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CAN ISRAEL AND SYRIA REACH PEACE?  
OBSTACLES, LESSONS AND PROSPECTS

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*THE ISAAC AND MILDRED BROCHSTEIN FELLOW IN PEACE AND SECURITY  
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## **Introduction**

At the turn of the century, during late 1999 and early 2000, Israel and Syria were about to sign a peace agreement, after more than fifty years of bitter conflict, including four wars and numerous smaller clashes.

Following almost a decade of protracted negotiations with U.S. involvement, most of the bilateral disputes had been settled with mutual understanding regarding Israeli withdrawal from the Golan (Jawlan ) Heights, security arrangements, as well as diplomatic and economic relations between Syria and Israel.

Yet, in the last stage of negotiations, in March 2000, the remaining obstacle to a peace agreement was a dispute over a narrow strip of land, some 12 kilometers long and a few hundred meters wide, along the northeastern shore of Lake Tiberias (or Sea of Galilee, or Lake Kinneret). President Hafiz Asad demanded sovereignty over this strip of land, allowing Syria direct access to the lake for fishing and swimming (and probably also giving Syria control over half the lake). This long-held position derived from Syria's demand for a return to the June 4, 1967 line which it had occupied since the 1948 war with Israel, although the international boundary demarcated in 1923 by the British Mandatory power in Palestine and the French Mandatory power in Syria was drawn 10 meters from the lake's northeastern shore.

Previously, however, at an advanced stage of the peace negotiations, in December 1999 and January 2000, Asad's chief envoy agreed that Israel should retain a 10 meter wide strip around the northeastern shore. Syria subsequently agreed to a 50 meter-wide strip provided Israel would accept the June 4, 1967 line as a basis for negotiations towards a final agreement. Barak, Israel's prime minister, had initially agreed to consider the June 1967 line as a basis for such negotiations. In principle or conceptually, he was prepared to withdraw to that line within the framework of a peace agreement, but he did not specify the exact demarcation of the line on the northeastern shore. Subsequently, however, Barak changed his mind and insisted on retaining a 400 meter wide strip of land. Barak thus seemed to have caused the breakdown of the Asad-

Clinton summit in Geneva on March 26, 2000, which was expected to bring about a breakthrough towards a Syrian-Israeli peace agreement.<sup>1</sup>

Barak also did not agree to a compromise proposal (made by Patrick Seale, Asad's semi-official biographer and backed by Moshe Ma'oz, Asad's unauthorized biographer, who brought it to Barak's attention alongside other Israelis) concerning the disputed strip of land suggested in early April 2000, namely, that full sovereignty would be exercised by Israel over the lake and by Syria over the disputed northeastern land strip; that Syria would have access to the lake for fishing and swimming, but not for drawing water; that the northeastern shoreline would be a joint tourist area for Syrians, Israelis and foreigners, under UN security supervision.<sup>2</sup>

Like Barak, Asad did not accept this compromise proposal, and as a result both leaders probably missed an opportunity to reach a peace agreement that could have served the national interests of both countries, as well as contribute to the security and stability of the region. For Israel such an agreement would remove a strategic threat — real or imagined — while neutralizing the Hizballah menace in southern Lebanon and leading to an Israeli - Lebanese peace agreement. Peace agreements with Syria and Lebanon would also have improved Israel's image in the Arab world while enhancing its bargaining position *vis-à-vis* the Palestinians and reducing the Iranian threat.

For Syria, peace with Israel, including the return of the Golan would have minimized the military-strategic peril and enabled Damascus to divert a large part of its military expenditure toward social and economic development. Syrian society and economy could have benefited from the American financial aid and investments that were likely to follow a peace agreement with Israel and erasing Syria from Washington's "black list" of countries supporting terror.

Why then did both Asad and Barak insist on controlling a narrow strip of land on the Lake Tiberias shoreline, and so missed an opportunity to advance their countries' national interests? Was this merely a game of bargaining or brinkmanship that could have been resolved had Clinton pressured them to complete the negotiations and reach a compromise settlement? Is it possible that this dispute over a narrow shoreline could not be settled by a win-win compromise

because it represents a zero sum game, deriving from the deep psychological, cultural, emotional and political conflicts between Syria and Israel, as well as from the questionable quality of Asad's and Barak's respective leadership and their poor potential to cope with deep-seated issues and old taboos?

For example, was Barak able or willing to overcome a large opposition among the Israeli-Jewish public, including within his own party, who refused to let the "cruel" Syrians "dip their toes" in Lake Kinneret (Tiberias), allegedly control part of it, or pollute its waters — the lake being a major reservoir of Israel's water, as well as a piece of national symbolism? As many Israelis would argue, until the 1967 war, Syria had endeavored to prevent Israel from using the River Jordan waters that flow into the lake, and to prevent Israeli fishermen from fishing there. To achieve their purposes, the Syrians exploited their military positions on the strategic Golan Heights, firing at Israeli localities in the Jordan Valley-Kinneret area.

Again, was Asad, powerful and autocratic, but affiliated with the Alawi minority heterodox sect, capable of "selling" his public a peace agreement with the hated "crusader" state of Israel, without demonstrating a major strategic-ideological gain? This would demand the resumption of Syrian control over the northeastern shoreline of the lake, representing a greater Arab nationalist gain than Egypt and Jordan had achieved in their peace agreements with Israel. Besides, the seriously ill Asad badly needed Syrian-Arab nationalist legitimacy for his posthumous legacy, and/or for facilitating his son, Bashar's, succession.

What conclusion, then, can we draw from this account? That there will never be peace between Israel and Syria if their positions will remain unchanged regarding the Lake Tiberias northeastern shoreline as it is reflected in the minds of Israelis and Syrians, as well as in the strategies of their leaders? Assuming that in the foreseeable future the Israeli and Syrian publics are not likely to moderate their positions, and may even aggravate them, can the respective present leaders, Ariel Sharon and Bashar Asad, reach a peace agreement? Bashar has already indicated his desire to renew peace negotiations with Israel, largely because of his strategic predicament following the U.S. military action in Iraq. But Sharon rejected Bashar's overture.

Will the U.S. exploit its military and political presence in Iraq, employ sticks and carrots, and bring about an Israeli-Syrian peace under a regional Pax Americana?

The aims of this paper are:

- To further examine the obstacles that caused the collapse of Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations in 2000, notably the issues of water, the Golan, public perceptions and national leadership; as well as the interplay among these factors;
- To draw some lessons from the failure of these negotiations as they affect Israeli-Syrian relations under Ariel Sharon and Bashar Asad and beyond, as well as to examine America's role in the peace process in light of its strategic aims in the Middle East.

### **A Major Obstacle: The Water Problem**

Of all the matters in dispute between Israel and Syria, water is a major problem. The issue has brought about a series of military clashes between the two parties, largely contributing to the outbreak of the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Although part of this problem was settled during the 1990's negotiations, the lingering dispute over Lake Tiberias' northeastern shoreline was, on the face of it, the main cause for the collapse of these negotiations in March 2000. To be sure, the water dispute does not involve only the northeastern shore of the lake, but also the Hula Lake (a marsh), the upper Jordan and its main tributary, the Banyas, arising in the Golan Heights.

The UN Partition Resolution No. 181 of November 29, 1947 made Israel's frontier with Syria follow the 1923 British-French international line. This boundary incorporated into Israel the whole of Lake Tiberias, with the frontier demarcating a land strip over a kilometer wide east of the lake and a strip 10 meters wide in the northeastern section (about 12 kilometers long). The British-French agreement of 1923 gave Syrians (and Lebanese) the rights to fish, swim in and otherwise use the waters of Tiberias and the Hula. The latter was included in British Palestine and subsequently in Israel. This was also the case of the upper Jordan River and the slopes of the Banyas, but not the Banyas spring which remained within the Syrian Golan Heights.



During the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, Syria occupied the northeastern section of Lake Tiberias and the banks of the Banyas; and continued to control these areas even though they had been declared demilitarized zones (DZ) in the 1949 Syrian-Israeli Armistice Agreement (Israel itself assumed control of large parts of the DZ in other areas). Despite the 1948 war and subsequent tense relations and hostilities, two Syrian military leaders — dictators Husni Za'im in 1949 and Adib Shishakli in 1952 — offered to conclude a peace, or non-belligerency, agreement, respectively, with Israel.<sup>3</sup> While offering to absorb hundreds or thousands of Palestinian refugees, the two leaders demanded sovereignty over the eastern sections of the Tiberias (half the lake) and Hula Lakes; and American financial and military aid to Syria. This aid was expected to strengthen and stabilize their new regimes and the Syrian nation state, and facilitate socio-economic reforms. No less important, the predicted strategic gains in the matter of the lakes would give these leaders public support and legitimacy. Indeed, the major weakness in these peace proposals was the ideological and emotional opposition of many or most Syrians to peace with the new Jewish state. Za'im, a Syrian Kurd who was indifferent to Arab ideology, disregarded these sentiments, whereas Shishakli, an Arab nationalist, was more sensitive to public opinion. He therefore did not offer full peace to Israel but only a non-belligerency agreement.

But the Israeli prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, did not even agree to meet Za'im. He insisted that the Syrian army, which had occupied some would-be Israeli territories west of the international boundary, should withdraw to this boundary before any negotiations could take place. At all events, Ben-Gurion was by no means prepared to relinquish Israeli sovereignty over any part of the Tiberias and Hula Lakes, to avoid creating a precedent regarding the borders or prejudicing Israel's national water reservoir.

In early 1951, Israel embarked on a big development project — the draining of Lake Hula, fed by the Jordan River, in order to reclaim 15,000 acres of land for cultivation, eradicate malaria from the area and increase the water supply. Syria strongly objected to the project because it would eliminate a natural buffer protecting them from Israeli tanks and would strengthen Israel's economy and stamina. So, Syria employed diplomatic pressure and military force to foil it, but did not succeed. However, this dispute provoked a series of military clashes that claimed Syrian



and Israeli lives. Clashes persisted for a longer period also along the eastern shore of Lake Tiberias, as both Syria and Israel attempted to prevent their respective fishermen from fishing in the northeastern tip of the lake. Ben-Gurion, unlike his foreign minister, Moshe Sharett, did not hesitate to make use of military force to prevent Syrian fishing in the lake. In early 1954 he gave an order “to react in an aggressive manner in each case affecting Israeli fishing in the Kinneret.”<sup>4</sup> In December 1955, for example, in reaction to Syrian firing at Israeli police boats, sent out as a bait,<sup>5</sup> troops led by Major Ariel Sharon (the current prime minister) launched heavy attacks on Syrian military positions near the lake. These attacks, which were also aimed at testing the October 1955 Syrian-Egyptian military pact, claimed the lives of 17 Syrian soldiers and 12 civilians; but this did not deter Syria from continuing to fire at Israeli fishermen and troops.

