THE SYRIAN THREAT - Syria, A United States Enemy With Impunity

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The current policies adopted by the Syrian regime and its occupation of Lebanon represent a key foreign policy issue to the United States. In this study we seek to provide information on:

1. The causes of Syria's occupation of Lebanon.
2. The methods by which this occupation threatens the U.S. national interests and security.
3. The moral implications it has on our perceived values in the region.

We intend to shed more light on the instruments adopted by the Syrian regime for more than thirty years to promote its policies especially the use of terror against enemies of the regime, including the U.S., and the continued use of these instruments by President Bashar Asad even after September 11.

Lastly, we would conclude with an overview of U.S. policy, arguments for change and some recommendations

THE ASADS' REGIME AND THE BA'TH PARTY

After being in power for over 31 years, the Asads' regime is often hard to separate from Syria the nation. First, it is worth to glance at the totalitarian nature of this regime and its damaging effects on Syria before showing how it has been able to affect its neighbors and the regional stability.

Hafiz Asad seized power in Syria in a coup on November 1970, two years after Saddam Hussein's Ba'th party did the same in Iraq. Both the Syrian and Iraqi Ba'th parties are derived from the same ideological branch of the Arab nationalist tree [1]. Both regimes are atrocious and share beyond the common ideology many other resemblances, including structural, government methodology, use of

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terror as instruments of policy, expansionistic claims and a commitment to regional instability as means of securing internal and regional power. In 1970, Asad, then Syria's defense minister, establishing a pattern that was to be repeated on several occasions notably in Lebanon [2], sent his army to invade Jordan and to fight along the Palestinians in their attempt to seize power from King Hussein. Although he was forced to withdraw his tanks later in face of American pressure, he used the events as a springboard for his final move in his accession to power. His move took place six weeks after the death of Jamal Abdul Nasser, the main figure in Arab politics for over sixteen years, a role Asad inspired to play for the rest of his live.

In what became a staple policy of his regime, Asad wasted no time in demonstrating his readiness to brutally squash any opposition. He hurriedly arrested his opponents and imprisoned the deposed chief of state Salah Jadid for over twenty years in Mezze prison. His methods of long and brutal imprisonment, torture and assassinations of his enemies earned him a constant generous stature among the ranks of human rights abusers. One example of his Stalinist brutality against his people is the Palmyra incident. On June 27th, 1980 he ordered his brother to send a "special unit" of 60 soldiers to the Palmyra prison where some five hundred political opponents were held, once there the soldiers opened fire in the dormitory slaughtering all the prisoners [3]. Another example of Asad's bloody trail against Syrians is the one in Aleppo after some demonstration of resistance to his rule in August 1980; scores of males over the age of fourteen were rounded up at random by his army and shot on the spot [4]. And in February 1982, as a further resemblance between the regimes in Syria and Iraq, 12,000 soldiers of Asad's elite forces besieged the city of Hama [5] in northern Syria and for three weeks reined terror and artillery barrages on its inhabitants. Over 20,000 lives perished, whole districts were razed and a third of the historic city was demolished.

Asad spent the later part of the 80's and 90's consolidating his power in Syria, using the same bloody tactics to overcome Lebanon and to impose his doctrine on both nations while planning his succession by his son Bashar. Hafiz el-Asad role models for most of his career were the Romanian dictator Nicolai Ceausescu and the North Korean dictator Kim Il Sung. Following their example Asad worked on merging his "revolutionary" regime with a monarchy [6]. While events spoiled the Romanian dictator plans and led to his demise, an event that profoundly shook Asad, the North Korean transition was more successful. Upon the death of Hafiz el-Asad in 2000, and against the hopes of many, Bashar inherited the family business. In the beginning Bashar promised changes towards freedom and openness. He quickly returned to his father's ways while relying on the old guards, the

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National Command of the Ba'th Party. Bashar so far demonstrated remarkable skills in adopting the old methods in abuse of human rights as noted recently in Amnesty International and even by some friends of the regime [7] and expanding his support to terrorist organizations and has been even more daring and vocal in deepening his ties with the "axis of evil" regimes, Iraq, Iran and North Korea.

To understand the reasons behind the consistency in policy, strategy and tactics from Asad senior to junior and to judge the catastrophic implications of the Asad regime on Syria and its neighbors, one has to look into the period following the collapse of the Soviet Union and detect the pattern of all the missed opportunities for change since then.

The Ba'th regime under both Asad father and son has consistently and violently opposed any opportunity to move toward democracy, human rights, economic development and social progress. The conclusion drawn is that change is very dangerous and could destroy the regime if it became soft or too flexible. An end of conflict with Israel, a move to democracy or an introduction of basic civic freedoms will create an opportunity for the Syrian people to demand reforms and changes that contradict the very existence of any totalitarian regime. The party's elite has staked careers and passions on ideologies that cannot accept nor will survive such a transition. Asad and his upper party echelon, rather than offering a true vision for the advancement of Syria and solve real domestic social and economical problems, have instead fed the masses continuous doses of hatred, anger and rejection of the Western civilization, United States and Israel.

The preservation of the status quo under Bashar has been implemented by revitalizing the same hard line ideologies and causes to tap into the people's passion requiring them to set aside aspirations for a better life, thus accepting their government's oppressive policy's in the name of the struggle against the nation's enemies. In a typical application of Asad's doctrine in Syria and to a great extent in Syrian controlled Lebanon, the rhetoric of the "Arab Islamic Struggle" against the Imperialistic plans of the United States and the Expansionist plans of Israel is conveniently used to brutally silence any opposition voices. The "External Enemy", who allegedly wants to humiliate the Arabs, trample their honor and destroy their religion, is always found to be behind any request for reforms. Democracy is said to be not a foundation of peace and prosperity but rather an American Ploy to despoil the Arabs and drain Islam of its meaning, a luxury that could not be afforded in a time of confrontation [8]. The large armed forces are maintained, mainly to secure the regime, at a cost of $1.2 Billion, more than half the government annual income of $2.3 Billion while unemployment is over

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20% and external debt is soaring at $22 Billion.

