

## **The Ineffective Role of the United States in the Syrian-Israeli Peace Process During the 1990s**

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### **Abstract**

The end of Cold War created a unique opportunity for both the Arabs and Israelis to end their animosity and for the United States to play an important role to bring them to peace negotiations. Therefore, during the 1990s, the U.S. facilitated several rounds of talks between Syria and Israel, but the negotiations complicated gradually. The talks were stalled over the fact that Israel did not want to withdraw from the Golan Heights prior to concluding security arrangements and normalization of relations with Syria.

There were variety of reasons that prevented Syria and Israel from reaching a peace agreement. Besides, unresolved issues such as the Golan Heights, the biased role of the United States in the Syrian-Israeli talks left the process at an intractable impasse. The fact that the U.S. had strategic relations with Israel and due to the increasing power of the Zionist lobby in the U.S. Congress, Washington failed to be an honest broker. Both Syrian and Israeli inflexibility, mutual mistrust and suspicious along with tentative and conditional nature of talks were proved hindrances.

The U.S. could play an active role through urging both Damascus and Tel Aviv to comply with the basic and logical needs of peace, pushing the Israelis to withdraw from the Syrian territory, urging the Syrians to moderate their positions-allowing new demarcation of border-strengthening confidence-building measures between the parties and assuring them that peace will provide their basic needs, and in no way will the conflict be settled at the expense of either's interests.

**Keywords:** Syria, the United States, Israel, Peace Process.

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## **Introduction**

During the Cold War, the United States viewed the Middle East through the prism of rivalry with the Soviets and as a buffer zone to contain Soviet influence [1], but the end of the Cold War helped U.S. power to spread hegemonic influence in the region, provided an opportunity to unilaterally implement its regional interests without being concerned about the long East-West conflict. The disintegration of the Eastern European regimes in the late 1980s, the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s as well as the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 had already brought enormous changes into the Middle East. Within this framework, the Bush administration proposed reconciliation of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the aftermath of the liberation of Kuwait in 1991.

At the same time, the enormous changes at the international and regional levels brought an ideal opportunity for the Syrians to make a strategic decision to join the U.S.-led coalition to fight the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and to realign its foreign policy toward the United States. These mutual interests helped the United States facilitate the negotiations between the Arabs and Israelis and to play an important role in the bilateral negotiations, hoping to bring an end to their intractable long animosities.

This research is mostly a case study to critically examine the role of the United States as a mediator and facilitator in the Middle East peace process within the context of the Syrian-Israeli negotiations during the 1990s. It will examine the United States' role before the negotiations began in

November 1991 in Madrid up to the end of the negotiations in Shepherdstown, West Virginia in January 2000. This research will also show how the end of the Cold War affected Syria's foreign policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict. The study of Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations, which took place during the last ten years of Hafiz al-Asad's presidency, demonstrated a variety of pragmatic and realist approaches in the making of foreign policy. Syria's experience is relatively a good example of how to adapt to the dramatic changes in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War.

The US role in the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations could be best analyzed within a greater framework of Washington's relations with both Damascus and Tel Aviv. The domination of the U.S. Congress by the pro-Israeli lobby, on one hand, and the pro-Israel bias of U.S. administrations, on the other, restricted any maneuverability in mediating in talks. The United States was not an impartial mediator. Although the United States had been an active participant in the negotiations for a comprehensive peace between Syria and Israel, it failed to bring an end to the deadlock due to its partiality. The strong U.S. interest in Israel, driven mostly by domestic politics, made it unwilling and unable to pressure Israel to make the necessary concessions. Syrian inflexibility and Israeli unwillingness to compromise were also crucial factors.

## **Background**

Before the 1990s, United States policy toward Syria was based on the perception of Syria as the surrogate of the Soviet Union, as a state sponsoring international terrorism, and as an opponent of the Middle East peace process [2]. Syria's close

relations with the Soviet Union during the period prior to the 1990s provided an opportunity for the east while Soviets to expand their influence in the Middle East. The United States, therefore, viewed Syria in the context of the Cold War rivalry with the Soviet Union. As much as the United States tried to exclude the Soviets from having an important role in Middle East affairs-particularly in the Arab-Israeli conflict-they also sought to contain Syria's regional role. The United States, therefore, tried to exclude Syria from the Arab-Israeli peace process in the late 1970s and early 1980s, or at least to marginalize Syria's role [3]. This unilateral policy provoked Syria to disrupt U.S. peace initiatives in the Middle East and exacerbated the already strained relations between the two countries.

During this period, the United States policy toward Syria was designed to prevent escalation of conflict between Syria and Israel, to consolidate the Camp David Peace Accord, and to prevent Syria from sabotaging U.S. interests in the region. Consequently, Syria faced economic sanctions, diplomatic pressures, and was named by U.S. administrations a pariah and rogue state. By the early 1990s, the international and regional changes as well as Syria's realistic understanding of these developments provided unprecedented common interests between the two countries; the United States, therefore, reconsidered its relations with Syria.

The fact that U.S.-Syrian relations have been strained in recent decades had an important implication for the U.S. role in the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations. The relations deteriorated due

to both realities and misperceptions. The two countries each perceived the other as seeming to ignore or sabotage its regional interests. Several other factors have also played the role for straining the relationship between Syria and the United States. The American plot to subvert Syrian government in the mid 1950s was the beginning of a decades long confrontation and animosity between the United States and Syria. Believing that Syria would prepare the ground for Soviet expansionism in the Middle East, the U.S., under the "Eisenhower Doctrine" [4], attempted to alter Syria's government. Consequently, Syria viewed United States policy as in conflict with its national interests [5].

Moreover, Syrians believe that because of U.S. strategic relations with Israel, the United States sought to contain Syria's legitimate interests in the region. From the 1960s onward, the United States became Israel's chief benefactor in its conflict with the Arabs and this policy exacerbated its relations with Syria [6]. In addition, Syria has been on the U.S. list of states sponsoring international terrorism since this list was created in 1979 [7]. The U.S. Congress, therefore, imposed several sanctions upon Syria, aiming to make this country ineligible to receive U.S. aid or purchase U.S. military equipment and high tech products. These sanctions have made improvement of relations between the two countries very difficult and contingent upon fundamental changes in Syrian foreign and domestic policy.

But in the early 1990s, a considerable shift in the U.S.-Syria relationship occurred. Syria's crucial decision to join the U.S.-led coalition against the

Iraqi invasion of Kuwait provided common interests between the United States and Syria [8] and, eased U.S.-Syria relations[9]. Syria's participation in the 1991 Madrid peace conference signified this new phase and increased the possible role that the U.S. could play in resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. Thereafter, the United States convened several rounds of talks between the Syrians and Israelis aiming to resolve the huge differences between the two neighbors, such as withdrawal of Israeli settlements from the Golan Heights, normalization of relations, and security arrangements.

#### **The Syrian-Israeli Track and the United States**

The peace negotiations between Syria and Israel began with Syria's acceptance of US-Soviet invitation to participate in the Madrid peace conference in November 1991 and were ended in March 2000, when the Americans frustratingly failed to overcome the intractable stalemate in the Syrian-Israeli track. Prior to the early phase of the negotiations, the United States took various diplomatic initiatives in order to convince Syria to participate in the Madrid peace conference. Syria was the first country that accepted the US-Soviet invitation to participate in the peace negotiations. Israel, however, was a reluctant participant that neither was willing to make territorial concessions to the Arabs nor was enthusiastic about taking the negotiations seriously.