The most crucial Syrian-Israeli conflict involved the use of the Jordan River waters. Damascus strongly opposed an American (and Israeli) project for the joint use of these waters by Israel and its Arab neighbors. This American project — the Eric Johnston plan of 1953 — was designed to distribute the Jordan Valley waters (including the Yarmuk) among Israel, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. However, according to General Burns, the UN-appointed chairman of the Syrian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission:

The Johnston negotiations seemingly close to success were stalled by the obduracy of the Syrian politicians. They simply would not agree to anything that would benefit Israel, even if the Arab states would thereby achieve greater benefits. Syria also opposed anything implying recognition of Israel’s right to exist.<sup>6</sup>

(But Israel and Jordan tacitly agreed to share the Jordan Valley waters).

Syria fought verbally, diplomatically and militarily against the Israeli project to divert Jordan River water to the Negev desert, which was inaugurated in 1958, at the northwestern corner of Lake Tiberias. After the ascendancy of the radical Ba‘th regime in March 1963, Damascus stepped up its shooting attacks against Israeli troops and the project site and later started work to divert the Banyas tributary of the Jordan.

Israel reacted forcibly and in early 1965 bombed and destroyed the Syrian diversion equipment. Simultaneously Syria asked Arab leaders, notably the Egyptian president Gamal Abd al-Nasser, to help it launch an all-Arab war against Israel. But in May 1965 Nasser “acknowledged that the Arab diversion plan could not be carried out and that the Arabs could not go to war in the foreseeable future.”<sup>7</sup>

But by late 1966 Nasser changed his mind when the Israeli-Syrian water conflict seemed to him to be escalating into an all-out Israeli offensive against Syria. Syria’s new leaders (since February 1966), Salah Jadid and Hafiz Asad, employed “guerrilla warfare” and “verbal aggressiveness” apparently as a “calculated provocation ... to engage Israel in decisive battle”<sup>8</sup> drawing in also Egypt and Jordan. But Israel’s pragmatic prime minister, Levi Eshkol, opted for limited operations against Syria for the “useful purpose of demonstrating Israeli capability of interdicting the diversion works by measures short of full-scale war.”<sup>9</sup> He did not wish to antagonize the U.S. government which supported Israel’s water project and opposed the Syrian diversion scheme, but warned Israel against launching a military assault against the Syrians. Activist Israeli politicians — Moshe Dayan, Shimon Peres and Yigal Allon — pressed Eshkol to inflict a massive military blow on Syria. Chief of Staff General Yitzhak Rabin in May 1966 and again on May 14, 1967 issued severe warnings to the Syrian rulers which were interpreted by both Syrian and Egyptian leaders as aiming at toppling the (neo) Ba‘th regime in Damascus.<sup>10</sup>

With Soviet inducement on May 14, 1967 Egypt invoked its newly signed military pact with Syria and later also with Jordan. It moved troops into the demilitarized Sinai peninsula, evicting the UN Emergency Force and closing the Tiran Straits to ships sailing to the Israeli port of Eilat. It also deployed troops in the Jordanian-held West Bank.

Considering these moves as a *casus belli* and receiving a “yellow light”<sup>11</sup> from Washington (which had failed to avert a war by diplomacy), on June 5, 1967 Israel launched a major offensive against Egypt, Syria and Jordan and in six days conquered Sinai, the Golan Heights, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. But on June 15, 1967 the Israeli cabinet unanimously adopted the following resolution:

Israel stands for the conclusion of a peace treaty with Syria (and Egypt) on the basis of the international boundary ... the conditions for a peace treaty are: (1) a total demilitarization of the Syrian [Golan] Heights ... (2) an absolute guarantee for free water flow from the River Jordan sources into Israel either by an alteration in the northern boundary or by an agreement between the two countries.<sup>12</sup>

Syria and Egypt rejected Israel's offer and continued in their belligerent attitudes toward Israel, who in October 1968 withdrew the June 1967 proposal and started to construct Jewish settlements on the Golan Heights.

To be sure, the water problem has continued to significantly affect Israeli-Syrian relations even during the peace process in the 1990s, as we shall elaborate below. It has, for example, constituted a major factor in the objection of many Israelis, including some national leaders, to relinquishing the Golan Heights to Syria, even in return for a peace agreement with Israel.

### **The Golan Issue: Water, Territory and Security**

Following the June 1967 war, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 242 (of November 22, 1967) calling for:

... a just and lasting peace in the Middle East which should include the withdrawal of Israel's armed forces from territories [not the territories as initially suggested and later altered to satisfy Israel] occupied in the recent conflict; termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every state in the area.<sup>13</sup>

Syria rejected this resolution, whereas Israel, Egypt and Jordan accepted it. Syria's rejection and continued belligerency, in word and deed, significantly contributed to molding a long-term Golan strategy among most Israeli leaders and citizens, namely: holding the Heights and incorporating, or annexing it (in)to Israel, *de facto* or even *de jure*.

This position, which remained the same for decades, derived mainly from the following arguments:

Our firm hold in the Golan Heights and the Hermon [Mount] shoulder is very vital not only in order to defend ... the Hula Valley from Syrian fire ... [it] derives from Israel's overall strategy, since this means defending the chief water sources.<sup>14</sup>

This Israeli strategy was also backed for a long time by Washington, which, like Israel, resented Damascus' pro-Soviet orientation, its support of the Palestinian guerrillas, as well as its military intervention in September 1970 against the Hashemite regime in Jordan. And although Washington did not approve Israel's settlement policy on the Golan and in the other occupied territories, Jerusalem continued to construct settlements on the Golan.<sup>15</sup> It granted the settlers ample land, financial aid and other privileges; while the Golan also became a popular tourist resort for many Israelis.

Israel significantly stepped up its settlement policy following the October 1973 (Yom Kippur/Ramadan) war. At the beginning of the conflict Syria occupied the entire Golan Heights for several days, before losing it again to Israel. The fact that the settlers had to be hurriedly evacuated might have indicated that the settlements were a security liability rather than an asset. But, adhering to the old Zionist-nationalist ethos of settlement, Israel did not change policy in favor of using only military units to hold the Golan.

Similarly, Israel did not change its policy of holding the Golan even after Syria accepted UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 338 (of October 22, 1973) which called for the implementation of UNSC Resolution 242 and for peace negotiations between the parties. For

one thing, the government and people were highly charged with feelings of anger and revenge against Syria on account of its initial military successes in the 1973 war, the “barbaric” treatment of Israeli POWs, the refusal to attend the Geneva peace conference in December 1973, as well as the continued war of attrition against Israeli troops during the spring of 1974. In addition, like the American Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Israel’s new prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, sought first to conclude political agreements with Egypt and Jordan, while delaying negotiations with Syria. But even in the event of full peace with Syria, Rabin argued, Israel should not “descend” from the Golan Heights but make “only cosmetic and definitely insignificant adjustments” in the Golan.<sup>16</sup> Like other Israeli leaders and most citizens, Rabin did not change this negative attitude toward Syria in subsequent years even though Asad publicly offered to sign a non-belligerency (“peace”) agreement with Israel in return for total Israeli withdrawal from the Golan.<sup>17</sup>

Asad’s peace offers were made to American journalists and various other personalities and were directed mainly toward the U.S. administration, probably aiming at bringing about American pressure on Israel to relinquish the Golan Heights for a non-belligerency agreement — not a normal peace — with Israel. Simultaneously, he continued to verbally attack Israel and Zionism, labeling them “colonialist,” “racist,” “expansionist,” and “an ally of Nazism.”<sup>18</sup>

However, this extreme rhetoric did not prevent the pragmatic Rabin from reaching a tacit agreement, or understanding, with the pragmatic Asad, under U.S. auspices: in spring 1976, during the Lebanese civil war, Rabin agreed to a Syrian military presence in Lebanon north of the Sidon-Jezzine line. He also did not go out of his way subsequently to help the Lebanese Maronites fight the Syrian occupiers, thus indicating his preference for strategic interests over ideological positions. Rabin’s successor (from mid-1977), Menachem Begin, the right-wing, ideological Likud leader, adopted a more militant position towards Asad regarding both Lebanon and the Golan. While massively helping the Maronite militias and directly intervening on their side, Begin described Syria’s attacks on the Christian Maronites as “genocide,” and believed that Israel’s Jewish mission was to help them fight their “fanatic” Muslim enemies: “What is being done to the Christians in Lebanon today is exactly what the Nazis did to the Jews in the 1940s in Europe.”<sup>19</sup> Consequently, Begin approved the plan of his defense minister, Ariel Sharon, to

invade Lebanon in June 1982, *inter alia* to dislodge the Syrian army from Lebanon and install a pro-Israeli Maronite government.

Several months earlier, in December 1981, Begin initiated and passed in the Knesset the “Golan Law” applying “Israeli law, jurisdiction and administration” to the Golan Heights, which, according to Begin, had been part of Eretz Israel (the Land of Israel) during many generations.<sup>20</sup>

To be sure, Begin’s Golan Law (and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon) enhanced Asad’s determination to achieve, with Soviet military help, a strategic balance with Israel in order to deter further hostile Israeli actions and if possible to recover the Golan by military force: “If the Israelis work to put the Golan within their borders, we will work to put the Golan in the middle of Syria and not on its borders ... History will record that the Golan was the climax of the disaster for the Israelis.”<sup>21</sup>

Syria, however, could neither reach a strategic balance with Israel nor recapture the Golan by military force, for several reasons,<sup>22</sup> notably the crucial change in Soviet Union policy, under Gorbachev, toward Syria. Gorbachev bluntly told Asad in April 1987 that “the reliance on military force in settling the Arab-Israeli conflict has completely lost its credibility,”<sup>23</sup> and urged him to seek a political settlement to the conflict with Israel.