These facts prove the futility of any diplomatic effort to bring the Asad's regime closer to reforms or to peace. Engaging the Syrians in subtle negotiations to convince them to withdraw from Lebanon, make peace with Israel and initiate democratic changes in Syria is the equivalent of convincing a sane man to commit suicide. Syria's Regime *raison d'etre* emanates from the allegedly unavoidable "struggle" against Israel and the United States.

THE OCCUPATION OF LEBANON

Since the establishment of the republic after World War I and its independence in 1943, Lebanon has been a staunch friend of the West and a parliamentary democracy in an otherwise unstable and pro-Soviet Arab world, a cause of real concern to its totalitarian larger neighbor, Syria. Hafiz El-Asad worked feverishly to destroy the Lebanese democracy since the early 70s. He fueled a bloody war between the Palestinians and the Lebanese Christians and then imposed himself as the peacemaker to militarily occupy the country in 1976. Despite heroic resistance by the Christians for over 15 years, Asad was able to complete his hold on the country in 1990, and forcefully occupy the Christian areas while the world's attention was focused on the crisis in Kuwait. In fact, Asad's occupation of Lebanon greatly resembles Hussein's occupation of Kuwait, but instead of the sudden and highly publicized massive invasion of the Iraqi army, Asad, in a testimony of his brilliant skills, achieved the final chapter of his occupation through deceit, assassinations, guile terror campaigns, subtle military operations and considerable American acquiescence.

Beyond the military presence and the wide intermingling of the Syrian Intelligence in all facets of the Lebanese political and judicial decision making, the Syrian regime has anchored its hegemony through a series of bilateral treaties the most prominent of which are the "Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination" and the "Security Agreement," both signed in 1991. These wide-ranging accords tie Lebanon ever more closely to Syria in all fields – military, political, social, economical, educational and cultural – and constitute the backbone of Syria's incremental annexation of Lebanon [9].

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Historically, the rulers in Damascus never reconciled themselves to the emergence of an independent and democratic Lebanese republic in 1943. They have implicitly rejected the sovereignty of Lebanon by refusing to establish official diplomatic relations with Beirut. There has never been an exchange of ambassadors between the two nations. Hafiz el-Asad early on declared that Syria and Lebanon are one nation one people, often stating: "*it is a mistake for anyone to believe or think that we will ever leave Lebanon.…to which we are bound by a common history and a common destiny*."[10]

Since the early 70s Lebanon has been the cornerstone in Asad's strategy of being the main figure in Arab politics and for Syria to be the dominant power in the Levant. Based on that premise, Syria's occupation of Lebanon should be considered the vanguard of the totalitarian regime's permanence and its ability to threaten the stability of the region. Control of Lebanon rewards Syria's regime with many strategic advantages. The gains the Syrians derive out of the occupation fall under three main strategies:

1. Fortification of the totalitarian regime:

As was the case of Eastern European satellite states with the Soviet Union, any free and striving democratic society adjacent to the totalitarian regime is considered a natural threat by the dictatorship and induces fear of infiltration of the democratic values to undermine the power structure.

Lebanon's once free and active press, multiple parties, educational diversity and independent judiciary system, were all deemed by the Asad regime as a fertile ground for Syrian nationals opposed to him and therefore freedom in Lebanon had to be squashed. Any voice questioning the validity or the legitimacy of Syria's policy is to be accused of assisting the Zionist enemy and prosecuted as a traitor.

Syrian intelligence agencies headed by the "high commissioner" of Lebanon, General Ghazi Canaan, infiltrate all organizations, being governmental, labor, military, educational, and political and ensure that any whimper of dissent is quickly dealt with.

The judicial system once independent from the state has become a clone of its counterpart in Syria, acts in many cases as the instrument of tyrannical supervision. A recent example of this is the events that occurred on August 7th, 2001 where scores of young men and women, including students and teenagers, suspected of being members of two opposition groups - the Lebanese Forces (LF) and the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) - were arrested after demonstrations and other peaceful activities

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calling for the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. Some of the detainees referred for trial before criminal or military courts were sentenced to prison terms on charges of distributing leaflets "harming the reputation of the Syrian army."[11] In another incident Raghida Dargham, an American-Lebanese journalist and UN correspondent for the newspaper al-Hayat, was indicted by the Military Court with "collaboration with the enemy", because of her participation in a conference where Israeli nationals were present. And more recently the courts in Beirut convicted and ordered the shut down of the Murr television network (MTV) on September 4th based on fabricated allegations and in response to the station vocal commentary against Syrian hegemony. When employees of the station and peaceful citizens held candles and parked themselves outside the building in protest, they were attacked and beaten by the security forces.