Prior to the negotiations, Israel refused to concede to Syria's demands that the relevant UN Resolutions to be the basis of the talks. Israel, moreover, made its participation in the

negotiations dependent upon several preconditions, including refusal to recognize the Palestinian delegation as an independent participant. Israel also insisted that the United Nations could only have a marginal role as a silent observer. The Israelis strongly rejected the proposal of withdrawing to the line prior to the June 1967 War. Therefore, it was obvious that there was not going to be any comprehensive peace.

There was a complex ambiguity that the Israelis would compromise their national interests by withdrawing from the strategic Heights. What did really lead the United States to propose a peace plan at a time when it was not clear whether its strategic ally, Israel, would agree to withdraw from the occupied Arab lands? Would the Israelis compromise their national interests by withdrawing from the strategic Heights? What forces led the Syrians to make such a strategic decision to attend the Madrid peace conference while they knew that it was unlikely that Israel would concede its position? How did the United States convince Syria to attend the conference? Before discussing Syria's participation in the peace process, it is necessary to explain the roots of Syria's making of foreign policy.

#### **Realism in Syria's Foreign Policy**

A variety of issues support the idea that Syria's foreign policy, during Hafiz al-Asad era, was formed through a realistic approach to international politics. Hafiz al-Asad understood the importance of power politics in the region and the structure of international political system, and therefore tried to

maximize Syria's gains by playing active regional role.

For example, following the structural changes in the international political system in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War, Syria made a strategic decision to further its relation with the United States, the only remaining hegemonic superpower, in order to accommodate to the changes in the Middle East. Syria, therefore, joined the U.S.-led coalition to fight against the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and also participated in the Madrid peace conference, hoping these actions would end Syria's isolation and resituate Syria as an important regional actor.

When Hafiz al-Asad came to power in 1970, he tried to balance Syria's objectives and capabilities. His main goal was to downgrade the objectives of Syria's foreign policy from the liberation all of Palestine to the recovery of the Arab lands that were occupied by Israel in the aftermath of the 1967 War, and finally to the recovery of only Syria's Golan Heights, which he lost when he was defense minister in 1967. Hafiz al-Asad also, at the same time, tried to upgrade Syria's military power and most importantly through playing an important, crucial, formidable role in regional crises. The interesting point was Asad's fascinating ability to use power politics in the region, particularly in Lebanon, as an important mechanism for making Syria an indispensable regional player that both the United States and other regional powers could not ignore or bypass in issues related to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Given Syria's tangible and intangible elements of power, and the fact that Syria was a poor

country that neither had the wealth of rich Arab countries (such as Saudi Arabia or Kuwait), nor the population and military strength of some others (such as Egypt and Iraq prior to the invasion of Kuwait), Hafiz al-Asad approached pragmatist policy and adopted a realist view of regional and international power politics, a policy that could turn Syria into a credible, indispensable regional player [10].

### **Syria's Participation in the Process [11]**

There is variety of factors that led to the arrangement of the Madrid peace conference: the end of the Cold War, the increasing U.S. hegemonic power in the region, and the fact that the U.S. administration perceived that there was a unique opportunity for the reconciliation of the Arab-Israeli conflict. These circumstances led to a conclusion that through bilateral and multilateral talks, based upon the land for peace formula, the Arab-Israeli conflict could be resolved [12]. Although Syria was remarkably suspicious about the prospects of any real and comprehensive progress in the reconciliation of its disputes with Israel, the following reasons forced Syria to reconsider its regional policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict:

- 1) The collapse of the East bloc and the disintegration of the Soviets undermined Syria's regional policy and at the same time brought enormous ambiguities to Syria's position in the Middle East.

- 2) In the aftermath of the end of Cold War, Syria could no longer balance its position through the mechanism of U.S.-Soviet rivalry in the region.

### *The Ineffective Role of the United States in the Syrian-Israeli ...*

Syria, therefore, significantly lost its leverage against increasing Israeli threats.

3) The importance of improving relations with the United States as the only remaining super power in order to bring an end to Syria's regional isolation.

4) The hope for the removal of Syria's name from the list of state sponsoring international terrorism.

5) The expectation to make Syria eligible for US economic aid through removal of Syria's sanctions by the United States.

In addition, U.S. administrations implicitly exploited Syria's need to improve its relation with the United States as leverage to further the negotiations. The Syrian officials realized the difficulties of the negotiations with the Israelis and, therefore, appeared to be more flexible, and willing to conclude a peace treaty with Israel if the latter agreed to withdraw from Syria's territory [13].

It is interesting that the United States could convince Syria to attend the conference while Israel did not comply with any of Syria's demands: Syria had long been calling for an international conference under the auspices of the United Nations and based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of land for peace. Syria also wanted Israel to commit to withdrawal from the Arab lands before the conference began. Israel not only refused to commit to withdraw from the occupied territories but also rejected the relevant UN resolutions and insisted that the UN role be marginal as an observer. But the United States, on its behalf, convinced Syria that the conference would be based upon the relevant UN resolutions,

arguing to Syria that under the new circumstances at both international and regional levels it had to retreat from its previous positions.

### **The United States' Role in the Process**

From the early phase of the Madrid peace conference, the United States played a crucial role in encouraging Syria to directly negotiate with the Israelis within the framework of the Madrid peace conference. Prior to the conference, between March and October 1991, the U.S. Secretary of State James Baker made eight trips to the region to convince the Arab states and Israel to reach compromises. In general, the Bush administration policy on the Middle East peace was based on the following understanding [14]:

1) Peace in the Middle East should be grounded on the need for comprehensive peace based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338, and the principles of territory for peace, security for Israelis, and legitimate rights for Palestinians.

2) Dual tracks of direct, simultaneous negotiations between Israel and the Arab states on one hand, and Israelis and Palestinians on the other.

3) Multilateral negotiations on regional issues between Israel, Arab countries, and other regional and international powers.

The United States in cooperation with the Soviets invited Syria to attend a peace conference in Madrid and assured Syria that they are "prepared to assist the parties to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement, through direct negotiations along two tracks, between Israel and the Arab states, and between

Israel and the Palestinians, based on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. The objective of this process is real peace [15].” The Israelis continued to insist on negotiations without preconditions which meant Israel would not accept the concept of trading land for peace as foreseen in the UN resolutions and demanded by both the Americans and Arabs [16].

Being under increasing Israeli pressure, the United States were unwilling to force Israel to comply with the UN resolutions in the negotiations with the Syrians. Moreover, the Israelis tried to discourage the Americans from playing an important role in the negotiations. Beside Israel’s refusal to trade land for peace, the building of new settlements in the occupied territories was another obstacle to the peace conference. Despite the U.S. request that Israel freeze its settlement activity in the occupied territories [17], Israel continued to confiscate Palestinian lands and to build new settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip [18]. Even during Secretary Baker’s trips to the region to persuade Israel to attend the conference, Shamir continued the policy of establishing or expanding new settlements [19].

Therefore, this Israeli policy frustrated U.S. Secretary of State James Baker [20]. Although the Bush Administration viewed new settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as “illegal” and an “obstacle to peace”[21] the U.S. government failed to put pressure on Israel in order to make this country comply with the basic needs for peace in the region: abandoning the settlements and trading land for peace. Even the Bush administration proposal to postpone a delay of 120 days in the \$10

billion of loan guarantees requested by Israel did not alter Israel’s policy and only led to deterioration of relations between the two countries [22]. In an analysis Robert G. Neumann argues the importance of Israeli lobby:

“Elections are expensive in America, and congressional candidates for election or reelection depend on outside, not party, funds to win...The pro-Israel lobby has for many years perfected its skill and superb organization by offering enticements as well as threats. By targeting specific senators and congressman for defeat, the lobby, centered especially in the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) but commanding other organisms as well, has shown how dangerous it can be to oppose the policies of Israel”[23].