At this juncture Asad probably concluded that the U.S. could be more effective than the USSR in helping him to regain the Golan within a political settlement with Israel, provided the U.S. president was not as pro-Israeli and anti-Syrian as was Ronald Reagan. In fact, George H.W. Bush, the new President (in early 1989) and his Secretary of State, James Baker, were indeed critical of Israel’s continued occupation of the Golan (as well as the West Bank and Gaza). They urged Israel (and Syria) to seek a political settlement on the basis of UN Resolutions 242 and 338, while initiating a new “framework for action and cooperation with Syria.”<sup>24</sup>

However, the new American-Syrian rapprochement and dialogue were not enough to bring about American pressure on Israel to negotiate the return of the Golan in a comprehensive peace conference. Unexpectedly, Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 gave Asad a rare

opportunity to enhance his relations with Bush and induce him to exert pressure on the right-wing, ideologically-moved Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Shamir. Asad himself compromised his pan-Arab Ba'athist ideology by joining American and British "imperialist" troops in the offensive against the Iraqi army in Kuwait. Thus, in their meeting in Geneva on November 23, 1990, Asad discussed with Bush not only the war in Kuwait but also the peace process with Israel and most probably the Golan issue. Whatever they concluded on this issue, both leaders agreed to settle the Arab (and Syrian)-Israeli conflict on the basis of UN Resolutions 242 and 338 and "the principle of territory for peace." In an interview with the *Washington Post* in late July 1991, Asad declared that the Bush administration's "seriousness has never been felt by us before ... the U.S. has not given assurances ... [but] the United States has not recognized the Israeli annexation of the Golan. It rejected this annexation and the other countries of the world have taken similar attitudes."<sup>25</sup>

With his new trust and expectation from Bush, Asad dropped his previous inflexible position and agreed, for the first time, to American terms regarding a peace conference in Madrid, notably that Syria would conduct *direct* negotiations with Israel without preconditions. Nevertheless, in press interviews senior Syrian officials unequivocally stated their unchanged principles concerning the two major contentious issues with Israel:

- Not to "sell out one inch of the occupied territories."
- "Israel has no right to a single drop of water in the region."<sup>26</sup>

The Israeli leaders, prime minister (Likud) Shamir and defense minister Rabin (Labor), initially rejected the U.S.-sponsored peace conference in Madrid (but subsequently, under heavy U.S. pressure, agreed to attend the conference). Their major objection continued to be a trade of the Golan for peace with Syria. For example, Shamir said in March and July 1991:

The Syrians will tell us that they want the Golan Heights and we shall tell them No! Undoubtedly the Golan Heights is part of Israel ... Resolution 242 has nothing to do with the Golan.<sup>27</sup>

Rabin seemed to adopt an even tougher position, saying repeatedly that he would rather retain the Golan even if this prevented peace with Syria than make peace with Syria and relinquish the Golan.<sup>28</sup>

The uncompromising positions of Shamir and Rabin reflected the views of most Israeli Jews: in public opinion polls conducted periodically from 1967 to 1991 an average of 90% said that they wished to retain the Golan.<sup>29</sup> In July 1991 69 members of the Knesset signed a document in which they undertook to maintain Israel's sovereignty over the Golan; while the government published a new plan aiming at doubling the Jewish population on the Golan.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Madrid Peace Process**

At the Madrid peace conference, which opened on October 30, 1991, and in subsequent months, both Israel and Syria adopted hostile rhetoric alongside some positive positions, but were still very far from reaching an agreement. Only after the election of Rabin as prime minister in June 1992 did Israeli-Syrian bilateral negotiations under American auspices become more constructive. Unlike the ideological Likud leader, Shamir, the pragmatic Rabin now changed his mind on the Syrian issue and, for the first time, agreed that UN Resolution 242 should also apply to the Golan; but he was still unwilling to relinquish the entire Golan Heights within a peace agreement with Syria, whereas Asad insisted on full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan. Initially, Asad did not specify what he meant by “full Israeli withdrawal” — should it be to the international frontier (i.e., the Franco-British boundary of 1923) which in the case of the Israeli-Egyptian agreement had been accepted?

However, from 1994 Asad repeatedly insisted that Israel should withdraw to the June 4, 1967 line, which included territories occupied by Syria in the 1948 war and later notably the northeastern shoreline of Lake Tiberias, as well as al-Himma (Hamat Gader) a hot spring and strategic area adjacent to the Jordanian border and the Yarmuk River, occupied by Syria in 1951. Demanding these strategic areas, particularly the northeastern shoreline, Asad rejected the 1923 boundary as an “imperialist” creation.<sup>31</sup> He may have intended to demonstrate to his people that



he could gain more territory from Israel than Sadat had obtained in his peace treaty with Begin in 1979.

Rabin told U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher in August 1993 and again in August 1994 that “hypothetically” he was prepared to withdraw from the Golan to the June 4, 1967 line but without precisely defining that line, on condition that Asad should commit himself to Israel’s peace requirements, namely diplomatic ties and normalization; demilitarization and security arrangements; a longer timetable for Israel’s withdrawal from the Golan, and separating peace with Israel from the Palestinian issue.<sup>32</sup>

Asad held different positions regarding security arrangements and the duration of Israel’s withdrawal, but stated that he was committed to establishing normal relations with Israel; he even convinced Clinton of such a commitment:

I also affirmed to President Clinton the readiness of Syria to commit itself to the objective requirements of peace through the establishment of peaceful normal relations with Israel in return for Israel’s full withdrawal from the Golan to the line of June 4, 1967 ... peace that prevails throughout the region and enables the peoples, Arabs and Israelis, to live in security, stability and prosperity.<sup>33</sup>

But Rabin was perhaps not fully convinced and asked that Asad should “convince the people of Israel that he means real peace.” He also suggested, for the first time, that the withdrawal from the Golan should be put to a referendum in Israel.<sup>34</sup> Rabin proposed a referendum possibly because he was concerned about the opposition to relinquishing the Golan among the Israeli-Jewish population (50% against, 42% in favor in June 1995). In addition, following the Oslo Agreement with the PLO (September 1993) and the peace agreement with Jordan (October 1994), Rabin was probably trying to squeeze more concessions out of Asad, perhaps accepting the 1923 international boundary rather than the June 4, 1967 line; or inducing Syria to lease to Israel the strategic regions of Mount Hermon and the Golan ridge.<sup>35</sup> Rabin’s tactics in late 1994

(which preceded Barak's similar behavior in late 1999) did not make Asad change his position regarding the June 4, 1967 line and consequently an Israeli-Syrian peace was not reached before Rabin's assassination on November 4, 1995.

Rabin's successor as prime minister, Shimon Peres, considered peace with Syria as highly important and a pivot of all-Arab-Israeli peace. He thus strove to further negotiations with Asad, in close coordination with Washington. He was mostly concerned with regional cooperation and economic development as the core for peace, rather than with security arrangements and border demarcations. He acknowledged Rabin's initial hypothetical position regarding the June 4, 1967 line but, unlike Rabin, intended to implement a peace agreement with Syria, including Israeli withdrawal in less than a year.<sup>36</sup> Asad responded positively to Peres' ideas but refused to meet him — as he had done regarding Rabin. He preferred not to make a gesture of public diplomacy before he made sure of Israel's real agenda.

Yet, during an intensive round of Syrian-Israeli negotiations in Wye Plantation at the end of December 1995-beginning of 1996, significant progress was made on certain issues, notably the water problem. For the first time the two delegations reached "a general understanding that the water needs of both sides should be secured both regarding quantities and quality." But Syria linked this understanding to the solution of its water dispute with Turkey and expected that the U.S. and Israel would help to settle this dispute.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, however, no peace agreement was reached during Peres' term in office, partly because Asad still refused to meet him and partly because of growing opposition within the ruling Labor party, including the Foreign Minister Ehud Barak, to Syrian demands. To overcome this obstacle, Peres decided in February 1996 to advance the national elections. But in early March he suspended peace negotiations with Syria, following a series of Palestinian terrorist attacks in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, which Syria refused to condemn. Earlier Peres had suggested to Asad, through Christopher, that negotiations should resume after the Israeli elections in May 1996.

Peres lost the elections to Binyamin Netanyahu, the Likud leader, who established a radical right-wing government. Not only did he not resume negotiations with Asad, but he denounced

Syria as a state supporting terrorism and threatened to curb it. Still, despite his tough rhetoric, Netanyahu secretly exchanged messages with Asad by proxy, mainly through Ron Lauder, an American friend, who owns a large cosmetics corporation. According to Dennis Ross, Clinton's envoy, 99% of the contentious issues between Israel and Syria were settled by Asad and Lauder, including the border problem,<sup>38</sup> but no peace agreement was reached. Yet it may be concluded at that juncture:

- That Asad was still interested in a peace agreement with Israel, albeit on his terms;
- That Netanyahu did not wish to completely break off the peace process with Syria, although he stated time and again that he was unwilling to relinquish the entire Golan for peace with a non-democratic state like Syria;
- That the Israeli electoral system which yielded several prime ministers during the peace process with Syria does not ensure a consistent Israeli peace policy.

Still, it seemed that the new prime minister, Ehud Barak (since May 1999) was determined to sign a peace agreement with Asad. He believed and stated that it was in Israel's interest to make peace with Syria in order to neutralize the Hizballah menace and withdraw peacefully from southern Lebanon; and to foster Israel's relations with other Arab countries, as well as to strengthen its position on the Palestinian track.<sup>39</sup> But he would not agree to Asad's request regarding the June 4, 1967 line, a 1996 commitment by Clinton that was conditionally pocketed by Rabin.

Asad continued to be interested in a peace agreement in order to retrieve the Golan Heights, enhance his Syrian-Arab legitimacy and prestige, and heal his wounded pride. He expected also that the U.S. (and Israel) would approve his control over Lebanon, that Clinton would delete Syria from the "blacklist" of countries supporting terror, and help it develop its economy through financial grants and investments. Clinton himself hoped to complete his continuing efforts to bring about a Syrian-Israeli peace (and a Palestinian-Israeli peace). He induced Asad to resume peace negotiations — suspended by Peres in March 1996 — by making him believe that Barak

was “serious” and ready to withdraw to the June 4, 1967 line. Asad then agreed for the first time to send his Minister of Foreign Affairs, Faruq al-Shar‘, to Washington.<sup>40</sup> The envoy arrived to negotiate a peace agreement with Barak on December 15, 1999.