2. International and Regional Leverage:

In foreign policy, no Lebanese decision is taken without the approval of Syria giving the Asad regime an additional voice in the regional and international arena. Moreover, Lebanon under the Syrian occupation has unwillingly become a breeding ground for terrorist organizations that are controlled by the Syrian regime to undermine stability in the Middle East and give Syria leverage over regional issues. A case in point is the attack staged by Hezbollah on August 29th, 2002 on the Israeli positions in the Shebaa Farms region in Southern Lebanon killing one soldier and injuring two. The attacks prompted the US Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near East Affairs David Satterfield to head to Damascus to discuss the attacks; conveniently at the time Congress was about to debate the Syria Accountability Act. Returning from Syria, Mr. Satterfield was quick to state to a group of Lebanese Christian opposition “the Administration opposes the Syria Accountability Act and has made this clear to the Congress.”[12] Nothing was mentioned about Lebanese sovereignty or withdrawal of Syrian troops. No anti-Israeli attacks are staged from Southern Lebanon until the Syrians want to deliver another message to a U.S envoy in Damascus. This pattern has been repeated on many occasions since the withdrawal of the Israeli army from Southern Lebanon in May 2000. While the State Department has fully expected the Lebanese Army to fill the vacuum and counted on the Lebanese government to be able to do so [13] the Syrians have prevented the Lebanese from deploying any considerable government forces on the border and consequently allowed Hezbollah to fill the vacuum. Since then and whenever the Syrians felt the need to be included in any Middle East diplomacy, they stir the Lebanese southern border with attacks by their terrorist proxies that prompt immediate visits by our

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diplomatic officials. This was again evident in April of 2002 when Secretary Collin Powell was visiting the region to defuse the eruption of violence in Israel and did not intend to visit Damascus. Hezbollah promptly staged a series of attacks and Mr. Powell found himself visiting Syria to quiet the Lebanese border.

Violence in the Southern Lebanon has the added benefit to the Syrian regime of projecting an image to the Arab masses as the defender of the Arab cause against Israeli aggression. Irrespective of the fact that the Syrians have not fired a single shot from their border at the Israelis since 1973, Lebanon's occupation provide them with the tool to attack Israel and any possible peace plan through the Lebanese border and via their proxies. This no cost endeavor enables them to claim their leadership role among the Syrians, Arabs and Moslems for championing the resistance against the West, the U.S. and Israel and yet on the other hand still claim deniability through playing the stabilizing role in face of any attempt to hold them accountable for spoiling the peace.

The Syrians have been extremely skilled using their ability to instigate violence in Lebanon to prompt the U.S. to court them as a critical element to any peace negotiation. At the same time, being the real obstacle for any form of peace and working towards the destruction of Israel and the erosion of all U.S. interests in the region, provides them with pretenses that could be fed to the masses in order to maintain their totalitarian regime in Syria, the occupation of Lebanon and an expanded leadership role in the Arab world. It is the ideal situation for a regime that has no intention whatsoever to change. The occupation of Lebanon has provided Asad with the prestige, the tools and the deniability to safely maintain the status quo and while the occupation continues, the Syrians will sure continue indefinitely to hold as a hostage the peace in the Middle East. The need for this is even stronger with Bashar el-Asad than previously with the senior Asad. Lacking the savvy experience of his father and facing ever-increasing burdens of a struggling economy and a steady rise in internal discontent, the young Asad is bound to exploit this strategy in Lebanon even further to strengthen his standing among his people, among Arabs and still show the West his aptitude in detracting any peace negotiations in the region.

3. Economic Exploitation:

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Over a million workers from Syria have entered the country and found by choice or force work in Lebanon. For a country such as Lebanon with a total population of 3.8 million and an

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unemployment rate of 18%, this economic drain is staggering. The Syrian workers send in access of $3.8 billion a year in hard currency to their families in Syria.

Substandard Syrian products regularly get exported to the Lebanese market. Plastics, shoes, fruit and dairy products are dumped in Lebanon at reduced prices depriving the Lebanese farmers and manufacturers a fair competition and for the Syrian producers, substantial hard currency.

Illegal drug crops in the Beqaa valley and its export to Arab and European countries under the supervision of the Syrian intelligence officers provide the regime with a substantial revenue source.

Smuggling of stolen products, money laundering and racketeering in all lucrative Lebanese enterprises, are all actions that the Syrian elite exploits, with the assistance of their intelligence officers, to pocket huge amounts of money. Examples of this silent partnership are the revenue that Syrians receive from Beirut Airport, Beirut Seaport, Casino of Lebanon and Cellular phone monopoly.

IMPACT ON LEBANON

For every benefit the Syrians receive from Lebanon, the Lebanese pay a heavy price. The total cost for the occupation since 1976 is staggering and the social, economical and demographic cost have been more devastating since 1991 the era of total Syrian hegemony.

Human Rights Abuse:

The U.S. State Department report on the condition of Human Rights in Lebanon in 2001 states that **"**the right of citizens to change their government remains significantly restricted by the lack of complete government control over parts of the country, shortcomings in the electoral system, and Syrian influence. The 2000 parliamentary elections were flawed and suffered from Syrian government influence. Members of the security forces used excessive force and tortured and abused some detainees. Prison conditions remained poor. Government abuses also included the arbitrary arrest and detention of persons who were critical of government policies" [13] The Government limits press freedom by continuing to harass, abuse, and detain journalists, forcing other journalists to practice self-censorship. The intelligence agencies under the supervision of Syrian officers continue to restrict radio

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and television broadcasting in a discriminatory manner especially those run by Christians. The Security and Intelligence "agencies" continue to restrict freedom of assembly and impose limits on freedom of association. Assassination of Christian opposition leaders, arbitrary detentions and being under the constant threat of being accused of treason has devastated most Christians.

Devastated Economy:

The post war economic policies of the pro-Syrian regime in Lebanon have proven disastrous. Under the much-flaunted banner of reconstruction, the government set about borrowing huge amounts of hard currency. Lebanon's stock exchange was the worst performing market in the Middle East in 1999 [15] In a 2000 released ranking of living standards in 218 cities around the world, Beirut finished 158th, lagging well behind the capitals of such impoverished countries as Pakistan, Bolivia, and Ghana [14.] From 1990 to 2002 the national debt has grown from $3.7 billions to $33 billions and has surpassed the GNP (175%). It takes nearly all the government's revenues just to service this monster debt. Unfortunately, the greater part of the borrowed money was not used for reconstruction but ended up mostly in the secret bank accounts of a handful of officials closely allied with key figures in the Syrian ruling elite and their Syrian partners.

