian-Israeli track as the new lion of Damascus might follow a different path from that of his father due to his promising educational background and appreciation of Western culture and thinking. Many Israeli and Western officials considered Bashar different from Hafez because he was born two years after the capture of the Golan Heights by Israel and was not bearing the burden of history and the feeling of revenge which shaped his father's decades-long attitude towards Israel. While Assad Sr. was representative of a radicalism of the nationalist Arab street in the 1950s and 1960s, Assad Jr. was a man of change in the Arab street, that is softening of anti-Israeli and anti-Western sentiment and diminishing Arab nationalism. Indeed, President Assad wanted to promote the Middle East peace process to end Syria's isolation in the international system and to overcome its long-term economic problems. In that regard, Israel perceived Bashar as a suitable partner, who might carry out public diplomacy with Israel in the peace negotiations and make use of Western and Israeli media effectively.¹⁴¹⁷

Before his election as Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad met with Secretary of State Albright in Damascus on 13 June 2000 and told her that he was willing to continue peace negotiations with Israel.¹⁴¹⁸ In the second part of his inaugural speech on 17 July 2000, President Assad elaborated on Syria's relations with Israel and the Middle East peace process. Although he used a harsh rhetoric against Israel, he did not refrain from reaffirming his commitment to peace as a "strategic choice", which was his father's pledge for a decade. Bashar said that:

"Israel still occupies our Golan and this is a topic that preoccupies us. The liberation of our territory is at the top of our national priorities and is as important to us as the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace that we have adopted as our strategic choice, but not at the expense of our territory nor at the expense of our sovereignty. Our territory and our sovereignty are a matter of national dignity and no one at all is allowed to compromise any of them. We were very clear in dealing with peace issues, firm in our stands since the beginning of the peace process in Madrid in 1991... Until this very moment they did not give us any proof that invites confidence that they have a true and genuine desire to achieve peace. Rather they have been suggesting different versions in order to cover what they truly want to do so... they suggest to give us 95% of our land and when we ask about the remaining 5% they say it is only a problem of few meters and this should not be an obstacle in the way of peace. If those few meters

¹⁴¹⁷ Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 149-150; Lesch, *Missed Opportunities*, 6.

¹⁴¹⁸ "Bashar Assad, Albright Meet in Damascus," *Washington Post*, June 14, 2000, 32.

are not a problem and should not be an obstacle in the way of peace, then why they don't return to the June 4th lines and give us 5% of the territory west of the Lake?"¹⁴¹⁹

In the same speech, President Assad also called for the Clinton administration to play the role of mediator in the peace process as follows:

“We call upon the United States to play its full role as an honest broker and a co-sponsor of the peace process. Pressure has to be exerted in order to implement the resolutions of international legitimacy with all the legitimate rights for the Lebanese, the Syrian and Palestinian people. We would like to stress here that we have the urge to reach a state of peace but we are not ready to give up an inch of our territory nor do we accept our sovereignty to be impinged upon. We would like to achieve peace because it is our strategic choice and because the Syrian people have always been, throughout history, a peace-loving people.”¹⁴²⁰

Indeed, positive messages for the renewal of the peace talks between Syria and Israel were reported from Damascus in the first months of Bashar's rule. In July 2000, it was rumored that Bashar was preparing to restart negotiations with Tel Aviv on the basis of land-for-peace formula and Israel's total withdrawal to the 4 July 1967 line.¹⁴²¹ However, early expectations for the renewal of the Syrian-Israeli track waned due to the al-Aqsa or the second intifada, which erupted after Ariel Sharon's provocative visit to the al-Aqsa Mosque in September 2000. As the al-Aqsa intifada aroused popular feelings in the Arab street due to Israel's brutal methods to put down on the protestors, there was a widespread official support for the uprising in the Arab world. President Assad was not an exception. Assad sought to capitalize on the anti-Israeli wave in the Arab street by using a militant anti-Israeli rhetoric. Despite warnings of the United States and Israel, he did not step back from supporting the militant Palestinian organizations and Hezbollah and disregarded the danger of military confrontation with Israel. In so doing, Assad aimed at assuming the leadership role for Syria in the Arab rejectionist front similar to the 1980s and promoted an Arab nationalist vision to portray himself as a leader sensitive to the feelings of his people.¹⁴²²

President Assad explained his unswerving support for the Palestinians and elaborated on his perception of peace with Israel on many occasions during the second intifada. To illustrate, at the Arab summit, held in Cairo in October 2000, to discuss aid to the Palestinians, he called

¹⁴¹⁹ “President Bashar al-Assad: inaugural address.”

¹⁴²⁰ Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 156-157.

¹⁴²¹ Zisser, “The Israel-Syria Negotiations,” 251.

¹⁴²² Hinnebusch, “Syria under Bashar,” 11-12; Zisser, “Bashar al-Assad: In or Out of the New World Order?,” 122; Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 151-152.

on the Arab states to confront Israel, demanded support for rejectionist Palestinian factions (Hamas and Islamic Jihad) stationed in Damascus, urged the Arab world to cut ties with Israel and impose an all-encompassing boycott against Israeli goods. He claimed that strategic environment in the Middle East was favorable to the Arab states. Besides, he argued that the balance of power in the Arab-Israeli conflict tilted towards the Arabs, which was proven by Hezbollah's victory over Israel in south Lebanon in May 2000. He called for a tough policy against Israel or the "peace of the strong" rather than "peace of the braves." Assad also claimed that Israel considered peace as a tactical option and opted for war despite the Arabs' willingness for peace and Syria's choice for strategic peace with Israel. So, the second intifada disclosed President Assad's Arab nationalist credentials as his remarks were reminiscent of his father's militant attitude towards Israel in early years of his rule.¹⁴²³ Nevertheless, Bashar explained Syria's posture on peace as a strategic option at the Cairo summit as follows:

"Syria wants a just and comprehensive peace with Israel. This desire reflects a strategic choice [by Syria] intended to guarantee the rights of the Arabs and the end of the Israeli occupation, so that the nations in the region will be able to live in peace, in security and in dignity.... We fought with honor, we are conducting negotiations with honor, and we will establish peace with honor.... If Israel's leaders summon up the courage needed to respond to this peace, a new dawn will burst forth in the region, security and stability will be assured, and we will establish normal peaceful relations between all the nations of the region."¹⁴²⁴

In this context, he called on the Clinton administration to broker peace in the Middle East at the Cairo summit by saying that "*For the United States, we feel that President Bill Clinton and the Secretary of State Madeleine Albright have the real intention and willingness to help parties achieve peace, a just and comprehensive peace.*" In the same month, Assad met with Secretary of State Albright in his visit to Saudi Arabia and discussed the renewal of the Syrian-Israeli peace track. However, Assad knew that neither the Clinton administration nor the Barak government were ready to resume peace talks while the violence was escalating in the region with the participation of Syria-backed groups in the second intifada. In this context, Bashar thought that resumption of the Syrian-Israeli peace talks was a remote possibility owing to the intifada and growing anti-Israeli sentiments in the Arab world. This caused a radical change in Assad's posture on the Middle East peace talks. He decided to enhance Syria's influence over the Palestinian track in line with its linkage with Hezbollah and asserted that Syria could not return to the negotiation table without improvement in the Palestinian track.¹⁴²⁵

¹⁴²³ Hinnebusch, "Globalization and Generational Change," 198-199; Hinnebusch, "Syrian Foreign Policy under Bashar al-Asad," 16; Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 159.

¹⁴²⁴ Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 156.

¹⁴²⁵ Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 121-122.

President Assad's support for the Palestinian cause during the second intifada can be observed not only in his words but also in his actions. Despite the objections of Washington, Syria continued to supply weapons with the Palestinian militant groups based in Damascus such as Hamas, the PFLP-GC and Islamic Jihad as well as Hezbollah to attack civilian and military Israeli targets. Owing to Syria's backing, Hamas and Ahmad Jibril's PFLP-GC, which was marginalized in Palestinian politics during the 1990s, turned out to be central players in the ongoing violence.¹⁴²⁶ Having seen the intensification of intifada and the support of the Arab street, Hezbollah also joined the fray and launched operations against Israeli targets in the Shebaa Farms area to bring it under Lebanese sovereignty by October 2000. The Assad regime officially endorsed the resistance and even Syrian religious authorities issued fatwas stating that martyrdom attacks of Hamas against Israeli civilians were permissible and even a duty under Islamic law.¹⁴²⁷

In addition to the second intifada, President Assad was reluctant to resume peace talks with Israel owing to the inauguration of George W. Bush as new president of the United States in January 2001 and the victory of Ariel Sharon in the February 2001 elections. Sharon was known for his stern opposition to the revival of the Syrian track on the basis of the Rabin deposit and the evacuation of the Golan Heights in exchange for peace with Damascus.¹⁴²⁸

In this milieu, President Assad began to insist by early 2001 that the Syrian-Israeli peace be a part of a comprehensive peace (which was put aside when the Palestinians began to pursue their own path in Oslo) including an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital city and preservation of the Palestinian rights of return and compensation. In so doing, Assad adopted a hard-liner and maximalist approach aiming to bolster his personal stature and Syria's position as a regional power in the Middle East. Syria's position that the Syrian-Israeli peace track could not be revived without improvement in the Palestinian track was also conveyed to Washington and publicly announced by Assad.¹⁴²⁹

President Assad gave an interview to *al-Sharq al-Awsat* on 8 February 2001, in which he outlined his posture on peace talks with Israel by indicating that he was determined to achieve

¹⁴²⁶ Gambill, "Sponsoring Terrorism: Syria and the PFLP-GC."

¹⁴²⁷ Gary C. Gambill, "Sponsoring Terrorism: Syria and Hamas," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin* 4, no. 10 (October 2002), https://www.meforum.org/meib/articles/0210_s1.htm; Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, 84.

¹⁴²⁸ Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 123.

¹⁴²⁹ Hinnebusch, "Globalization and Generational Change," 198; Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 122.

the goals of Hafez al-Assad. The most striking aspect of the interview was that he elaborated on his peace vision which was substantially diverging from that of his father. Although Hafez al-Assad had limited Syria's strategy of comprehensive peace to the Syrian and Lebanese tracks as his partners in the Madrid peace process (Jordan and the Palestinians) had signed separate peace agreements with Tel Aviv, Bashar's peace vision was signifying a return to the old Syrian position, i.e., a unified Arab front in dealing with Israel. In the interview, in opposition to his father's pragmatic and balanced peace vision, Bashar announced that agreement on the Golan Heights and Lebanon was not enough. He underlined that Syria, Lebanon and Palestine tracks were integral and must move simultaneously. He said that signing of a peace agreement between Israel and Syria did not bring comprehensive peace to the region. He also explained that Syria wanted peace but an agreement involving all Arab countries would prove real support for the intifada.¹⁴³⁰ In the interview, Assad said that:

“The ultimate goal is a just and comprehensive peace. “Comprehensive” means all the occupied territories: the Golan and Lebanon do not constitute the comprehensive peace and therefore there must be a symmetry between the Syrian and Lebanese tracks on the one hand and the Palestinian track on the other... The word “comprehensive” has a pan-Arab connotation and we insist on comprehensive peace and on cooperation and coordination with the Arabs on other tracks.”¹⁴³¹

At the Arab League summit in Amman in March 2001, President Assad reiterated Syria's objectives by stating that Syria sought a “*just and comprehensive peace based on the Madrid terms of reference, withdrawal from the Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian territories to the June 4, 1967, lines, the return of East Jerusalem, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.*”¹⁴³²

Just Ariel Sharon took office in March 2001, President Assad also told Jordanian newspaper *al-Majd* in an unofficial interview on 19 March 2001 that “*We, first of all, aim to support the popular intifada, which we see as a courageous demonstration of resistance that must not be neglected or left without support.*” President Assad surprisingly announced that newly elected prime minister of Israel dispatched a special envoy to Damascus to advance the Syrian-Israeli peace track. Yet, Assad informed the envoy about his rejection of Sharon's proposal to prevent him from maneuvering between the Syrian and Palestinian tracks. He underlined that he strongly opposed to Israel's efforts to endanger the Palestinian track and that Syria would not

¹⁴³⁰ Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, 85; Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 149-151.

¹⁴³¹ Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 122.

¹⁴³² *Ibid.* 123.

handle the issue of the Golan Heights before the resolution of the Palestinian Question including the issue of Jerusalem. The underlying reasons behind President Assad's initial tough stance were the absence of American sponsorship for peace talks and of a mechanism that would monitor Israel's commitments to peace process.¹⁴³³

The Sharon government decided to show Israel's muscles owing to the Assad regime's ongoing support for the militant Palestinian organizations and Hezbollah during the second intifada. Israeli Air Force carried out an air strikes on a Syrian radar station in the Dahr al-Baydar area of Mount Lebanon and killed a number of Syrian soldiers in retaliation to Hezbollah's attacks in the Shebaa Farms in April 2001. In July 2001, Israel attacked another Syrian radar station at Riyaq in the Beqaa Valley. However, Syria refrained from retaliating these attacks. Despite fears of Syria's retaliation, Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa said that "*Damascus will not give Sharon the satisfaction of escalating the conflict.*" During Israeli aggression, Syria could not convince Washington of restraining Tel Aviv. The Bush administration did not condemn the Israeli operations and blamed Syria for worsening situation along the Israeli-Lebanese border owing to its unwillingness to curb Hezbollah's activities.¹⁴³⁴

In the aftermath of 9/11, the prospect of Syrian-Israeli peace track seemed grim owing to Prime Minister Sharon's uncompromising posture on the Golan Heights and President Assad's harsh and uncompromising rhetoric against Israel. Although Assad endorsed Saudi-led Arab Peace Initiative envisioning the formula of "full normalization in exchange for full withdrawal from occupied territories" at the Arab summit in Beirut in March 2002, he was not comfortable with the plan prepared by Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah. For this reason, Syrian officials changed some aspects of the plan successfully by replacing the term "normalization" in the phrase of "normalization of relations" with the word "normal" signifying a limited relationship like a state of non-belligerency in time of peace with Israel.¹⁴³⁵

Assad also perceived the plan of an attempt to promote the Israeli-Palestinian peace track at the expense of the interests of Syria and to sideline Damascus in the Middle East peace process. Even though Assad reluctantly accepted the plan, he continued his uncompromising and militant rhetoric against Israel. At the summit, he declared that every Israeli occupier either

¹⁴³³ Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, 83-84; Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 162-163.

¹⁴³⁴ Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 133-134, 159-160; Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, 86.

¹⁴³⁵ Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 130-131; Ross, "U.S. Policy toward a Weak Assad," 94.

military or civilian was a legitimate target. He also said that resistance is a legitimate right and that “*as much as we are concerned about peace, we should also be eager to remain steadfast and maintain the intifada [sic].*” Although Syria began to restrain the activities of militant Palestinian groups to avoid American retaliation in the war on terror, it continued to allow Hezbollah to carry out operations across the Israeli-Lebanese border.¹⁴³⁶

5.4.4.2. Minimalist Engagement: The Bush Administration and the Syrian-Israeli Track (2001-2005)

Unlike the Clinton administration, the Bush administration was not willing to perform the NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst in the Syrian-Israeli peace track since the beginning of the first term. The Bush administration was determined to distance its Middle East policy from that of the Clinton administration and change it with its own set of unique ones. President Bush was critical of Clinton’s all-encompassing involvement in the peace process that ultimately failed to bring a genuine peace between the two sides in 2000. In this context, President Bush disbanded the State Department’s peace process team, dissolved the Office of the Special Middle East Coordinator, and gave the conduct of Middle East policy to the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. President Bush’s National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice uttered the reluctance of the Bush administration to play a mediator role in the peace process by stating that “*We shouldn’t think of American involvement for the sake of American involvement... Washington should consider it a slap at the United States or a disengaged American policy if the parties can progress on their own.*”¹⁴³⁷

There were substantial differences between the Bush administration’s and Clinton administration’s posture on the Middle East peace process. While the Clinton administration viewed the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a means of dealing with security challenges emanating from Iraq and Iran, the Bush administration replaced it with a mixture of realpolitik and ideology. The primary objective of the Bush administration was to oust dictatorial regimes of Iraq and Iran and change them with democratic and moderate ones. According to it, achieving this goal first would enhance the prospects of peace and prosperity in the core area of the Middle East and then pave way to the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Thus, the Bush administration did not make the Syrian-Israeli track its foreign policy priority in the Middle East unlike the Bush Sr. and Clinton administrations. When Powell paid

¹⁴³⁶ Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 163-164; Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria’s Waiting Game*, 84; Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 158-159, 163.

¹⁴³⁷ Rabinovich, *Damascus, Jerusalem and Washington*, 9-10; Rabinovich, “The Bush Administration, Israel and Syria,” 341-342.

his first visit to Syria in February 2001, the renewal of the peace process was not at the top of his agenda. Powell went to Damascus to dissuade Syria from helping Iraq eschew the sanction regime by pumping oil via the Kirkuk-Banias pipeline rather than discussing the peace process in detail.¹⁴³⁸ Nevertheless, Powell sought to alleviate President Assad's concern regarding the peace process in order not to alienate Syria in Washington's struggle with Iraq. In this respect, Powell said that President Assad agreed on the Bush administration's offer that the Syrian-Israeli track could go hand in hand with the Palestinian-Israeli track.¹⁴³⁹

There were the additional factors that dissuaded the Bush administration from playing the role of mediator prior to 9/11 terrorist attacks. First, President Assad's tough pan-Arab stance, his support for the militant groups during the intifada as well as his harsh anti-Israeli rhetoric severed the U.S.-Syrian relations. President Assad's radical posture on the Palestinian Question consolidated his negative image among certain groups in Congress and the Bush administration.¹⁴⁴⁰ Second, Syria's engagement with Iraq discouraged the Bush administration from playing the role of mediator in the peace talks. Third, domestic hardships such as the composition of the Senate and the split between Democrats and Republicans prevented President Bush from involving in complex issues like the Syrian-Israeli peace track. For this reason, the Bush administration relinquished its efforts to be a part of the Arab-Israeli conflict following the al-Aqsa intifada and the election of Sharon. In sum, the Bush administration pursued policy of "minimalist engagement" in the peace talks described in the parlance of the State Department in opposition to the Clinton administration's full partnership.¹⁴⁴¹

As mentioned above, the Bush administration sought to distance itself from Israel by embracing the Arab states including Syria in the global war on terror. Syria responded positively by initiating intelligence cooperation with the United States against al-Qaeda, which foiled terrorist attacks against American targets in the Middle East. In addition to its intelligence sharing, secular nature of the Syrian Baath regime was appreciated by the Bush administration as an antidote to Islamic radicalism in the Middle East. Yet, the influence of the neocons in the Bush administration spoiled the early engagement between Washington and Damascus after the Afghanistan Operation as the Middle East turned out to be the next target of democracy promotion via forceful regime change in Iraq. What's more, American and

¹⁴³⁸ Rabinovich, "The Bush Administration, Israel and Syria," 342.