A few months earlier Asad and Barak had exchanged mutual appreciative comments in the press. Barak depicted Asad as “the builder of modern Syria,” while the usually skeptical Asad said that Barak was “a strong and honest leader interested in peace.” Asad’s envoy to the Washington talks, Faruq al-Shar‘, articulated peaceful relations with Israel in rather positive language (see below). He also indicated that the Syrian-Israeli conflict was not about existence (*wujud*) but about borders (*hudud*) — meaning the June 4, 1967 line.<sup>41</sup>

Most Israelis were now in favor of peace with Syria but not for retreating from the entire Golan Heights to the June 1967 line (only 13% agreed, December 1999). Many also resented the fact that Asad himself did not come to meet Barak in Washington but sent Faruq al-Shar‘, who even refused to shake hands with Barak in front of the TV cameras. More and more Israelis (47%) felt that Barak was moving too fast toward an agreement with Syria which was likely to endanger water sources and let the Syrians “dip their toes in the Kinneret” [Tiberias Lake].<sup>42</sup> This in spite (or because) of Barak’s assertion that four of his predecessors, including Rabin, had agreed to withdraw to the June 4, 1967 line.<sup>43</sup> To be sure, Clinton and Asad considered this Barak assertion as a commitment.

Yet, concerned about tepid public support (in early January 2000 51% were against withdrawal to the shoreline), Barak went back on the commitment to his Syrian and American interlocutors made at the Washington meeting. He refused to discuss the June 4, 1967 demarcation line in the Shepherdstown talks of early January 2000. According to Clinton, in Shepherdstown the gap between the Syrians and the Israelis was not large: the Syrians now agreed that Israel would retain a 10 meter wide strip around Lake Tiberias and later even a 50 meter-wide strip provided the June 4, 1967 line should be the basis for negotiations. Barak declined and the talks were suspended by Syria.<sup>44</sup>

Dennis Ross, the chief American envoy, writes that Barak's reaction "deflated us," while President Clinton says: "I was, to put it mildly, disappointed" particularly since the Syrian negotiators came "in a positive and flexible state of mind, eager to make an agreement ..."<sup>45</sup>

Barak continued to insist on certain preconditions to the final negotiation with Syria, notably the revival of the Lebanese track in order to neutralize Hizballah's menace in southern Lebanon. Still, in order to reduce public opposition to withdrawal to the 1967 line, Barak leaked to *Ha'aretz* the complete text of a U.S. draft of a Syrian-Israeli peace agreement which stipulated out *inter alia* that full peaceful relations would be established between the parties. The Syrians had earlier leaked to Arab newspapers their own version of the draft and other comments, indicating that the U.S. draft agreement was not final and that Israel accepted withdrawal to the June 4, 1967 line.<sup>46</sup>

But Clinton did not tolerate the Syrian-Israeli impasse for long. He asked Barak for a fresh proposal regarding the final border with Syria. Barak now demanded Israeli sovereignty over the entire lake — to prevent Syria from becoming a littoral state and controlling part of the water — plus a 400 meter-wide strip on the northeastern shoreline, as compared with the 10 meter-wide strip of the international boundary. Calling this proposed border the June 4, 1967 line, Barak was prepared to compensate Syria by conceding the al-Hima (Hamat Gader) area, several kilometers southeast of the lake, that had been under Israeli sovereignty according to international law and was occupied by Syria in 1951. Clinton apparently did not argue with Barak's proposal ("a respectable offer"), nor did he inquire — despite Secretary Allbright's advice — whether or not Asad was prepared to accept it. In the event, at their summit meeting in Geneva on March 26, 2000, Asad flatly and promptly rejected Barak's design as presented by Clinton. He demanded the entire northeastern shore of the lake *inter alia* to "put his feet in the water."<sup>47</sup> This position represented a significant retreat from Syria's January position at Shepherdstown; in a way it resembled in a way Barak's change of position regarding the June 4, 1967 line.

Obviously, neither Barak nor Asad agreed to a compromise proposal presented in early April 2000 by Patrick Seale, Asad's sympathetic biographer, namely:

- Israel would have complete sovereignty over the lake, and Syria over the northeastern shoreline, but without drawing water from the lake, only fishing and swimming in it;
- This strip, including a road, along the lake would be a joint tourist area, supervised by the UN and available to Syrian, Israeli and foreign tourists;
- That Syria and Israel would manage and ensure the water regime in the region.<sup>48</sup>

Seale's proposal might perhaps have served as a basis for final negotiations and a peace agreement between Israel and Syria. But both Barak and Asad were deeply hurt and unwilling to change their original positions. Barak "needed to show his public that Israel would regain control of essential water resource," while Asad belligerently remarked: "The lake [Tiberias] has always been our lake, it was never theirs ... There were no Jews to the east of the lake."<sup>49</sup> Asad, very ill, was engaged in preparing an orderly transfer of power to his son, Bashar. Asad died on June 10, 2000, and Bashar was subsequently "elected" as Syria's president and *inter alia* reiterated his father's legacy that peace with Israel was Syria's strategic choice.

But Barak was indifferent, if not hostile, scrambling to revive the Israeli-Palestinian track and expecting to achieve a breakthrough. Barak convinced Clinton to help him in these new efforts, and abandon the Syrian-Israeli track. But, as we know, the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations at Camp David in July 2000 failed, partly leading to the *intifada* which broke out on September 28, 2000. Continuing Palestinian-Israeli strife, the election of Ariel Sharon as prime minister in February 2001, the election of George W. Bush as U.S. president in November 2000, 9/11/2001 in the U.S., the American invasion of Iraq in March 2003 — all these have frozen the Israeli-Syrian dialogue, causing it to suffer a serious setback.

It would be useful at this point to offer some tentative explanations for the failure of the Asad-Barak peace negotiations, drawing conclusions from this failure concerning the prospects for an Israeli-Syrian peace in the foreseeable future, after the reelection of Bush in November 2004.

## Explanations and Lessons

A straightforward explanation of the failure of the Asad-Barak indirect peace negotiations at the Clinton-Asad summit in Geneva would read as follows: Asad and Barak presented bargaining positions, even using a kind of brinkmanship, in their attempts to realize their territorial demands. Clinton could, and should have produced a compromise proposal, perhaps similar to Seale's blueprint, rather than simply show Asad Barak's new plan, which claimed more Syrian territory. Clinton apparently failed to prepare the Geneva summit, as Secretary Allbright had wished, and invited Asad to Geneva on an indistinct pretext. He was consequently accused by many Arabs, possibly also Asad himself, of conspiring with Barak to squeeze further concessions from Syria. In the eyes of many Syrians Clinton lost his status as "a full partner and an honest broker,"<sup>50</sup> an essential prerequisite for achieving a Syrian-Israeli peace.

No less crucial was the loss of Barak's credibility with Asad, who had previously tried to depict him as "a strong and honest leader interested in peace."<sup>51</sup> But when Barak changed his mind regarding the future of the shoreline, Asad probably felt that he had been misled and that Barak was not a serious partner for peace. The highly suspicious Asad had possibly developed similar opinions about previous Israeli leaders who had made commitments to withdraw to the June 4, 1967 line, but later tried to manipulate him into accepting their conditions (as he himself did to Israeli leaders). One case in point occurred during the August 1993 negotiations, with U.S. Secretary of State Christopher's mediation. Displeased with Asad's response to his offer, Rabin stopped his negotiations with Syria in favor of working on the Oslo Agreement with the PLO (September 1993) and subsequently, a peace agreement with Jordan (October 1994, see also above). Rabin declared that a withdrawal from the Golan should be approved by a national referendum, thus aiming *inter alia* at inducing Asad to use public diplomacy in order to help him, Rabin, prepare Israeli Jewish public opinion for the relinquishment of the Golan in return for peace with Syria.

## Public Opinion and Public Diplomacy

Indeed, public opinion and public diplomacy constitute two of the main intertwined factors deeply influencing the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations. In the democratic state of Israel any leader would need a majority support for a peace agreement with the “fierce” Syrian enemy, by convincing this majority that Syria had changed and no longer posed a threat to Israel. But even in authoritarian Syria, a leader like Asad would prefer not to prejudice his legitimacy as an Arab ruler by making peace with the Israeli “arch foe” without achieving a national-strategic gain. Being an Alawi, considered a non-Muslim heretic by many Muslims, Asad himself critically needed to gain more from Israel than Sadat had achieved for Egypt, namely, a piece of strategic Israeli territory.

However, leaders are not always supposed to be led by public emotions and perceptions, but rather to lead people to destinations that serve national interests. As Ataturk reportedly said: “I do not care what the people wish; I know what the people need.” In the Syria-Israel case, this would require from the respective leaders a reeducation of their publics with the aim of breaking down the decades’ long psychological barrier between Syrian Arabs and Israeli Jews, namely mutual suspicion, prejudice, demonology, and animosity. This kind of barrier, particularly on the Syrian side, cannot be abolished over a short time, as Asad himself admitted in 1974: “The Syrian difficulty is that people who have been nurtured over twenty-six years on hatred [towards Israel] cannot be swayed overnight by our changing our course.”