### **Rabin’s Government and Hope for Progress**

Only after Prime Minister Rabin came to power in June 1992 did the Syrians hope that there could be some progress in the Syrian-Israeli track. The United States supported Rabin’s position and encouraged all parties to take the opportunity to further the negotiations. But the Syrian-Israeli negotiations did not resume until the Israelis concluded an interim agreement with the Palestinians in September 1993 (The Oslo Accords) and with the Jordanians in October 1994. Although the Americans encouraged the Israelis to work simultaneously on several issues, the Israelis preferred to postpone the Syrian track because of Damascus rigid demand

for full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

The Oslo Accords had significant effects on Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations [24]. The agreement greatly undermined Syria's bargaining position wherein Hafiz al-Asad insisted on a unified, strong, common Arab stance in order to secure Arab rights. Moreover, the accord undermined Syria's goal of a comprehensive peace in the negotiations and stalled further progress along the Syrian-Israeli track.

Since the initial phase of the Middle East peace process in October 1991, the negotiations between Israel and Syria had been stuck on setting priorities: should Syria's acceptance and definition of full peace come first or should the Israelis first commit to withdrawal from the Golan Heights? The talks were deadlocked over enormous differences between Syria's expectations and so from Israel's. Syria had proposed full peace in return for full withdrawal from the Golan Heights. But they refused Israeli demands that they explicitly define what full peace would mean lest it be defined too rigidity or too narrowly. Accordingly, Israel also had refused to define the extent of its withdrawal from the Golan Heights, and even refused to commit itself to the principle of land for peace until Syria defined the meaning of peace. Therefore, having been discouraged by the prolonged deadlock in the bilateral negotiation with Israel and by the problem of procedural matters, Syria's frustration led Syria's foreign minister in late September 1993 to declare, "Syria would boycott the next round of peace talks unless

Israel offered a prior commitment to withdraw from the Golan Heights" [25].

#### **Clinton-Asad Meeting (January 1994)**

The stalled negotiations brought more uncertainty. The United States encouraged the two parties to resume their negotiations. President Clinton even met with Hafiz al-Asad in Geneva in January 1994, and visited Syria later that year in October. The meeting between the presidents in Geneva and Damascus provided an opportunity for Syria to spell out its concept of peace. It also helped Syria to improve its relations with the United States and to convince the U.S. president to assert Syria's key role in the Middle East peace process.

This meeting was part of the United States' effort to further the Arab-Israeli peace process. The meeting between two Presidents was also a reminder that Syria was a major player in the Middle East, and that the United States could not ignore or bypass Syria in the peace process. Despite the difficulties in the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations, a comprehensive peace in the Middle East was believed to depend on progress on the Syrian-Israeli track. A meaningful agreement between Syria and Israel was expected to further progress on the other tracks, especially the Lebanese and Palestinian ones because Syria had long had enormous influential power in Lebanon and over Palestinian opposition groups residing in Syria. It was because of Syria's important role in the peace process that the U.S. president decided to meet with Hafiz al-Asad, although the U.S. continued to list Syria as a state which allowed so-

called “terrorist groups” to use its territory to attack U.S. interests in the region.

#### **Clinton Visit to Damascus (October 1994)**

Bill Clinton’s visit to Damascus was the first in 20 years by an American president. It was surprising that Clinton decided to visit a country that had been branded a sponsor of international terrorism. He decided to visit Damascus on the grounds that Syria's role in the peace process was indispensable and that Washington would remain a peace mediator.

The meeting reflected a grudging, mutual respect between the two countries. On the one hand, because of U.S. strategic relations with Israel [26] and the nature of Syrian-Israeli disputes, Syria believed that the constant U.S. role as a third party in the negotiations with the Israelis was essential. On the other, the U.S. maintained that Syria's role in the Middle East peace process was crucial for the entire process to reach a meaningful conclusion that would assure both Israel’s security and integration into the region. Therefore, the meeting was expected to improve U.S.-Syrian bilateral relations. The two countries reached an understanding that with mutual cooperation they could achieve their national interests in the region.

However, it was clear that the U.S. president’s visit to Damascus would not bring a breakthrough on the Syrian-Israeli track. The purpose was to reassure Syria that the United States would play a constructive role as a full partner and an honest broker to advance the Syrian-Israeli track [27]. President Clinton stated, “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 [28].” President Clinton also reaffirmed Syria's position in the peace process [29].

#### **American Initiatives to Further the Syrian-Israeli Track**

Following Clinton’s meeting with Hafiz al-Asad and his visit to Syria, the United States focused on Syria’s peace track with Israel. This, in return, encouraged Syria and Israel to end the prolonged stalemate in their peace negotiations. As a result, Syria and Israel held several negotiations under American sponsorship during 1994 and 1995. In a remarkable move toward reconciliation of Syrian-Israeli disputes, the Americans proposed that the Army Chiefs of Staff of both Syria and Israel hold private negotiations in an effort to break their deadlock. Both Syria and Israel accepted the proposal and the Chiefs of Staff met for the first time in December 1994 in Washington to discuss security issues. Due to the deep differences in Syrian and Israeli concepts of peace, the negotiations between Amnon Shahak and Hikmat al-Shihabi, respectively the Israeli and Syrian chiefs of staff, failed to produce any positive progress. However, maintaining that progress on the security issues would make it easier to further progress on the other issues, the United States persuaded Syria and Israel to resume their negotiations on security arrangements [30]. Consequently, Syria and Israel’s chiefs of staff met again in Washington in June 1995 [31].

### **The Wye Plantation Talks**

In the aftermath of the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, the prospect for peace between Syria and Israel had dimmed [32]. The Israelis were deeply split over Golan Heights issue. However, the assassination created a new opportunity for peace negotiations between Syria and Israel. This intensive new phase of negotiations came after a rather long hiatus in the talks. After more than four years of negotiations, the two countries remained deeply distrustful of each other. The previous rounds of negotiations had failed to produce any progress because of continuing disagreement about Israel's withdrawal from the Golan Heights and its insistence on normalization of relations prior to withdrawal. Now Syria showed greater seriousness about reaching an agreement with the new Prime Minister Shimon Peres. Peres also showed his willingness giving optimism to the United States. Therefore, the talks resumed at Wye Plantation in Maryland on December 27, 1995.

Under American auspices, the Syrians and Israelis agreed, for the first time, to negotiate various aspects of their disputes, such as terms of normalization of relations, the nature of peace, and security arrangements, and other issues related to the future of Syrian-Israeli relations. Secretary of State Christopher undertook two missions to the region in the early 1996 in order to accelerate the search for peace between the two countries. Syria's chief of the negotiating team, Ambassador Moualem, described the achievements of the Wye talks as "serious and useful." He also maintained "We completed 75 percent of the work of

negotiating an agreement [33]." The Americans also confirmed that both parties achieved considerable progress in the negotiations. At the end of first round of talks, "Chief US negotiator Dennis Ross expressed his delight that more had been achieved in their six days of talks so far than during the four years of Israeli-Syrian negotiations that had gone before [34]."

### **The Suspension of Talks**

The Wye talks, which brought new opportunities to the Syrian-Israeli negotiations, were ended by the Israelis on March 4, 1996 before the negotiations completed. There were several reasons the negotiations were suspended; the two most important were the early election proposal and the threat of suicide bombers.