Syrianization of the Institutions:

Lebanon's military establishment has been integrated in training, equipment, weapons, and even dress into the ways of the Syrian Armed Forces. Lebanese officers that show signs of patriotism have been purged through demotion or outright expulsion. Those officers who undergo training tours in Syria usually stand a better chance of promotion when they return to Lebanon.

Lebanon's judiciary system once independent of the state, has over time succumbed to the stifling embrace of Syrianization and is quickly becoming a clone of its counterpart in Syria [16]. Judges regularly receive instructions from Syrian intelligence officials. Military courts have in most cases replaced civilian ones where they hold summary trials, reaching quick verdicts, and meting out harsh sentences with little regard for the rights of defendants to obtain fair legal representation as was the case with many peaceful civilians during August 7th, 2001 demonstrations.

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In the last twelve years, Lebanon's advanced and diverse educational curriculum has been subjected to a concentrated Arabization and elimination of Western cultural influence. The Lebanese liberal education, which for decades served as a conduit between Middle Eastern and Western culture, is perishing at an accelerated speed.

Since the 19th century, Beirut has served as a main center for free expression, information and ideological dialogues. Hundreds of magazines and newspapers and thousands of books were published and distributed throughout the Middle East. The Syrian regime dictated a "Security Agreement" with Lebanon effectively censoring any information that might be critical of Syria. State security agencies monitor all forms of media and brutal measures are taken whenever the relation with the "Sister Country" is mentioned in any unfavorable manner. The violent shut down of the Murr Television station (MTV) mentioned above and the law suit recently brought against the Lebanese Broadcasting Company (LBC), both mostly owned and run by Christians and both reflecting opinions opposed to the Syrian occupation, are examples of this crack down on free expression.

Erosion of the Christian Population and Islamization of the Country:

Since the 4th century A.D. the Christians of Lebanon had a dominant and powerful role in the Levant. They maintained a good measure of autonomy throughout the Islamic conquests of the 7th century and were able to play an important part in keeping the Western civilization and values vibrant in the Middle East during the 6 centuries of Mamelouks and Ottoman dominations. After World War I, Christians, who represented the majority of Lebanese citizens, built the Republic based on Judeo-Christian values and adopted mostly French laws to govern the society. In 1943, the Christians partnered with their Muslim countrymen and gained independence based on maintaining Lebanon as a unique balance of religious tolerance and where Christians can feel secure of their identity in a Muslim dominated region. In the war years of 1975 to 1990, the Christians at devastating cost, resisted assaults on the state and the Christian areas against Palestinian organizations headed by the PLO and against an assembly of Syrian backed and supported terrorist organizations and headed by heavily armed Syrian Army brigades. In addition to tens of thousands of human casualties, the cost of fighting the Palestinians and the Syrians included the loss of 440 churches and monasteries, or one third of the total Christian places of worship in Lebanon. 17 out of 33 dioceses and 29% of the Christian schools were also either damaged or completely destroyed [17]. Thus, today more than ever, the Christian presence in Lebanon, that survived for centuries all forms off attacks, is on the verge of extinction.

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Prior to the war years, the Christian population accounted for just over 50% of the population of Lebanon. Today this percentage has dropped by 10% due to increased emigration from Syrian tyranny, a high Muslim birth rate and an en masse "naturalization" of foreigners. As is the 1994 law that allowed more than 300,000 people, two-third of them Muslim Syrians to become Lebanese citizens. The effect of this arbitrary decision on a country of 3.8 million is a serious tilt in the demographic balance and electoral votes a fact that allowed many of the pro-Syrian candidates to win in the 1996 and 2000 elections.

The growing influence of Hezbollah under Syrian sponsorship is at the expense of the Christians' influence and presence. Hezbollah officials never tired of repeating that they want to establish an Islamic Republic in Lebanon. Even the terrorist organization's platform states that "*we do not hide our commitment to the rule of Islam, we call upon the nation to choose an Islamic regime.*" Clearly, left at the mercy of the Syrians and Hezbollah's strategy, pro-Western Christians' influence is quickly dwindling in Lebanon.

THE ASADS' REGIME'S TOOLS OF POLICY

Since the early 70s, the Syrian regime has shown a determined will and mastery in the use of various tools of policy that have created instability in the region and continue to pose a global threat.

The Terror Weapon*:*

Syria is one of the original countries to be placed on the list of state sponsors of terrorism that was adopted in 1979 pursuant to Section 6 of the Export Administration Act. [18] Even post-September 11, Syria continues to provide safe haven and logistic support to a variety of terrorist groups. Several of these groups maintain a presence in Damascus and terrorist training facilities or forces in Syria. Terrorist groups also have bases in parts of Syrian controlled Lebanon. According to the State Department, six of the twenty-eight terrorist organizations cited in Patterns of Global terrorism 2001 receive some level of sponsorship and support from Syria, and a number of senior terrorist leaders coordinate terrorist activities and reside in Damascus. Namely, Ahmad Jibril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (FPLP-GC), the Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ),

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Abu Musa's Fatah-the-Intifadah, George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Hamas and Hezbollah. Indeed, of the seven states sponsoring terrorism on the State Department's list, Syria rivals Iran for conducting the most frenetic activity in support of terrorism [19].

From the Syrian perspective, the intensive use of the "terror weapon" allows Syria to advance a range of its interests both domestically and internationally: it guarantees the stability and survival of the regime at home; it enables Syria to apply pressure to its enemies in the Arab world; it strengthens the Syrian occupation of Lebanon; it punishes Western countries and achieves political gains from them; and, above all else, it furthers Syria's strategic interests in the conflict with Israel [20].