¹⁴³⁹ Perlez, "Powell Proposes Easing Sanctions on Iraqi Civilians."

¹⁴⁴⁰ Lesch, *Missed Opportunities*, 7.

¹⁴⁴¹ Rabil, "The Ineffective Role of the US," 435-436; Nejad, "The Ineffective Role of the United States," 60.

Israeli officials began to equate al-Qaeda with the PLO and Osama bin Laden with Yasser Arafat. Despite Syria's intelligence cooperation, they also castigated Syria's posture by pointing to its linkage with the militant Palestinian groups and Hezbollah, which they considered nothing but a bunch of terrorists. By late 2001 and early 2002, mixed signals were coming from Washington as to Syria's role in the war on terror. While Congress was preparing the Syria Accountability Act, the Pentagon was verbally attacking Syria's position. Besides, the pressure groups such as the neocon think tanks, Christian evangelicals, Christian Lebanese, and Syrian exiles were enhancing their criticisms against Syria to persuade the Bush administration to add Syria to axis of evil composed of Iran, Iraq and North Korea. On the other hand, the State Department and President Bush were supporting engagement with Syria not for its seminal role in the peace process but for its contribution to fight al-Qaeda, which allegedly was planning to regroup in Lebanon and garner support for in the Arab world in an imminent war in Iraq. In this milieu, President Assad believed that the Bush administration might preserve status quo in the U.S.-Syrian relations and maintain its policy of engagement with Syria.¹⁴⁴²

Nevertheless, the Bush administration's preoccupation with fighting terrorism after 9/11 turned out to be the major stumbling block to its performance of the NRC of peace catalyst in the Syrian-Israeli peace track. In the post-9/11 international environment, Syria could not readjust to profound changes in U.S. foreign policy, couched in the Bush Doctrine. Although Syria thought that it could play the game with old rules, meanwhile the new rules were being written in Washington, especially in Congress, the Pentagon and the neocon think tanks, which considered the Assad regime as a source of problem rather than a solution. The Pentagon began to shape U.S. foreign policy as Washington was at war with the Taliban in Afghanistan, and with other terrorist organizations. This caused a belligerent posture in American foreign policy towards Iran and Syria. Despite the State Department's positive comments about Syria's contribution to fighting al-Qaeda, it did not have weight in foreign policy making apparatus.¹⁴⁴³

When the Bush administration began to deal with the Middle East peace process with the "Quartet" (the United States, the UN, the EU and Russia) initiative in April 2002, it focused solely on the Palestinian track and totally sidelined the Syrian track.¹⁴⁴⁴ In this period, the U.S.-

¹⁴⁴² Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 162-163.

¹⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹⁴⁴⁴ Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 123.

Syrian relations were at record low owing to Syria's backing for the militant Palestinian groups stationed in Damascus and abetting Hezbollah with Iranian supplies against Israel.¹⁴⁴⁵ When President Bush outlined his Middle East peace vision in a speech on 24 June 2002, he did not assign Syria a central place in the peace process. In his speech, Bush mentioned Syria in relation with terrorism issue by stating that:

“Syria must choose the right side in the war on terror by closing terrorist camps and expelling terrorist organizations. Leaders who want to be included in the peace process must show their deeds an undivided support for peace. We must also resolve questions concerning Jerusalem, the plight and future of Palestinian refugees, and a final peace between Israel and Lebanon, and Israel and a Syria that supports peace and fights terror.”¹⁴⁴⁶

The Syrian track was totally disregarded by the Bush administration on the way to the invasion of Iraq as Syria did not comply with the NRCs of hegemon, defender of the Pacific Union and Tribune and agent of American values. According to Assad, there was a close relationship between Israel's aspirations and the Bush administration's invasion plans as he regarded the American intentions to attack Iraq as “*a cover for the Israeli crimes and the encirclement of the Intifada and resistance.*” As mentioned above, Assad also called on the Arab leaders at the summit of Sharm al-Sheikh in March 2003 not to open their territories to American invaders, which would enable them to destroy Iraq.¹⁴⁴⁷

In this period, Assad also believed that a Syrian-Israeli peace was not possible owing to the victory of Ariel Sharon's Likud Party in the January 2003. That's why, after the start of the Operation Iraqi Freedom, he used a hawkish rhetoric against Israel in his famous interview with *al-Safir* on 27 March 2003. Assad said that:

“No one among us trusts Israel, not us in Syria, and not any of our Arab brothers. We expect an attack by Israel anytime; even if it does not threaten to attack us right now, we have to understand that Israel's way is a way of treason, a mentality it has followed ever since it was established. Its existence itself is threatening to us. This is a continuous threat. This is deeply rooted in its actions and nature and, after all, the West formed it so it will be a continuous threat for us.”¹⁴⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴⁵ Gambill, “Sponsoring Terrorism: Syria and Hamas.”

¹⁴⁴⁶ George W. Bush, “President Bush Calls for New Palestinian Leadership,” *The White House Archives*, June 24, 2002, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020624-3.html>.

¹⁴⁴⁷ Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, 92.

¹⁴⁴⁸ Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 153.

The U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003 badly soared the U.S.-Syrian relations. Syria was marginalized owing to its anti-war posture and illegal arms shipment to Iraq even before the start of the U.S.-led operation. Syria's finger in the Iraqi insurgency gave an upper hand to anti-Syrian groups led by the neocons, who were suspicious about Syria's intentions during the peace negotiations in the 1990s, in Washington as the State Department's policy of constructive engagement faltered. According to the neocons in the Bush administration, Syria must be isolated and punished with military means to change at least its anti-American and anti-Israeli posture in the Middle East. They even threatened Syria with regime change if it did not stop abetting Iraqi insurgents, its involvement in Lebanon, its support for terrorist groups and development of WMD program. Against this backdrop, it seemed that Syria would be the next target of the Bush administration after the invasion of Iraq. With the list of demands submitted in Powell's May 2003 visit, the Bush administration demonstrated that it did not care about Syria's interests in the Middle East, namely recovering the Golan Heights through peace negotiations with Israel and securing its position in Lebanon. President Assad was compelled to give signals of willingness to reinvigorate peace talks with Israel in April and May 2003 in order to break Syria's isolation in the post-invasion Middle East. However, Israel and the United States were not interested in Assad's offer as they evaluated his eagerness for fresh peace talks as a sign of his weakness and distress rather than a genuine quest for peace.¹⁴⁴⁹

While the Bush administration was escalating the pressure on Syria after the Operation Iraqi Freedom by charging Damascus with harboring senior Baathist fugitives and by supporting terrorist groups, it also demonstrated that the Syrian-Israeli track was not its priority in the Middle East. Instead, President Bush sought to advance the Palestinian-Israeli track after the invasion of Iraq as he thought that the PLO could come to terms with the United States and Israel. In this context, the Bush administration considered pressure on Syria as a way of assurances to Prime Minister Sharon in the Palestinian track. One of advisors of President Bush explained this policy as follows:

“Syria is the only country on Israel's borders still at war with it. By putting the screws to Assad, we hope to reinforce to Sharon that we'll never do anything that could compromise Israel's security. Getting tough with Syria could help us move Sharon toward peace. That really could calm the region - and that, we hope, could also calm the Islamic world's general anti-Americanism.”¹⁴⁵⁰

¹⁴⁴⁹ Lesch, *Missed Opportunities*, 10; Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, 126-127; Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, 93-94.

¹⁴⁵⁰ Kramer, “Behind Bush's Rocket to Syria.”

So, it was evident that dynamics of the Syrian-Israeli track totally changed after the invasion of Iraq as the United States' policy towards Syria turned hostile. In this milieu, President Assad had to meet all demands of the Bush administration and its neocon associates before the renewal of negotiations with Israel: expulsion of the Palestinian militant factions from Damascus, cutting ties with Hezbollah and total withdrawal from Lebanon (until 2005), which were indeed unacceptable to Syria. This meant that Syria had to sacrifice its cards in the Middle East to recover the Golan and maintain its regional influence. While Syria considered these issues as a price of a peace agreement with Israel encapsulating its withdrawal to the 4 June line, the United States and Israel wanted Syria to pay the price before the conclusion of peace treaty. This was a major shift in U.S. policy under the Bush administration towards the Syrian-Israeli track.¹⁴⁵¹

In this context, while American foreign policy was becoming more ideological and less pragmatic, Syria was losing its importance and key role in the Middle East peace process. In this period, Jordan assumed the role of Syria in the peace talks, which Damascus performed for nearly three decades. Thus, Syria and Lebanon were not invited to negotiations within the framework of the "Road Map" to the Middle East peace sponsored by the Quartet (the United States, Russia, the European Union and the UN) in Sharm al-Sheikh, Egypt on 3 June 2003. Instead of them, moderate Arab states such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Jordan and the new Palestinian PM Mahmoud Abbas participated in the summit. In so doing, the Bush administration's plan was to isolate Syria, deprive it of its cards and impose the conditions on it set along Israel's needs and interests. The main objective of the Road Map was to restart the Middle East peace process after the failure of Madrid and Oslo peace processes. By initiating such a process, the Bush administration sought to demonstrate that conquering Iraq was not its only objective in the Middle East.¹⁴⁵²

Despite Syria's exclusion from the summit and ongoing American pressures owing to Iraq, President Assad decided to give placating messages to the Bush administration about peace process. Although he initially seemed opposed to the Road Map, he demonstrated his willingness to take part in the peace talks with Israel under the leadership of the United States in order not to be isolated in the region in case of signing of an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal. On 9 June 2003, President Assad gave an interview to *al Arabiya* television and announced

¹⁴⁵¹ Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 165.

¹⁴⁵² Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, 95; Wieland, *Syria at Bay*, 130; Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 165-166.

that “Syria is interested in the Road Map not only for the Israeli-Palestinian track, but also for the Syrian-Israeli track.” Despite Assad’s positive messages, the Bush administration preferred the Israeli-Palestinian track to the Syrian-Israeli track.¹⁴⁵³ Assad admitted this fact in his interview by saying that “*The summit was concerned with the Palestinian track and the road map. I think the Syrian track for them [the United States] now has been delayed. We don’t know why, but for now it’s not on the table.*”¹⁴⁵⁴

In the same interview, Assad also admitted the changing regional dynamics in terms of Syrian-Israeli peace by stating that:

“We know that Israel is supported by the United States and that all its arsenals are open to [Israel]. This occurs at a time when the Soviet Union is no longer at our side. The world power balance has changed. Therefore, [a strategic military balance between us and Israel] is no longer on the agenda.... We must strive for an [Arab–Israeli] balance of power. No single Arab country can establish a balance of power, however limited, with Israel. Additionally, the problem is not military. I believe that the graver problem is the question of a balance of power in its broad sense: economic, technological, social and other. We must strive for this kind of balance of power with Israel, and of course Syria cannot attain it alone.”¹⁴⁵⁵

Secretary of State Powell commented on Syria’s future in the Middle East peace process in a joint press conference with Prime Minister Sharon in Jerusalem on 20 June 2003 by stating that:

“The region is changing. Saddam Hussein and that evil regime is gone. The leaders in the Middle East are committed to a peace process - using the process of the road map to get to our objective. Syria can either be a contributing member to this process, or continue to be a terror-supporting regime that does not want to be a part of this process, in which case there will consequences for such action in terms of inability to have a more positive relationship with the United States and we hope other responsible members of the international community. And we will continue to convey that message to Syria in no uncertain terms.”¹⁴⁵⁶

Powell reiterated his ideas in an interview with Israeli daily on 30 July 2003 and made it clear that it was directly related to Syria’s decision to change its rejectionist role in the Middle East. Powell stated that:

“Syria can either be a positive force or it can be a negative force. If it continues to support terrorist activity, if it continues to give haven to Hamas and PIJ and others, and Revolutionary -- Iranian Revolutionary Guards, and if it continues to facilitate the

¹⁴⁵³ Zisser, “Syria, the United States, and Iraq.”

¹⁴⁵⁴ Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 166.

¹⁴⁵⁵ Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 164.

¹⁴⁵⁶ “Joint Press Conference with Israeli Prime Minister Sharon.”

transshipment of material to Hezbollah, it will be held to account and they will be increasingly isolated as the peace process moves forward without them, and as Iraq becomes a democratic state that does not wish to work with states that continue to sponsor terrorist activity. So I think there are opportunity costs in this for Syria if they don't change their policies."¹⁴⁵⁷

President Assad continued to give positive messages to calm down the Bush administration and announced one month after the Sharm al-Sheikh conference that Syria would accept the Palestinians' decision on their future.¹⁴⁵⁸ However, Israel was discouraged by the neocons to respond to Syria's offer as they believed that a peace deal at that moment would be beneficial to Syria rather than Israel.¹⁴⁵⁹ In addition to Israel, the Bush administration maintained its tough position due to Syria's lack of support during the invasion of Iraq. Despite Syria's willingness to join the negotiations, the Bush administration dismissed Syria's views on the Road Map. Although some American and Europeans assured Syria that it would be included in the second round of road map, Syria believed that the Bush administration had no serious intention to reinvigorate the Middle East peace process.¹⁴⁶⁰

Meanwhile, the Bush administration's uncompromising attitude towards Syria led to a more Israeli though position against Syria. In August 2003, Israeli jets flew over Assad's palace at the seaside of Latakia as a message to Syria to curb Hezbollah's attacks along the Israeli-Lebanese border. More importantly, Israel bombed a training site of the Palestinian groups in the Syrian village of Ain Saheb near Damascus in October 2003. Ain Saheb Operation, which was carried out in retaliation for a suicide attack killing 22 people in Haifa claimed by Islamic Jihad, was noteworthy as it was the first Israeli attack on Syrian territory since the Yom Kippur War of 1973. Syria perceived the attack as a joint Israeli-American plot to destabilize and possibly topple the regime. It immediately condemned it and sought to pass a UNSC resolution denouncing violation of its sovereignty. Israel's Ambassador to the UN tried to legitimize the attack by pointing to other examples of fighting terrorism and its state sponsors. The Bush administration immediately declared its support for Israel's self-defense and called on both sides to ease the tension. On 6 October 2003, U.S. Ambassador to the UN John Negroponte said that Syria was "*on the wrong side of the war on terrorism.*" The Bush administration also vetoed Syria-sponsored resolution at the UNSC.¹⁴⁶¹

¹⁴⁵⁷ "Interview by Hemi Shalev of Ma'ariv Newspaper."

¹⁴⁵⁸ Simon and Stevenson, "The Road to Damascus," 114.

¹⁴⁵⁹ Hinnebusch, "Syria under Bashar," 12.

¹⁴⁶⁰ Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, 96.

¹⁴⁶¹ Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 164-165; Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria's Waiting Game*, 60; Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 167.

Given the unfavorable regional environment, President Assad decided to call for the renewal of Syrian-Israeli peace talks providing that it started where it had stopped four years ago and normalization of relations with Israel in an interview with New York Times in November 2003.¹⁴⁶² Assad called on the Bush administration to revive the Syrian-Israeli track as the peace deal had been 80 percent complete before his accession to power.¹⁴⁶³ Despite President Assad's overtures to restart negotiations with Israel just before signing the SALSA into law, the Sharon government was not keen to return to table as it was strongly against total withdrawal from the Golan Heights even in exchange for normal diplomatic relations and security guarantees given by Syria. Thus, Sharon dismissed Assad's offer and uttered Israel's long-lasting demand that Syria stop its sponsorship of terrorist organizations. In late December, Israel also declared that it would spend \$90 million to expand Jewish settlements in the Golan Heights by building 900 new homes within three years. Israeli Minister of Agriculture Yisrael Katz underlined his government's position on the Golan by saying that "*the Golan is an inseparable part of the state of Israel, and we have no intention to give up our hold.*"¹⁴⁶⁴

The passing of the SALSA in Congress in December 2003 was yet another response to President Assad's peace call. President Bush approved the SALSA on 12 December 2003, in which his administration's minimalist approach towards the Syrian-Israeli track could be seen as well.¹⁴⁶⁵ In the SALSA, it was demanded that "*the Governments of Lebanon and Syria should enter into serious unconditional bilateral negotiations with the Government of Israel in order to realize a full and permanent peace.*"¹⁴⁶⁶ In this context, the United States insisted that Syria enter peace negotiations unconditionally instead of bringing the two parties to the table with the earlier negotiation positions, in which they made substantial concessions. In so doing, both Congress and the Bush administration demonstrated that they rejected moderate position of the Barak government and welcomed the rejectionist posture of the Sharon government. Congress' and the Bush administration's call for bilateral Israel-Syria and Israel-Lebanon negotiations meant the violation of UN Security Council Resolution 338 calling for

¹⁴⁶² Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, 97; Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 167.

¹⁴⁶³ Neil MacFarquhar, "Syria Pressing for Israel Talks," *New York Times*, December 1, 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/01/world/syrian-pressing-for-israel-talks.html>.

¹⁴⁶⁴ Zunes, "U.S. Policy towards Syria," 58-59; Ma'oz, *Syria's Role in the Region*, 22.

¹⁴⁶⁵ Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 168.

¹⁴⁶⁶ "Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003."

multilateral negotiations among the parties given the interconnectedness of the concerns of three states.¹⁴⁶⁷

In early January 2004, President Assad again transmitted his willingness to restart peace negotiations through Turkish intermediaries and hinted that he was ready for negotiations without preconditions. In the Israeli press, it was claimed that Syria was willing to give up its former claims over the northeastern shore of Lake Tiberias. Senator Bill Nelson, who met with Assad in the same month, told Haaretz that Assad agreed to restart peace negotiations without demanding that it start where it had stopped. Yet, Assad did not give these messages publicly and Syrian officials denied claims about negotiations without preconditions. However, the Bush and the Sharon governments interpreted Bashar's positive messages as an indication of his weakness rather than as a genuine desire for peace. Israel was not keen to believe the words but actions of Syria as it was still hosting the militant Palestinian groups in Damascus and supporting Hezbollah in Lebanon. Sharon said that peace negotiations could only start if Syria stopped its support for the militant Palestinians groups stationed in Damascus and Hezbollah in Lebanon. To measure Syria's seriousness, Israel's President Moshe Katsav invited Assad to Jerusalem to hold meeting about peace, but Syria rejected such an offer as a trick to eschew serious peace negotiations.¹⁴⁶⁸

Above all, the Bush administration was still unenthusiastic about performing the NRC of peace catalyst between Syria and Israel. The Bush administration was not interested in Assad's peace initiatives and instead of dealing with the Syrian-Israeli track it suggested that Syria follow the Libyan example and voluntarily give up its WMDs. In January 2004, Assistant Secretary of State William Burns said that the Bush administration was generally supportive of the Syrian-Israeli peace track but did not give no official response to Assad's messages.¹⁴⁶⁹ In fact, the United States under Bush Jr. was not eager to improve its relations with Syria as it was viewed as a threat and one of the evil regimes in opposition to Bush Sr. administration's perception of Syria during the Gulf Crisis when Syria was accepted as a potential ally of the United States against Saddam Hussein. Mediating Syrian-Israeli peace talks was a priority of the previous administrations and achieving Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon and ending its

¹⁴⁶⁷ Zunes, "U.S. Policy towards Syria," 58.