Under the shadow of elections, Peres was not able to focus on the Syrian-Israeli track while he faced intense opposition by the Likud Party, led by Binyamin Netanyahu. The United States also could not do anything to help Peres to win the election. The sense of horror that came after several suicide bombings in Israel in early 1996 had immediate effects on historic moves towards peace between Syria and Israel. It also had an important impact on Israel's early elections that were to be held in May 1996; Peres lost the elections.

The bombings brought an end to the negotiations between the Syrians and Israelis that had been scheduled to continue on February 27, 1996 as part of the completion of the Wye talks. Besides the Syrian talks, the bombings also jeopardized the entire peace process between the Palestinians and Israelis. The bombings

undermined negotiations on the final status of Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip that were scheduled to begin in early May 1996.

### **The Impact of Operation Grapes of Wrath**

Operation Grapes of Wrath [35] had enormous negative impact on the peace process. The operation showed that the Israeli government preferred the use of military might to bring peace to its northern border. The operation brought enormous casualties, triggered Arab anger against Israel's policies, and jeopardized the achievements of previous rounds of negotiations. It also led to the victory of the Likud Party in the election.

The Israeli invasion of Lebanon brought increasing international condemnation of Peres's government. Despite this criticism, the Clinton administration showed its unambiguous backing for the Israeli invasion. According to Patrick Seale "For the Syrians, the most disturbing element of this new constellation was the U.S. involvement, most regrettably the 'green light' Washington is believed to have given Israel for Operation Grapes of Wrath. It is generally supposed that approval for the operation was given when President Clinton took Peres back to Israel on Air One from the Sharm al-Shaykh summit and attended, along with the director of the CIA, a meeting of the Israeli inner cabinet" [36]. Patrick Seale continued, "American support for Grapes of Wrath-indeed Clinton's haste to reward Peres for the disastrous operation-came as a shock to the Syrians not least because, until 1996, their relations with the United States had, by their lights, been reasonably good" [37].

### **Complete Deadlock in the Syrian-Israeli Negotiations (1996-1999)**

The achievement of the several rounds of talks between Israelis and Syrians at Wye Plantation during the period between December 1995 and February 1996 led to a remarkable understanding. It brought optimism and a breakthrough in the Syrian-Israeli peace process. Both parties and the American peace coordinators were satisfied with the achievement of the negotiations [38]. But despite this optimistic progress, political developments [39] inside Israel and at the regional level drastically changed the situation on the ground.

The negotiations that had already been suspended by Peres in early March 1996 came to an intractable stalemate when Netanyahu won the general election of May 1996. Netanyahu's victory exacerbated the problems of the peace process between Syria and Israel; not only was there no meaningful movement on the Israeli-Syrian track during Netanyahu's premiership [40], but the new Israeli Prime Minister tried to reverse the unwritten agreement that the Syrians had achieved with the Israeli Labor Party during several rounds of peace negotiations. "Netanyahu has criticized Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres for deferring too much to Asad and has expressed the view that Syria can be made to accept 'subarrangements' that enhance Israel's security without Israel having to return any territory on the Golan" [41]. There were no negotiations during nearly four years of Netanyahu's government.

### **U.S. Efforts for the Resumption of Talks**

Despite tensions in Syrian-Israeli relations following the suspension of talks, the Americans made several attempts to renew negotiations after the formation of the new Israeli government. Dennis Ross, the U.S. Middle East peace coordinator, met with Hafiz al-Asad in late July 1996. But due to Netanyahu's refusal to commit his government to the previous unwritten agreement, on the one hand, and Syria's insistence on resumption of the negotiations from the point at which it was suspended, on the other, the negotiations did not resume during Netanyahu's premiership. During the period after the suspension of talks, Syrian officials repeatedly claimed that they reached the understanding with the Labor Party that Israel would withdraw from the entire Golan Heights in exchange for peace and normalization of relations with Syria [42].

### **Barak's Election and its Impact on the Peace Process**

On 17 May 1999, the Israelis overwhelmingly elected Ehud Barak as their Prime Minister. The election of Ehud Barak created encouraging momentum for the resumption of peace negotiations with both the Palestinians and Syrians. Barak's emphasis on peace as an approach to bring security for the Israelis pleased the Arab parties in the peace process [43]. Barak's victory was welcomed by the U.S. administration, hoping the new Israeli government would provide an opportunity for the United States to facilitate the peace process in the Middle East. Syria also welcomed Barak's election [44].

Following the formation of the new Israeli government, substantive efforts took place to help Syrians and Israelis resume their negotiations. Hoping to broker a peace treaty, President Clinton took diplomatic initiatives to revive the long-suspended negotiations between Syria and Israel [45]. He seemed willing to take whatever steps necessary to establish a peace treaty in his remaining months in office. President Clinton sent a letter to Hafiz al-Asad, urging him "to seize the moment of opportunity for peace negotiations with Israel [46]." But the problem was that Syria wanted to resume the talks where they left off in March 1996, maintaining that the previous Israeli Labor government made a promise that they would retreat from the entire Golan Heights in return for full peace with Syria [47]. The Israeli government denied that there were such a commitment and insisted that the talks should resume without preconditions. It took more than six months before the United States could convince Syria and Israel to resume their negotiations. The United States refused to propose that the negotiations be based upon previous agreements frustrating the Syrian delegation in the peace process.

The United States apparently came down on the Israeli side, confirming, "Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, and there were no agreements in this area [48]." The U.S. State Department's spokesman also determined that "The United States only conveys, from one party to another, what we are authorized to convey"[49], confirming that there had not been such a commitment by the Israelis to withdraw from the entire Golan Heights as the Syrians claimed [50].

### **Clinton's Initiative**

However, with American support, Barak showed willingness to trade land for peace with Syria, although he refused to define the scope of Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights [51]. Following months of continuous diplomatic efforts, both Syria and Israel were frustrated by the inability to reach an agreement for resumption of their negotiations. On December 8, 1999, Clinton announced that Syria and Israel agreed to resume their negotiations “from the point at which they left off,”[52] with no preconditions. He gave no details on what the two sides had already agreed to, nor did he state what the Syrian and Israeli positions were; a formulation in which each side could reserve the right to maintain their own interpretation of what the point was.

President Clinton was interested “in establishing a legacy as a peacemaker in his remaining time in office [53].” Therefore, he took various initiatives to help the parties resume their negotiations. He lured the two sides together by proposing an ambiguous formula that Syrian-Israeli negotiations were to resume “from the point where they left off” without any specific references to what “the point” was. This formula satisfied both parties since they could interpret “the point” in their own way on the basis of all previous negotiations that took place under American auspices. To the Israelis “the point” meant no preconditions, no guarantees on withdrawal and, of course, no full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. To the Syrians “the point” meant the renewal of Rabin’s promise that Israel would fully withdraw from Syria’s territory in exchange for

full peace and normalization of relations with Israel.

### **Shepherdstown Talks**

The Shepherdstown Talks were the first meetings between Syria and Israel after nearly four years. It was also the last Syrian-Israeli meeting under President Clinton’s auspices. Talks focused mostly on: Israel’s demand that security should be addressed first, and Syria’s insistence that Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights must be discussed before other issues. Mutual mistrust had always been a significant obstacle in the Syrian-Israeli negotiations.

The Syrian-Israeli negotiations frequently stalled because of procedural problems and, most importantly, what should come first. The two sides could not reach a compromise. The U.S. proposed to set up four technical committees to address simultaneously the main issues of contention: border/withdrawal, security arrangements, water, and normalization of relations.