The manner in which the "terror weapon" is used by the Syrian regime, as well as the targets of this weapon, changes from time to time in accordance with political developments and changing pressures on Syria. In the past decade, one can perceive changes with regard to the manner in which the "terror weapon" was used when compared with the 1970s and 1980s. The factors underlying these changes were: the elimination of domestic opposition, the downfall of the Soviet Union, Syria's isolation in the Arab arena, Syria's "off and on" participation in the peace process and its growing need for the United States. All of these factors led the Syrian regime to try and alter its image as a state sponsor of terrorism via tactical changes in the use of the "terror weapon", but without making any strategic concessions concerning its use of terrorism as a weapon for advancing Syrian interests.

In the pan-Arab arena, this tool has been used frequently against Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians in order to impose Syrian hegemony on the components of what the Syrians consider "Greater Syria." Particularly Lebanon experienced the most brutal and inhumane impact of this policy. Assassinations of political and opinion leaders such as President Bashir Gemayel, Kamal Jumblatt, Danny Shamoun, Salim al-Lawzi and recently Ramzi Irany, who have opposed the Syrian occupation, has become a constant in Lebanese life. Noted expansion to the application of this tool is kidnapping, numerous car bombs in civilian areas and indiscriminate bombardment of Christian residential neighborhoods, all made the Syrian goal a reality.

Terror attacks against Western targets carried by the Syrian proxies include the assassination of U.S. Ambassador Francis E. Meloy and Economics Assistant Robert O. Warring in June 1976, the U.S. diplomat William Buckley in March 1984, Malcolm Kerr the president of the American University in Beirut in the same year, the librarian Peter Kilburn in 1986 and U.S. Colonel William Higgins in

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February of 1988.

Kidnapping was also frequently used as an application of this tool to reach Syria's policy objectives. A number of American educators, activists and journalists were abducted in Lebanon under Syrian supervision. American University president David Dodge and members of the faculty Thomas Sutherland, Frank Reiger, Joseph James Cicippio and David Jacobsen were all victims of this tool. As was the case with Presbyterian minister Benjamin Weir, Terry Anderson of the Associated Press and Jeremy Levin of the American Cable Network who also were kidnapped in 80s. In more than one instance the Syrians, after masterminding the kidnappings, arranged a ceremonial release of the hostages to consequently receive credit and thanks from the U.S.

However, the most devastating attacks were the suicide car bombs. Most notably the attack on the U.S. Embassy in Beirut in April of1983, which left 63 people dead, of whom 17 were Americans and the attack on the Marine compound in Beirut killing 241 American marines. Hezbollah performed these attacks against the background of a mounting Syrian concern over an impending Israeli-Lebanese peace treaty.

The policy of using the terrorist weapon against the U.S. could only have been the fruit of President Asad's personal decision. The senior officials in the intelligence and security agencies whose involvement in terrorist attacks were exposed, headed by Muhammad al-Khouli, are Alawites and are among the hard core of Asad's supporters. Employing the terror weapon served the Syrian's regime political objectives by bringing about the removal of the multinational forces from Beirut, severe damage the West's influence in Lebanon, the undermining of Amin Gemayel's pro-Western regime, the derailment of the Israeli-Lebanese agreement and ultimately the facilitation to impose the Syrian occupation of Lebanon. Without this Syrian interference Lebanon would have been at peace with Israel since 1983.

The Syrian regime has been careful to use terrorist "contractors" and avoid the appearance of direct involvement and in the last 18 years, left-wing Palestinian organizations, once the core element of this tool, were replaced by a combination of Islamic extremist organizations through a joint Syrian-Iranian co-production. The headquarters, training bases, logistical, political and propaganda offices of these organizations are primary based in Syria or occupied Lebanon. The Iranians on their part offer ideological, military and financial support. In this combination, Hezbollah represent the A-Team [21]

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while others including Hamas, the Islamic Jihad and PFLP complement the arsenal and are used where and when appropriate. Until today Hezbollah still acts as the main contractor of the Syrian terror trade. Timely violence in South of Lebanon, the deployment of thousands of missiles in the area, organizing the Karine-A weapons shipment to Palestinian extremists and the increased coordination with "al-Qaeda on logistics and training for terrorist operations, money laundering, weapons smuggling and acquiring forged documents"[22] all are evidence that Syrian efforts to use the terrorism weapon have expanded under Bashar el-Asad.

Weapons of Mass Destruction*:*

Syria today is a prominent and a senior member of the chemical and biological weapons (CBW) club. As early as 1992, the U.S. Defense Department ranked Syria as the sole Muslim state possessing a "chemical systems capability in all critical elements" for chemical weapons. And in recent years, Syria has added biological weapons to its store-weapons with far more strategic value than chemical weapons. Budgeting these weapons is generously available at the expense of the impoverished Syrian people. The measly picture that is drawn for the Syrian army based on its conventional ordnance is misleading. Syria spends between $1 billion and $2 billion annually on its ballistic and CB capabilities, an enormous share of the Syrian military budget. Syria now possesses the most formidable CBW capabilities of any Arab state. Its arsenal probably even exceeds that of Iran in quantity and quality[23].

Syria has a combined total of several hundred Scud B, Scud C and SS-21 SRBMs, It is pursuing both solid- and liquid-propellant missile programs and relies extensively on foreign assistance in these endeavors. North Korean and Russian entities have been involved in aiding Syria's ballistic missile development. All of Syria's missiles are mobile and can reach much of Israel, Jordan, and Turkey from launch sites well within the country [24].

Aid and Support to the "Axis of Evil":

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The Asad regime has in the past few years established strong political, economic and security relations with Saddam Hussein's regime. Syrian diplomacy has played a major role in strengthening the resolve of many Arab states in rejecting our efforts to militarily remove Saddam Hussein. The

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Syrian regime is also using a railroad to Iraq—authorized to facilitate the U.N. oil-for-food program—to transport conventional arms including tanks, air defense equipment and surface-to-air missiles as well as "flow-forming machines," which are used to produce components crucial to the building of nuclear weapons. An illegal oil pipeline running between Syria and Iraq provides Saddam Hussein with $1.1 billion annually to support the development of his hidden weapons arsenals. Syria also profits from this illegal scheme, making $1.2 billion annually.

