



Policy Paper No. 75
Myopic Vision:
Israeli Withdrawal from the Golan Heights and the
Prospects for War with Syria

Shawn Pine

The Decision Matrix

The decision matrix is a tool used by the United States military to assist in the decision making process. It allows for the quantitative measurement of subjective data, and facilitates decision making when confronted with a number of courses of action. The decision matrix program solves decision matrices under the conditions of risk and uncertainty with multiple criteria. It selects the optimal strategy and lists the values calculated for each strategy. The sensitivity analysis subprogram conducts an analysis of how sensitive the results are to changes in the values of the probabilities or weights. The program recalculates the decision matrix many times. Each time it applies a small change to the probability or weight corresponding to the specific state of nature. If this change results in a different strategy being selected, the program outputs the value where the change occurred and the new optimal strategy. The select weights program analytically selects appropriate weights for each state of nature column based on a 'pair-wise' comparison of the comparison. The consistency ratio must be 90 percent or better for decision matrix totals to be considered accurate.

Methodology

Four different matrices were conducted for this study. The first two matrices examined the short-term optimal choices for Syria and Israel when considering a myriad of variables and the impact of full, partial, or no Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights on those variables. The third matrix evaluates the optimal Israeli choice by looking at the same variables in the medium/long-terms. Finally, the last matrix determines the optimal Syrian option in light of its medium and long-term strategic goals.

The assumption in the development of these matrices is that Israel has in principle accepted the "land for peace" formula, and that it defines peace as including the principles of full normalization of relations with all its trappings. The election of the Israeli nationalist Likud party has not changed the fundamental precept underlying the discussion of the variables that the current negotiations require Israeli withdrawal from territories captured in the 1967 War in exchange for peace with its neighbors. The current Israeli government, led by Benjamin Netanyahu, accepts, albeit grudgingly, that territorial compromise will be required if it hopes to obtain a peace treaty with Syria. In this respect, the change in Israeli leadership has not changed the fundamental precept regarding the current peace process. However, what has changed is the Israeli perception of how important it is for Israel to obtain a peace treaty with Syria, and what price, in terms of territorial withdrawal from the Golan Heights, Israel should pay to achieve such a treaty. While the previous Israeli government was in principle committed to total Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, the current Israeli government appears willing to negotiate a partial withdrawal to some agreed point on the

Golan Heights. Whether or not the Likud position is feasible is not relevant to the development of these matrices. Consequently, for the purpose of this paper, it is assumed that should Israel voluntarily agree to full, or partial, withdrawal from the Golan Heights, it would not subsequently be the first to initiate hostilities.

Conversely, the empirical evidence suggests that Syria is intent on achieving something closer to a non-belligerency agreement rather than a full peace treaty with Israel. Moreover, there is a virtual consensus of opinion among Middle East experts that there is a high probability that Syria would initiate another war with Israel should it perceive that the balance of forces has shifted to its favor. This suggests that Syria may have more compelling strategic interests than regaining control of the Golan. Consequently, the matrices were developed with the assumption that Syria may be compelled to violate an agreement with Israel if that agreement is in variance with more intrinsic Syrian strategic interests.

Israeli and Syria Short-Term Decision Matrices

War Amelioration – Defined as those actions taken that will discourage neighbors from resorting to violence as a form of conflict resolution.

Winning – Defined as the ability to emerge victorious, and keeping its economic, political, and social infrastructure intact, in a future military conflict.

Casualties – Defined as the number of killed and wounded in a conflict, military engagement, or terrorist attack.

Terrorism – Defined as violence directed toward civilians, with the intent of eroding the national will of the people or forcing the government to make political concessions.

Early Warning – Defined as ability to assess the current distribution of forces, new developments, and intentions of neighboring states.

Strategic Freedom of Maneuver – Defined as the ability of the government to make decisions, and take appropriate action, unencumbered by external political constraints.

Tactical Freedom of Maneuver – Defined as the ability of military forces to conduct military operations unencumbered by topographical physical constraints.