¹⁴⁶⁸ Gary C. Gambill, "Assad's Desperate Diplomacy," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin* 6, no. 1 (January 2004), https://www.meforum.org/meib/articles/0401_s1.htm; Simon and Stevenson, "The Road to Damascus," 118.

¹⁴⁶⁹ Simon and Stevenson, "The Road to Damascus," 110; Ziadeh, *Power and Policy in Syria*, 97.

support for terrorist organizations were considered secondary and could be solved after a final peace settlement was achieved. But this changed with the coming of Bush W. Bush.¹⁴⁷⁰

President Bush's decision to implement SALSA on 11 May 2004 was a further blow to the U.S.-Syrian relations. In his letter to Congress on the day of signing, President Bush pointed to Syria's role as a stumbling block to peace in the Middle East by stating that:

“Syria's support for terrorism, its military presence in Lebanon, its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, and its actions to undermine US and international efforts with respect to the stabilization and reconstruction of Iraq are sufficiently grave to constitute a threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States. These policies by the Government of Syria directly threaten regional stability and undermine the U.S. goal of a comprehensive Middle East peace.”¹⁴⁷¹

In the summer of 2004, President Assad also publicly demonstrated his readiness to resume peace talks with Israel. In July 2004, he reportedly told UN Middle East Envoy Terje Røed-Larsen that “*we must find a mechanism to re-launch talks. Syria has not requested that any party be included in the roadmap because the Syrian track is based on [UN] Security Council resolutions and on the principle of land-for-peace formula.*” When Syrian and Israeli officials visited Turkey simultaneously in July 2004, it was rumored that Tel Aviv and Damascus were preparing for the resumption of the negotiations under Turkish mediation. Besides, Chief of Staff of the IDF Moshe Yaalon announced that Israel would be prepared to evacuate the Golan in exchange for peace with Syria as the IDF was capable of defending Israel without the Golan Heights. Yaalon's remarks aroused hopes for the renewal of peace talks between Israel and Syria.¹⁴⁷²

In the second half of 2004, there were significant developments in the U.S.-Syrian-Israeli triangle. After Secretary of State Powell's meeting with Sharaa in September 2004, former Assistant Secretary of State and Ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk met with President Assad in Damascus in October 2004. Indyk announced that President Assad was ready to strike a peace deal with Israel and to cooperate with the United States to stabilize Iraq. Indyk said that “*Something is going on in Syria and it is time for us to pay attention.*” He observed a “*clear*

¹⁴⁷⁰ Zisser, “Bashar al-Assad: In or Out of the New World Order?,” 125; Gambill, “Assad's Desperate Diplomacy.”

¹⁴⁷¹ George W. Bush, “Message to the Congress Transmitting the Executive Order Blocking Property of Certain Persons and Prohibiting the Export of Certain Goods to Syria, May 11, 2004,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of George W. Bush, Book I- January 1 to June 30, 2004* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2005), 853.

¹⁴⁷² Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 169.

change” in Syria’s attitude as President Assad offered the renewal of the peace talks with Israel without preconditions, but he had insisted on returning to the negotiation table where they halted during the Clinton administration. Indyk also said that President Assad gave up his demand that Israel should first sign a peace agreement with the Palestinians and then resume peace talks with Syria. However, Israel assassinated a senior Hamas member in Damascus in September 2004 to demonstrate Syria’s connection with terrorism. The Lahoud crisis in September 2004 strained the U.S.-Syrian relations and further complicated the scene in the Middle East process.¹⁴⁷³

In sum, there was no serious development to restart the Syrian-Israeli peace track till the end of the Bush administration’s first term as President Bush made the Israeli-Palestinian track his priority. On 19 December 2004, President Bush publicly summarized his attitude to the Syrian-Israeli track by saying that “*Now al-Asad needs to wait - first peace between Israel and Palestine, and then we’ll see what to do with Syria.*”¹⁴⁷⁴

5.4.4.3. No More Mediation: The Bush Administration and the Syrian-Israeli Track (2005-2009)

At the beginning of the Bush administration’s second term in 2005, there was no sign of improvement in the Syrian-Israeli track as well as in the U.S.-Syrian relations. Amid reports on the Bush administration’s plans to launch military strikes against Syria in January 2005 to force it to end its support for the Palestinians’ attacks after election of Mahmoud Abbas, Syrian Foreign Minister Sharaa called on Israel on 24 January 2005 (just four days after Bush’s second inauguration) to restart the peace talks and promised to attain peace in exchange for Israel’s total evacuation of the Golan Heights. He also congratulated Mahmoud Abbas for his election as the new president of the Palestinian Authority on 9 January 2005 to demonstrate Syria’s openness to progress on other peace tracks.¹⁴⁷⁵

Nevertheless, the new Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice blamed Syria for damaging the U.S.-Syrian relations and for being an obstacle to the Arab-Israeli peace process as well as political reforms that Washington was trying to implement in the Middle East. These comments were interpreted as the United States’ determination to bring down the Assad regime sooner or later. Syria considered the fissure in the relationship with Washington as an

¹⁴⁷³ Ibid., 169-172.

¹⁴⁷⁴ “Syria: Israel does not want peace,” *Al Jazeera*, December 27, 2004, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2004/12/27/syria-israel-does-not-want-peace>.

¹⁴⁷⁵ Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus*, 173.

extension of Israel's influence in Washington or malicious anti-Syrian inclination of the Americans to blame Syria for everything. However, President Assad was confident that the United States did not want a "second Iraq" in the Middle East. He was sure of Syria's central position in the Middle East and said that "*The Americans would ultimately understand that we [Syria] are the key to the solution. We are vital to the renewal of the peace process [and] to the future of Iraq, and one day you will see that they will come knocking on our door.*"¹⁴⁷⁶

The Hariri assassination, the ongoing security problems along the Syrian-Israeli border and Syria's connection with the militant Palestinian groups as well as Hezbollah put the United States and Syria on a collision course during the second Bush administration. President Bush regarded Syria's support for terrorist organizations particularly as an obstacle to comprehensive peace and its hegemony over Lebanon as a major impediment to development of democracy in the Middle East. Thus, contrary to other post-Cold War administrations, the Bush administration did not perceive Syria of a partner in the Middle East peace process but as a radical spoiler. President Bush expressed his perception of Syria to news reporters on 12 October 2005 as follows: "*We're making good progress toward peace in the Holy Land, but one of the areas of concern is that foreign countries, such as Syria, might try to disrupt the peace process through encouraging terrorist activities.*"¹⁴⁷⁷

Ehud Olmert, who was Head of the Kadima Party, became the caretaker prime minister when Prime Minister Ariel Sharon suffered a serious stroke in early 2006. Then, Olmert won the March 2006 elections and formed a new cabinet in the spring of 2006. Initially, Prime Minister Olmert followed Sharon's uncompromising posture on the Syrian track. Olmert's main aim was to obtain a mandate to resolve the Palestinian issue and to keep the Golan Heights out of his agenda. Even though President Assad and senior Syrian officials maintained their will to restart the talks, he refused Syria's peace overtures. Olmert also hinted that his standing was an extension of the Bush administration's objections to the renewal of the Syrian-Israeli peace track, which would curb the American efforts to isolate and delegitimize the Assad regime.¹⁴⁷⁸

¹⁴⁷⁶ Zisser, *Commanding Syria*, 145-146.

¹⁴⁷⁷ George W. Bush, "Remarks Following Discussions with President Aleksander Kwasniewski of Poland and an Exchange with Reporters, October 12, 2005," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of George W. Bush, Book II-July 1 to December 31, 2005* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006), 1546.

¹⁴⁷⁸ Rabinovich, *Damascus, Jerusalem and Washington*, 16-17; Itamar Rabinovich, *How to Talk and How Not to Talk to Syria: Assessing the Obstacles to and Opportunities in A Future Israeli-Syrian-American Peace Negotiation*, Middle East Memo No 18 (Washington D.C., The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, 2010), 3.

Indeed, it was not a secret that the Bush administration publicly expressed its reservations and ideological objections to peace talks between Tel Aviv and Damascus, which could strengthen the Assad regime, without receiving anything from it in Lebanon, in the Middle East or in the international arena.¹⁴⁷⁹

Nevertheless, Olmert decided to change his attitude towards peace talks with Syria as he began to view direct rejection of Syria's offers as an unwise policy. Thus, Olmert began to present a list of demands that Syria would have to meet before the start of negotiations rather than rejecting the idea of peace talks itself. It was not only the Olmert government but also the Bush administration recalibrated its attitude towards the Syrian-Israeli peace track. President Bush softened his attitude and gave up expressing his opposition to the Syrian-Israeli talks. Nonetheless, he explained that it was not the business of Washington but the duty of the parties to reach an agreement. He also reiterated that the United States would not be a party in the negotiations. As Syria saw peace agreement with Israel as a part of a larger settlement with the United States, the Bush administration's new posture became an impediment to a peace agreement between Tel Aviv and Damascus.¹⁴⁸⁰

The Israel-Hezbollah War in the summer of 2006, which escalated the tension between Damascus and Tel Aviv, was a serious blow to the hopes for renewal of the peace talks between the two countries. Syria supplied advanced weapons to Hezbollah during the war and threatened to join the war on the side of Hezbollah. The Bush administration sought to use Israel as a card to undermine Syria and tried to persuade Israel to open a second front against Damascus during the war. Yet, Tel Aviv rejected the Bush administration's offer.¹⁴⁸¹ In his memoirs, President Bush explained his policy towards Syria in the Israel-Hezbollah War by stating that "*In the short run, I wanted to see Hezbollah and their backers badly damaged. In the long run, our strategy was to isolate Iran and Syria as a way to reduce their influence and encourage change from within.*"¹⁴⁸²

Following the war, having seen the success of Hezbollah and failure of the IDF, President Assad confidently claimed victory against Israel in a speech to the journalists' convention on

¹⁴⁷⁹ Eyal Zisser, "It's a Long Road to Peace with Syria: From the Second Lebanon War to Peace Overtures in Ankara," *Strategic Assessment* 11, No. 2 (November 2008): 109.

¹⁴⁸⁰ Rabinovich, *Damascus, Jerusalem and Washington*, 17.

¹⁴⁸¹ Eyal Zisser, "The Failure of U.S. Policy toward Damascus," *Middle East Quarterly* 20:4 (Fall 2013): 61; Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria's Waiting Game*, 85.

¹⁴⁸² Bush, *Decision Points*, 414.

15 August 2006. Assad threatened Israel that if it did not restart the peace process with Syria and evacuate the Golan Heights to the shore of Lake Tiberias, it would face a new confrontation on the Golan similar to that of between Israel and Hezbollah. Assad said that Syria would not wait for the return of the Golan indefinitely and carry out a resistance strategy (*muqawama*) predicated on the model of Hezbollah, which forced Israel to withdraw from south Lebanon in May 2000 without receiving anything in exchange. Assad's threatening speech opened a new era of ambivalence in Syrian-Israeli relations. While Syria and Israel started a military build-up due to fear of military confrontation, which caused a tense atmosphere and a sense of imminent war, ironically activities speeded up in Tel Aviv and Damascus for the renewal of the peace negotiations. Following the war, President Assad called on Israel to the restart of the peace talks many times and announced his willingness to sign a peace treaty with Tel Aviv. In Israel, experts and commentators promoted the idea of the reinvigoration of the Syrian-Israeli peace track owing to Israel's deteriorating strategic situation in the wake of the war in Lebanon.¹⁴⁸³

It seemed that the balance of power was in favor of Syria in the wake of the war and thereby the Assad regime was much more willing to initiate fresh peace talks with Israel. To illustrate, Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Miqdad said in a visit to Oman on 27 August 2006 that "*When Israel, supported by the US, is ready to resume the peace process on the basis of international resolutions, Syria will be constantly ready to achieve results that restore the Arabs' legitimate rights, notably a just peace... We will continue our efforts to bring about a just peace.*"¹⁴⁸⁴ In an interview with Der Spiegel on 24 September 2006, President Assad clarified his position on the peace talks as follows:

"I do not share the view that Israel should be wiped off the map. After all, we want to make peace with it. I believe that any time is the right time for making peace, especially following a war. Syria and Israel can live side by side in harmony and recognize each other's existence. We held talks in the 1990s, and we do not conduct negotiations with a country only in order to wipe it off the map afterwards."¹⁴⁸⁵

On the other hand, Prime Minister Olmert did not embrace Syria's peace overtures as he did not want to enter negotiations in a position of weakness after Israel's failure in the war against Hezbollah.¹⁴⁸⁶ Olmert refused Assad's appeal by allegedly stating that "*As long as I am prime*

¹⁴⁸³ Zisser, "It's a Long Road to Peace with Syria," 109-110.

¹⁴⁸⁴ Quoted in Lesch, *Missed Opportunities*, 33.

¹⁴⁸⁵ Zisser, "It's a Long Road to Peace with Syria," 119.

¹⁴⁸⁶ Lesch, *Missed Opportunities*, 23.

minister, the Golan Heights will remain in our hands forever because it is an inseparable part of Israel.” Yet, he later said that he was misquoted. Then, Olmert underscored that Israel would renew talks with Syria providing that Assad stopped its support for Hezbollah and terrorism. In this period, it was reported that the Bush administration discouraged Israel from resuming peace talks with Syria as it opposed to the renewal of dialog within the framework of its policy of isolation towards Syria.¹⁴⁸⁷

In the second half of 2006, there were some informal and backchannel contacts between Israel and Syria with Turkey’s mediation and Swiss help. Ibrahim Suleiman, a Syrian-American businessman, and Alon Liel, a former Director General of the Israel’s Foreign Ministry, prepared an unofficial plan to attain Syrian-Israeli peace. This unofficial initiative sought to transform the Golan Height into a demilitarized zone under Syria’s sovereignty which would be accessed by citizens of Israel without visa. According to the document, Israel would control the upper Jordan River and Lake Tiberias and Tel Aviv and Damascus would establish normal diplomatic relations. On the other hand, neither Syria nor Israel endorsed the private initiative. Prime Minister Olmert said that “*No one in the government was involved in this matter. It was a private initiative.*” Syria’s state-run Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) reported from a Foreign Ministry official that Israel’s report was “*completely baseless and unfounded.*” The private initiative did not stimulate the Syrian-Israeli peace track while the United States and Israel were criticizing Syria’s support for Hezbollah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, its efforts to destabilize Lebanon, its connection with the Iraqi insurgents fighting American troops and its strategic relationship with Iran.¹⁴⁸⁸

In late 2006, expectations for the U.S.-Syrian dialog were high after the victory of the Democrats in both houses of Congress in the November 2006 mid-term elections. On the other hand, the Bush administration maintained its tough position against Syria. In late November 2006, NSA Stephen Hadley elaborated on the administration’s attitude towards Syria at a press briefing. Hadley strongly underlined that Syria could not be a partner in the Middle East peace process by saying that:

“Syria, which is clearly putting pressure on the Lebanese democracy, is a supporter of terror, is both provisioning and supporting Hezbollah and facilitating Iran in its

¹⁴⁸⁷ International Crisis Group, *Restarting Israeli-Syrian Negotiations*, Middle East Report No. 63 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2007), 2-3.

¹⁴⁸⁸ Greg Myre, “A private Israeli-Syrian effort for the Golan Heights revealed,” *New York Times*, January 16, 2007, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/16/world/africa/16iht-mideast.4227244.html>; Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria’s Waiting Game*, 85.

efforts to support Hezbollah, is supporting the activities of Hamas. This is not a Syria that is on an agenda to bring peace and stability to the region, and I think Prime Minister Olmert said, under those circumstances, with that kind of Syrian policy, how can you talk about negotiating on the Golan Heights? Seems to me that's a sensible position."¹⁴⁸⁹

A senior administration official also expressed the United States' concerns about Israel's engagement with Syria within the context of Middle East peace process by pointing to its repercussions in Lebanon as follows:

"If Syria is serious and Israel wants to engage with it, we will not object. But the real problem today with Syria is unrelated to the Golan. It has to do with Lebanon. Syria is as single-minded on this as possible: they want to stop the tribunal [related to the al-Hariri assassination] and reassert their influence in Lebanon. They will do what they can to achieve both, so there is a cost to any of us dealing with Syria because a deal on any other issue – Iraq or the Golan – necessarily would come at Lebanon's expense."¹⁴⁹⁰

There were other voices in Washington calling for an engagement with Syria. The most prominent of these voices was James Baker's Iraq Study Group, which published a report on Iraq on 6 December 2006. In the report, it was underlined that growing problems in Iraq could only be resolved by engaging with Iraq's neighbors and improving American position in the region. The report suggested that the Bush administration launch a broader regional diplomatic initiative including a dialog with Damascus. The group urged the U.S.-Syrian dialog as a part of comprehensive diplomatic initiative in the Middle East that would pave the way for renewal of peace negotiations and finally a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace. According to the group, this policy would bolster the United States' position in Iraq and contain Iran's influence in this country. On the other hand, President Bush dismissed the idea of reaching a *modus vivendi* with Syria offered by the Iraq Study Group by adopting policy of regime change in Syria. The Bush administration anticipated that Syria could be distanced from Iran not via diplomatic means but through pressure and isolation. That's why, it enhanced pressures on Syria by allying with Sunni Arab states such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, all of which were afraid of a Shiite Crescent dominated by Iran. Yet, Israel opposed to U.S.-sponsored regime change in Damascus due to fear of another Iraq-like chaos and the absence of viable alternative to the Assad regime.¹⁴⁹¹

¹⁴⁸⁹ Stephen Hadley, "Press Briefing by National Security Advisor Steve Hadley," *The White House Archives*, November 28, 2006, <https://georgewbushwhitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/11/20061128-14.html>.

¹⁴⁹⁰ International Crisis Group, *Restarting Israeli-Syrian Negotiations*, 5.

¹⁴⁹¹ Sadat and Jones, "U.S. Foreign Policy toward Syria," 98; Lesch, *Missed Opportunities*, 24.