However, Syrian leaders, including Asad, have themselves nurtured this hatred in speeches and proclamations, as well as in the media and school textbooks. Since the 1970s, Asad himself and the Syrian press and school curricula had depicted Israel as “racist,” “colonialist,” “aggressive,” “neo-Nazi” and “a cancer.”<sup>52</sup> During the Madrid peace process, Asad moderated his anti-Israeli expressions, restraining himself to “expansionist” and anti-Arab.<sup>53</sup> But he did not prohibit the publication of anti-Jewish/anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli books and articles, including compositions by his own Defense Minister, Mustafa Tlas, and material appearing in the Syrian army journal, *Jaysh al-Sha’b*.<sup>54</sup>



It is true that during the peace process Asad made several public gestures towards Israel and Jews: permitting American investigators to look for the remains of Israeli soldiers missing since the 1982 war in Lebanon; allowing the remaining Syrian Jews to emigrate; and admitting Israeli Arab visitors. In the course of the Madrid peace process, Asad and his aides occasionally and publicly spoke (in Arabic) about the importance of peace (but seldom referring to Israel as the peace partner), using expressions such as: “the peace of the brave”; “the peace of knights”; “honorable peace”; the “struggle for peace is much harder than our war campaigns” as well as “normal peace relations (*alakat silm a’ dia*) with Israel ...”; “peace that prevails throughout the region and enables its people, Arabs and Israelis, to live in security, stability and prosperity.”<sup>55</sup>

Asad’s foreign minister made some significant comments regarding peace with Israel in the Washington talks (December 15, 1999), when for the first time he stood next to an Israeli prime minister, Barak, although refusing to shake hands with him:

... for Israel peace will mean the end of psychological fear ... ending the occupation will be balanced for the first time by eliminating the barrier of fear and anxieties and exchanging it for a true and mutual feeling of peace and security ... a peace agreement between Syria and Israel and between Lebanon and Israel would indeed mean for our region the end of a history of wars and conflicts and may well usher in a dialogue of civilization and an honorable competition in various domains — the political, cultural, scientific and economic.<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless, Asad did not engage in public diplomacy such as meeting an Israeli prime minister, or even participating in a TV satellite interview (let alone visiting Israel). Rabin complained about this omission in November 1992, and added: “Syria’s president [Asad] has not done even one percent of what President Sadat did to convince the people of Israel and in Syria that he wants peace.”<sup>57</sup> Indeed, in late 1999 Asad rejected a suggestion by Dennis Ross to visit the Israeli Knesset in Jerusalem.<sup>58</sup>

Indeed, impartial and even pro-Syrian Arabists have blamed Asad for refusing to engage in public diplomacy, thus contributing to the failure of the peace process with Israel. Patrick Seale criticized Asad in April and May 2000:

You cannot make peace with Barak alone, but [you must] make peace with the government of Israel, the Knesset and even the entire Israeli people ... Syria must convince them, through public diplomacy and negotiating, that peace is not a danger and that they must accept it ... Finally, Syria's style in the negotiations which was characterized by intransigence, refusal to deal with public diplomacy and ignoring Israeli public opinion, must bear some of the burden of responsibility for the failure.<sup>59</sup>

Concerning Israel's public diplomacy, Israeli leaders were certainly not invited to appear on Syrian TV or on other Syrian media (Israeli TV was only once permitted by Syria to interview Faruq al-Shar'). Still, Rabin, Peres and Barak made sporadic attempts to prepare Israeli Jewish public opinion for a withdrawal from the Golan in return for peace with Syria. But, there was hardly any official Israeli effort (except by some academics) to improve Syria's poor image among most Israelis. For example, in June 1999 Barak for the first time described Asad as "the builder of modern Syria" but after the collapse of the Geneva summit, Barak labeled Asad "a Ceaucescu-style aging dictator."<sup>60</sup>

To be sure, Likud leaders as well as certain figures in the opposition preached strongly against relinquishing the Golan to Syria — "one of the most oppressive, tyrannical regimes in the world" (Itzhak Shamir, Israel's prime minister, at the Madrid peace conference, October 1991).<sup>61</sup> Shamir's chief aide and head of Israel's team in the Madrid peace negotiations, Yossi Ben Aharon, depicted the Syrian regime as "totalitarian, dealing in terrorism and drugs and keeping its Jews as hostages."<sup>62</sup>

Labor leaders by and large did not use such offensive expressions, but periodically stressed that keeping the strategic Golan was more important than peace with Syria. Rabin himself, when in

the opposition in 1990-1991, repeatedly said that he would rather retain the Golan even if this prevented peace with Syria.<sup>63</sup> But when Rabin as prime minister (1992-1995) tried to prepare the Israeli-Jewish public for the possibility of withdrawing even from part of the Golan, including the Israeli settlements, he was met with a series of demonstrations and protests by right-wing parties and Golan settlers (including members of his Labor party). Jewish extremists called him a “traitor who deceived the people” and was endangering Israel’s security and water resources.<sup>64</sup>

Considering this hostile attitude of many Israelis toward Syria, it is not surprising that neither Rabin nor Barak were able to muster a solid majority among the public in favor of total withdrawal even in return for peace with Syria. In March 2000, for example, 55% of Israeli Jewish respondents to a opinion poll survey said “they would not trust a peace agreement signed with Mr. Asad.” An earlier survey in January 2000 showed that 25% of “leftist” Israelis did not support peace with Syria, while 20% were “hesitant.”<sup>65</sup> Accordingly and on the face of it, Barak had almost no chance to win a public referendum or a Knesset majority for a withdrawal from the entire Golan down to the Tiberias lakeshore, in return for peace with Syria. As already indicated, this was a major cause of the retraction in his position in early 2000, thus contributing his share to the collapse of the Geneva summit in March 2000.

It can certainly be argued that Barak (and previously Rabin) could, or should have shown personal courage and historic leadership in realizing his vision and reaching his destination, while mobilizing the public to support peace with Syria. He might have succeeded in the latter endeavor by offering a promising peace package with Clinton’s backing, namely:

- Effective security for Israel through demilitarization of the Golan and American supervision, including an early warning station on Mount Hermon.
  
- U.S. enhancement of Israel’s strategic-military edge vis-à-vis Syria and other Arab countries.

- American financial assistance (some \$16 to 20 billion was mentioned)<sup>66</sup> to help evacuate the settlements on the Golan and resettle the inhabitants in Israel proper.
- Regional water projects with international financial assistance and in cooperation with Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority to provide sufficient water for Israel and its Arab neighbors.
- Extending the scope of peace with other Arab countries and enabling Israelis to travel by land to Lebanon, Syria, Turkey and Europe.

Barak could thus have followed the precedent of Menachem Begin, the statesman who agreed in 1978 to relinquish the entire Sinai including the Yamit settlements for peace with Egypt. He took this historic-strategic decision even though some 80% of the Israeli Jewish population had previously opposed such a deal; and he succeeded in changing their minds and enlisting overwhelming public support for peace with Sadat (who had previously visited the Israeli Knesset).

Still, in many respects Barak cannot be compared with Begin, or Asad with Sadat, while Syria and the Golan cannot be fully equated with Egypt and Sinai. In sum, without articulating a full comparison, it can be argued that neither Barak nor Asad manifested leadership and statesmanship, behaving more as politicians and tacticians. Both were constrained by their publics' mutual fear, mistrust and hatred. Neither of them, as well as other Israeli and Syrian leaders, did much to change these emotions, periodically even nurturing them, particularly in Syria. Asad hardly ever used public diplomacy to try and convince the Israeli population that he supported peace with Israel. On the contrary, the prolonged anti-Israeli/anti-Jewish indoctrination in the Syrian media as well as the periodic unleashing of Hizballah attacks from southern Lebanon against Israeli targets, reinforced Syria's image as a brutal enemy in the eyes of many Israelis.

### **Grim Peace Prospects: Bashar, Sharon and Bush**

Considering the responsibilities of Asad, Barak and to some degree Clinton in the failure of the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations of early 2000, it could have been expected that their successors would be able to draw the correct conclusions and act to bring about Israeli-Syrian peace:

- Ariel Sharon as a right-wing leader, might follow the Begin example, namely, make peace with Syria in order to outflank the Palestinian problem relegate it to disengagement from the Gaza strip and four Jewish settlements in the northern West Bank.
- Bashar Asad, who was two years old when the Golan was occupied by Israel, perhaps did not harbor a deep resentment of Israel, and his residence in London might have made him more open-minded and flexible in using public diplomacy vis-à-vis Israel.
- George W. Bush might have wished to follow and enhance his father's policy regarding the Syrian-Israeli equation. Bush Sr. had been more evenhanded than Reagan and had pressed Israel to attend the Madrid peace conference with Syria in October 1991. Earlier, in March 1990, he had induced Asad to join the anti-Iraqi coalition, considering him as a partner in U.S. Middle Eastern strategy.<sup>67</sup>

However, under Bashar, Sharon and G.W. Bush, not only have bilateral negotiations failed to resume, but Israeli-Syrian relations have further deteriorated and prospects of peace between them have significantly diminished. The reasons for the widening Israeli-Syrian gap are partly associated with harmful public diplomacy (notably by Bashar) and poor public education on both sides, and partly with the U.S. military occupation of Iraq and its repercussions.

It is true that, upon his becoming the president of Syria in June 2000, and subsequently, Bashar declared several times that peace with Israel continued to be Syria's strategic choice, but insisted on Israeli withdrawal to the June 4, 1967 line within a peace framework. He indeed called for the resumption of negotiations with Israel from the point where they had been suspended in early 2000. Subsequently, however, Bashar stopped insisting on this point and suggested that peace

negotiations with Israel should resume with no preconditions and reach agreement regarding the exact demarcation of the June 1967 line.<sup>68</sup>

Unfortunately, most Israeli Jews, and particularly Prime Minister Sharon, ignored or rejected Bashar's suggestions, for one or more of the following reasons:

- Bashar is considered by many Israelis as a “half-baked,” feeble leader subject to the influence, if not dictates, of the strong, rigid “old guard” and thus unable — possibly unwilling — to deliver peace with Israel to his people.
- He is considered by most Israeli Jews as anti-Israeli, anti-Jewish/anti-Semitic, even more so than his father, owing to his periodic rhetoric as well as his hostile policies. For example, in May 2001, in the presence of Pope John Paul II at the Syrian-Israeli cease fire line, Bashar suggested that:

Christians and Muslims join in confronting Israel and the Jews who try to kill the principles of all religions with the same mentality with which they betrayed Jesus Christ and in the same way they tried to kill the Prophet Muhammad.