Although this arrangement brought a breakthrough for convening the Syrian-Israeli talks, the negotiations failed to make any progress on confidence-building measures. The fact that the two sides had huge disagreements over which issues should take priority in the talks led to the suspension of negotiations. Only the committees on normalization of relations and security arrangements ever met. The other two committees on border/withdrawal and water, did not convene because the Israelis wanted to know the extent of Syria’s willingness to agree to security arrangements, such as the scope of demilitarized

zones and establishment of early warning stations, before discussing Syria's demand for full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. From Syria's point of view, negotiating issues such as these and other points of contention such as water rights, normalization of relations, and the nature of peace and future relations were pointless until they knew whether Israel was willing to fully withdraw from the entire Golan Heights. Therefore, the whole new process came to a complete deadlock and finally was suspended by the Syrians on the grounds that Israel refused to convene the border committee.

#### **American Last Initiatives to Resolve the Syrian-Israeli Disputes**

Although the United States proposed a compromise solution for the resumption of talks and for keeping the talks on track, they appeared to be significantly ineffective in convincing Israel to comply with the U.S. proposal. Therefore, in an attempt to further the negotiations, the United States prepared a seven-page document [54] as a draft of a possible peace treaty between Syria and Israel. It was a summary of the issues that Syria and Israel had already agreed upon in the past and the differences that remained to be resolved through substantive discussions. The document was conveyed confidentially to the Syrian and Israeli negotiating teams, but it was leaked to an Israeli newspaper, Ha'aretz on January 13, 2000 [55].

The document indicated [56] both sides agreed to terminate the state of war and establish peace between them. Accordingly, Syria showed more flexibility on several key issues such as security

arrangements and normalization of relations. Syria made an important concession regarding the early warning stations and agreed that these stations on Mt. Hermon be operated by the United States and France. The document also indicated that the two sides had agreed to full diplomatic relations, free trade, open borders, and cooperation in tourism. However, it made clear that they still had not reached an agreement on many substantial issues. These included security arrangements, water sharing, the scope and timing of Israeli withdrawal, the position of the final border, and the extent of demilitarized zones.

#### **Suspension of Shepherdstown Talks**

Following Syria's dissatisfaction with Israel's refusal to negotiate the borders and withdrawal issues, the negotiations in Shepherdstown slowed down. The U.S. initiatives did not lead to a breakthrough. The talks ended without even a working framework for a provisional agreement on core disputes. Syria took a rigid position and later refused to participate in any negotiations unless Israel agreed to discuss withdrawal issues [57]. According to the New York Times, "the leak of the draft to an Israeli newspaper unsettled the Syrians, who had never before disclosed to their public what they were willing to give up. It was interpreted in the Arab world as Syria making big concessions without winning much in return [58]." Therefore, the process that might have brought both Syrians and Israelis to a comprehensive peace fell apart and led to another stalemate. The only hope for breaking the stalemate was the meeting between

President Clinton and Hafiz al-Asad, in March 2000, in Geneva.

### **The Geneva Summit (March 2000)**

After a nearly two-month stalemate in the Syrian-Israeli negotiations, President Clinton announced that he would meet with Hafiz al-Asad in an effort to bridge the differences between Syria and Israel, hoping it would lead to a renewal of the negotiations. This meeting between the two was the first since President Clinton met with Syria's president in Damascus in November 1994. Prior to the summit, there were some expectations that the Geneva meeting would bring about a breakthrough in the stalled Syrian-Israeli negotiations, on the assumption that a summit at the presidential level would not be held unless both parties had already known the general outcome [59].

But at the summit, President Clinton recited "Barak's maximum requirements" to make peace with Syria. According to some sources, he brought "two entirely new Israeli demands: mastery of all the water (which Asad took to mean not only of Lake Tiberias but also of the tributaries of the Jordan River), and control of a zone hundreds of meters east of lake Tiberias (Syria had held the north east corner prior to 1967), pushing the border to the foot of the Golan escarpment [60]." That President Asad apparently rejected these demands. Reciting maximum Israeli demands, instead of bringing a compromise solution, badly damaged U.S. role [61] as an honest broker in the Syrian-Israeli disputes. According to Seale, "The summit never recovered from this unfortunate start. It turned

into a fiasco, damaging Assad's hitherto friendly relationship with the American president. Assad returned home in a sour mood. He felt he had been tricked [62]."

Therefore, the summit came to a quick end, without any news conference or even a joint statement. There was no agreement on resumption of future talks. The Summit not only failed to produce any tangible or even incremental progress on the Syrian-Israeli track, but also made renewal of the negotiations very difficult since the negotiations had failed at the presidential level. Although President Clinton cautioned Hafiz al-Asad that "if progress were not achieved now in the peace process, it could be generations before they could resume again" [63], the negotiations were stalemated on the ground that there were no compromise proposal advanced by the Clinton administration. While the United States mediators knew the main obstacles in the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations, they failed to bring proposals to close the enormous gaps between the parties and once again demonstrating their ineffective role in the Syrian-Israeli peace process.

In conclusion the key reason, according to Seale, for the failure of the summit was that "Israel wants to push the Syrians back from the Lake not only beyond the June 4 line, but beyond the 1923 international border by several hundred meters in order to control the road which runs around the Lake...the Israelis are not only disputing Syria's demand that the border run along the June line; they even want to amend the 1923 line and push it further east [64]."

### **The Prospect of Syrian-Israeli Peace Process**

When the Clinton's last peace initiatives came to bring Syria and Israel to the negotiating table, the world were on the brink of unprecedented, dramatic changes that fundamentally affected not only the Middle East but also the world politics, in general. Prior to the tragedy of September 11, 2001, the death of Hafiz al-Asad in June 2000 and then coming of new Syrian president, Bashar al-Asad, brought more ambiguities to the future of the Syrian-Israeli peace process. The fact that Syria's new president had neither his father charisma nor his long term experiences in dealing with both domestic and regional conflict made everything more complicated on the ground. Although he insisted that Syria would continue the legacy of Hafiz al-Asad, Bashar al-Asad was not ready to enter the negotiations with the Israelis without any preconditions. Moreover, the election of Sharon, Likud's hard liner leader, had also diminished any chance for the resumption of Syrian-Israeli negotiations. In addition to these regional developments, the impact of American presidential election on the peace process and the fact that neo conservatives in the Bush administration were not in a position to continue Clinton's full engagement in the Middle East peace process brought another obstacle to the resumption of Syrian-Israeli peace process. The changes in American foreign policy toward the peace process, therefore, did not provide any opportunities for the Syrians and Israelis to return to the talks.

In addition, the terrorist attacks of September 11 brought unprecedented challenges to the United States adopting more aggressive, unilateral policy

toward some Middle Eastern states that from American point of view had long supported terrorism and provided safe haven for them. Syria was among the countries that came under intensive political pressure by the United States. Therefore, contrary to the fact that Syria's relation somehow improved with the United States, due to Syria's cooperation with the CIA in regard to Al-Qaeda activities, U.S.-Syrian relationship deteriorated in the aftermath of September 11. Particularly, when the United States attacked Iraq in March 2003, the relations between the two countries reached the lowest point ever. Even the United States threatened that it might invade Syria, due to Syria's support of Iraqi insurgencies.

The aftermath of September 11 had variety of regional and domestic implications. Among them, the Greater Middle East initiatives aimed at bringing more pressure on Middle Eastern states, including Syria, to democratize their policy. The US invasion of Afghanistan and the removal of Saddam Hussein could be best understood within this framework. These events, particularly US invasion of Iraq deteriorated the already tense relation between the United States and Syria. Syria's strong opposition to the war, on one hand, and the increasing Iraqi insurgencies, on the other, brought more pressure on Syria. The Bush administration, therefore, significantly increased its anti-Syrian rhetoric based on the fact that they maintained Syria were behind the Iraqi rebels.