In 2007, there were some developments in the U.S.-Syrian-Israeli triangle regarding the peace talks. There were several high-level ministerial contacts between the Bush administration and the Assad regime throughout 2007. For example, Secretary of State Rice met with Syrian officials at Iraq's neighbors conference on 4 May 2007 in Sharm al-Sheikh, Egypt. The Rice-Muallem meeting was interpreted as a sign of crucial change in the Bush administration's policy as it had adopted an uncompromising position for a long time. On the other hand, in addition to President Bush's reluctance, Prime Minister Olmert and many Israelis were skeptical about negotiating with Syria owing Assad's defiant attitude. When Prime Minister Olmert invited Syria to restart the peace talks in early June 2007, he underlined Israel's security concerns about Syria's support for militant groups as preconditions. But Assad did not respond to his call for a few days and Olmert blamed him for refusing Israel's peace offer.¹⁴⁹²

Bush and Olmert played down the expectations for future negotiations with Syria at a joint press conference at the White House on 19 June 2007. In response to a question President Bush refused to play the role of mediator between Israel and Syria. Olmert uttered his suspicion about Assad as a peace leader and explained that the conditions were not suitable to restart peace talks with Syria.¹⁴⁹³ It seemed that the United States and Israel chose promoting Mahmoud Abbas after the victory of Hamas in Gaza instead of rejuvenating the Syrian-Israeli peace track. President Assad responded the Bush-Olmert meeting by announcing his willingness to hold open peace talks with Israel under auspices of Turkey. Yet, Assad made it clear that Israel must totally withdraw from the Golan Heights to start the negotiations.¹⁴⁹⁴

In his address to the People's Assembly at the beginning of his second term on 17 July 2007, Assad elaborated on Syria's preconditions for the renewal of the talks with Israel as follows:

“The first option is a public declaration of the Israeli prime minister to the Israeli public saying that peace with Syria means returning all of the land [the Golan Heights] and an Israeli withdrawal to the lines of June 4, 1967. The second option is giving a written pledge – similar to the Rabin deposit [which would guarantee, at the conclusion of the negotiations, the full return to the Syrians of the Golan Heights up to the lines of June 4, 1967]. The third option, which is the required minimum as far as Syria is concerned, is the existence of secret and indirect contacts with Israel, i.e.,

¹⁴⁹² Ma'oz, *Syria's Role in the Region*, 18-22.

¹⁴⁹³ George W. Bush, “Remarks Prior to Discussions with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel and an Exchange with Reporters, June 19, 2007,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Administration of George W. Bush, Book I-January 1 to June 30, 2007* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2008), 769.

¹⁴⁹⁴ Scheller, *The Wisdom of Syria's Waiting Game*, 85.

indirect contacts through a mediating country with a view to arriving at an acceptable approach with regard to the negotiations and their results.”¹⁴⁹⁵

While the Bush administration ratcheted up pressure on Syria owing to its alleged involvement in nuclear activities with North Korea’s help after Israel’s air strike on a nuclear facility in Syrian town al-Kibar on 6 September 2007,¹⁴⁹⁶ a noteworthy attempt to renew the Syrian-Israeli peace talks came from Secretary of State Rice. On 23 September 2007, Rice invited Syria to participate in the Middle East peace conference, to be held in Annapolis in November 2007. Rice’s invitation was interpreted as the recognition that the Bush administration understood impossibility of sidelining Syria for a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.¹⁴⁹⁷

Rice was making substantial efforts to prepare the ground for the negotiations as she met with Walid Muallem weeks before the conference in Ankara, Turkey on 3 November 2007. It seemed that the departure of many leading neoconservatives from the Bush administration especially from the Department of Defense tilted the balance to the realists and gave the Department of State upper hand in foreign policy. In this context, Syria once again began to appear as a key actor in Middle East to sustain stability and achieve peace after the debacle in Iraq.¹⁴⁹⁸ On the other hand, VP Cheney opposed to Rice’s initiative as it could be interpreted as turning a blind eye to Syria’s efforts to build a covert nuclear facility and its role in jihadist flow into Iraq and killing of the American soldiers. Cheney was also critical of Syria’s subversive activities in Lebanon through Hezbollah after the Hariri assassination. Hence, he argued that Syria must be held accountable not engaged.¹⁴⁹⁹

On 27 November 2007, Syria joined the Annapolis Conference with Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Miqdad to demonstrate its discomfort with the Bush administration’s policies. Nevertheless, Syria’s participation was significant a few months after Israel’s attack on a northeastern Syrian town al-Kibar.¹⁵⁰⁰ Rice wanted to see Syria in the conference because she was concerned about the possibility of Syria’s sabotage to her peace overall initiative. In her

¹⁴⁹⁵ Zisser, “It’s a Long Road to Peace with Syria,” 115.

¹⁴⁹⁶ Mark Mazzetti and Helene Cooper, “U.S. Official Says Syria May Have Nuclear Ties,” *New York Times*, September 15, 2007, 7.

¹⁴⁹⁷ Helene Cooper, “U.S. Will Invite Syria to Peace Conference,” *New York Times*, September 24, 2007, 7.

¹⁴⁹⁸ Sadat and Jones, “U.S. Foreign Policy toward Syria,” 98.

¹⁴⁹⁹ Cheney&Liz Cheney, *In My Time*, 479-480.

¹⁵⁰⁰ Rabinovich, *Damascus, Jerusalem and Washington*, 16.

memoirs, Rice wrote about the Annapolis Conference that “*The speeches were overwhelmingly positive. Even the Syrian was conciliatory, and I made sure to treat him with respect. Of course Damascus had sent its deputy foreign minister. That’s fitting, I thought. One foot in the international community and one foot in terrorism.*”¹⁵⁰¹

Especially, the Israeli government backed Rice’s engagement with Syria as Tel Aviv had its own interest in Syria’s participation mainly keeping the northern front safe and calm. Owing to Israel’s interest, Rice was able to overcome the White House’s opposition. In the end, the Annapolis Conference did not yield any tangible result and Syria’s low-profile participation in the conference did not bring a breakthrough in the Syrian-Israeli track.¹⁵⁰² President Assad said that “*It is perhaps too late to talk about peace in the last year of this U.S. Administration. It will be preoccupied with elections.*” Prime Minister Olmert also announced that “*Conditions are not yet at the point for talks with Syria... There’s enough that we will have to do that will be heartbreaking.*”¹⁵⁰³

In fact, Syria considered the Annapolis Conference as a platform to advance the Israeli-Palestinian track and to sideline Syria’s interests. Meanwhile, there emerged diverge of opinion between the Department of State and the White House, despite Rice’s efforts to embrace Syria, President Bush maintained his anti-Syria and anti-Assad posture. When he hosted a delegation of Syrian dissidents in the Oval Office on 4 December 2007, relations between Washington and Damascus strained once again.¹⁵⁰⁴

In the beginning of 2008, Olmert began to think that the balance of power between Israel and Syria-Hezbollah bloc was restored and the security situation along Israel’s northern border was unfavorable to Israel’s enemies. At that juncture, Prime Minister Olmert decided to restart the talks with Syria and to try to attain a peace agreement with Damascus under the aegis of Turkish mediation. Prime Minister Olmert transmitted his commitment to the Rabin deposit of 1993 (Israel’s willingness to retreat to the 4 June 1967 line) to President Assad via Turkish

¹⁵⁰¹ Rice, *No Higher Honor*, 615.

¹⁵⁰² Zisser, “It’s a Long Road to Peace with Syria,” 113.

¹⁵⁰³ Sharp, *Syria: Background and U.S. Relations*, 22.

¹⁵⁰⁴ Lawson, *Global Security Watch – Syria*, 158.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in February 2008. President Assad revealed Olmert's message and its content in his interview with Qatari newspaper *al-Watan* on 24 April 2008.¹⁵⁰⁵

In mid-April 2008, Prime Minister Olmert also gave a series of interviews about the nature of Syrian-Israeli negotiations. He said that the Israeli-Syrian talks were serious and that he was aware of the consequences of a potential deal between the two sides. Olmert said that "*I will only say one thing, and I am serious and mean what I say: "There is room for a process which will lead to an agreement between Israel and Syria. The Syrians know I want this. They know what my expectations are, and I think I know what their expectations are."*¹⁵⁰⁶ On 21 May 2008, both Syria and Israel simultaneously announced the renewal of the indirect peace negotiations with Turkish mediation, which would transform into all-encompassing direct negotiations. After the announcement, they started to hold indirect negotiations in Turkey. Both Israel and Syria had stakes in disclosure of the secret negotiations. President Assad wanted to strengthen his hand in international diplomatic arena owing to the Bush administration's ongoing policy of isolation. Prime Minister Olmert sought to give hopes to Israeli society which was demoralized by series of regional developments especially security threats emanating from Iran and Hezbollah.¹⁵⁰⁷

The timing of announcement in May 2008 was quite interesting as Olmert was having political and personal troubles at home such as corruption charges and declining domestic support base. Another development that pushed Olmert to rejuvenate the Syrian track and to announce it was that Israel discovered a North Korea-sponsored nuclear facility in northeastern Syrian town al-Kibar, which was successfully destroyed by Israeli warplanes on 6 September 2007.¹⁵⁰⁸ Interestingly, al-Kibar operation commenced a complex dialog between Damascus and Tel Aviv. By carrying out such an operation, the Olmert government sought to restore the balance of power in the Israeli-Syrian relations after the Israel-Hezbollah War of 2006, to reestablish Israel's deterrence against Syria and to expose President Assad's war threats as mere bluff. It was a bold decision to execute the operation, but Israel did not humiliate Syria to the point at which the Assad regime would respond with military force. President Assad

¹⁵⁰⁵ Zisser, "It's a Long Road to Peace with Syria," 114-115.

¹⁵⁰⁶ Rabinovich, *Damascus, Jerusalem and Washington*, 17.

¹⁵⁰⁷ Rabinovich, "The Bush Administration, Israel and Syria," 351; Rabinovich, *Damascus, Jerusalem and Washington*, 17.

¹⁵⁰⁸ Al-Kibar facility was a source of concern for the Bush administration. In the summer of 2007, foreign policy team discussed military strike on the facility but President Bush did not embrace this idea and opted for diplomatic pressure. See Cheney & Cheney, *In My Time*, 470-473.

again avoided retaliation by military means by saying that it would serve Israel's interests. Israel also assassinated Hezbollah's military commander Imad Mughniyeh in February 2008 in Damascus and Assad's military advisor Muhammad Suleiman in Tartus in August 2008. Syria avoided harsh reaction and even did not blame Israel for the assassinations. Even two months after the Mughniyeh event, Syria announced the renewal of the indirect talks with Israel under Turkish mediation. Thus, publicizing the indirect negotiations in a sense gave President Assad an explanation to Syrian society why he did not resort to force against Israel. In that regard, it is noteworthy that when the Bush administration disclosed in the spring of 2008 intelligence information about North Korea's assistance to Syria by releasing photographic images of the nuclear site before Israel's bombardment to embarrass Syria and North Korea, Bouthaina Shaban alleged that the Olmert government had accepted full withdrawal from the Golan Heights. Yet, Prime Minister Olmert refused to comment about Shaban's remarks.¹⁵⁰⁹

In the talks, Israel was represented by Head of Prime Minister's Office Yoram Turbowicz and his advisor Shalom Turjeman, Syria was represented by Foreign Ministry Advisor Riad Daoudi, who took part in the negotiations with the Israelis since the 1990s. Although the content and the progress of the indirect peace talks were not revealed, it was reported that both sides reached an agreement on security and other issues after four rounds of indirect negotiations. During the negotiations, Israel sought to receive a commitment from Syria regarding its alliance with Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas as well as normalized relations and security arrangements. Syria, for its part, sought to extract a formal and binding promise from Israel as to withdrawal to the 4 June 1967 line. In June 2008, it became clear that negotiations would not produce tangible results for a peace agreement. Yet, both sides kept continuing negotiations. It was questionable to what extent the Olmert government had authority and power to give commitments to Syria before February 2009 elections while he had serious domestic political problems. The Syrian side was not enthusiastic about peace talks while the Bush administration was edging towards the end of its second term. According to the Syrian officials, having peace talks with Israel would be more meaningful after the election of new American administration. Syria also maintained its anti-American regional position and its posture on the issues of negotiation. For example, President Assad visited Iran in early August 2008 to alleviate Iran's concerns about peace talks and Syria's future stance in the region. Syria also continued to provide advanced weapons to Hezbollah to demonstrate its animosity

¹⁵⁰⁹ Rabinovich, *Damascus, Jerusalem and Washington*, 17-18; Zisser, "It's a Long Road to Peace with Syria," 108, 112; Henriksen, *America and the Rogue States*, 168-169.

against Israel. At the summit of heads of Mediterranean states in Paris in July 2008, President Assad refused to meet with Olmert and shake hands with him.¹⁵¹⁰

Although President Bush was informed about the announcement of Syrian-Israeli indirect talks, he castigated the idea of negotiating with terrorists and radicals for a long time. He even compared such negotiations with appeasement of Nazi Germany before the WWII in his speech to the Knesset on 15 May 2008. One week before the announcement, President Bush gave an interview to four Israeli journalists and denied accusations that he discouraged Olmert from talking to Syria, yet he reprimanded President Assad and his regime. It was reported by Israeli officials that the Bush administration was the only stumbling block to peace talks with Syria, which was advocated by Prime Minister Olmert and Defense Minister Ehud Barak. Especially Elliott Abrams, who was a famous neocon and Bush's deputy national security adviser, warned against the Syrian-Israeli negotiation. Officials in the Bush administration were concerned that negotiation between Tel Aviv and Damascus would mean rewarding Syria while Washington was seeking its isolation owing to its interference in Lebanese affairs and support for Hezbollah. The announcement of the renewal of the talks between Israel and Syria was blow to the Bush administration's policy towards Syria. The New York Times quoted an official in the Bush administration who described Olmert's policy as "*a slap in the face.*" Another senior administration official said that "*They weren't asking our permission.*"¹⁵¹¹

On the day of announcement of the resumption of Syrian-Israeli indirect negotiations under Turkish mediation, Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs David Welch spoke to reporters in Washington on 21 May 2008. In response to a question about the United States' role in the negotiations, Welch said that the United States did not play a role in facilitating the talks and appreciated Turkish role and mediation in the Syrian-Israeli track. He also said that the United States would welcome inclusion of Syria in Middle East peace process, but the administration was specifically working on the conclusion of a Palestinian-Israeli agreement. Welch explained that although the Bush administration would welcome progress on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, its priority was the Palestinian track. He elucidated the United States' posture on the Syrian track as follows:

¹⁵¹⁰ Zisser, "It's a Long Road to Peace with Syria," 117; Rabinovich, *Damascus, Jerusalem and Washington*, 18-19.

¹⁵¹¹ Helene Cooper, "Advice from White House Is Not Always Followed," *New York Times*, May 22, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/22/washington/22assess.html>; Rabinovich, "The Bush Administration, Israel and Syria," 352-353.

“[Achievements on the Palestinian track] does not mean that we would not favor the expansion of such efforts between Israel and Lebanon and between Israel and Syria. We had our concerns about Syrian behavior in any number of dimensions that suggested to us it would be rather more difficult to pursue that track. That Israel has been able to open some sort of indirect conversation about these matters with the Syrian Government with the good offices of Turkey is a good thing. I mean, I’m not saying it’s not. And we hope it prospers. But where we’re making the major investment right now is on the Palestinian track.”¹⁵¹²

Despite Turkish mediation, Syria called for the Bush administration to play a direct role in the peace talks and emphasized that the United States was the only state which could bring a peace agreement between Syria and Israel. Yet, the Bush administration was reluctant to engage with the Syrian track as its priority was achievement of comprehensive agreement between the Palestinians and Israel. Although senior officials in the State Department told that Syria’s offer was worth examining as it would serve wedging Syria from Iran, President Bush did not embrace this idea.¹⁵¹³ In this context, President Bush maintained his ardent anti-Syrian posture. He indicated that he was not only critical of Olmert’s opening to Syria but also French President Nicolas Sarkozy’s diplomatic engagement with Damascus in the summer of 2008. When President Bush visited Paris in June 2008, the difference of opinion between him and Sarkozy became evident. President Bush opposed to diplomatic efforts of Paris serving legitimization of the Assad regime.¹⁵¹⁴

Despite President Bush’s uncompromising attitude, some senior American officials acknowledged the significance of the Syrian-Israeli peace track and welcomed the talks between the two sides under Turkish mediation in the course of 2008. Secretary of State Rice held a meeting with Foreign Minister Walid Muallem at the UN in September 2008. On the other hand, it was leaked to the Israeli press that when Prime Minister Olmert paid a farewell visit to President Bush in November 2008, President Bush discouraged him from making concessions on the Golan Heights.¹⁵¹⁵

Negotiations suffered a serious blow when Prime Minister Olmert visited Ankara for discussions on 22 December 2008. Olmert was expecting Foreign Minister Walid Muallem’s participation of the Ankara negotiations, but he was disappointed when this did not happen.

¹⁵¹² Welch, “Briefing on Lebanon and Other Middle East Issues.”

¹⁵¹³ Jay Solomon, “Syria Seeks U.S. Role in Talks,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 31, 2008, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB121219416678734449>.

¹⁵¹⁴ Zisser, “It’s a Long Road to Peace with Syria,” 116-117; Rabinovich, *Damascus, Jerusalem and Washington*, 19.

¹⁵¹⁵ Rabinovich, *Damascus, Jerusalem and Washington*, 16.

Five days after Olmert's visit, Israel launched Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip, which led to Turkey's criticism and put an end to its mediation efforts as well as the peace talks. Mistrust between the United States and Syria proved resilient when American troops based in Iraq carried out an assault in the eastern Syrian town of Al Bu Kamal to hunt a leader of Iraqi insurgency in the last weeks of the Bush administration.¹⁵¹⁶

In sum, contrary to the Bush Sr. and Clinton administrations, the Bush Jr. administration did not perform the NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst to resolve the conflict between Syria and Israel.

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter pointed out that U.S-Syrian relations were characterized by overt confrontation from 2001 to 2009 due to the Bush administration's hostile policies towards Syria. Although Syria initially cooperated with the Bush administration in the war on terror, the Assad regime's defiance during the invasion of Iraq, its support for the militant Palestinian groups and Hezbollah, its WMD capability, its pan-Aran posture on the peace process, and its hegemony over Lebanon were deemed inconsistent with the NRCs of the United States, performed in the wake of 9/11. Due to the Assad regime's challenge to unilateral hegemony of the United States, the Bush administration under the influence of the neocons sought to isolate Syria in the international system and to punish it by imposing economic sanctions. That's why, the United States' constructive engagement with Syria under Bush H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton administrations ended during the tenure of George W. Bush. The Bush Jr. administration perceived Syria as a stumbling block to its designs in the Middle East, mainly democracy promotion. In this respect, the Bush administration pushed Syria out of Lebanon to rescue Lebanese democracy from Syria's tutelage. Furthermore, the Bush administration did not consider Syria a partner in the Middle East peace process and thus it did not perform the NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst to find a solution to the Syrian-Israeli impasse. So, incongruence in the role conceptions of the United States and Syria during the Bush administration shaped the conflictual nature of bilateral relations.