A few weeks earlier, he opined that Israel was “a racist society, even more racist than the Nazis.” Bashar has continued his verbal attacks on Israel, labeling it *inter alia* an “illegitimate state.”<sup>69</sup>

- Unlike his father, who had agreed to disconnect the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations from the Palestinian problem, Bashar insisted on linking the two issues within “a just and comprehensive peace” and from “a pan-Arab perspective.”<sup>70</sup> Bashar repeatedly hailed the Palestinian *intifada* after its eruption in late September 2000, and initially criticized the Saudi initiative and the Arab League proposal of March 2002 that for the first time called on recognizing Israel within the June 4, 1967 line (later Bashar grudgingly endorsed the Arab League resolution.)<sup>71</sup>

- Bashar permitted Palestinian organizations such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad to maintain offices in Damascus and allegedly to direct from there operations against Israeli targets.
- Unlike his father, Bashar is on good terms with Hasan Nasrallah, Hizballah leader and has continued to supply arms (which also come from Iran) to this Lebanese militant organization, refusing by and large to halt its periodic attacks against Israel.<sup>72</sup>
- Bashar continued to enhance his strategic-military ties with Iran, a sworn enemy of Israel, apparently in an attempt to create — together with the former Iraq — a strategic depth vis-à-vis Israel.<sup>73</sup>
- Bashar strengthened Syria's relations with Saddam's Iraq, *inter alia* for the above reasons. He vehemently opposed the U.S. attack in March 2003, claiming that this war served Israeli interests.<sup>74</sup>

Obviously, many Israelis have been infuriated by all this. Some may have recalled the prophet Amos. “For three crimes of Damascus and for four I will not revoke its punishment” (Amos 1:3). Only a few would admit that some of Bashar's hostile rhetoric and policies have not really reflected aggression, but rather immaturity and weakness, as well as unhappy attempts to gain legitimacy at home. But by most Israelis Bashar's conduct has been interpreted as negative public diplomacy and as reflecting anti-Israeli, anti-Jewish indoctrination of his public. Consequently, Israelis would argue, Bashar should be sternly warned if not punished, since he also poses a strategic threat to Israel with his long range missiles carrying chemical warheads.<sup>75</sup> Many Israelis, including politicians, have not changed their belligerent attitude, even after Bashar softened his statements about Israel over the last two years.

Following the U.S. military occupation of Iraq, which imposed severe geostrategic predicaments on Syria, Bashar and his aides repeatedly stated that Syria was ready to resume peace negotiations with Sharon,<sup>76</sup> whom they had previously depicted as a peace rejectionist. In an

interview with the *New York Times* in late December 2003, Bashar stressed his desire to unconditionally revive peace talks with Israel. “If such talks did succeed, the president said he saw no reason that Syria could not have full normal relations with Israel — ‘normalization’ means like the relations between Syria and the United States.”<sup>77</sup> Earlier Bashar promised Secretary of State Colin Powell that he would close the offices of certain Palestinian organizations — Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.<sup>78</sup>

Significantly, following this interview not a few Israelis (27%) were prepared for a total withdrawal from the Golan in return for peace with Syria. Some, including cabinet ministers such as the foreign minister, Silvan Shalom, the Chief of Military Intelligence, Major General Aharon Ze’evi Farkash, the Chief of Staff General Moshe Ya’alon and other senior military officers, as well as several Arabists, advocated the renewal of peace negotiations with Bashar. Ya’alon also told *Yediot Ahronot* (August 13, 2004) that “considering the military needs it is possible to reach an agreement [with Syria] while giving up the Golan Heights.” The president, Moshe Katzav, who also advocated peace negotiations with Syria, went out of his way to invite Bashar to Jerusalem an invitation which Bashar initially rejected as a gimmick, but according to former senior Israeli officials, in 2003, Bashar suggested to visit Israel and to address the Knesset, without preconditions.<sup>79</sup> However, Sharon ignored and thwarted Bashar’s suggestion, indicating later that such a visit was never initiated.<sup>80</sup> Although Damascus denied his intentions to visit Jerusalem, throughout 2004, Bashar continued to reiterate his desire to renew peace negotiations with Israel with no preconditions. He also had the Syrian parliament pass a new law in October 2004, abrogating a previous legislation (from 1972) prohibiting to negotiate with Israel, an “enemy state.”<sup>81</sup> In addition Lebanon’s president, Emile Lahud publicly backed Damascus’s desire to renew peace negotiations with Israel. Also, Egypt’s president, Hosni Mubarak offered to mediate between Syria and Israel while the new PLO leader Mahmud Abbas agreed with Bashar to coordinate their moves regarding peace negotiations with Israel.<sup>82</sup>

However, a majority of Israeli Jews (68%) remained unwilling to trade the Golan even for peace with Syria. Among them were Prime Minister Sharon, Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, most cabinet ministers, and Mossad Chief, General (ret.) Meir Dagan.<sup>83</sup> Various arguments were used to reject Bashar’s suggestion, such as: he is not serious; he is engaged in a public relations



campaign; he is weak and does it to please the U.S.; the U.S. itself has no interest in renewing Syrian-Israeli negotiations at this juncture. Sharon himself reminded his public that Syria is a “cruel” country, giving the well-worn example of Israeli POWs of the 1973 war, butchered by a Syrian soldier who later received a medal (even according to Mustafa Tlas).<sup>84</sup>

Sharon had repeatedly insisted that Bashar must first evict the “Palestinian terrorist headquarters” from Damascus and stop helping them; deploy the Lebanese army along the border with Israel, while removing Hizballah from there and dismantling its missile system. “If we would see that all these steps are adopted, it is possible then to think ... [But] I do not think that it is possible to agree to the Syrians’ demands concerning the borders and the water problems ... it is absolutely impossible to return to what has taken place in previous negotiations. Those negotiations during the times of several prime ministers [from both parties — Labor and Likud] were certainly very dangerous to Israel.”<sup>85</sup> Sharon indeed uttered the genuine motive for his refusal to negotiate with Bashar, namely, that the price tag for peace with Syria was relinquishing the Golan; he was not prepared for this equation, also since he is engaged in the Palestinian issue, which is more crucial. In his annual Hertzelia speech, in mid-December 2004, after Arafat’s death, Sharon spoke about an historic breakthrough with the Palestinians in 2005, but not Syria. He blamed Damascus (and Tehran) for supporting terrorism and blocking democratization and reform.<sup>86</sup>

However, Sharon hinted earlier that it was possible to make peace with Syria without relinquishing the Golan, and reportedly said that “the Golan has a place in the people’s heart more than Judea and Samaria [West Bank].”<sup>87</sup> In the same vein, in late 2003 Sharon and his cabinet adopted a grand project to double the number of Jewish settlers (some 17,000 in 2004) on the Golan within three years. The initiator of the project, Agricultural Minister Israel Katz declared: “The Golan is ours and we do not have any intention to give it up ... our objective is that Asad will view from his house windows the flourishing, blooming Israeli Golan Heights.”<sup>88</sup>

Based on this government line, as well as on Syria’s geostrategic predicament, more and more Israelis, including politicians and military analysts, have adopted a new approach — “to go Turkish” — i.e., equating the Golan and Israel with Iskanderun and Turkey. As we know,

Turkey annexed the Syrian Alexandretta-Iskanderun region (renamed Hatay) in 1939, after the French Mandatory power yielded to Turkish pressures, conducting a referendum in Alexandretta which confirmed that the majority of the population wished to belong to Turkey. Since then, despite annual Syrian protests, this region to all intents and purposes has become a part of Turkey. When Bashar made a state visit to Turkey in January 2004 for the first time since Syria's independence, he refrained from bringing up this delicate issue.

Not a few Israelis had previously advocated the "Turkish" approach in another sense, by applying military pressure to Syria in reaction to its harboring of Palestinian terror organizations — just as Turkey did regarding the "Kurdish Workers Party" (PKK).<sup>89</sup>

In fact, Israel under Sharon occasionally employed such methods. In April and July 2001 the Israeli air force destroyed two Syrian positions in Lebanon in retaliation for Hizballah attacks on Israeli targets. In September 2003 the air force flew over Bashar's villa in Latakia and on October 5, 2003, it bombed a Palestinian organization's site near Damascus in reaction to a Palestinian attack inside Israel.<sup>90</sup>

### **The American Role**

President Bush did not criticize the Israeli air attack inside Syria (the first since the 1973 war); he even said that Israel had "a right to defend itself. Israel must not feel constrained in defending its homeland." Washington also did not urge Sharon to respond positively to Bashar's suggestion regarding the resumption of Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations. According to Sharon, Bush's aides only raised this issue at a meeting in November 2003, but Sharon dismissed this suggestion, proposing instead to Bush that Israeli should unilaterally withdraw from the Gaza Strip.<sup>91</sup>

Bush's strong backing of Sharon and serious reservations concerning Bashar are largely related to the Iraqi war and Syria's anti-American conduct. Indeed, Bashar vociferously opposed the U.S. invasion of Iraq and allegedly helped Saddam and Saddam loyalists both before and after the war: hiding supposed Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Syria; accepting billions

of dollars of Saddam's assets in Syrian government controlled banks; admitting Iraqi regime fugitives; and allowing Arab volunteer fighters to cross the Syrian border to participate in anti-American guerrilla actions.<sup>92</sup> In addition, Syria itself has developed WMD, mainly chemical weapons, has sponsored terrorism, mainly against Israel, and has continued to occupy Lebanon against the will of many Lebanese.

Consequently, the White House labeled Syria "a rogue nation" while other U.S. officials declared that it was qualified to replace Iraq in Bush's "Axis of Evil" concept alongside Iran and North Korea.<sup>93</sup> On October 19, 2003, the U.S. House of Representatives voted 398 to 4 to approve the Syrian Accountability Act of 2002 (SAA) and impose economic and diplomatic sanctions on Syria, unless it ceases to support terrorist groups and develop WMD, and ends the occupation of Lebanon. The Senate and President Bush subsequently endorsed this bill. Damascus reacted with anger and hinted that it was not helpless, *inter alia* enhancing its strategic relations and cooperation with Iran and Hizballah.<sup>94</sup>

Yet since the American occupation of Iraq in March-April 2003, Damascus has endeavored to mend fences with Washington, helping the CIA to pursue some al-Qaida members in Syria, and making several conciliatory statements toward Washington.<sup>95</sup> On October 16, 2003, as a member of the UN Security Council, Syria voted in favor of the U.S.-U.K. resolution authorizing an American-led multinational force in Iraq. Bashar is obviously aware of Syria's weakened geostrategic situation — surrounded by pro-American regimes: Turkey, Israel, Jordan, and Iraq. He does not seek a military confrontation with any of these, and certainly not with the United States, which could lead to his demise. Bashar might have an incentive to cooperate with the United States provided Washington extends economic aid and investment, erases Syria from the list of countries supporting terrorism, and helps it to regain the Golan Heights in return for peace with Israel.