These events finally brought an end to any prospect for the peaceful resolution of the Syrian-Israel disputes. In fact, due to the important role of the United States in mediating between Syria and

Israel, the weakening of US-Syria relations led to the continuation of stalemate in the Syrian-Israeli peace process. In brief, the events of early new millennium had enormous effect on the Middle East politics and because of the dramatic changes in US policy toward the Middle East, in general, and toward Syria, in particular, there would be no hope for the resumption of talks between Syria and Israel in the near future. Of course, there would be no motives for the confrontation, either. The no-war, no-peace status quo will dominate Syrian-Israeli relations for while.

### **Conclusion**

A variety of reasons prevented Syria and Israel from reaching a peace treaty during the several rounds of negotiations under American auspices in the 1990s. Besides unresolved issues such as the Golan Heights and the rigidity of Syrian and Israeli position, the biased role of the United States in the Syrian-Israeli talks left the process at an intractable impasse.

Realistically, there is little hope for peace between Syria and Israel unless the United States takes evenhanded, diplomatic initiatives to bring the Syrians and Israelis to the conclusion that peace-with all its pre-requisites-is in the interests of both countries. It is obvious that there can be no peace between Syria and Israel while Israel continues its occupation of the Golan Heights. It is unlikely that Israel will withdraw from the Golan Heights unless they reach an agreement with the Syrians that will secure their access to Golan's water and provide ironclad guarantees for Israeli security. Even if Syria agrees to Israel's conditions

it is not clear that to what extent Israel will be willing to fulfill Syria's basic demands.

The United States had strategic relationship with Israel and because of that failed to be evenhanded in mediating Syrian-Israeli disputes. Moreover, the U.S. not only refused to improve its relations with Syria but also tried to use variety of patterns of influence in order to affect Syria's position in the peace process. For example, although the U.S. acknowledged Syria has not been engaged in international terrorism since 1986, the United States refused to remove Syria's name from the terrorist list. The United States also continued to impose sanctions on Syria, aiming to influence Syria's domestic and foreign policy. Both the Bush and Clinton administrations explicitly made improvement of U.S. relations with the Syrians contingent upon progress in the peace process between Syria and Israel. Such progress was unlikely without good relations between Syria and the United States.

The United States failed to provide a basic outline for the reconciliation of the Syrian-Israeli conflict. Without having an internationally recognized framework for solving their disputes, on one hand, and being suspicious of each other's true intentions, on the other, both parties, particularly the Israelis, made demands harder to fulfill for the establishment of a possible peace treaty between them. There would be no hope for reconciliation of Syrian-Israeli disputes while the latter made the depth of its withdrawal from the Golan Heights contingent upon the depth of peace with Syria, a position which has neither a legal nor logical base. There could be no peace with Syrian

territory under occupation. The United States appeared reluctant to advise Israel that peace has its own prerequisite and that such a vague formula would never lead to a peace treaty.

Therefore, the less willing the United States was to pressure Israel to make compromises, the more determined Syria became to resist making concessions to Israeli demands. As a result, the less ready Syria was to make the necessary concessions, the more the United States ignored Syria's core demand for full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights as the basis for a comprehensive peace. Consequently, the less attention the United States paid to Syria's demands, the more Syria resisted and defied American peace initiatives. This scenario brought the whole peace process to several stalemates although Syria avoided sabotaging the initiatives. This was because Syria wanted to moderate its positions as accommodation to the new changes in the international and regional political systems, on one hand, and their need to better their relationship with the United States in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, on the other.

Therefore, any Syrian-Israeli peace is dependent on a variety of factors, functioning together in a complicated process. The United States could play an important role by assuring Israel that their security needs will be met and promising Syria that their lost territories will be returned to them in their entirety. The United States also could strengthen confidence-building measures between the parties and assure them that peace will meet their basic needs and that in

no way will the conflict be settled at the expense of either's interests.

## References

- [1] The Middle East, moreover, was vital to U.S. interests because of its geopolitical situation as well as its enormous natural resources. The U.S. policy during this period was designed to support pro-Western Arab countries and to prevent any radical group from taking power in this region.
- [2] Meredith R. Sarkees and Stephen Zunes, "Disenchantment With the New World Order: Syria's Relations With the United States," *International Journal* Vol. XLIX, (spring 1994): p. 355.
- [3] There was no reference to Syria in the two peace agreements that were signed under American auspices during this time: the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel in 1978, and the stillborn May 17, 1983 Accord between Lebanon and Israel. Syria, therefore, adopted a policy to isolate Egypt from the Arab world, and to sabotage the May 17 Accord through its proxies in Lebanon.
- [4] David W. Lesch, *Syria and the United States: Eisenhower's Cold War in the Middle East* (Westview Press, 1992), pp. 5-13 and 29-39. See also George Lenczowski, *American Presidents and the Middle East* (Duke University Press, 1990), pp. 52-54.
- [5] According to Saunders, "each action that Eisenhower administration took to minimize Soviet influence in Syria seemed to have the

opposite effect.... The sharp anti-Syria and anti-Arab nationalist rhetoric uttered by American officials throughout the period and CIA covert operations drove Syria ever closer to the Soviets, who welcomed the opportunity to gain influence in the Middle East.” (Bonnie F. Saunders, *The United States and Arab nationalism: the Syrian case 1953-1960* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1996) p. VIII.)

[6] Syria viewed the creation of Israel in Palestine, historically a part of Greater Syria, as an “imperialist-created colonial settler state unjustly implanted in the heart of the Arab world, as well as a security threat and an obstacle to Arab unity.” (Alasdair Drysdale and Raymond Hinnebusch, *Syria and the Middle East Peace Process* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1991), p. 98.)

[7] This was mostly because Syria supported and provided safe-haven for some Palestinian and Lebanese groups and other organizations that U.S. administrations considered terrorist groups.

[8] Syria and Iraq had long been bitter enemies. Rivalry between the two ruling Ba’th parties had been tense during the 1980s when Syria backed Iran after the Iraqi invasion of Iran in 1980. Disagreement on various regional issues intensified personal animosity between Hafiz al-Asad and Saddam Hussein. The rivalry between the two countries was so tense that Syria took the opportunity to join the U.S.-led coalition, fighting against the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in the early 1990s.

[9] Meredith R. Sarkees and Stephen Zunes, p. 355.

[10] In discussing Hafiz al-Asad’s role in the making of Syrian foreign policy, Raymond Hinnebusch well explained his characters and the implication of Asad’s personality on Syrian political orientation. He stated: “President Hafiz Al-Asad, a man of strong personality, unique authority within the elite, and possessed of wide powers of office, is clearly the dominant decision-maker. Asad is, first of all, an intense nationalist, strongly committed to the Arab cause, and unprepared to concede major principles...Asad is also a realist rather than an ideologue...Asad tends to think in the objective strategic terms of the military professional...He is cautious, never moving without thorough analysis of the balance of forces, and less ready to expend than to accumulate power used to influence; He is flexible and will bargain if it can be done from a position of enough strength to win some advantage...Asad also has a cool nerve, can recover from setback, and is uneasily panicked... Determined, intelligent, energetic, able to learn from mistakes...Asad is a shrewd practitioner of power politics, able to manipulate power balances, proxies, threats, and subversion, ruthless toward opponents, and a true Machiavellian prepared to use any means, from the bombardment of civilians to assassinations. (Raymond Hinnebusch, “Revisionist Dreams, Realistic Strategies: The Foreign Policy of Syria,” in Bahgat Korany and Ali al-Din, *The Foreign policy of Arab States: The Challenge of Change* (Boulder: Westview, 1991), pp. 387-388.)