Weights and Values

Each of the criteria has been evaluated as to the effect Israeli withdrawal, or no withdrawal, will have on each one. A numerical value has been assigned to each effect as follows:

High Positive Effect – 7

Medium Positive Effect – 6

Low Positive Effect – 5

Neutral – 4

Low Negative Effect – 3

Medium Negative Effect – 2

High Negative Effect – 1

Selected Weights Criteria

It is important to stress that the sensitivity analysis addresses disagreements over the weighting of criteria. If the criteria are not sensitive then no significant shifting in the importance of criteria will change the matrix.

Israeli Selected Weights

War Amelioration is favored over winning and casualties, and strongly favored over all others.

Winning is equal over casualties, slightly favored over strategic freedom of maneuver, and favored over all others.

Casualties is slightly favored over strategic freedom of maneuver and favored over all others.

Strategic freedom of maneuver is slightly favored over terrorism, and favored over all others.

Terrorism is slightly favored over all others.

All others are equal.

Syrian Selected Weights

Prioritizing Syrian interests was aided by circulating a questionnaire among various Israeli experts from the Jaffee Center in Tel Aviv University and the Begin – Sadat Center from Bar-Ilan University. The results of the questionnaires were tabulated and added to existing research data.

Winning is favored over war amelioration and strategic freedom of maneuver, strongly favored over all others.

War Amelioration is slightly favored over strategic freedom of maneuver and casualties, favored over tactical freedom of maneuver, and early warning, and strongly favored over terrorism.

Strategic freedom of maneuver is equal over casualties, slightly favored over tactical freedom of maneuver and early warning, and favored over terrorism.

Casualties is slightly favored over tactical freedom of maneuver and early warning, and favored over terrorism.

Tactical freedom of maneuver and early warning are equal, and favored over terrorism.

Discussion

Short-Term Effects of Full, Partial, or No Israeli Withdrawal from the Golan Heights

War Amelioration

Full Israeli Withdrawal

In the short-term, full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a high positive effect on deterring the prospects of war. Return of the Golan Heights to Syria will fulfill one of Syria's primary short-term strategic objectives. It will resolve an issue of national importance to the ruling Syrian regime and restore a vestige of Syrian pride. Additionally, assuming that any treaty will be coupled with an economic aid package, Syria will have a huge financial incentive to restrain from military action. Syria will be able to focus on continuing the modernization of its military, and consolidating its control over Lebanon.

Full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will enhance Syrian strategic security by removing the threat Israeli forces pose by their deployment in close proximity to Damascus. Moreover, any potential Israeli

aggression will be deterred by the probable deployment of multinational forces, and the untenable prospect of having to fight to regain the Golan Heights should it initiate hostilities.

Partial Israeli Withdrawal

In the short-term, partial Israeli withdrawal have a high positive effect on deterring the prospects of future war. Any partial Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will be accompanied by many of the same safeguards and constraints as a full Israeli withdrawal. The main differences being the depth of Israeli withdrawal and the corresponding depth of normalization between the two countries. From a Syrian perspective, a partial Israeli withdrawal will have a medium positive effect on deterring a potential Israeli attack. While the agreement would moderate potential aggressive Israeli behavior, it would still leave Israel in a tactical and strategic advantage vis-a-vis Syria.

No Israeli Withdrawal

In the short-term, no Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a low negative effect on deterring the prospects of war. Refusal of Israel to withdraw will exacerbate tensions with Syria and prompt that country to take measures to derail the peace process with other states. Among the measures available to Syria are: becoming the leader of a rejectionist front opposing Israeli normalization with other states in the region; attempting to subvert and replace Arafat as leader of the Palestinian Authority; increasing terrorism on Israel's northern border; and initiating a limited conventional war with Israel.

However, the possibility of Syria initiating a war in the short-term is low. Syria is still in the process of accumulating and assimilating large quantities of military hardware. This process coupled with the positioning of Israeli forces in close proximity to Damascus, serves as a powerful deterrent to Syria in the short-term. From a Syrian perspective, no Israeli withdrawal would have a medium negative impact on deterring potential Israeli aggressive intentions. Syria may believe that Israel will seek to escalate tensions with Syria to pressure that country into negotiating a partial settlement.

Winning

Full or Partial Israeli Withdrawal

Full or partial return of the Golan heights will have a neutral effect on winning a conflict since returning the Golan Heights is believed to significantly reduce the prospect of war to negligible proportions in the short-term.