Iran recently transferred hundreds of tons of weapons to Hezbollah via Syria. Members of Iran's Revolutionary Guards often run the Syrian-sponsored terror training camps in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. This year, Asad hosting Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi, head of the judiciary in the Islamic Republic and one of the most prominent anti-Khatami conservatives. Shahroudi is the person most likely to lead the hard-line conservatives in the next presidential elections in Iran.

North Korea and Syria signed an agreement this month on "scientific and technical cooperation," which could entail collaboration on ballistic missile technology and non-conventional arms. Bashar Asad recently received Kim Yong-Nam, president of North Korea's Supreme People's Assembly Presidium to improve cooperation between the two countries in the economic, military, political and cultural fields. This came at a time when Washington was trying to impose widespread changes on the region in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 attacks. Kim received a rapturous welcome in Damascus and the two sides pledged their determination to further develop cooperation, building on the foundations laid down by the "immortal leaders Hafiz Asad and Kim Il Sung."[25]

Obviously, President Bashar el-Asad's is working hard on improving his cooperation and strengthening his standing in the "evil" camp to confront the "tyrannical policies" of President Bush and to prove Syria's well earned eligibility for inclusion in the new "Axis of Evil."

PAST AND PRESENT U.S. POLICY

U.S. Policy towards Syria:

Asad's regime, exploiting the United States hopes of bringing Syria and Lebanon to the peace process, was allowed a lot of impunity for its actions in Syria and Lebanon and for its criminal attacks against United States citizens and interests. Also, it cunningly manipulated the US foreign policy makers by giving them some phony signs of cooperation.

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In 1990, Hafiz el-Asad ceased the opportunity of the United States desire to form a broad coalition against Iraq. He sent a token force to liberate Kuwait. This seemed enough of a price to allow his army to savagely complete his control of Lebanon. And in return to vague promises of participation in the peace process, he received considerable prestige and recognition from the U.S. Presidents and various Secretaries of States in addition to no timely objections to his accelerated program to acquire weapons of mass destruction.

After 9/11, Bashar Asad, feigned cooperation in the war against terror by sharing intelligence information about only those individuals undesirable to the Syrian Alouite regime while hosting herds of leaders and elements of terrorists organizations on the Syrian soil and in Lebanon. The mere interrogation of an operative and some intelligence on al-Qaeda seems enough for some to brand Syria as an ally in the war against terror.

Despite the overwhelming facts that prove that the Syrian regime has no interest in any successful conclusion to any peace process, that it is supporting global terrorism and relentlessly building a huge arsenal of weapons of mass destruction, some US officials are adamantly reluctant from taking a stand against Syria.

The inability of the US foreign policy makers to treat Syria as the rogue nation it really is and the wishful thinking of some who see Syria as a promoter of stability and peace [26] in the region have led to over twenty five years of disastrous failures in the Middle East.

The irony is that the evil deeds that are committed by the Syrian regime rival the ones committed by Iran and Iraq combined. Yet the deception skills of the Syrians reward them with a double standard of U.S. policy and a generous dose of appeasement.

U.S. Policy vis-à-vis the Occupation of Lebanon:

Historic ties between Lebanon and the U.S. have seen American business and academic institutions flourish since the 19th century. The Lebanese immigrants established a strong and law abiding entrepreneurial communities throughout the Americas. Until the mid-60s, the economic, personal and political freedom found in Lebanon offered a model for the Arab world that complemented the U.S strategic interests and hence, Lebanon received much more attention in

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Washington.

Since the outbreak of the war, the official U.S. position "supported the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Lebanon." Although at times the official position included statements in "support of the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon," at no time did any State Department or White House official specifically call on Syria to withdraw from Lebanon.

By 1989, the U.S. had abandoned all efforts to directly assist Lebanon in maintaining any remnants of sovereignty and the official position evolved to support the Saudi-sponsored Ta'if agreement as an "Arab solution for the Lebanese problem." In the last twelve years the "Arab solution" has been transformed into a "Syrian solution" and only articles suitable to Syria were ever executed while others, such as the timely redeployment of Syrian forces, became empty rhetoric. Yet, the U.S. official statements have not gone beyond supporting the implementation of the Ta'if agreement.

In the late 90s, when Syrian non-compliance with Ta'if became obvious, American officials changed their approach and tied the sovereignty and independence of Lebanon to the Arab-Israeli peace process. Giving Syria yet another incentive to drag the process for decades to come. In reality, U.S. officials rationalized that since the Lebanese war is over, very little priority should be given further to the small country. In the last two years of the Clinton Administration, and within the increased effort to reach any settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict, Administration officials became even vocal in support of the Syrian occupation, some even "appealing to prominent Lebanese politicians and opinion makers to allow Syrian troops to remain in Lebanon" [27] after the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon. Assistant Secretary of State Edward Walker testified in congress in 2000 that the State Department "believe that the Lebanese people through their democratic process, can make important decisions about their future relationship with Syria" [28] somehow missing the fact that the Lebanese have been under an occupation of a totalitarian regime and democracy is nonexistent. In June 2000, former Secretary of State Madeline Albright went as far as praising Syria for playing a "constructive role as far as Lebanon is concerned. We hope that they will continue to do so." Despite the fact that the policy of appeasing the Syrians has been a complete failure – in seducing the Syrians to the peace process, in maintaining the peace in South Lebanon, in curbing the activities of radical Islamic organization, in improving human rights in Syria and Lebanon and in convincing Bashar to be less totalitarian than his father, the public position of the State Department has remained

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the same: no public denouncing of the Syrians and let's continue to engage them in subtle diplomacy.