An important element in Syria's efforts to improve relations with the U.S. is certainly reflected in Bashar's public suggestion in December 2003 and in September 2004 to renew peace talks with Israel, without preconditions and under American auspices.<sup>96</sup> But the Bush administration, both before and after the November 2004 American election, not only has refrained from

inducing Israel to renew peace negotiations with Syria., it has strongly discouraged the Israeli government to do so, mainly owing to the alleged military and financial help by Syrians to the anti-American insurgents in Iraq.<sup>97</sup> The crucial question is whether or not these steps and similar measures would serve American and Israeli interests in the Middle East; namely, applying military, economic and diplomatic pressures on Damascus, such as: UN resolution 1559 (September 2004) initiated by the U.S. and support also by France, calling upon Syria to withdraw its military forces from Lebanon. (Significantly, Israel's chairman of the National Security Council, General Giora Ailend stated in early December 2004 that it is not in Israel's interest for the Syrian army to withdraw from Lebanon, since this could destabilize Lebanon, unleash Hizballah and ignite trouble in the Golan.)<sup>98</sup> Such harsh measures, including occasional military attacks may backfire and further aggravate the U.S. position in Iraq and beyond.

In contrast, taking into account these recent attempts by Bashar Asad to improve relations with the U.S., his domestic and regional predicaments, as well as the significant record of Hafiz Asad's cooperation with the United States over many years, Washington may carefully consider a new strategy toward Damascus, namely, embracing Syria, and gradually integrating it into a positive brand of "Pax Americana" — a network of pragmatic Arab regimes, along with Turkey and Israel, that would cooperate with the United States to combat terrorism, maintain stability, and develop their economies. As far as regional policy is concerned, it is indeed a vested U.S. interest to bring Syria into the fold, in parallel with the Palestinians. Helping Syria and the Palestinians to settle their conflict with Israel is likely to enhance America's position in the Middle East and clean up its tarnished image as a neo-imperialistic crusader power, while also advancing Israel's interests — to maintain its strategic advantage and coexist peacefully with its Arab neighbors.

## **Conclusions**

It is, in sum, in the interest of the U.S., Israel and Syria to bring about peace and stability in the Middle East. An Israeli-Syrian peace agreement would be an important step in this direction and, on the face of it, relatively easy to reach, namely: a compromise settlement for a narrow strip of land along the northeastern shore of Lake Tiberias.

Yet, the dispute over this narrow strip of land reflects deeper issues of conflict between Syria and Israel, apart from the water problem that could be resolved by technological and financial means. The crucial issues relate to national ethos and ideology, psychological barriers and emotional grievances — all interwoven in the collective historic memories, creating mutual prejudice, demonization and animosity.

Leaders on both sides (notably in Syria) by and large have nurtured these negative feelings and attitudes in order to gain legitimacy (particularly in Syria) and/or popularity. Even while the bilateral peace negotiations between Syria and Israel were going on, leaders on neither side prepared their respective publics for peaceful coexistence. They, notably Asad, systematically refrained from using public diplomacy to demonstrate to both Israelis and Syrians the values of peace. Furthermore, Asad would not accept a compromise solution on the Lake Tiberias shoreline because he badly needed public legitimacy, while Barak went back on his previous informal agreement because he felt that he had no public support for such an agreement.

Yet, if either Barak or Asad had shown real leadership and chosen to go for an historical breakthrough in a peace agreement, they might have succeeded in leading their peoples rather than being led by public constraints. As Clinton has recently remarked: “If Barak made real peace with Syria, it would lift his standing in Israel and across the world, and increase the chances of success with the Palestinians.”<sup>99</sup> Certainly, Clinton himself could have helped to produce such a breakthrough, had he prepared the Geneva summit more effectively, by inducing both leaders beforehand to reach a full and clear-cut understanding, and using stick and carrot tactics, when necessary.

Indeed, in the absence of strong and visionary leaders in Syria and Israel, the role of an honest American broker and powerful statesman is crucially important for reaching a peace agreement between Damascus and Jerusalem. At present Israeli-Syrian relations are at a grave impasse, largely owing to the unhelpful attitudes of Sharon and Bush. Since Bush’s reelection in November 2004, it remains to be seen whether or not these attitudes will change.

Without American pressure, which is not expected in the near future, Sharon is not likely to resume negotiations with Damascus. He will continue to be deeply engaged with the Palestinian problem, and possibly with the evacuation of Jewish settlements from the Gaza Strip, as well as from the northern West Bank. He will continue to have Israeli public support for such moves, but by no means for evacuating Jewish settlements on the Golan, within a peace settlement with Syria.

As it were, Bashar can try to force Sharon to negotiate by unleashing Hizballah attacks on northern Israel or by initiating guerrilla attacks against Israel settlements in the Golan (for the first time since 1974). But if Bashar adopts such bold steps he would in fact play into the hands of Sharon, who would heavily retaliate against Lebanese and/or Syrian targets, also in order to meet the expectations of many Israelis. (In fact Bashar has indicated his peaceful intentions by ordering to rebuild the town of Quneitra on the Syrian side of the Golan).

In the short run, considering the significant imbalance of power between Israel and Syria, Israel can continue to hold the Golan and ignore Syria's suggestion to trade it for a peace agreement. But, in the longer run, such strategy is likely to further isolate Israel in the region as well as prejudice its interest in fully settling both the Lebanese (Hizballah) issue and the Palestinian refugee problem (about 600,000 refugees in both Syria and Lebanon). It is also in the vested interest of the U.S. — and indeed a major challenge for the newly-elected American president — to help advance a Syrian-Israeli peace agreement, as well as an Israeli-Palestinian settlement. These could improve U.S. power position and image in the Arab and Muslim countries as well as help it create an American-coordinated stable strategic system in the region. Finally, for Syria and Israel a formal peace agreement with U.S. involvement might offer an essential beginning for a gradual process of reconciliation between the two peoples.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See Bill Clinton's, *My Life* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2004) pp. 883-886, 903-904); also comments by Dennis Ross (Clinton's envoy to the negotiations), *The Missing Peace. The Inside Story of the Fight for Middle East Peace* (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004) pp. 521, 539, 554, 575, 577, 583; Uri Sagie, chief Israeli negotiator, *Yediot Ahronot*, June 25, 2004, p. 3; *Ha'aretz*, July 7, 2004, p. B2; Nabil Khalifa, "Why did Hafiz al-Asad insist on the 4 June 1967 line," (in Arabic) *Al-Wasat*, April 3, 2000, p. 13. For Barak's version, see Ari Shavit, *Ha'aretz Magazine*, Sept. 9, 2002.
- <sup>2</sup> *Al-Hayat*, April 8, 2000; Eyal Zisser, "The Israel-Syria negotiations — what went wrong?" *Orient*, 42(2) (June 2001) p. 240.
- <sup>3</sup> For details see Moshe Ma'oz, *Syria and Israel: From War to Peacemaking* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995) pp. 20-26.
- <sup>4</sup> Aryeh Shalev, *Cooperation Under the Shadow of Conflict* (in Hebrew, Tel Aviv, Israel Defense Ministry, Ma'aracot Publishing House, 1989) p. 298.
- <sup>5</sup> Edson Burns, *Between Arab and Israeli* (London, 1962) p. 113.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113; cf. Dulles to Eisenhower, Confidential, 7 May 1954, U.S. Department of State Declassified Document No. 308 (1982).
- <sup>7</sup> Tabitha Petran, *Syria* (London, Ernest Benn, 1972) p. 293.
- <sup>8</sup> Patrick Seale, *The Observer Foreign News Service*, 19 May 1967; Petran, pp. 195-196.
- <sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of State, 25 May 1965.
- <sup>10</sup> *Middle East Record* 1967 (Tel Aviv, Tel Aviv University, 1968) p. 161; UN Security Council Official Records (1967) S/7495, 15 Sept. 1966.
- <sup>11</sup> William B. Quandt, "Lyndon Johnson and the June 1967 war," *Middle East Journal*, 46 (1992) p. 199.
- <sup>12</sup> M. Avidan, "19 June 1967: The Israeli Government Hereby Decides," *Davar* (in Hebrew, Tel Aviv) 2, 5, 19 June 1967.
- <sup>13</sup> For the full text see UN Security Council Record, 1967, pp. 8-9.
- <sup>14</sup> Yigal Allon, *Kelim Shluvim* (in Hebrew, Tel Aviv, 1980) p. 117.
- <sup>15</sup> *The Knesset Records*, Jerusalem, No. 60, 1857, 16 March 1971 (in Hebrew).
- <sup>16</sup> Yitzhak Rabin, *Pinkas Sherut* (in Hebrew, Tel Aviv, 1979) pp. 442, 447, 471, 475 .

- <sup>17</sup> For details see Ma 'oz, pp. 144-147.
- <sup>18</sup> Ma 'oz, pp. 142-143.
- <sup>19</sup> Reuven Avi Ran, *Syrian Involvement in Lebanon, 1975-1985* (Tel Aviv, 1986) pp. 111-112, 133-134 (in Hebrew).
- <sup>20</sup> Aryeh Na'or, *Begin Bashilton* (Tel Aviv, 1993) pp. 232-233 (in Hebrew).
- <sup>21</sup> Asad's speech, Damascus TV, October 1, 1983.
- <sup>22</sup> See Ma 'oz, pp. 189-190.
- <sup>23</sup> Ephraim Karsh, *The Soviet Union and Syria* (London, 1988) p. 92.
- <sup>24</sup> *Yediot Ahronot*, 23 May and 11 July 1989.
- <sup>25</sup> See respectively, William B. Quandt, *Peace Process, American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967* (Washington DC, Brookings Institution, 1993) pp. 396, 399, 402; *Washington Post*, 29 July 1991.
- <sup>26</sup> Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), 10 October 1991.
- <sup>27</sup> *Yediot Ahronot*, 19 March 1991; *Ma'ariv*, 30 July 1991.
- <sup>28</sup> *New York Times*, 24 December 1989; *Yediot Ahronot*, 19 June 1990 and 4 April 1991.
- <sup>29</sup> *New York Times*, 24 March 1991.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ha'aretz*, 21 July 1991; Israel Radio, 23 July 1991.
- <sup>31</sup> Nabil Khalifa, *al-Wasat*, April 3, 2000, pp. 12, 14.
- <sup>32</sup> Cf. Ma 'oz, pp. 247, 249, on the Syrian-Israeli negotiations see also Helena Cobban, *The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks, 1991-1996 and Beyond* (Washington DC, Brookings Institution, 1995); Itamar Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace: The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations* (Princeton University Press, 1998). Cf. Clinton, p. 883.
- <sup>33</sup> Reuter News Agency, Damascus, 27 October 1994. See also Syrian TV, 10 January 1994; *al-Safir* (Beirut), 18 January 1994.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ha'aretz*, 18, 20 and 26 January, 8 September and 7 October 1994; *Near East Report* (Washington DC), 24 January 1994.