No Israeli Withdrawal

No withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a high positive effect for Israel and a high negative effect for Syria on winning a conflict. Israel would enjoy a decisive tactical and strategic advantage under such conditions. The deployment of Israeli troops in close proximity to Damascus would enable Israel to quickly achieve a decisive victory. Only if Syria achieved strategic surprise, as in 1973, could it hope to achieve even a limited tactical victory. However, this is unlikely give the historical precedent, improved and more sophisticated Israel early warning capabilities, and the present state of Syrian forces.

Casualties

Full Israeli Withdrawal

In the short-term, full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a high positive effect on reducing Israeli casualties. These reductions will occur due to a presumed Syrian commitment to control Hizbullah activities along Israel's northern border. This variable is neutral in the case of Syria.

Partial Israeli Withdrawal

In the short-term, partial Israeli withdrawal will have a medium positive effect on reducing casualties. These reductions will occur because it is believed that any agreement will be accompanied by a Syrian commitment to control Hizbullah activities along Israel's northern border. However, Syrian zeal will be mitigated by its disappointment in not having achieved a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

No Israeli Withdrawal

In the short-term, no Israeli withdrawal will have a medium negative effect on reducing Israeli casualties. These casualties will occur due to an incremental increase in the amount of terrorism from Israel's northern border. This variable is neutral in the case of Syria.

Terrorism

Full Israeli Withdrawal

In the short-term, full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a high positive effect on reducing the frequency and intensity of terrorism against Israel. This is based on the assumption that any treaty with Syria will include understandings concerning Lebanon. As part of the treaty, it is presumed that Syria will agree to curb Hizbullah terrorism and to stop the transfer of weaponry from Teheran to that group. This variable is neutral for Syria.

Partial Israeli Withdrawal

In the short-term, partial Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a low positive effect on reducing the frequency and intensity of terrorist attacks. It is assumed that any agreement with Syria will include an agreement on Lebanon. However, a partial Israeli withdrawal will dampen the zeal in which Syria will fulfill its commitments to control terrorism. This variable is neutral for Syria.

No Israeli Withdrawal

In the short-term, no Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a high negative effect on reducing the amount of terrorism against Israel. Syrian failure to achieve an Israeli withdrawal will prompt that country to increase its support of terrorism on Israel's northern border. This variable is neutral for Syria.

Early Warning

Full Israeli Withdrawal

In the short-term, full Israeli withdrawal will have a medium negative effect on Israel's early warning capabilities. Israel will have to give up its ground early warning stations and rely on airborne platforms. These platforms will degrade Israeli early warning capabilities as their effectiveness is debilitated during

periods of bad weather. Full Israeli withdrawal will have a high positive effect on Syrian early warning capabilities since they will probably be allowed to establish early warning stations on the Golan Heights as part of any agreement.

Partial Israeli Withdrawal

In the short-term, partial Israeli withdrawal will have a medium positive effect on Israel's ability to maintain its early warning capabilities. Any partial Israeli withdrawal will probably be to a point in which Israel can maintain some of its ground early warning capabilities. Partial Israeli withdrawal will have a high positive effect on Syrian early warning capabilities since they also will be able to establish early warning stations on the Golan Heights.

No Israeli Withdrawal

In the short-term, no Israeli withdrawal will have a high positive effect on Israel's ability to maintain its early warning capabilities. No Israeli withdrawal will have a medium negative effect on Syrian early warning capabilities since both their depth and response time is curtailed by the Israeli presence on the Golan Heights.

Strategic Freedom of Maneuver

Full or Partial Israeli Withdrawal

In the short-term, full or partial Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a medium negative effect on strategic freedom of maneuver for Israel. Israeli forces on the Golan Heights will be replaced with multinational or US peacekeeping force. The presence of these forces will deter Israel from taking unilateral action that it might otherwise be compelled to take.

In the short-term, full or partial Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a medium positive effect on Syria's strategic freedom of maneuver. The presence of multinational or US peacekeeping forces on the Golan, coupled with the removal of Israeli forces from that area, will have a deterrent effect on Israel, thereby allowing Syria greater strategic freedom of maneuver. The political leadership of these multinational forces will be intent on preventing escalation of tensions and will inhibit either side from taking action against the other. This will work against Israel since that country is traditionally more sensitive to hostile Syrian movements, and would be inclined to exercise more freedom of action against Syria. However, Israel is also, given its relationship with the West, more susceptible to external pressures.