THE CASE FOR IMMEDIATE CHANGE IN U.S. POLICY

The Legal Argument:

Since September 17, 1982, Syria has been in violation of UN Security Council resolution 520, demanding that "all non-Lebanese forces" leave Lebanon. Syria's argument that they are in Lebanon by the Lebanese request is refuted in three points:

First, they have entered Lebanon in 1975 illegally without any official request as stated by Hafiz el-Asad himself in a speech on August 20th, 1976: *"Syria and Lebanon, throughout history, were always one country, one people. This is a fact that should be taken into consideration by everybody… and it is for this reason that we were obliged to provide weapons and ammunitions and decided to intervene under the name of "the Army for the Liberation of Palestine"; This "army" entered the Lebanon despite everybody without taking any advice from the national parties nor any authorization from anywhere…*"

Second, the Syrians have officially been requested to leave by Presidents Elias Sarkis, Amin Gemayel and by General Michel Aoun, at the time when he was the head of the transitional government.

Third, the Ta'if accord, which was agreed to by Syria and supported by the U.S., stipulated "*a redeployment of the Syrian armed forces inside Lebanon within a period of two years, followed by a complete withdrawal"*.

Additionally, the Syrians are in violation of UN resolutions 661, 687 and 986 restricting the purchase of petroleum from Iraq and restricting the sale of conventional weapons and assistance in weapons of mass destruction programs.

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The Moral Argument:

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President Wilson believed in the moral obligation of the United States and often restated that America's special mission transcends day-to-day diplomacy and obliges it to serve as a beacon of liberty for the rest of mankind. President Truman's doctrine in face of totalitarian regimes' way of life, which "*relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio; fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms,*" proclaimed it should be "*the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressure.*" [29] However, the United States, the historic leader of the forces of freedom, seem dedicated in the case of Lebanon, to a negative role of supporting a brutal occupation by a totalitarian regime. In the few incidents in our history where similar position was taken, such as the case of the Hungarian students and workers uprising in 1953 against the Soviets, the sad result is severe damage to our moral standing in the world and discouragement of aspiring people to believe in our American values.

Lebanese in general and Christians in particular have believed in our values of democracy, freedom and human rights for over a hundred years. They have fought for over 26 years, at a great cost, the enemies of our values and freedoms, the same enemies we find ourselves today and after September 11, in a global war against. Is it not the time to regain our moral role and take active and substantial steps to free Lebanon? Is it not timely to publicly declare the evil Syrian totalitarian regime, as our enemy?

The National Interest Argument:

Our best interests are served in a lasting peace in the Middle East. At every major diplomatic turn, Syria stood in the way of America's efforts for peace. In 1978, Damascus was a key actor in the Arab regional alignment against the Camp David Peace Accord between Israel and Egypt. In 1983, Syria opposed the May 17 Agreement negotiated during the Reagan presidency between Lebanon and Israel. Since 2000, the Syrians have undermined any effort to negotiate a settlement of the Palestinian problem by prompting its terrorist "contractors" to erupt violence.

Attacks by Syrian sponsored terrorism since the early 80s have claimed hundreds of American lives. One could easily make the argument that those attacks and our lack of proportional response, emboldened Syria and its allies and served as an operational and ideological model for the attacks of

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September 11.

In defiance of President Bush's proclamation of "either with us or against us" in the war on terror and an offer of amnesty for previous actions, Bashar el-Asad has expanded his support to terrorism and deepened his cooperation with Iraq, Iran and North Korea. Clearly Mr. Asad has chosen the "against us" camp. Appeasement and subtle diplomacy have failed us for the last 26 years. Despite all our efforts to seduce Syria for over two decades, The Asad regime still considers us the enemy and uses the "struggle" to maintain and strengthen its existence.

The occupation of Lebanon provides the Syrian regime with excellent means to prolong this "struggle". By using Lebanon as a façade, the Syrians are able to fend all direct accusations while threatening our interests and national security. It would only be logical to conclude that the elimination of the threat and the advancement of our strategic interests have to start with ending the occupation of Lebanon.

Time is of The Essence:

Before his death on September 9th, 2001, Ahmad Shah Massoud had been visiting various Western capitals pleading his case of the impeding threat to the West by the Taliban and al-Qaeda and begging for any help to the Afghani Northern Alliance in their fight against the Taliban. His warnings were dismissed as unimportant, as no one saw the magnitude of the danger nor liked the involvement in the Afghani internal political quagmire. Two days after his death, the world woke up to the harsh reality of his alarm. No one could know if substantial help to Massoud would have averted the attacks, but one could argue that being late to act in Afghanistan had considerably increased the human losses, time and cost of our later intervention.

Today, many Lebanese are begging for help and warning of the threat that Hezbollah and their Syrian masters are plotting. The cost to free Lebanon would have been considerably less if we had taken actions against the Syrians, Palestinians and Islamic radicals in 1976. After the United States Embassy and the Marine barracks were attacked in 1983 a forceful and decisive response then could possibly have averted the pattern of suicide terrorist attacks that have led to September 11. Again, in 1989, we stood silent and immobile while the Syrian heavy artillery was brutally pounding the free

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Lebanese civilian areas that fought radical Islamic groups and their Syrian protectors. Our passive attitude through these episodes have demoralized most Lebanese and convinced them of the futility of fighting the Syrians alone. Over 700,000 mostly pro-Western well-educated young Christians, have left the country and thousands are still leaving every month. The influence of radical Islam in education, military and demography is expanding at a formidable pace; Hezbollah is quickly becoming the unstoppable evil, created and nurtured by Iran and Syria. While serving the Syrian goals in the short run, Hezbollah's long time agenda aims at establishing an Iranian-style theocratic state. Lebanon is irreversibly sliding away from being a pro-western nation to becoming a land of intolerance, oppression and misery. The time to act is now before the world loses the lone bastion of democracy in the Arab world.