- <sup>35</sup> Cf. *Ha'aretz*, 7 October 1994.
- <sup>36</sup> Uri Savir, *The Process* (in Hebrew, Tel Aviv, Yediot Ahronot Publishing, 1998) p. 299; Itamar Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace* (in Hebrew, Tel Aviv, Yediot Ahronot Publishing, 1998) p. 253.
- <sup>37</sup> Savir, p. 313; cf. Clinton, p. 886..
- <sup>38</sup> Ross, pp. 511-512, claims that Asad agreed, according to Lauder, that the border should run "off the Sea of Galilee..." Uri Sagie says that Netanyahu's envoy Ron Lauder agreed to the June 4, 1967 line; interview in *Yediot Ahronot*, June 25, 2004, p. 3.
- <sup>39</sup> Cf. Uri Sagie, *The Israeli-Syrian Dialogue: A One-Way Ticket to Peace?* (Rice University, The James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy of Rice University), October 1999, p. 51; Clinton, p. 884; Ross, p. 504.
- <sup>40</sup> Clinton, p. 22 (in *Yediot Ahronot*); cf. Raviv Drucker, *Harakiri: Ehud Barak, the Failure* (in Hebrew, Tel Aviv, Yediot Ahronot Publication, 2002) pp. 65-67.
- <sup>41</sup> Quoted in Zisser, pp. 232, 234 respectively; cf. Clinton, p. 886.
- <sup>42</sup> Drucker, pp. 71-73, 84-85; Ross, p. 521.
- <sup>43</sup> Zisser, p. 235; Ross, p. 577.
- <sup>44</sup> Clinton, p. 884; Ross, p. 537; cf. Drucker, pp. 87, 91, 93.
- <sup>45</sup> Ross, p. 555; Clinton, p. 886.
- <sup>46</sup> Akiva Eldar, *Ha'aretz*, January 13, 2000, p. B3; Talal Salman, *al-Safir*, January 15, 2000; *al-Hayat*, January 9, 2000, quoted in *Ha'aretz*, January 10, 2000, p. A2.
- <sup>47</sup> Clinton, p. 903; Ross, pp. 583-588; Drucker, p. 107; Khalifa, p. 15; *New York Times*, March 21 and 27, 2000.
- <sup>48</sup> *Al-Hayat*, April 8, 2000, quoted in Zisser, p. 240. For other commentaries on the failure of the Geneva summit, see articles by Salim Nassar, *al-Hayat*, April 1 and 29, 2000; Hasan Nafi'a, *al-Hayat*, April 24, 2000.
- <sup>49</sup> Cf. Salim Nassar, "How Clinton demolished the Geneva Summit in Barak's interest," *al-Hayat*, April 1, 2000 (in Arabic). Cf. an interview with Barak's media adviser, Gadi Baltiansky, *Ha'aretz Magazine*, March 9, 2001, p. 33; *New York Times*, March 27, 2000, p. 1.
- <sup>50</sup> Ross, pp. 521 and 585, respectively.

- <sup>51</sup> *Al-Hayat*, June 23, 1999, quoted in Zisser, p. 232; cf. Clinton, pp. 886, 903.
- <sup>52</sup> Quoted in Ma'oz, pp. 121, 145; cf. *New York Times*, March 24, 2000, p. A21, article by Thomas Friedman; *Near East Report*, June 26, 2000, p. 51.
- <sup>53</sup> Interviews with *al-Ahram*, October 11, 1995; with Radio Kuwait, May 18, 1996.
- <sup>54</sup> Mustafa Tlas, *The Zionist Matzo* (in Arabic, Damascus, 1984). See also *al-Hayat*, October 21, 2002; *Jaysh al-Sha'b*, May 1, 1990, November 1, 1991, June 1, 1996.
- <sup>55</sup> See respectively Ma'oz, pp. 241, 226, 229, 232-233, 242, 251, 218.
- <sup>56</sup> *Tishrin*, December 17, 1999; *Ha'aretz*, December 16, 1999.
- <sup>57</sup> Interview with Rabin in *Time Magazine*, November 30, 1992.
- <sup>58</sup> Ross, p. 545.
- <sup>59</sup> *Al-Hayat*, April 17 and May 9, 2000, quoted in Zisser, p. 241; see also Richard Murphy, Mideastq@aol.com, February 23, 2000.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ma'ariv*, March 31, 2000, quoted in Zisser, p. 241.
- <sup>61</sup> *New York Times*, November 2, 1991.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ha'aretz*, July 26, 1991.
- <sup>63</sup> *Yediot Ahronot*, June 19, 1990; April 4, 1991.
- <sup>64</sup> Ma'oz, p. 228, n. 15.
- <sup>65</sup> *New York Times*, March 27, 2000, p. 1; cf. *Ha'aretz*, January 6, p. B4, Jan 20, 2000, p. A2. For annual Israeli polls concerning peace with Syria see The Tami Steinmatz Center for Peace Research, *Peace Indices*, June 1994-October 2002. <http://spirit.tau.ac.il/socant/peace/peaceindex2003/2003.html>. These polls are based on a sample of the adult Jewish public.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ha'aretz*, December 13, 1999; Drucker, p. 101.
- <sup>67</sup> Cf. *Washington Post*, July 29, 1991.
- <sup>68</sup> Bashar to Ambassador Indyk, *Yediot Ahronot*, September 10, 2004; see also *Jerusalem Post*, June 25, 2000; *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 8, 2001.

- <sup>69</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, "Empty deeds, ugly words," *New York Times*, May 11, 2001; Zvi Barel, "The language test of Syria's president," *Ha'aretz*, December 5, 2003. Cf. *al-Ba'th*, July 31, 2001.
- <sup>70</sup> *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 8, 2001 — interview with Bashar; cf. Patrick Seale, "How Dr. Bashar is rethinking and reshaping Syrian strategies," *Mideast Mirror*, December 7, 2000.
- <sup>71</sup> Gary C. Gambill, "Syria and the Saudi peace initiative," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, March-April, 2002.
- <sup>72</sup> Cf. Friedman, *New York Times*, May 11, 2001; Ze'ev Schiff, *Ha'aretz*, January 20, 2004.
- <sup>73</sup> Cf. Seale, *Middle East Mirror*, December 7, 2000.
- <sup>74</sup> *Al-Safir*, March 27, 2003; *New York Times*, April 15, 2003, p. B3.
- <sup>75</sup> *Yediot Ahronot*, August 8, 2003.
- <sup>76</sup> UPI, April 28, 2003; *Ha'aretz*, July 7, 2003. See also Bashar to Ambassador Indyk, *Yediot Ahronot*, September 10, 2004.
- <sup>77</sup> *New York Times*, December 1, 2003.
- <sup>78</sup> *Washington Post*, May 4, 2003; *Newsweek*, May 19, 2003.
- <sup>79</sup> *Ha'aretz*, January 8 and 14, 2004.
- <sup>80</sup> *Ma'ariv*, December 1, 2004; *Ha'aretz*, December 3, 2004.
- <sup>81</sup> *Yediot Ahronot*, October 15, 2004; *Idem*, December 3, 2004.
- <sup>82</sup> *Ha'aretz*, November 30 and December 7, 2004; *Washington Post*, December 7, 2004.
- <sup>83</sup> *Yediot Ahronot*, January 16, 2004; Ze'ev Schiff, "Syria does not have a partner," *Ha'aretz*, December 28, 2003 and January 7, 2004.
- <sup>84</sup> *Yediot Ahronot*, January 12, 2004.
- <sup>85</sup> Sharon to *Ha'aretz*, September 14, 2004. For detailed arguments see Efraim Inbar in *Bitterlemons*, December 30, 2004.
- <sup>86</sup> *Ha'aretz*, December 16, 2004.
- <sup>87</sup> See respectively Uri Sagie to *Yediot Ahronot*, January 16, 2004; *Ha'aretz*, December 28, 2003.
- <sup>88</sup> *Yediot Ahronot*, December 31, 2003.

- <sup>89</sup> Cf. *Ha'aretz*, March 19, 2002. See also Efraim Inbar in *Bitterlemons*, December 30, 2004.
- <sup>90</sup> *New York Times*, October 7 and December 1, 2003; cf. *Yediot Ahronot*, May 30 and July 9, 2004.
- <sup>91</sup> See respectively Richard W. Stevenson and Earl Hicks, "Bush tells Israel it has the right to defend itself," *New York Times*, October 7, 2003, A1, A13; *Ha'aretz*, September 14, 2004.
- <sup>92</sup> For more details and analysis, see Moshe Ma'oz, "Damascus vs. Washington: Between the 'Axis of Evil' and 'Pax Americana'," *Inventing the Axis of Evil. The Truth about North Korea, Iran and Syria* (New York, The New Press, 2004) pp. 157 ff.
- <sup>93</sup> See Ma'oz, *Damascus*, p. 157 and notes. Bush first indicated this concept in the State of the Union Address, June 2002.
- <sup>94</sup> Cf. Zohar Palti, "Is all quiet on Israel's northern front?" Peacewatch #443, February 27, 2004, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy; *Ma'ariv* February 27, 2004.
- <sup>95</sup> Bashar to *al-Hayat*, October 7, 2003; to Ambassador Indyk, *Yediot Ahronot*, September 10, 2004..
- <sup>96</sup> Bashar to *New York Times*, December 1, 2003, p. 1; to Ambassador Indyk, *Yediot Ahronot*, September 10, 2004..
- <sup>97</sup> *Washington Post*, October 31, 2004; the *Observer* (London), October 27, 2004; *the Times* (London), December 22, 2004.
- <sup>98</sup> *Ha'aretz*, December 1, 2004.
- <sup>99</sup> Clinton, p. 886.