No Israeli Withdrawal

In the short-term, no Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a medium positive effect on allowing Israel to pursue its strategic national interests free from third party interference. In the short-term, no Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a low negative effect in allowing Syria to pursue its strategic national interests free from third party interference. Israeli presence on the Golan Heights inhibits Syrian strategic freedom of maneuver.

Tactical Freedom of Maneuver

Full Israeli Withdrawal

Full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a high negative effect on Israeli tactical freedom of maneuver. Israeli forces would have to reestablish defensive positions in the Hula Valley. Should another

war occur, Israeli forces would face the daunting task of having to reoccupy the Golan Heights. For Syria, full Israeli withdrawal would have a medium positive effect on its tactical freedom of maneuver.

Partial Israeli Withdrawal

A partial Israeli withdrawal would have a medium positive effect on Israeli tactical freedom of maneuver. This is predicated on the assumption that Israel would still retain a military presence on areas determined to be tactically important. For Syria, a partial Israeli withdrawal would have a medium negative impact on Syrian tactical freedom of maneuver for precisely the same reasons that it is positive for Israel.

No Israeli Withdrawal

In the short-term, no Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a high positive effect on Israeli tactical freedom of maneuver and a high negative effect for Syria.

Results of Short Term Matrices

Matrix 1 Israeli Short Term Interests

	Weight	Full	Partial	No	
War Amelioration	6.51	7	7	3	
Winning	3.26	4	4	7	
Casualties	3.26	7	6	3	
Strategic FoM	2.19	2	2	6	
Terrorism	1.43	7	5	1	
Early Warning	1	2	6	7	
Tactical FoM	1.00	1	6	7	
Total		98.8	101.7	80.7	Consistency 90.24

Sensitivity Analysis: The optimal strategy changes from course of action two to course of action one if the weighting of casualties increases to 6.26, or if the weighting of terrorism increases to 3.43.

	Weight	Full	Partial	No	
Winning	7.49	4	4	1	
War Amelioration	4.31	7	6	2	
Strategic FoM	2.74	6	6	3	
Casualties	2.63	4	4	4	
Tactical FoM	1.57	6	2	1	
Early Warning	1.57	7	7	2	
Terrorism	1.00	4	4	4	
Total		111.5	100.9	43.6	Consistency 93.06

Analysis of the Matrices

The two short-term matrices accurately reflect the bargaining positions taken by both sides during the peace negotiations between Syria and the previous Israeli government. Syrian President Assad's adamancy for full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights is reflected by the Syrian short-term decision matrix, which shows the optimal Syrian strategy as being full Israeli withdrawal. The fact that none of the criteria are sensitive reflects the inflexibility of the Syrian position and underscores the difficulties facing the new Israeli government should they try to obtain a settlement with Assad short of full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. The only pause for optimism, is that a partial Israeli withdrawal is significantly more beneficial from a Syrian perspective than no Israeli withdrawal.

Conversely, the optimal short-term Israeli strategy vacillates between full and partial withdrawal depending upon the change in the weighting of the criteria. An increase in the weighting (importance) of terrorism or casualties changes the optimal short-term Israeli strategy from partial withdrawal to full withdrawal. This demonstrates how the regularity of Hamas and Hizbullah terrorist attacks against Israeli targets created a new set of dynamics for the former Israeli government, and shifted the optimal Israeli strategy from partial to full withdrawal from the Golan Heights. This partially explains why the previous Israeli government was reportedly willing to commit itself to a full withdrawal from the Golan Heights. Faced with incessant terror attacks emanating from both the Lebanese border in the north, and from the West bank and Gaza, the importance of relieving the threat of terrorism, and reducing the number of casualties, gained an importance out of proportion to its real value. From a short-term political perspective the previous government had little choice but accelerate the peace process or to discredit itself.

Israeli And Syrian Medium/Long Term Strategic Interest Matrices

Medium/Long Term Effects of Israeli Full, Partial or No Withdrawal from the Golan Heights

The same values and weighted criteria used in the short-term Israeli decision matrix were used for the medium/long-term matrix.