- [11] For a more information See: Itamar Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace: the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 36-43.
- [12] In an analysis regarding Syria's participation in the Madrid peace conference, Hafiz al-Asad stated, "Long discussions that lasted for months were held with the American administration, especially with the Secretary of State at that time, James Baker, after which we agreed that the initiative, which had become clear, aimed at building a just and comprehensive peace on the basis of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, including a political settlement for the rights of the Palestinian people, along with an American assurance that the United States does not endorse the annexation of any part of the territories occupied in 1967, in keeping with a past American position that rejected the application of Israeli law to the Golan. On that basis we took part in the Madrid conference and in the discussions that were held in Washington." ("Assad's Speech to Parliament: There Is Some Hope for Peace." *Mideast Mirror*, September 12, 1994, Section: Syria, Vol. 08, No. 175.)
- [13] Syria made considerable concessions to directly negotiate the Arab-Israeli disputes with the Israelis. In the past, Syria insisted on the full implementation of UN Resolutions 242 and 338 and on Israeli's commitment for full withdrawal from the entire Golan Heights. Syria also maintained that any conference on the Middle East should be under United Nations auspices.
- [14] See *The New York Times*, March 8, 1991. p. A6. and "Transcript of President Bush's Address on End of the Gulf War," p. A8.
- [15] U.S. Department of State, Department of State Dispatch, (November 25, 1991).
- [16] *The Jerusalem Post*, June 13, 1990.
- [17] Despite Bush's position on new Israeli settlements, "Shamir announced near the beginning of Baker's seventh trip that Israel had constructed 15,780 housing units for Jewish settlers in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip." (Thomas R. Mattair, "The Arab-Israeli conflict: The Madrid conference and Beyond," *American-Arab Affairs* No. 37(Summer 1991): p. 10.). This settlement building was crucial to gaining permanent control of the West Bank and Gaza. As Shamir's cabinet minister once declared "the 1967 borders [are] obliterated... talk of land compromise is irrelevant... We believe our boundaries are at the Jordan River... We won't freeze the settlements at any price. Not even at the cost of the American loan guarantees." (*The Los Angeles Times*, September 25, 1991: p. A1.) For a comprehensive review of U.S. policy toward Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip see: Donald Neff, "Settlements in U.S. Policy," *Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol. 23, No. 3 (Spring 1994): pp. 53-69.
- [18] *The Los Angeles Times*, April 7, 1991: p. A1 and pp. A7-A8.
- [19] In a meeting with the far-right wing Tehiya Party, Shamir assured them that "settlements would continue and ... [that] he would never

- trade land for peace.” (*The New York Times*, April 24, 1991: p. A11).
- [20] In an interview, he said, “we were very disappointed to learn ... that there is yet another settlement that has been established in the occupied territories. I think that probably points up rather visibly that it is easier to obstruct peace than it is to promote it and that the establishment of those settlements certainly doesn’t help the effort of those who are interested in peace.” (*The New York Times*, April 25, 1991: p. A3). In testimony before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, Baker said, “I do not think there is any bigger obstacles to peace than the settlement activity...nothing has made my job of trying to find Arab and Palestinian partners for Israel more difficult than being greeted by a new settlement every time I arrive [in Israel].” (Thomas R. Mattair, “*The Bush Administration and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*,” p. 68).
- [21] In an interview, the Secretary of State said, “We feel extraordinarily strongly about the issue...I think the President will be willing to go to the American people (to argue the issue) because it is their tax dollars that will be supporting settlement activity that we used to characterize as illegal -- and which we now moderately characterize as an obstacle to peace.” (*The Los Angeles Times*, September 18, 1991, p. A1.)
- [22] *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 23, 1991, p.19. and *The New York Times*, September 23, 1991, p. A10.
- [23] Robert G. Neumann, “1992 – A Year of Stalemate in the Peace Process?” *Middle East Policy* Vol. I, No. 2, (1992): P.48.
- [24] Although Syria neither supported nor opposed the accord, Hafiz al-Asad threatened that Syria would foil the accord if it become clear that it would create major damage to Syria's national interest. (Anoushirvan Ehteshami and Raymond Hinnebusch, p. 162.)
- [25] “A Syrian warning to Jordan: separate peace can bring instability,” *Mideast Mirror*, September 28, 1993, section: Israel: Vol. 07, No. 209.
- [26] Helena Cobban, *The Superpowers and the Syrian-Israeli Conflict*, pp. 78-103. David W. Lesch, ed. *The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999). Pp. 227-243.
- [27] As President Clinton stated in a joint press conference with the Syrian president, “the role of Syria in the security and stability of the region is absolutely critical. I don't think we can finish a comprehensive peace or maintain peace in the region unless there is peace between Syria and Israel.” (“Assad commits to peaceful normal relations with Israel,” *Mideast Mirror*, October 27, 1994, Section: The Arab World; Vol. 08, No. 208.)
- [28] “Clinton In The Middle East,” *The New York Times*, October 28, 1994, p. A21.
- [29] Syria insisted that peace be based on the relevant UN resolutions and the principle of

trading land for peace. Clinton said, “For peace to endure, it must also be just. Peace between Israel and Syria must be based on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of land for peace. Peace must also be real. More than mere words on paper, more than just the absence of war, nations must establish normal, peaceful relations.”<sup>1</sup> (“Clinton In The Middle East,” *The New York Times*, October 28, 1994, p. A21).

[30] *The Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 1995, p. A6.

[31] The negotiations led to a mutual understanding on security issues, titled “The Aims and Principles of the Security Arrangements.” Although this achievement was neither peace treaty nor a comprehensive agreement on security issues, it was considered a framework for progress in the Syrian-Israeli track. (Helena Cobban, *The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks: 1991-1996 and Beyond*, pp. 68-69).

[32] Benny Morris, “After Rabin,” pp. 77-87.

[33] In an interview, Ambassador Moualem stated, “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 Qunerita 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.” (Helen Cobban’s interview with Ambassador Muoalm, Washington, D.C., June 1999: Quoted from her book: *The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks: 1991-1996 and Beyond*, p. 136).

[34] Quoted from Helena Cobban, *The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks: 1991-1996 and Beyond*, p. 134.

[35] The Washington Post reported: “The trigger came April 8, when a 16-year-old Lebanese boy was killed by a mysterious explosion in Barasheet. Israel described the explosive as an old mine or shell; Hezbollah accused Israel of planting a bomb. On April 9, the guerrillas loosed the deadliest Katyusha barrage into northern Israel in more than two years, inflicting 34 casualties.... Israel’s diplomatic channels to Washington fell silent. The Clinton administration did nothing to intervene. Two days later, after quietly evacuating children from Israel’s northernmost towns, Peres launched Operation Grapes of Wrath. (*The Washington Post*, April 21, 1996: p. A1).

[36] Patrick Seale and Linda Butler, “Asad’s Regional Strategy and the Challenge from Netanyahu,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol. 26, No. 1 (Autumn 1996): pp. 28-29.