¹⁵¹⁶ Rabinovich, *How to Talk and How Not to Talk to Syria*, 3-4; Lawson, *Global Security Watch – Syria*, 158.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This study has examined U.S. foreign policy towards Syria during the presidencies of George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush by deploying role theory. The dissertation has argued that U.S. foreign policy in the post-Cold War era can be understood through a role theory based foreign policy analysis model encapsulating domestic and international determinants as well the interplay between them. Accordingly, the dissertation has demonstrated that U.S. foreign policy conducts were extension of the national role conceptions (NRCs) of the American foreign policymaking elites (the members of the NSC), who formulated the NRCs filtering through domestic and international determinants. In the dissertation, it is pointed out that the NRCs of the post-Cold War American administrations and their performance in major events such as the Gulf crisis, the Middle East peace process and the invasion of Iraq can account for cooperation and conflict between the United States and Syria from 1989 and 2009. Thus, the dissertation has explained that U.S. foreign policy towards Syria in the post-Cold War era was closely associated with how American policymakers perceived their states (ego part) in dealing with these events.

The dissertation has also stressed that Syria's compliance or non-compliance with the NRCs of the successive post-Cold War administrations influenced the nature of the U.S.-Syrian relations. The U.S.-Syrian relations witnessed thaw and cooperation from 1989 to 2001 owing to Syria's compliance with the NRCs of the George H. W. Bush administration in the Gulf crisis, the Madrid Peace Conference, and the Lebanese arena as well as with the NRCs of the Bill Clinton administration during the Middle East peace process and the Lebanese crises. However, Syria's non-compliance with and challenge to the NRCs of the George W. Bush during the U.S. invasion of Iraq and its aftermath badly soured bilateral relations in the 2000s. Thus, the dissertation has contended that Syria's responses to the NRCs of the United States (alter-ego part) also matter in explaining conflict and accommodation between the two countries in the post-Cold War era.

There are two main contributions of the dissertation to the academic literature: theoretical and empirical. First, the dissertation has offered role theory as a useful framework of analysis to

explain U.S. foreign policy towards Syria in the post-Cold War era. In the academic literature, the U.S.-Syrian relations have been studied mainly from realist perspective. Most of the scholars have argued that conflict and cooperation between the countries can be explained through their national security and national interests. Some scholars have tried to analyze the U.S.-Syrian relations from constructivist perspective by focusing on the role of ideology or from an eclectic perspective by mixing ideology and interest. Nevertheless, theoretical attempts in explaining the U.S.-Syrian relations have remained scarce. This study has attempted at challenging realism-dominated literature by offering role theory as a comprehensive analytical framework to make sense of U.S. foreign policy towards Syria from 1989 to 2009.

The second contribution of the dissertation is empirical. In the academic literature, there is no study focusing on U.S. foreign policy towards Syria during successive administrations of George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush. By covering 30 years of the U.S.-Syrian relations by using numerous primary sources such as archival and official documents, newspapers, and memoirs as well as a wide range of secondary sources, the dissertation has also sought to make an empirical contribution to the literature.

Drawing on Holsti's, Aggestam's and Breuning's approaches to role theory, this dissertation has developed a role theory based foreign policy analysis model in which foreign policymakers, who constitute the NRCs of their states, are located at the intersection of various domestic and external determinants. Idiosyncratic characteristics, perceptions, and world views of state elites are also important in the formulation of the NRCs in this model. These actors filter through numerous domestic and international factors while producing the NRCs of their states. Even though this model concentrates on agential power of foreign policymakers, it does not neglect indirect influences of domestic and international determinants over NRCs. Following their creation, the NRCs shape foreign policy actions and conducts of state, which is defined as national role performance in role theory.

The dissertation has utilized Philippe Le Prestre's role set, entailing eleven NRCs of the United States in the post-Cold War era, to explain U.S. foreign policy towards Syria from 1989 to 2009. In the dissertation, the most relevant NRCs that affected the U.S.-Syrian relations have been picked up from Le Prestre's role set. They can be noted as hegemon, regional stabilizer/peace catalyst, tribune and agent of American values, defender of the pacific union and balancer. The dissertation has maintained that U.S. policy of constructive engagement and overt confrontation towards Syria were extension of these NRCs in the post-Cold War era.

The dissertation has also sought to expose internal and external sources of the NRCs of the United States. The transformation of the international system from bipolarity to unipolarity with the collapse of the Soviet Union and expectations of other actors have been defined as external sources of the NRCs of the United States. At the domestic level, unprecedented military and economic capability, the idea of American exceptionalism and American public opinion shaped the NRCs of the successive post-Cold War administrations. While the newly emerging international system (the alter ego part) primarily affected the NRCs of the George H. W. Bush administration, identity variables (the ego part) shaped the NRCs of the Bill Clinton administration. The rise of the neocons in the George W. Bush administration was the driving force behind the NRCs of the United States in the 2000s. Hence, ideational preference representation (the ego part) again was the main source of the NRCs during the George W. Bush administration.

The dissertation has utilized role theory as it opens the black box of the state to make sense of U.S. foreign policy in the post-Cold War era. Drawing on role theory's theoretical toolkit, this study has indicated that American foreign policymakers, who formulated and executed the NRCs, shaped U.S. foreign policy towards Syria from 1989 to 2009. Especially performance of the NRC of hegemon multilaterally or unilaterally determined the trajectory of the U.S.-Syrian relations in this period. George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton enacted the NRC of hegemon multilaterally, but George W. Bush performed it unilaterally. Syria cooperated with the United States during the George H. W. Bush and the Clinton administrations because they acted in the international system in a multilateral fashion. When Syria demonstrated its willingness to socialize in the U.S.-led multilateral international system, both administrations also enacted the NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst in the Middle East by making the Syrian-Israeli peace track their priority and by incorporating Syria into the Middle East peace process as a key actor.

Both the Bush Sr. and the Clinton administrations' active involvement in the peace process coincided with the changing role of Syria in the post-Cold War Middle East. Given the collapse of Syria's Cold War patron, i.e., the Soviet Union, Hafez al-Assad was compelled to give up policy of strategic parity with Israel and Syria's tactical rejectionist role in the Middle East in the 1980s. Assad publicly declared that a separate peace deal with Israel under the aegis of the United States was Syria's strategic option. Therefore, roles of the United States and Syria converged in the Middle East as both states aimed to take part in the resolution of the decades-long Syrian-Israeli conflict. The Bush Sr. and the Clinton administrations' policy of constructive engagement as well as Syria's compliance with the NRCs of the United States

led to normalization and cooperation between Washington and Damascus in the Lebanese arena as well. As the post-Cold War American administrations assumed responsibility to achieve peace and stability in the Middle East, they perceived Syria's presence in Lebanon as a stabilizing factor and rewarded Syria's compliance with the NRCs of the United States by acknowledging its hegemony over Lebanon.

On the other hand, the George W. Bush administration under the influence of the neocons executed the NRC of hegemon unilaterally in the international system and in the Middle East sub-system. The Bush administration pursued an assertive and belligerent foreign policy in the war on terror by invading Afghanistan and Iraq. Although Syria initially cooperated with the Bush administration by providing intelligence assistance against al-Qaeda, it refused the Bush administration's demands on the militant Palestinian groups and Hezbollah, denounced its invasion of Iraq and its Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI) to promote democracy in the Middle East forcefully. Owing to the Bashar al-Assad regime's opposition to the unilateral enactment of the NRCs of hegemon and tribune and agent of American values in the Middle East, the Bush administration did not perform the NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst in the Syrian-Israeli peace track. Despite Syria's occasional tactical calls for renewal of peace talks under the sponsorship of the United States, the Assad regime adopted a pan-Arab posture on the Middle East process, which totally put it on a collision course with Washington. Due to Syria's defiance and non-compliance with the NRCs of the United States, the Bush administration followed policy of overt confrontation towards Syria by imposing heavy economic sanctions and pushing it out of Lebanon after the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in 2005.

Drawing on role theory's theoretical assumptions, the study has argued that evolution of U.S. foreign policy from constructive engagement to overt confrontation in the post-Cold War era can be explained by looking at the leadership factor as presidents played a principal role in formulating and enacting the NRCs of the United States. While George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton were less ideological, George W. Bush was much more ideological in constituting the NRCs of the United States. In this respect, it should be noted that ideological influence of the neocons in the Bush administration in shaping the NRCs in an aggressive way shaped U.S. foreign policy towards Syria. In addition to the NRCs, the dissertation has argued that the context also affected the trajectory of the U.S.-Syrian relations from 1989 to 2009. The outbreak of the Gulf crisis under the George H. W. Bush administration, the Middle East peace process between Israel and the Arab parties under the Clinton administration and the war on terror under the George W. Bush administration influenced the nature of the U.S.-Syrian relations.

The dissertation has demonstrated that the NRCs of the United States emerged out of interplay of domestic and international determinants, which were assessed by foreign policymaking elites or the members of the NSC in the Bush Sr. administration. The collapse of the Soviet Union was the most significant external factor that compelled the Bush administration to reposition the United States in the unipolar international system. Besides, enormous economic and military capabilities of the United States, the idea of American exceptionalism vetted in American political culture as well as American public opinion affected the NRCs of the Bush administration at the domestic level. Given these factors, the Bush administration's foreign policy elites formulated and performed the NRCs of the United States. Especially the outbreak of the Gulf crisis triggered the execution of the NRCs couched in the concept of new world order. The Bush administration performed the NRCs of hegemon, tribune and agent of American values, defender of the pacific union, regional stabilizer, and balancer during the Gulf crisis. Syria decided to participate in the U.S.-led anti-Iraqi coalition against the Saddam regime to socialize in the U.S.-led new world order in the absence of the Soviet Union. Hence, Syria complied with the Bush administration's NRCs during the Gulf crisis. As there was a close relationship between the concept of the new world order and the Gulf crisis, the Bush administration embraced Syria owing to its willingness to go along with the NRCs of the United States. Thus, U.S. foreign policy towards Syria under the George H. W. Bush administration began to be characterized by constructive engagement and cooperation with the outbreak of the Gulf crisis.

After the Gulf War, the Bush administration performed the NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst in the Madrid Peace Conference and its aftermath to find a solution to decades-long Arab-Israeli conflict. In this period, Hafez al-Assad gave up tactical rejectionist role of Syria in the 1980s by recognizing the broker role of the United States between Tel Aviv and Damascus. The Bush administration hailed Syria's changing role and its acknowledgement of the mediator role of the United States in the peace process. Hence, the Bush administration considered Syria as a key to peace in the Middle East peace process. The U.S.-Syrian cooperation at the onset of the post-Cold War era manifested itself in the Lebanese arena as well. As the primary goal of the Bush administration was to sustain peace and stability of Lebanon, it recognized Syria as a stabilizing force in early 1990s rather than as a troublemaker thanks to Syria's cooperation with Washington in the Gulf crisis and in the Madrid peace process.

When we look at the Clinton administration, we observe that the NRCs of the United States under the Clinton administration were products of the interplay of domestic and international

factors. Economic and military strength of the United States, the idea of American exceptionalism and American public opinion were domestic factors that influenced the NRCs. The unipolar international system and expectations of other actors from the United States as the world's sole superpower constituted international factors influencing the NRCs of the Clinton administration. President Clinton's and his foreign policy team (the NSC) filtered through these factors and shaped the NRCs of the United States from 1993 to 2001. As the transition from bipolarity to unipolarity was completed, the Clinton administration's ideological outlook focusing on promotion of democracy and free market economy across the globe shaped the NRCs of the United States. In this period, U.S. foreign policy towards Syria continued to be characterized by constructive engagement and cooperation. The Clinton administration's enactment of the NRC of hegemon multilaterally and the NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst came to the front in its relations with Syria. The Clinton administration got involved in the Syrian-Israeli peace track as full partner and honest broker to achieve a genuine peace between Syria and Israel. Syria's compliance with the Clinton administration's NRCs contributed to cooperation between Washington and Damascus in this period. Syria officially demanded that the Clinton administration involve in the Syrian-Israeli peace track as a full partner and honest broker. Thus, it can be argued that there was convergence of the roles of the United States and Syria during the Clinton administration. The Clinton administration's perception of Syria as a key to comprehensive peace in the Middle East also contributed to thaw between the two countries.

Here it should be noted that both the George H. W. Bush and the Bill Clinton administrations downplayed problematic issues between the United States and Syria such as Syria's sponsorship of international terrorism owing to its key position in the Middle East peace process. They also recognized Syria's hegemony over Lebanon and did not categorize Syria as a rogue or backlash state in the Middle East.

Table 2: The NRCs that shaped U.S. foreign policy towards Syria from 1989 to 2009

U.S. PRESIDENT	MAJOR EVENT(S) IN U.S. FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS SYRIA	THE NATIONAL ROLE CONCEPTIONS OF THE UNITED STATES IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA				
		Hegemon	Defender of the Pacific Union	Tribune and Agent of American Values	Regional Stabilizer	Balancer
George H. W. Bush	Gulf Crisis					
	Madrid Peace Process					
	Lebanon					
Bill Clinton	Syrian-Israeli Peace Track					
	Lebanon					
George W. Bush	Invasion of Iraq					
	Lebanon					
	Syrian-Israeli Peace Track					

We can see the continuity of the NRCs under the George W. Bush administration between 2001 and 2009. Yet, the Bush administration performed the NRCs of hegemon, defender of the Pacific Union, tribune and agent of American values and balancer unilaterally during the invasion of Iraq and its aftermath under the influence of the neocons. The rise of the neocons and the assertive nationalist figures in the first Bush administration was the main reason for change in the NRCs of the United States after 9/11. At the domestic level, in addition to the rise of the neocons, enormous military and economic capability of the United States and the idea of American exceptionalism shaped the NRCs of the Bush administration. International terrorism threat, which caused the war on terror, and the unipolar international system affected the NRCs of the Bush administration at the international level. President Bush and his foreign policy team (the NSC) filtered through these factors, formulated the NRCs of the United States, and performed them accordingly during the first term. Although the neocons were sidelined in the second Bush administration and realist foreign policy elites gained upper hand, this caused only stylistic change in U.S. foreign policy and the NRCs persisted in the second term of George W. Bush.

The NRCs of the Bush administration shaped U.S. foreign policy towards Syria in the 2000s. Despite intelligence cooperation between Washington and Damascus against al-Qaeda in the early phase of the war on terror, influence of the neocons in the Bush administration (especially in the Pentagon) soon derailed the U.S.-Syrian relations. Although President Bush initially seemed willing to maintain the State Department's policy of constructive engagement with Syria in the war on terror, he changed his posture owing to Syria's non-compliance with the NRCs of the United States during and after the invasion of Iraq. In fact, Syria's new president Bashar al-Assad adopted an uncompromising attitude to Washington and a pan-Arab posture in the Middle East after his ascent to power in July 2000. He denounced the U.S. invasion of Iraq, supported Iraqi insurgency, continued to sponsor the militant Palestinian groups and Hezbollah. He also maintained Syria's alleged WMD program, rejected promotion of democracy in the Middle East in a forceful way and sought to preserve Syria's hegemony over Lebanon. Thus, Syria under Bashar did not comply with the NRCs of the Bush administration and their performance in the Middle East, which put Washington and Damascus on a collision course during the 2000s. Unlike the Bush Sr. and the Clinton administrations, U.S. foreign policy towards Syria under the George W. Bush administration was characterized by overt confrontation and discord.

The U.S.-Syrian discord influenced bilateral relations in the Lebanese arena and the Middle East peace process. As the Bush administration perceived Syria's dictatorial regime as a threat

to Lebanese democracy, it punished Syria by pushing it out of Lebanon after the Hariri assassination in 2005. The Bush administration also did not perform the NRC of regional stabilizer/peace catalyst in the Syrian-Israeli peace track owing to contentious issues between the two countries. The Bush administration considered Syria's linkage to the militant Palestinian groups and Hezbollah as a threat to peace and stability in the Middle East and thus it only endorsed the Palestinian-Israeli track.

To sum up, this dissertation has put forward that role theory could account for U.S. foreign policy towards Syria in the post-Cold War era. Theoretical framework of the dissertation can be applied to other cases as well. The United States' relations with small states in different parts of the world before or after the Cold War can be studied through role theory based foreign policy analysis model offered in the dissertation.

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APPENDICES

A. CURRICULUM VITAE

Nuri SALIK

EDUCATION

2012-2018: *PhD in History*, Institute of Social Sciences, Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University. (Cum. GPA: 3.82 over 4.00). The topic of dissertation: “Turkey’s Policy towards Syria between the Two Coups: 1960-1980”.

2009-2012: *Master of Science in International Relations*, Middle East Technical University, Department of International Relations (Cum. GPA: 3.43 over 4.00). The title of thesis is “Syrian Foreign Policy from Independence to the Baath Party’s Accession to Power: 1946-1963”.

2007-2009: *Bachelor of Science Minor in International Relations*, Middle East Technical University, Department of International Relations (Cum. GPA: 2.92 over 4.00).

2004-2009: *Bachelor of Arts Major in History*, Middle East Technical University, Department of History (Cum GPA: 3.53 over 4.00).

2000-2003: Kadriye Morođlu High School, İstanbul.

WORK EXPERIENCE

April 2018 – Present: *Assistant Professor* at Department of History, Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Ankara/Turkey.

July 2011-April 2018: *Research Assistant* at Department of History, Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Ankara/Turkey.

July 2009-July 2011: *Research Assistant* at Department of History, Erciyes University, Kayseri/Turkey.

FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English (Advanced)

French (Intermediate)

Arabic (Elementary)

ACADEMIC PUBLICATIONS

1. “Demokrasiden Diktatörlüğe: Suriye’de Siyasal Sistemin Evrimi,” in *Başlangıcından Günümüze Türk Tarihinde Doğu Akdeniz*, ed. Hakan Doğan and Ahmet Demir, Ankara: Berikan Yayınevi, 2021, 247-274.
2. “Reform Arayışından Devrimci Mücadeleye: Beşşar Esed Döneminde Suriye Muhalefeti,” in *Orta Doğu’ya Bakış – 2*, ed. Sayim Türkman and Abdurrahman İlhan, Ankara: Nobel Yayınları, 2021, 447-487.
3. *İki Darbe Arasında Türkiye’nin Suriye Politikası (1960-1980)*, Ankara: Nobel Yayınları, 2020.
4. *Sultan II. Abdülhamid Dönemi: Siyaset, İktisat, Dış Politika, Kültür, Eğitim* (ed.), İstanbul: İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2019 (with M. BULUT, M. Enes KALA, and M. NAR).
5. “Baas Rejiminin Patikası: Suriye Krizine Tarihsel Sosyolojik Bir Yaklaşım,” *Suriye: Tarih, Siyaset, Dış Politika*, H. M. Eravcı (ed.), Ankara: TTK Yayınları, 2018, 125-145.
6. “Uluslararası İlişkilerde Küçük Devletler: Gelişimi, Tanımı, Dış Politika ve İttifak Davranışları,” *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Cilt 14, Sayı 53, 2017, 3-22 (with Prof. Ozlem TÜR KÜÇÜKKAYA).
7. *Bağımsızlıktan Arap Baharına Suriye: İç ve Dış Politika* (ed.), Ankara: Nobel Yayınları, 2016 (with Prof. Mehmet Akif OKUR).
8. “Modern Suriye’de Toplum ve Siyaset: 1946-2000,” in *Bağımsızlıktan Arap Baharına Suriye: İç ve Dış Politika*, Mehmet Akif Okur and Nuri Salık (ed.), Ankara: Nobel Yayınları, 2016.
9. “Osmanlı İdaresi ve Fransız Manda Yönetimi Altında Suriye,” in *Bağımsızlıktan Arap Baharına Suriye: İç ve Dış Politika*, Mehmet Akif Okur and Nuri Salık (ed.), Ankara: Nobel Yayınları, 2016 (with Prof. Mehmet Akif OKUR).
10. “Rethinking State-Society Relations in Syria until 1970: What Does the Center-Periphery Model Tell Us?,” *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, (Middle Eastern Studies), Cilt 5, Sayı 2, 2014, 115-140.
11. *Syrian Foreign Policy From Independence to the Baathist Coup, 1946-1963*, (With a Preface by Prof. Meliha Benli Altunışık), Ankara, Orion Yayınları, 2014.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

1. “Syria’s Security Policy under Bashar al-Assad: Continuity and Change,” 2nd *Hitit International Congress on Security Congress*, 9-11 December 2022, Çorum, Turkey.
2. “Devrim ve Dış Politika: Suriye Baas Partisi Örneği (1963-1970),” *VI. Middle East Congress on Politics and Society*, 11-13 November 2022, Sakarya, Turkey.
3. “Alawite Center versus Sunni Periphery: State, Society and Conflict under the Assads, 1970-2014,” *Mediterranean Studies Association 18th Annual Congress*, 27-30 Mayıs 2015, Athens, Greece.
4. “Beşşar Esad’ın Patikası: Suriye Krizine Tarihsel Sosyolojik Bir Yaklaşım,” *Uluslararası Suriye Sempozyumu: Tarih, Siyaset ve Dış Politika*, 24-26 Nisan 2015, Ankara, Turkey.

SCHOLARSHIPS

2019: TÜBİTAK, 2219-A Doktora Sonrası Araştırma Bursu, Georgetown Üniversitesi, School of Foreign Service, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Washington D.C. / ABD.

2017: TÜBİTAK, 2214-A Doktora Sırası Araştırma Bursu, King's College London, Institute of Middle Eastern Studies, Londra, İngiltere.

RESEARCH AREAS

History of Syria

Syrian Domestic and Foreign Policy

Modern History of Turkey

Turkish Foreign Policy

Theories of International Relations

B. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Soğuk Savaş yıllarında ABD-Suriye ilişkilerinin sorunlu geçmişi nedeniyle, Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemin başlangıcında ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasının yörüngesi belirsizdi. Suriye'nin Sovyetler Birliği ile ittifakı, İsrail'e karşı düşmanlığı, uluslararası terörizm sponsorluğu, Orta Doğu barış sürecindeki oyun bozucu rolü ve Lübnan'daki askeri varlığı Washington ve Şam arasında uzun süredir devam eden tartışmalı konulardı. Şaşırtıcı bir şekilde, ABD-Suriye ilişkileri George H. W. Bush yönetiminde normalleşti ve önemli ölçüde iyileşti çünkü ABD ve Suriye Körfez krizinde, Madrid barış sürecinde ve Lübnan'da uzlaşmaya varabildi. ABD-Suriye iş birliği, Washington'un Clinton yönetiminde Suriye ile İsrail arasında gerçek bir barış sağlama sorumluluğunu üstlenmesi nedeniyle hızla devam etti. Suriye'nin Orta Doğu'daki kilit konumu sayesinde hem Bush hem de Clinton yönetimleri Suriye'ye yönelik "yapıcı angajman" politikası izledi ve iki ülke arasındaki sorunlu konuları, özellikle de Suriye'nin uluslararası terörizmle bağlantısını göz ardı etmeyi tercih etti. Bu tutum, 1989'dan 2001'e kadar Washington ve Şam arasında karşılıklı anlayış ve iş birliğine katkıda bulundu.

Öte yandan, George W. Bush yönetiminin işbaşına gelmesiyle birlikte, ABD'nin Irak'ı işgali, Suriye'nin militan Filistinli gruplar ve Hizbullah ile bağlantısı, kitle imha silahları kapasitesi ve Lübnan üzerinde süregiden hegemonyası gibi konular nedeniyle ABD ile Suriye arasındaki yumuşama ortadan kalktı. Bush yönetimi, Suriye'nin 11 Eylül'den hemen sonra el-Kaide'ye karşı ABD'yle istihbarat iş birliği yapmasına rağmen Irak'ın işgali sırasındaki muhalif tutumu nedeniyle Suriye'yi ekonomik yaptırımlar uygulayarak ve Lübnan'dan çıkararak izole etmeye ve cezalandırmaya çalıştı. Ayrıca, baba Bush ve Clinton yönetimlerinin aksine, oğul Bush yönetimi Suriye-İsrail barış görüşmelerine arabulucu olarak dahil olmayı reddetti. Dolayısıyla, 2001-2009 yılları arasında devam eden Bush yönetimi boyunca ABD-Suriye ilişkilerine "açık çatışma" ve anlaşmazlık damgasını vurdu.

Geriye dönüp bakıldığında, Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde ABD-Suriye ilişkilerinin hiçbir zaman bir ittifak seviyesine ulaşmadığı ve ikili ilişkilerin iş birliği ile çatışma arasında gidip geldiği bir gerçektir. Sovyetler Birliği'nin çöküşünün ardından ABD-Suriye ilişkilerinin ikircikli doğası göz önüne alındığında, bu çalışma temel olarak "*Soğuk Savaş sonrası*

dönemde ABD-Suriye ilişkilerindeki iş birliği ve çatışmayı ne açıklar?” araştırma sorusuna cevap vermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma ABD-Suriye ilişkilerini Washington açısından incelemektedir, çünkü ABD'nin dünyanın tek hegemonu olarak Soğuk Savaş sonrası uluslararası sistemde küçük bir devlet olan Suriye'den daha güçlü olduğu tartışılmaz bir gerçekliktir. Bu bağlamda, bu tez, 1989-2009 yılları arasında George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton ve George W. Bush'un başkanlık dönemlerinde ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasını analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Rol teorisinin kuramsal yaklaşımından faydalanan çalışma, ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasının ne ölçüde ulusal rol tasavvurları (URT) ve Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemdeki uygulamaları tarafından şekillendirildiğini ortaya koymayı hedeflemiştir. Çalışma ayrıca, Suriye'nin ABD'nin URT'lerine uyup uymamasının 1989-2009 yılları arasında ikili ilişkilerde iş birliği ve çatışmayı etkileyip etkilemediğini ortaya koymayı amaçlamıştır.

Çalışma, ana araştırma sorusuna ek olarak aşağıdaki alt sorulara da yanıt aramaktadır: Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde ABD-Suriye ilişkileri neden iş birliğinden çatışmaya doğru evrilmiştir? ABD'nin Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemdeki URT'leri ve bunların uygulanması 1989-2009 yılları arasında Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasını ne ölçüde şekillendirmiştir? Suriye'nin ABD'nin URT'lerine uyup uymaması Soğuk Savaş sonrası Amerikan yönetimlerinin Suriye'ye yönelik politikasını etkilemiş midir? ABD'nin ve Suriye'nin rol tasavvurlarında bir uzlaşma/çatışma var mıdır? Varsa, bu uzlaşma veya çatışma tezde incelenen dönemde iki ülke arasındaki çatışma ve iş birliğini etkilemiş midir?

ABD-Suriye ilişkileri üzerine oluşan akademik literatüre baktığımızda, yapılan çalışmaların çoğunun Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde ikili ilişkileri realist perspektiften incelediğini görüyoruz. Literatürde Washington ile Şam arasındaki çatışma ve iş birliğinin çoğunlukla iki ülkenin ulusal ve güvenlik çıkarlarıyla yakından ilişkili olduğu savunulmaktadır. Akademisyenler, Suriye'nin Körfez krizi sırasında ABD ile iş birliği yapmasının, Madrid Barış Konferansı'na katılmasının ve ardından İsrail ile ikili barış görüşmelerine oturmasının, teröre karşı küresel savaşın ilk aşamalarında ABD'ye verdiği desteğin Şam'ın pragmatik kaygılarıyla açıklanabileceğini iddia etmişlerdir. Bu akademisyenlere göre, iş birliği örnekleri Suriye'nin ulusal çıkarlarını korumak ve Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde Washington tarafından tecrit edilmekten ve cezalandırılmaktan kurtulmak için dünyanın tek süper gücü olarak ABD'nin yanında yer almasının bir neticesidir.

İkili ilişkilerin çatışan yönüyle ilgili olarak, akademisyenler Washington ile Şam arasındaki çatışmayı çoğunlukla aynı realist perspektiften yorumlamışlardır. Örneğin, Suriye'nin 2003'te Irak'ın işgali sırasında ABD'ye karşı çıkması, işgal sonrasında Irak'taki isyana destek vermesi

ve ABD'ye karşı İran ve Hizbullah'la (ya da direniş eksenini olarak adlandırılan grupla) ittifak kurması, Suriye'nin dengeleme stratejisinin bir uzantısı olarak açıklanmıştır. Realist yorumların yanı sıra, literatürde ikili ilişkileri ideolojinin rolüne odaklanarak inşacı perspektiften veya ideoloji ve çıkarı birlikte ele alarak eklektik bir perspektiften analiz eden az da olsa çalışma bulunmaktadır.

ABD-Suriye ilişkileri üzerine çalışan akademisyenlerden bazıları Erik L. Knudsen, Stephen Zunes, David Lesch, Flynt Leverett, Eyal Zisser, Ibraheem Saeed al-Baidhani, Robert G. Rabil, Neil Quillam, Itamar Rabinovich, Ahmad Soltani Nejad, Raymond Hinnebusch ve Jasmine K. Gani'dir. Bu akademisyenlerin çalışmalarına baktığımızda, bazıları Körfez Savaşı ve Madrid barış süreci gibi belirli temalara odaklanarak Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde ABD-Suriye ilişkilerini betimleyici bir şekilde anlatırken, diğerleri ikili ilişkileri teorik bir perspektiften açıklamaya çalışmışlardır. Örneğin, Meredith Reid Sarkees ve Stephen Zunes, Erik L. Knudsen ve Eyal Zisser Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde ABD-Suriye ilişkilerindeki normalleşmeyi Körfez Savaşı ve Orta Doğu barış sürecinin ikili ilişkiler üzerindeki etkisini analiz ederek betimleyici bir yöntemle açıklamaktadırlar.

David Lesch, Suriye dış politikasını ve Beşar Esad döneminde ABD-Suriye ilişkilerini *New Lion of Damascus: Bashar al- Asad and Modern Syria (Şam'ın Yeni Aslanı Beşar Esad ve Modern Suriye)* başlıklı ünlü kitabında ele almaktadır. Lesch, 2000'li yılların ilk yarısındaki ABD-Suriye ilişkilerini derinlemesine analiz etmesine rağmen, ikili ilişkileri teorik bir yaklaşımla incelememiştir. Benzer şekilde, Flynt Leverett ve Eyal Zisser de 2000'li yıllarda ABD-Suriye ilişkilerindeki bazı tartışmalı konuları teorik bir çerçevede kullanmadan kapsamlı bir şekilde ele almaktadır. Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde ABD-Suriye ilişkilerini analiz eden bir diğer akademisyen ise Ibraheem Saeed al- Baidhani'dir. Iraklı bir tarih profesörü olan Baidhani, 1989-2014 yılları arasındaki ABD-Suriye ilişkilerini betimleyici bir şekilde açıklamaktadır.

ABD-Suriye ilişkileri üzerine teorik perspektiften yapılan çalışmalar da mevcuttur. Örneğin Neil Quillam, Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde Suriye'nin ABD liderliğindeki yeni dünya düzenine katılma kararını teorik bir perspektiften anlamlandırmaya çalışmaktadır. Quillam, analitik bir çerçeve olarak Steven David'in *omni-balancing* teorisinin gözden geçirilmiş bir versiyonunu kullanarak Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemin başlangıcında Suriye'nin ABD'ye yönelik tutumundaki değişime odaklanmaktadır. Quillam, iç ve dış değişkenleri kapsayan kapsamlı bir çerçeve oluşturma çabasına rağmen, yeni dünya düzeninde Suriye dış politikasını, anarşik uluslararası sistemde Suriye'nin ulusal güvenlik kaygıları gibi realist argümanlara dayanarak açıklamaktadır. Dahası, Quillam'ın kitabının kapsamı sadece Körfez

Savaşı ve Madrid barış sürecini kapsayan 1990'lı yıllarla sınırlıdır.

Robert Rabil, *Syria, the United States, and the War on Terror in the Middle East (Suriye, ABD ve Orta Doğu'da Terörle Savaş)* başlıklı kitabında Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde ABD-Suriye ilişkilerine açıklık getirmektedir. Kitapta ABD-Suriye ilişkilerinin gelişimini anlatan Rabil, ikili ilişkilerin iki taraf arasındaki “kaygılar, yanlış algılar ve yanlış anlaşılmalara” ile şekillendiğini belirtmektedir. Rabil, Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde ABD ile Suriye arasındaki anlaşmazlığın nedeninin, ulusal güvenlik çıkarlarının, daha açık bir ifadeyle rejim güvenlik çıkarlarının çatışması olduğunu iddia etmektedir.

Raymond Hinnebusch da Beşar Esad döneminde ABD-Suriye ilişkilerindeki çatışmaları analiz etmekte ve Suriye'nin Irak işgali ve sonrasında Washington'a meydan okumasının, milliyetçi politikasının bir ürünü olan ABD'ye bağımlı olmamasının bir sonucu olduğunu savunmaktadır. Hinnebusch ayrıca Suriye'nin çıkarlarının Arap milliyetçisi kimliği tarafından şekillendirildiğini savunmaktadır.

Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde ABD-Suriye ilişkilerinde Orta Doğu barış süreci konusunun hâkim temalardan biri olduğunu belirtmek gerekir. Bu nedenle, akademik literatürde bu dönemde ABD'nin Suriye-İsrail barış sürecindeki rolüne odaklanan çok sayıda kitap ve makale bulunmaktadır. Örneğin Ahmad Soltani Nejad, 1990'larda ABD'nin Suriye-İsrail barış görüşmelerindeki etkisiz rolünü mercek altına almaktadır. Nejad, Suriye ile İsrail arasındaki barış görüşmelerinin başarısızlıkla neticelenmesinin temel sebebi olarak, ABD'nin İsrail'e Suriye'nin topraklarından vazgeçmesi için baskı yapma konusundaki isteksizliği ve Suriye'nin İsrail'e güvenlik ihtiyaçlarını karşılayacağı konusunda güvence vermemesi olarak ifade etmektedir. Robert Rabil bir başka çalışmasında ABD'nin 1990'ların başından 2000'lerin başına kadar Suriye-İsrail ilişkilerine müdahil olmasının ardındaki dinamikleri ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Washington'un Arap-İsrail çatışması bağlamında Suriye'ye yönelik ikircikli bir dış politika izlediğini savunan Rabil, Amerikan yönetimleri Arap-İsrail çatışmasının çözümünde Suriye'nin pozisyonuna yakın dururken, Kongre'nin İsrail'e verdiği desteklediğini altını çizmektedir.

Pressman, 1991-2000 yılları arasında Suriye-İsrail görüşmelerinde taraflı bir arabulucu olarak ABD'nin başarısızlığını arabuluculuk ve müzakere literatürü çerçevesinde açıklamaya çalışmaktadır. Itamar Rabinovich de ABD'nin Irak'ı işgali ve Suriye'nin Lübnan üzerindeki hegemonyası gibi ABD ile Suriye arasındaki sorunlu konuları ve Bush yönetiminin 2000'li yıllardaki Suriye-İsrail barış yoluna bakışını betimleyici bir şekilde ele almaktadır.

ABD-Suriye ilişkilerine odaklanan en kapsamlı kitap Jasmine K. Gani tarafından kaleme alınmıştır. *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations: Conflict and Cooperation (Suriye-ABD İlişkilerinde İdeolojinin Rolü: Çatışma ve İş Birliği)* başlıklı kitabında Gani, tarihsel analiz, inşacılık ve dış politika analizini bir araya getirerek Suriye'nin ABD'ye yönelik dış politikasında kimlik/ideolojinin rolünü vurgulamaktadır. Öncelikle ikili ilişkileri Suriye açısından inceleyen Gani, ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasını ayrıntılı olarak ele almamaktadır. Gani, kitabında ABD-Suriye ilişkilerini anlamlandırmak için hâkim realist perspektife meydan okumak yerine realizme bir ek olarak inşacılığı kullanmaktadır. Gani'ye göre, Suriye-ABD çekişmesinin dört alanı vardır: Arap-İsrail çatışması, Lübnan, Irak ve Suriye'nin kendi içindeki çatışma. Gani, Arap-İsrail arenasının ABD-Suriye düşmanlığının en önemli ve biçimlendirici yönü olduğunu ve ikili ilişkilerdeki diğer konuları etkilediğini iddia etmektedir. Gani, Arap-İsrail arenasından çıkarılan sonuçların çoğunun ABD-Suriye ilişkilerindeki diğer konulara da uygulanabileceğini öne sürmekte, ancak kitabı boyunca yalnızca Arap-İsrail çatışmasına yoğunlaşarak diğer konuları ihmal etmektedir. Gani'nin kitabı Uluslararası İlişkiler teorilerini en iyi kullanan en son çalışma olmasına rağmen, George W. Bush döneminde ABD-Suriye ilişkilerini ele almamaktadır.