Today the Syrian regime represents a clear and present threat against the United States and against world peace. Actions against it, if taken promptly, might avoid greater losses and prevent a more dangerous and costly future confrontation. If we allow events to proceed in their chartered course, disillusioned with the effectiveness of appeasement and paralysed by the deception skills of the Syrians, then less and less choices will be available and the price of each becomes considerably higher. In the end when the threat becomes too great, and the diplomatic paralysis erodes most options, the only choice left would be military actions at the ultimate price of human lives.

Experience has reinforced what ideology has taught the Syrian regime – that the political process being external or internal is about winners and losers not about compromise. The hollow rhetoric by Syrian officials proclaiming their interest in better relations with the U.S., their commitment for "fair and comprehensive peace," and in offering token and questionable assistance in our hunt for al-Qaeda, serve only to blur our vision of the creeping danger. The pattern of events since 1970 and until today, unequivocally prove that the Syrian regime considers the United States an enemy. In fact, they never tire from declaring this to the Syrian people and all the Arabs. Bashar Asad on July 16, 2002, during Kim Yong-Nam visit to Damascus stated: *"Bush tyrannical policies, based only on US military supremacy, is spreading a wave of terror in the world, under the pretense of fighting terrorism.."* Then, Syria's Minister of Foreign Affairs Faruq Sharaa commenting on Israel attacks in Gaza against Hamas militants said on July 25, 2002, *"Bush policies lack common sense"* and *"Israel's attack in Gaza that killed 16 people, including 9 children, is similar to the bloodbaths committed by the United States in Afghanistan.."* The fact that we are being deceived by their empty gestures is the proof, at least in their eyes, that they are winning and we are loosing. Our consistent

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diplomatic efforts in seducing Damascus to reach a compromise are perceived as signs of weakness.

The reality is, Bashar al-Asad and his Ba'th party are enemies of the United Sates. The time for our policy to change and cope with this fact is now. Our just demands should be made clear to Damascus, and our policy should be to pressure the Syrians to meet those demands, our resolve should also be clear to use our might in support of our policy. Our key demand should be a democratic Lebanon free of Syrian occupation. In addition to being the correct moral position, it is the key for advancing our interests in the Middle East and it is the key for eliminating a major element of the Syrian threat to our security.

POLICY OPTIONS

- Clear Statement of Policy outlining our just demands. The Syrian Accountability Act states these demands. Support and passage of the bill will send a clear message to Damascus of where the American people stand.
- Further statements from the Administration officials and most critically, President Bush, should unequivocally inform the Syrians of the perils of their current policy and demand their total withdrawal from Lebanon and the ceasing of their support of terrorism in all its shapes.
- Publicly announcing the inclusion of Syria in the "Axis of Evil." Merely recognizing their relentless efforts to be a senior partner with the other three.
- Refraining from making statements by State Department officials in support of the Syrian role in Lebanon. In contrast, our ambassador in Beirut and our officials in Washington should be vocal in support of pro-democracy efforts and leaders in their opposition of the Syrian rule.
- Lowering the level of diplomatic exchange to deprive the Syrians form the prestige they seek.
- Financially and logistically supporting Lebanese opposition leaders living outside the country and demanding the release of those imprisoned by the occupation.
- Insist on sending the Lebanese Armed Forces to the Lebanese Southern border.
- Press on taking away all weapons in the possession of Hezbollah and other terrorist groups operating in Lebanon.

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- Work on reengaging other Arab countries in support of the sovereignty of Lebanon.
- Ceasing any and all forms of aid to Syria and redirecting aid to Lebanon towards social and charitable organizations aiming at relieving the suffering of stranded Lebanese.
- If above options fail, Washington should work on ousting Syria from international forums and work with our allies to reduce their diplomatic and economical ties with Damascus.
- As a last resort, military action should not be ruled out and that should be clear to Syria. Covert or overt operations could be directed at Syria's weapons of mass destruction, its oil pipeline with Iraq, the piles of weapons being sent to Iraq, Damascus airport as the channel of terrorist logistical support, its military forces in Lebanon and the terrorist camps and headquarters in Syria and Lebanon.

CONCLUSION

State Department officials' assumption that peace in the Middle East could not proceed without Syria's support is absolutely correct. Damascus has made this reality its objective for the last thirty years and used various immoral and illegal policy tools to reach this end. Ironically, U.S. diplomacy supporting their occupation of Lebanon has enabled them to succeed.

Peace in the Middle East and the once democratic Lebanon, have been taken hostages by the Syrians. It is this status quo that guarantees the continuity of their totalitarian regime. Our failed efforts to advance peace in the region have been countered with the Asads' successful efforts in strengthening their ability to destabilize the region and in "global" expansion of their threat. The Syrian regime has not, and will not jeopardize its own dictatorship by willingly allowing the "struggle" against us to cease. When asked by his biographer Patrick Seale about a sentence to summon his legacy, Hafiz el-Asad replied: "*the struggle shall go on.*"[30]

The case is clear that the United States interests and objectives could not be achieved through a policy of tacit and sometimes explicit, approval of the Syrian *modus operandi* and their occupation of Lebanon, but only through a determined and assertive diplomacy based on just demands and a resolve to use our might in support of our policy.

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As we nationally debate the means to deal with Saddam's threat, we should not create a double standard for the Asad's threat. They are two sides of the same coin. And while our soldiers are placed ever closer to the threat source, let us not underestimate our ability to direct the winds of change. Our determined will and actions should engulf the main pillar of terrorism in the region- the Asad regime. It is only through a free Lebanon and a democratic Syria that terrorism will abate, stability in the region will be achievable and Peace will prevail.

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