- [37] Patrick Seale and Linda Butler, "Asad's Regional Strategy and the Challenge from Netanyahu," p. 29.
- [38] The Syrian Times reported on January 27, 1996 that the American coordinator of the peace talks, Dennis Ross, said, "they had achieved more than all the negotiations between the two parties since the Madrid conference." (*Middle East Contemporary Survey* Vol. XX, 1996, (Westview Press, 1998), p. 661.) Moreover, Syrians and Israelis also stated their satisfaction. According to Asad, the Wye Plantation talks were "conducted in a better atmosphere than in the past." Also, Uri Savir, the director-general of the Israeli foreign ministry and head of the Israeli delegation to the talks "asserted that a peace agreement could be reached before the end of 1996, and that the real remaining problem between Israel and Syria was mainly psychological." (Eyal Zisser, "Syria," *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, Vol. XX, 1996, (Westview Press, 1998), p. 661).
- [39] These developments were the result of several suicide bombings, Peres's decision to hold an early election, and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in April 1996.
- [40] Laura Drake, "A Netanyahu Primer," *Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol. 26, No. 1 (Autumn 1996): pp. 58-69.
- [41] Patrick Seale and Linda Butler, "Asad's Regional Strategy and the Challenge from Netanyahu," p. 27.
- [42] "Fresh Light on the Syrian-Israeli peace Negotiations, an interview with Ambassador Walid Al-Moualem," pp. 82-83.
- [43] In an interview before the election, he said, "I want to give a new momentum to peace agreements.... I learned during many years -- decades -- of fighting that the right way to bring about personal security to Israelis and overall security to Israel is through peace agreement with our neighbors." (*The New York Times*, May 18, 1999, p A1).
- [44] Martha Neff Kessler, "Syria, Israel and the Middle East peace process: Past success and Final Challenges," pp. 69-70.
- [45] During the period before Israel and Syria agreed to resume their negotiations (from early July 1999 to December 1999), a number of secret, unofficial, and diplomatic missions took place to close the distance between the opening positions of the Syrians and Israelis. Following Barak's election, Patrick Seale, Asad's biographer, had a role in restoring the process, carrying a series of messages between Syria and Israel. James Baker, former U.S. Secretary of State, and Edward Djerejian, former U.S. Ambassador to Israel and Syria visited Syria in July 1999. Spanish Prime Minister, Jose Maria Anzar also visited both Syria and Israel in July 1999, hoping to bridge the differences over resumption of talks. (See: *Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol. XXIX, no. 1 (Autumn 1999): p. 114. And *Mideast Mirror*, July 19, 1999, Section:

Israel; Vol. 13, No. 136).

[46] *The New York Times*, July 27, 1999: p. A3.

[47] Syria maintained that Rabin and Peres committed to withdraw to the June 4, 1967.

[48] Patrick Seale, "The Syrian-Israeli negotiations: who is telling the truth?" p. 66. Although Syria claimed that Israel was committed to fully withdraw from the Golan Heights, The United States maintained that there was no such agreement.

[49] Patrick Seale, "The Syrian-Israeli negotiations: who is telling the truth?" p. 66.

[50] The Israeli government also made clear that "Israel never gave any commitment to withdraw to this or that line. The territorial issue, just like other issues, should be part of the negotiations and not a prerequisite to them." (Patrick Seale, "The Syrian-Israeli negotiations: Who is telling the truth?" *Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol. XXIX, No. 2 (Winter 2000): p. 66).

[51] He later insisted that Israel would never return to the pre-1967 border (*Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol. XXIX, No. 1, (Autumn 1999): p. 114).

[52] "A leap forward in Mideast peacemaking," *Christian Science Monitor* December 10, 1999: p. 6.

[53] *The New York Times*, July 21, 1999: p. A12.

[54] "Syria Offers Israel Major Concessions," *The Washington Post*, January 14, 2000: p. A1.

[55] According to *The New York Times*, the leak of the draft enormously damaged the ongoing peace process between Syria and Israel in

Shepherdstown: "Peace talks were suspended in January after the leak of a draft treaty embarrassed Syrian officials and indicated that Syria had already negotiated some aspects of normalizing relations with Israel without nailing down a firm Israeli commitment to leave all the occupied Golan Heights, the main issue separating the two sides." ("Assad Meeting With Clinton Could Renew Peace Talks," *The New York Times*, March 23, 2000: p. A9).

[56] "Clinton Administration: A framework for peace between Israel and Syria," *Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol. XXIX, no. 3, Spring 2000: pp. 157-161.

[57] *Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol. XXIX, no. 3 (Spring 2000): p. 123. See also: *Mideast Mirror*, February 3, 2000, Section: Syria, Egypt, Vol. 14, No. 23.

[58] "Israel And Syria Postponing Talks," *The New York Times*, January 18, 2000: p. A1.

[59] In an interview with the Lebanese newspaper, *al-Mustaqbal*, Syria's foreign minister said, "when Clinton invited Assad to meet him in Geneva, he told him he had something important to tell him which due to its importance could not be conveyed through the normal channels of communication. Accordingly we went to Geneva on the basis that we would be apprised of something important." ("Sharaa: Assad won't bequeath his son a dishonorable peace," *Mideast Mirror*, March 31, 2000, Section: Syria, Vol. 14, No. 63).

[60] *Journal of the Palestine Studies* Vol. XXIX, No. 4, (Summer 2000): p. 128.

[61] At least from Syria's point of view.

[62] Patrick Seale, "Obituary of the Syrian Track,"  
*Journal of the Palestine Studies* Vol. XXIX,  
No. 4 (Summer 2000): p.155.

[63] "Israel's intransigence blamed for failure of  
Assad-Clinton summit," *Mideast Mirror*, March  
27, 2000, Section: Syria, Vol. 14, No. 59.

[64] "Israel's intransigence blamed for failure of  
Assad-Clinton summit,".

## نقش نامؤثر آمریکا در مذاکرات صلح سوریه و اسرائیل در دهه ۱۹۹۰

### احمد سلطانی نژاد<sup>۱</sup>

تحولات اساسی در صحنه روابط بین‌الملل پس از فروپاشی اتحاد شوروی فرصت مناسبی را برای اعراب و اسرائیل فراهم آورد تا به دشمنی دیرینه خود پایان دهند. همچنین این تحولات موقعیت مناسبی برای ایالات متحده پدید آورد تا نقش مهمی در مذاکرات صلح اعراب و اسرائیل ایفا کند. طی دهه ۱۹۹۰، ایالات متحده تسهیلاتی فراهم کرد تا گروه‌های مذاکره‌کننده سوری و اسرائیلی طی چند دور مذاکرات رسمی و غیررسمی مسائل اساسی بحران اعراب و اسرائیل را با هدف عادی‌سازی روابط بررسی کنند. این مذاکرات بسیار پیچیده و دشوار بود و چندین بار بخاطر پافشاری اسرائیل بر مخالفت با عقب‌نشینی از بلندبدهای جولان به بن‌بست رسید.

عوامل بسیاری مانع پیشرفت مذاکرات صلح سوریه و اسرائیل شد. علاوه بر مسائل لاینحل مانند اختلاف بر سر بلندبدهای جولان، عواملی چون عدم توانایی آمریکا در پیگیری نقشی بیطرفانه در این مذاکرات یکی از موانع اساسی محسوب می‌شود. ایالات متحده همواره روابطی استراتژیک با اسرائیل داشته در حالی که از بهبود روابط با سوریه خودداری ورزیده است. گروه‌های طرفدار اسرائیل نفوذی قابل توجه در کنگره آمریکا داشته‌اند و این امر سبب شده است که آمریکا نتواند یک میانجیگر بیطرف در مذاکرات فی‌مابین اسرائیل و سوریه باشد. همچنین موانع دیگری چون پافشاری دو طرف بر مواضع خود و عدم وجود اعتماد بین سوریه و اسرائیل همراه با مشروط بودن مذاکرات، نقشی اساسی در بن‌بست این مذاکرات طی دهه ۱۹۹۰ داشته است.

واژگان کلیدی: سیاست خارجی، سوریه، آمریکا، مذاکرات صلح سوریه و اسرائیل.

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۱. استادیار دانشگاه تربیت مدرس