Yukarıda değinilen bütün bu çalışmalar Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde bir ya da iki Amerikan yönetiminde ABD-Suriye ilişkilerindeki ana temalar, konular ve dinamikler hakkında fikir edinmemizi sağlamış olsa da, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton ve George W. Bush'un birbirini izleyen yönetimleri sırasında ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasını ele alan ayrıntılı bir çalışma bulunmamaktadır. Çalışmaların çoğu, Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde ABD-Suriye ilişkilerinde Körfez Savaşı, ABD'nin Irak'ı işgali, Madrid barış süreci gibi tek bir olaya ya da olaylar zincirine veya Suriye'nin uluslararası terörizmle bağlantısı, kitle imha silahları kapasitesi ve ABD'nin haydut devlet suçlamaları gibi belirli tema ya da konuların sürekliliğine odaklanmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, bu tez ABD-Suriye ilişkilerinde temaların sürekliliğine odaklanmanın yanıltıcı olacağını, çünkü bu temalardan bazılarının Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde belirli tarihsel kavşaklarda ikili ilişkileri etkilemede etkisiz kaldığını ileri sürmektedir. Örneğin, George H.W. Bush yönetimi terörizm konusunda Suriye'ye benzer bir tutum benimsemiş ya da Bill Clinton yönetimi Orta Doğu barış sürecindeki yapıcı rolü nedeniyle Suriye'yi haydut devlet olarak kategorize etmemiştir. George W. Bush yönetimi ise Suriye'yi haydut devlet, hatta şer ekseninin *de facto* üyesi olarak görmüş ve terörizm konusunu Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasının merkezine koymuştur. Bu nedenle, bu çalışma George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton ve George W. Bush'un başkanlık dönemlerindeki kendine has dinamikler, özellikler ve ana olaylara odaklanarak ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasını açıklamanın daha isabetli olacağını ileri sürmektedir.

Tez, uluslararası terörizm suçlamaları, haydut devlet iddiaları ve kitle imha silahları meselesi gibi temaların sürekliliğini izlemek yerine her bir yönetimin Suriye'ye yönelik politikasına odaklanmanın Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde ABD-Suriye ilişkilerine dair daha iyi bir resim sunduğunu iddia etmektedir. Dolayısıyla bu tez, 1989-2009 yılları arasında birbirini takip eden üç yönetim boyunca ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasının derinlemesine bir analizini sunarak ve Arap Baharının patlak vermesinden önce ABD-Suriye ilişkilerinin arka planını inceleyerek akademik literatüre katkıda bulunmaktadır.

Tez ayrıca ABD-Suriye ilişkilerini açıklamaya yönelik teorik girişimlerin bugüne kadar çok az olduğunu iddia etmektedir. Gani'nin kitabı literatürde bir istisna teşkil etse de, kitap Suriye'nin ABD'ye yönelik dış politikasını açıklamakta, ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasını merkezine almamaktadır. Bu tez, rol teorisinin Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde ABD dış politikasını açıklamak için hem iç hem de dış faktörleri ve bunlar arasındaki etkileşimi kapsayan uygun ve kapsamlı bir çerçeve sunduğunu savunmaktadır. Ayrıca, rol teorisinin bu dönemde ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasına da tatbik edilebileceğini öne sürmektedir. Dolayısıyla, realizmin literatürdeki baskınlığı göz önüne alındığında, bu çalışma Kalevi J. Holsti, Lisbeth Aggestam ve Marijke Breuning'in rol teorisi yaklaşımlarından yararlanarak rol teorisi temelli bir dış politika analiz modeli kullanarak ABD-Suriye ilişkileri literatürüne katkıda bulunmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın rol teorisini analitik çerçeve olarak benimsemesinin temel nedeni aktörlere, süreçlere ve çeşitli yerel ve uluslararası faktörlere odaklanarak bütüncül bir teorik çerçeve sağlamasıdır. Dahası, rol teorisi devletin kara kutusunu açarak devlet elitlerinin/dış politika yapımcılarının devletlerinin URT'lerini ve dış politika eylem ve davranışları olarak URT'lerin uygulanmasını şekillendirmedeki rollerine odaklanmaktadır. Rol teorisi ayrıca, bütüncül analitik çerçevesi sayesinde akademisyenlerin devletlerin dış politikalarındaki değişim ve/veya sürekliliğin izini sürmelerini ve iç-dış, özne-yapı ve kimlik-çıkart dikotomilerinin üstesinden gelmelerini sağlamaktadır.

Rol teorisi temelli dış politika analizi modelinde, devlet elitleri veya dış politika yapımcıları devletlerinin URT'lerini oluştururlar. Karar vericiler iç ve dış faktörlerin kesişim noktasında yer alırlar ve URT'leri oluştururken ve uluslararası sistemde uygularken bu faktörlerden etkilenirler. Liderlerin kendine özgü özellikleri, algıları ve dünya görüşleri de URT'lerin oluşturulmasında önemlidir. Bu modelde, uluslararası sistemin doğası, çok uluslu kurumlar, uluslararası anlaşmalar, dış aktörlerin beklentileri ve dünya kamuoyu uluslararası düzeyde dış politika yapımcıları etkilemektedir. İdeolojik (devletin kimliği, toplumun kültürü ve

kamuoyu) ve maddi (devletin yasal-siyasi sistemi, askeri, ekonomik ve teknolojik kapasitesi) faktörler iç ortamı şekillendirmektedir. Model, devlet elitlerinin URT'leri oluşturmadaki öznel gücüne vurgu yapsa da, yerel ve uluslararası faktörlerin dolaylı olarak URT'lerin oluşumu üzerindeki etkisini de kabul etmektedir. URT'ler bir devletin dış politika eylemlerine ve diğer aktörlere yönelik uygulamalarına, başka bir deyişle ulusal rol performanslarına rehberlik eder.

Tez, 1989-2009 yılları arasında ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasına ışık tutmak için Philippe Le Prestre'in Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde ABD'nin on bir URT'sinden oluşan rol listesinden yararlanacaktır. ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikası bu dönemde yapıcı angajman ve açık çatışma arasında gidip geldiğinden, tez ABD'nin Suriye politikasının URT'lerine ve bunların Amerikalı politika yapımcılar tarafından yürürlüğe konmasına odaklanılarak doğru bir şekilde anlaşılabilirliğini öne sürmektedir. Dolayısıyla, çalışma boyunca ABD'nin URT'lerinin ve Suriye'nin kritik durumlarda bunlara uyup uymamasının 1989'dan 2009'a kadar ABD-Suriye ilişkilerinin gidişatını şekillendirdiği öne sürülmektedir. Bu bağlamda tez, rol teorisinin teorik araç setini kullanarak ABD-Suriye literatürüne teorik bir katkı sağlamaktadır.

Tez, rol teorisini kullanarak ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasına odaklanan bir vaka çalışmasıdır. Tezin teorik çerçevesinin, ABD'nin dünyanın farklı bölgelerindeki küçük devletlere yönelik dış politikasının analizinde diğer vakalara da uygulanabileceğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu tez aynı zamanda niteliksel analiz türüne dayanmaktadır. Çalışmada, ABD'nin Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikası üzerindeki etkilerini ortaya çıkarmak için çok çeşitli birincil ve ikincil kaynak eleştirel bir şekilde değerlendirilmiştir. Çalışmada, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton ve George W. Bush yönetimlerindeki üst düzey Amerikan dış politika yapımcılarının açıklamalarını, konuşmalarını, basın toplantılarını, toplantı tutanaklarını ve telefon görüşmelerini içeren arşiv ve resmî belgelerden kapsamlı bir şekilde yararlanılmıştır. Bu kapsamda *Beyaz Saray Arşivi*, *Dışişleri Bakanlığı Arşivi*, *George Bush Başkanlık Kütüphanesi Arşivi* ve *William J. Clinton Başkanlık Kütüphanesi Arşivi* gibi dijital arşivlerden çok sayıda belge elde edilmiştir. Arşiv kaynaklarına ek olarak, çalışmada 1989-2009 yılları arasında Amerikan başkanlarının resmî açıklamalarını içeren çok sayıda *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* dokümanı yoğun olarak kullanılmıştır. ABD-Suriye ilişkilerine dair birincil kaynakların kullanılması, tezin akademik literatüre ampirik katkısıdır.

Tezde, Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde ABD-Suriye ilişkilerinin dinamiklerine ışık tutmak için gazete ve medya kaynaklarından da yararlanılmıştır. ABD'nin 1990'larda Suriye'ye yönelik

dış politikası incelenirken CIA'in *Dış Yayınlar Bilgi Servisi* belgelerinden yararlanılmıştır. Çalışma boyunca *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Times* ve *New York Daily News* gibi çeşitli Amerikan ve İngiliz gazetelerinden yararlanılmıştır. Ayrıca *CNN*, *BBC*, *Arab News*, *Haaretz*, *al Jazeera*, ve *CBS News* gibi haber portalları da çalışmanın diğer kaynakları olmuştur. Gazeteler ve haber portalları sayesinde, ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasını bağlamına oturtmak ve tezde incelenen her dönemin özelliklerini kavramak mümkün hale gelmiştir.

Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasını anlamlandırmak için çalışmada George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, James A. Baker, Warren Christopher, Madeleine Albright, Condoleezza Rice, Dick Cheney ve Donald Rumsfeld gibi üst düzey Amerikan dış politika yapımcılarının anılarından da yararlanılmıştır. Anılar, Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde Amerikalı yetkililerin Suriye algısını birinci elden anlattıkları için ABD-Suriye ilişkilerini anlamak açısından oldukça önemlidir. Anılara ek olarak, bu çalışma 1989-2009 yılları arasında ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasını açıklamak için kitaplar, makaleler, süreli yayınlar ve Kongre Araştırma Servisi gibi devlet kurumlarının raporları gibi ikincil kaynaklara da dayanmaktadır.

Çalışma altı bölümden oluşmaktadır. Giriş bölümünün ardından ikinci bölümde çalışmanın teorik ve analitik çerçevesi çizilmektedir. Bölüm, rol teorisinin sosyoloji alanında ortaya çıkışı ve 1970'lerde Dış Politika Analizi (DPA) alanına girişi ile başlamaktadır. Farklı akademisyenlerin ulusal rol tasavvurlarına ilişkin tanımlar verildikten sonra, bölüm rol teorisi akademisyenlerinin çok sayıda kitap ve makalesini inceleyerek rol teorisindeki özne-yapı tartışması, iç-dış eksenini, dış politikada süreklilik-değişim ve söylem-uygulama gibi temel konuları tartışmaktadır. Bölüm ayrıca rol teorisinin DPA alanına katkısını da açıklamaktadır. Son olarak, bölüm 1989-2009 yılları arasında ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasını analiz etmek için rol teorisine dayalı bir dış politika analizi modeli sunmaktadır.

Üçüncü bölüm George H. W. Bush yönetimindeki ABD dış politikasına ve 1989-1993 yılları arasında Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasına odaklanmaktadır. Bölüm, Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemin başlangıcında ABD dış politikasının temel hedeflerini ve dünya iki kutupluluktan tek kutupluluğa dönüşüme tanıklık ederken Bush yönetiminin URT'lerinin ABD dış politikasını nasıl şekillendirdiğini inceleyerek başlamaktadır. Bush yönetiminin üst düzey yetkililerinin resmî açıklamalarına ve beyanlarına dayanan bu bölüm, "yeni dünya düzeni" kavramının Bush yönetiminde ABD'nin uluslararası sistemdeki ve Orta Doğu alt sistemindeki URT'lerinin temelini oluşturduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Bölüm, ABD'nin

Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasının 1989'dan 1993'e kadar yapıcı bir angajmanla karakterize edildiğini savunmaktadır. Ayrıca, Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde Suriye'nin ABD liderliğindeki yeni dünya düzeninde sosyalleşmek için değişen rolünün ve Suriye Devlet Başkanı Hafız Esad'ın ABD'nin URT'lerini kabul etmesinin iki ülke arasında iş birliğine yol açtığını ileri sürmektedir. Bu bölümde, ABD-Suriye iş birliği, Bush yönetimi boyunca vuku bulan üç ana konuya odaklanılarak uzlaşan roller üzerinden incelenmektedir: Körfez Savaşı, Madrid barış süreci ve Lübnan.

Dördüncü bölüm, 1993-2001 yılları arasında Bill Clinton yönetiminde ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasını incelemektedir. Bölüm, Bill Clinton yönetiminin uluslararası sistemdeki ve Orta Doğu alt sistemindeki URT'lerine odaklanarak başlamaktadır. Bölümde Clinton yönetiminin Bush yönetiminin Suriye'ye yönelik yapıcı angajman politikasını sürdürdüğü savunulmaktadır. Bu dönemde ABD-Suriye ilişkilerindeki ana tema ABD tarafından desteklenen Suriye-İsrail barış müzakereleri olmuştur. Bu bağlamda bölüm, Clinton yönetiminin himayesindeki Suriye-İsrail barış görüşmelerinin çeşitli aşamalarının derinlemesine analizini sunmaktadır. Bölüm, Clinton yönetiminin Suriye-İsrail barış görüşmelerinde tam bir ortaklık ve dürüst bir aracı rolü oynadığını ve Suriye'nin ABD'nin rolünü kabul etmesinin Washington ve Şam arasında uzlaşma ve iş birliğine zemin hazırladığını ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca, barış görüşmelerinin nihai başarısızlığına rağmen, Clinton yönetiminin Suriye'nin Orta Doğu barış sürecindeki merkezi rolü nedeniyle Suriye'nin uluslararası terörizmle bağlantısını ve Lübnan üzerindeki hegemonyasını göz ardı ettiğinin altı çizilmektedir.

Çalışmanın beşinci bölümü George W. Bush yönetiminin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasını açıklamaya ayrılmıştır. Bu bölüm yine Bush yönetiminin uluslararası sistemdeki ve Orta Doğu alt sistemindeki URT'lerini saptayarak başlamaktadır. Bölümde, önceki yönetimlerin aksine Bush yönetiminin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasının 2001'den 2009'a kadar açık bir çatışmaya sahne olduğu savunulmaktadır. ABD ve Suriye teröre karşı savaşın ilk aşamalarında El Kaide'ye karşı iş birliği yapmış olsa da, Bush yönetiminde neoconların yükselişi nedeniyle ikili ilişkiler hızla kötüleşmiştir. Bush yönetiminin 11 Eylül sonrası uluslararası düzende URT'lerini tek taraflı güç kullanarak uygulaması Suriye'ye yönelik politikasını da şekillendirmiştir. ABD'nin Irak'ı işgali, Suriye'nin Irak'taki isyana destek vermesi, Filistinli militan grupları ve Hizbullah'ı desteklemesi, kitle imha silahları kapasitesi ve Lübnan üzerindeki hegemonyası Washington ve Şam'ı karşı karşıya getirmiştir. Beşar Esad'ın bu dönemde benimsediği uzlaşmaz pan-Arap tutumu ve Bush yönetiminin URT'lerine meydan okuması ikili ilişkileri daha da gerginleştirmiştir. İki taraf arasındaki

tartışmalı konular nedeniyle Bush yönetimi Suriye-İsrail barış görüşmelerinde rol oynamamıştır. Bu bölümde ABD ve Suriye arasındaki açık çatışma üç ana konu etrafında tartışılmıştır: ABD'nin Irak işgali, Lübnan arenası ve Orta Doğu barış süreci.

Bu tez, ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasını George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton ve George W. Bush döneminde rol teorisini kullanarak incelemiştir. Tez, Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde ABD dış politikasının rol teorisine dayalı dış politika analiz modelinin bütüncül perspektifi ile anlaşılabilirliğini savunmuştur. Buna göre tez, ABD'nin dış politika davranışlarının, Amerikan dış politika yapıcı elitlerinin URT'lerinin bir uzantısı olduğunu ve bunları iç ve uluslararası belirleyicilerin süzgecinden geçirerek formüle ettiklerini ortaya koymuştur. Tezde, Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde Amerikan yönetimlerinin URT'lerinin ve Körfez krizi, Orta Doğu barış süreci ve Irak'ın işgali gibi önemli olaylardaki uygulamalarının, 1989-2009 yılları arasında ABD ile Suriye arasındaki iş birliği ve çatışmayı açıklayabileceği belirtilmiştir. Böylece tez, Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasının, Amerikalı politika yapıcıların bu olaylarla başa çıkmada devletlerini nasıl algıladıklarıyla yakından ilişkili olduğunu göstermiştir.

Tezde ayrıca Suriye'nin Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde iş başına gelen ABD yönetimlerinin URT'lerine uyup uymamasının ABD-Suriye ilişkilerinin doğasını etkilediği vurgulanmıştır. Suriye'nin Körfez krizi, Madrid Barış Konferansı ve Lübnan'da George H. W. Bush yönetiminin; Orta Doğu barış süreci ve Lübnan krizleri sırasında da Bill Clinton yönetiminin URT'lerine uyması nedeniyle ABD-Suriye ilişkileri 1989'dan 2001'e kadar yumuşama ve iş birliğine sahne olmuştur. Ancak Suriye'nin George W. Bush yönetiminin Orta Doğu barış süreci ve Lübnan krizleri sırasındaki URT'lerine uymaması ve bunlara meydan okuması ABD'nin Irak'ı işgali ve sonrasında yaşananlar 2000'li yıllarda ikili ilişkileri çatışmacı bir evreye taşımıştır. Dolayısıyla bu tez, Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde iki ülke arasındaki çatışma ve uzlaşmanın açıklanmasında Suriye'nin ABD'nin URT'lerine verdiği tepkinin de önemli olduğunu iddia etmektedir.

Tezin akademik literatüre teorik ve ampirik olmak üzere iki temel katkısı bulunmaktadır. İlk olarak, tez, rol teorisini Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasını açıklamak için kullanışlı bir analiz çerçevesi olarak sunmuştur. Daha önce belirtildiği gibi, akademik literatürde ABD-Suriye ilişkileri çoğunlukla realist perspektiften incelenmiştir. Akademisyenlerin çoğu, iki ülke arasındaki çatışma ve iş birliğinin ulusal güvenlik ve ulusal çıkarları üzerinden açıklanabileceğini savunmuştur. Bazı akademisyenler ise ABD-Suriye ilişkilerini ideolojinin rolüne odaklanarak inşacı perspektiften ya da ideoloji ve çıkarı mezcederek eklektik bir perspektiften analiz etmeye

çalışmıştır. Bununla birlikte, ABD-Suriye ilişkilerini açıklamaya yönelik teorik girişimler sınırlı kalmıştır. Bu çalışma, rol teorisini faydalı ve kullanışlı bir yaklaşım olarak takdim ederek hâkim realist paradigmaya meydan okumayı amaçlamıştır.

Tezin ikinci katkısı ampiriktir. Yukarıda da belirtildiği gibi akademik literatürde George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton ve George W. Bush dönemlerinin tamamını kapsayarak ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasını irdeleyen bir çalışma bulunmamaktadır. Tez, arşiv ve resmî belgeler, gazeteler ve anılar gibi çok sayıda birincil kaynağın yanı sıra çok çeşitli ikincil kaynaklar kullanarak, ABD-Suriye ilişkilerinin 30 yılını mercek altına almış ve literatüre ampirik bir katkı sağlamayı da amaçlamıştır.

Bu tez aynı zamanda Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde ABD'nin URT'lerinin iç ve dış kaynaklarını ortaya koymaya çalışmıştır. Sovyetler Birliği'nin çöküşüyle uluslararası sistemin iki kutupluluktan tek kutupluluğa dönüşmesi ve diğer aktörlerin ABD'den beklentileri ABD'nin URT'lerinin dış kaynakları olarak tanımlanmıştır. Ülke içinde ise, ABD'nin muazzam askeri ve ekonomik kapasitesi, Amerikan istisnacılığı fikri ve Amerikan kamuoyu, Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde iş başına gelen yönetimlerin URT'lerini şekillendirmiştir. Yeni ortaya çıkan uluslararası sistem öncelikle George H. W. Bush yönetiminin URT'lerini şekillendirirken, kimlik değişkenleri Bill Clinton yönetiminin URT'lerinde belirleyici olmuştur. George W. Bush yönetiminde neoconların yükselişi, 2000'li yıllarda ABD'nin URT'lerinin arkasındaki itici güç olmuştur. Dolayısıyla, neocon fikriyatı ekseninde gerçekleşen ideolojik tercihler George W. Bush yönetimi sırasında URT'lerin ana kaynağı olmuştur.

Bu tezde, devletin kara kutusunu açtığı için rol teorisinden yararlanılmıştır. Rol teorisinin teorik araç setinden yararlanan bu çalışma, URT'leri formüle eden ve uygulayan Amerikan dış politika yapıcılarının 1989-2009 yılları arasında ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasını şekillendirdiğini göstermiştir. Özellikle hegemon ulusal rol tasavvurunun çok taraflı ya da tek taraflı uygulanması bu dönemde ABD-Suriye ilişkilerinin yörüngesini belirlemiştir. George H. W. Bush ve Bill Clinton hegemon ulusal rol tasavvurunu çok taraflı olarak tatbik ederken, George W. Bush bunu tek taraflı uygulama yoluna gitmiştir. Suriye, George H. W. Bush ve Clinton yönetimlerinde uluslararası sistemde çok taraflı bir şekilde hareket ettiği için ABD ile iş birliği yapmayı tercih etmiştir. Suriye, ABD liderliğindeki çok taraflı uluslararası sistemde sosyalleşmeye istekli olduğunu gösterdiğinde, her iki yönetim de Suriye-İsrail barış görüşmelerini öncelikleri haline getirerek ve Suriye'yi kilit bir aktör olarak Orta Doğu barış sürecine dahil ederek Orta Doğu'da bölgesel istikrar sağlayıcı/barış katalizörü rol tasavvurunu uygulamışlardır.

Hem baba Bush hem de Clinton yönetimlerinin barış sürecine aktif katılımı, Suriye'nin Soğuk Savaş sonrası Orta Doğu'da değişen rolüyle aynı döneme denk gelmiştir. Suriye'nin Soğuk Savaş'taki hamisi Sovyetler Birliği'nin çöküşü Hafız Esad'ı İsrail ile stratejik eşitlik politikasından ve 1980'lerde Suriye'nin Orta Doğu'daki taktiksel retçi rolünden vazgeçmeye zorlamıştır. Esad, ABD'nin himayesi altında İsrail ile ayrı bir barış anlaşmasının Suriye'nin stratejik seçeneği olduğunu açıkça ilan etmekten geri durmamıştır. Dolayısıyla, her iki devlet de on yıllardır süren Suriye-İsrail çatışmasının çözümünde yer almayı amaçladığından, ABD'nin ve Suriye'nin rolleri Orta Doğu'da birbirleriyle örtüşmüştür. Baba Bush ve Clinton yönetimlerinin yapıcı angajman politikası ve Suriye'nin ABD'nin URT'lerine uyması, Washington ve Şam arasında Lübnan arenasında da normalleşme ve iş birliğini beraberinde getirmiştir. Soğuk Savaş sonrası Amerikan yönetimleri Orta Doğu'da barış ve istikrarı sağlama sorumluluğunu üstlendiklerinde, Suriye'nin Lübnan'daki varlığını istikrar sağlayıcı bir faktör olarak algılamış ve Suriye'nin Lübnan üzerindeki hegemonyasını kabul etmişlerdir. Böylece Amerikan yönetimleri Suriye'nin ABD'nin URT'lerine uymasını Lübnan üzerinden ödüllendirme yoluna gitmişlerdir.

Öte yandan, neoconların etkisi altındaki George W. Bush yönetimi, uluslararası sistemde ve Orta Doğu alt sisteminde hegemon ulusal rol tasavvurunu tek taraflı olarak yürütmüştür. Bush yönetimi Afganistan ve Irak'ı işgal ederek teröre karşı savaşta iddialı ve saldırgan bir dış politika izlemiştir. Suriye başlangıçta el-Kaide'ye karşı istihbarat sağlayarak Bush yönetimiyle iş birliği yapmış olsa da, Bush yönetiminin Filistinli militan gruplar ve Hizbullah'la ilgili taleplerini reddetmiş, Irak'ın işgalini ve Orta Doğu'da demokrasiyi teşvik etmeye yönelik Büyük Orta Doğu İnisyatifi'ni şiddetle kınamıştır. Beşar Esad rejiminin tek taraflı olarak uygulanan hegemon ve Amerikan değerlerinin savunucusu rol tasavvurlarına karşı çıkması nedeniyle Bush yönetimi, Suriye-İsrail barış görüşmelerinde bölgesel istikrar sağlayıcı/barış katalizörü rolünü oynamaktan geri durmuştur. Suriye'nin zaman zaman ABD'nin sponsorluğunda barış görüşmelerinin yenilenmesine yönelik taktiksel çağrılarına rağmen, Beşar Esad rejimi Orta Doğu barış sürecinde kendisini Washington ile tamamen karşı karşıya getiren pan-Arap bir duruş benimsemiştir. Suriye'nin ABD'nin URT'lerine meydan okuması nedeniyle Bush yönetimi, ağır ekonomik yaptırımlar uygulayarak ve 2005 yılında eski Lübnan Başbakanı Refik Hariri'nin öldürülmesinden sonra Suriye'yi Lübnan'dan çekilmeye zorlayarak Şam'a karşı açık çatışma politikası izlemiştir.

Rol teorisinin kuramsal varsayımlarına dayanan bu çalışma, Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde

ABD dış politikasının yapıcı angajmandan açık çatışmaya doğru evrilmesinin ABD'nin URT'lerini oluşturan liderlere bakılarak açıklanabileceğini öne sürmektedir. George H. W. Bush ve Bill Clinton daha az ideolojik davranırken, George W. Bush, ABD'nin URT'lerini oluştururken çok daha ideolojik davranmıştır. Bu bağlamda, Bush yönetimindeki neoconların ABD'nin URT'lerini agresif bir biçimde şekillendirmedeki rolü, ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasını etkilemiştir. Tezde, URT'lere ek olarak, bağlamın da 1989'dan 2009'a kadar ABD-Suriye ilişkilerinin gidişatını belirlediği ileri sürülmüştür. George H. W. Bush yönetiminde Körfez krizinin patlak vermesi, Clinton yönetiminde İsrail ve Araplar arasındaki Orta Doğu barış süreci ve George W. Bush yönetiminde teröre karşı savaş ABD-Suriye ilişkilerinin doğasını etkilemiştir.

Bu tez, Baba Bush yönetiminde ABD'nin URT'lerinin dış politika yapıcı elitler tarafından değerlendirilen iç ve uluslararası faktörlerin karşılıklı etkileşiminden ortaya çıktığını göstermiştir. Sovyetler Birliği'nin çöküşü, Bush yönetimini ABD'yi tek kutuplu uluslararası sistemde kendisini yeniden konumlandırmaya zorlayan en önemli dış faktör olmuştur. Bunun yanı sıra, ABD'nin muazzam ekonomik ve askeri kapasitesi, Amerikan siyasi kültüründe yer alan Amerikan istisnacılığı fikri ve Amerikan kamuoyu, Bush yönetiminin URT'lerini iç ortamda etkilemiştir. Bush yönetiminin dış politika elitleri bu faktörleri göz önünde bulundurarak ABD'nin URT'lerini formüle etmiştir. Özellikle Körfez krizinin patlak vermesi, yeni dünya düzeni kavramıyla ifade edilen URT'lerin uygulanmasını tetiklemiştir. Bush yönetimi Körfez krizi sırasında hegemon, Amerikan değerlerinin koruyucusu ve temsilcisi, pasifik birliğinin savunucusu, bölgesel istikrar sağlayıcı ve dengeleyici URT'lerini tatbik etmiştir. Suriye, Saddam rejimine karşı ABD öncülüğündeki Irak karşıtı koalisyonu katılmaya karar vererek Sovyetler Birliği'nin yokluğunda ABD liderliğindeki yeni dünya düzeninde sosyalleşmek istemiştir. Böylece Suriye, Körfez krizi sırasında Bush yönetiminin URT'leriyle uyumlu hareket etmiştir. Bush yönetimi, yeni dünya düzeni kavramı ile Körfez krizi arasında yakın bir ilişki olduğu için, Körfez krizi sırasında ABD'nin URT'lerine uymaya istekli olması nedeniyle Suriye ile yakınlaşmayı uygun bulmuştur. Böylece, George H. W. Bush yönetiminde ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikası yapıcı bir angajman ve iş birliği ile karakterize edilmiştir.

Körfez Savaşı'ndan sonra Bush yönetimi, on yıllardır süren Arap-İsrail çatışmasına bir çözüm bulmak için Madrid Barış Konferansı ve sonrasında bölgesel istikrar sağlayıcı/barış katalizörü rolünü üstlenmiştir. Bu dönemde Hafız Esad, ABD'nin Tel Aviv ile Şam arasındaki arabulucu rolünü kabul ederek Suriye'nin 1980'lerdeki taktiksel retçi rolünden vazgeçmiş, Bush yönetimi de Suriye'nin değişen rolünü ve ABD'nin barış sürecindeki

arabulucu rolünü benimsemesini övmüştür. Bu nedenle Bush yönetimi, Suriye'yi Orta Doğu barış sürecinde barışın anahtarı olarak görmüştür. Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemin başlangıcındaki ABD-Suriye iş birliği Lübnan arenasında da kendini göstermiştir. Bush yönetiminin öncelikli hedefi Lübnan'da barış ve istikrarı sağlamak olduğundan, Suriye'nin Körfez krizinde ve Madrid barış sürecinde Washington ile iş birliği yapması sayesinde 1990'ların başında Suriye'yi Lübnan'da sorun çıkarıcı bir ülke olarak değil istikrar sağlayıcı bir güç olarak kabul etmiştir.

Clinton yönetiminde ABD'nin URT'leri iç ve dış faktörlerin karşılıklı etkileşiminin ürünüdür. Bu dönemde ABD'nin ekonomik ve askeri gücü, Amerikan istisnacılığı fikri ve Amerikan kamuoyu URT'leri etkileyen iç faktörlerdi. Tek kutuplu uluslararası sistem ve diğer aktörlerin dünyanın tek süper gücü olarak ABD'den beklentileri, Clinton yönetiminin URT'lerini etkileyen uluslararası faktörleri oluşturdu. Başkan Clinton ve dış politika ekibi bu faktörleri süzgeçten geçirerek 1993'ten 2001'e kadar ABD'nin URT'lerini şekillendirmiştir. İki kutupluluktan tek kutupluluğa geçiş tamamlanırken, Clinton yönetiminin dünya genelinde demokrasi ve serbest piyasa ekonomisinin teşvik edilmesine odaklanan ideolojik bakış açısı ABD'nin URT'lerini belirlemiştir. Bu dönemde ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikası yapıcı angajman ve iş birliği ekseninde şekillenmeye devam etmiştir. Clinton yönetiminin Suriye ile ilişkilerinde çok taraflı bir biçimde uygulanan hegemon ve bölgesel istikrar sağlayıcı/barış katalizörü URT'leri ön plana çıkmıştır. Clinton yönetimi, Suriye ve İsrail arasında gerçek bir barışın sağlanması için Suriye-İsrail barış sürecine tam bir ortak ve dürüst bir arabulucu olarak dahil olmuştur. Suriye'nin Clinton yönetiminin URT'lerini kabul etmesi, bu dönemde Washington ile Şam arasındaki iş birliğine katkıda bulunmuştur. Suriye, Clinton yönetiminden Suriye-İsrail barış sürecine tam bir ortak ve dürüst bir arabulucu olarak müdahil olmasını resmen talep etmiştir. Dolayısıyla, Clinton döneminde ABD ve Suriye'nin rollerinde bir örtüşme olduğu söylenebilir. Clinton yönetiminin Suriye'yi Orta Doğu'da kapsamlı barışın anahtarı olarak görmesi de iki ülke arasındaki buzların erimesine katkıda bulunmuştur.

Burada hem George H. W. Bush hem de Bill Clinton yönetimlerinin, Orta Doğu barış sürecindeki kilit konumu nedeniyle Suriye'nin uluslararası terörizme sponsorluğu gibi ABD ile Suriye arasındaki sorunlu konuları göz ardı ettiklerini belirtmek gerekir. Ayrıca her iki yönetim de Suriye'nin Lübnan üzerindeki hegemonyasını tanımış ve Suriye'yi Orta Doğu'da haydut devlet olarak kategorize etmemişlerdir.

George W. Bush yönetiminde 2001-2009 yılları arasında URT'lerin devamlılığı görülmektedir. Ancak Bush yönetimi, neoconların etkisiyle Irak işgali ve sonrasında hegemon, pasifik birliğinin savunucusu, Amerikan değerlerinin temsilcisi ve dengeleyici

URT'lerini tek taraflı olarak tatbik etmiştir. Neoconların ve ilk Bush yönetimindeki aşırı milliyetçi figürlerin yükselişi, 11 Eylül'den sonra ABD'nin URT'lerindeki değişimin ana nedeniydi. Dolayısıyla, neoconların yükselişine ek olarak, ABD'nin muazzam askeri ve ekonomik kapasitesi ve Amerikan istisnacılığı fikri yerel düzeyde Bush yönetiminin URT'lerini şekillendirmiştir. Teröre karşı savaşa neden olan uluslararası terörizm tehdidi ve tek kutuplu uluslararası sistem Bush yönetiminin URT'lerini uluslararası düzeyde etkilemiştir. Başkan Bush ve dış politika ekibi bu faktörleri süzgeçten geçirerek URT'lerini formüle etmiş ve ilk dönem boyunca uygulamıştır. Her ne kadar ikinci Bush döneminde neoconlar kenara itilmiş ve realist dış politika elitleri ön plana çıkmış olsa da, bu durum ABD dış politikasında sadece şekilsel bir değişime neden olmuş ve ikinci Bush döneminde de URT'ler devam etmiştir.

Bush yönetiminin URT'leri 2000'li yıllarda ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikasını şekillendirmiştir. Terörle savaşın ilk aşamasında Washington ve Şam arasında El Kaide'ye karşı istihbarat iş birliği yapılmasına rağmen, Bush yönetiminde (özellikle Pentagon'daki) neoconların etkisi kısa sürede ABD-Suriye ilişkilerini rayından çıkarmıştır. Başkan Bush başlangıçta Dışişleri Bakanlığı'nın terörle savaşta Suriye ile yapıcı angajman politikasını sürdürmeye istekli görünse de, Suriye'nin Irak'ın işgali sırasında ve sonrasında ABD'nin URT'lerine uymaması nedeniyle tutumunu değiştirmiştir. Suriye'nin yeni Devlet Başkanı Beşar Esad, Temmuz 2000'de iktidara geldikten sonra Washington'a karşı uzlaşmaz bir tutum ve Ortadoğu'da pan-Arap bir duruş benimsemiştir. Esad, ABD'nin Irak'ı işgaline karşı çıkmış, Irak'taki direnişi desteklemiş, militan Filistinli grupları ve Hizbullah'ı himaye etmeye devam etmiştir. Esad ayrıca, Suriye'nin kitle imha silahları programını devam ettirmiş, Orta Doğu'da demokrasinin teşvik edilmesine şiddetle karşı çıkmış ve Suriye'nin Lübnan üzerindeki hegemonyasını korumaya çalışmıştır. Dolayısıyla Beşar yönetimindeki Suriye, Bush yönetiminin URT'lerine ve Orta Doğu'daki uygulamalarına karşı çıkarak 2000'li yıllarda Washington ve Şam'ı karşı karşıya getiren bir tutum takınmıştır. Baba Bush ve Clinton yönetimlerinin aksine, George W. Bush yönetiminde ABD'nin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikası açık çatışma ve anlaşmazlık ile karakterize edilmiştir.

ABD-Suriye anlaşmazlığı ikili ilişkileri Lübnan arenasında ve Orta Doğu barış sürecinde de olumsuz yönde etkilemiştir. Bush yönetimi Suriye'nin diktatoryal rejimini Lübnan demokrasisi için bir tehdit olarak algıladığından, 2005 yılında vuku bulan Hariri suikastından sonra Suriye'yi Lübnan'dan çıkararak cezalandırmıştır. Bush yönetimi ayrıca, iki ülke arasındaki ihtilafli konular nedeniyle Suriye-İsrail barış görüşmelerinde bölgesel istikrar sağlayıcı/barış katalizörü rolünü üstlenmemiştir. Bush yönetimi Suriye'nin Filistinli

militan gruplar ve Hizbullah ile olan bağlantısını Ortadoğu’da barış ve istikrara yönelik bir tehdit olarak değerlendirmiş ve bu nedenle sadece Filistin-İsrail barış görüşmelerini destekleme yoluna gitmiştir.

Özetle bu tez, rol teorisinin Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde ABD’nin Suriye’ye yönelik dış politikasını açıklayabileceğini ortaya koymuştur. Bu tezin teorik çerçevesi ABD dış politikasındaki diğer vakalara da uygulanabilir. ABD’nin Soğuk Savaş öncesinde veya sonrasında dünyanın farklı bölgelerindeki küçük devletlerle olan ilişkileri rol teorisi üzerinden incelenebilir.

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