War Amelioration

Full Israeli Withdrawal

In the medium and long terms, full Israeli withdrawal will have a high negative effect on deterring the prospects of future war. Within the next decade, both Syria and Egypt will be in the final stages of modernization and build-up of their conventional and non-conventional forces. Israel's qualitative military edge will be substantially degraded as Western military hardware and technology is transferred to the Arab states in vast quantities. The quantitative asymmetry in the balance of forces will increase in favor of the Arab states due to demographic and economic realities. Additionally, Israeli non-conventional deterrence capabilities will be partially neutralized due to the acquisition of offensive nuclear weapons by any number of Arab states.

Evolving Syrian strategic interests may motivate Syria to renege on existing or future commitments. Moreover, the removal of Israeli forces from the Golan Heights will have removed the deterrent effect of having Israeli units deployed in close proximity to Damascus. This will have two adverse effects. First, loss of the Heights will reduce the bar in which Syria will perceive that it has gained strategic parity with Israel. Second, should Syria manage to militarily occupy the Heights before the start of hostilities, it would gain an enormous tactical and strategic advantage over Israel, increasing the probability that any military conflict would spread to Israeli populated areas, rather than be confined to Syria and the Golan Heights.

Partial Israeli Withdrawal

In the medium and long terms, partial Israeli withdrawal will have a high positive effect on deterring the prospects of future war. This assessment is predicated on the belief that any partial Israeli withdrawal will keep Israeli forces in occupation of key strategic points thereby deterring Syria from initiating hostilities.

No Israeli Withdrawal

No Israeli withdrawal will have a low positive effect on deterring Syria from initiating hostilities. The strategic advantage afforded Israeli forces, coupled by the close proximity of these forces to Damascus, will deter Syria from launching an attack until it is convinced that it has achieved strategic and tactical military parity with Israel. This would be difficult since Syria's ability to import western technology will be severely constrained because of the continuation of the conflict and its continued support for terrorism which would make the West hesitant to agree to any substantial transfer of weapons to Syria.

Winning

Full Israeli Withdrawal

In the medium and long terms, full Israeli withdrawal will have a high negative effect on Israel's ability to win a future conflict. Even a demilitarized Golan Heights would pose a serious threat since the possibility would remain that Syria could achieve strategic surprise and occupy the Golan Heights before Israel reacted. If this should occur, the strategic and tactical advantage afforded Syria from the Golan Heights will give it an enormous advantage over Israel.

Partial Israeli Withdrawal

In the medium and long terms, partial Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a medium positive effect on Israel's ability to win a future conflict. This is predicated on the assumption that under any partial agreement Israel will maintain control over those portions of the Golan Heights deemed tactically important to Israel.

No Israeli Withdrawal

In the medium and long terms, no Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a high positive effect on Israel's ability to win a future conflict. Israel would start such a conflict with a significant strategic and tactical advantage virtually insuring that the ground conflict will be conducted on Syrian territory.

Casualties

Full Israeli Withdrawal

In the medium and long terms, Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a high negative effect on reducing the number of Israeli casualties. Should Syria initiate a war and occupy the Golan Heights through strategic surprise it would result in a significantly higher number of Israeli military and civilian casualties.

Partial Israeli Withdrawal

In the medium and long terms, partial Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a high positive effect on reducing Israeli casualties. This is predicated on the conclusion that under any partial agreement Israel will maintain control over those portions of the Golan Heights deemed tactically important to Israel. Moreover, Israeli deployment in these areas would act as a powerful deterrent to Syria.

No Israeli Withdrawal

In the medium and long terms, no Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a high positive impact in reducing the number of Israeli casualties should hostilities be initiated. Israel would start the conflict with a significant tactical and strategic advantage, which will insure that the ground battles will be conducted on Syrian territory.

Terrorism

Full Israeli Withdrawal

In the medium and long terms, full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a low positive effect in reducing terrorism from Israel's northern border. Syria, albeit incrementally, will allow Hizbullah terrorism from Lebanon to continue against Israel. Syria will allow this to occur for both strategic and tactical reasons. First, Syria will be under intense pressures from Iran to allow Islamic terrorists to attack Israel from Lebanon. Second, Syria will be coerced to allow such actions or face the prospect of Hizbullah attacks against Syrian forces in Lebanon. Syrian threats of escalation and military reoccupation of the Golan Heights will have a deterrent effect on Israel's freedom of action against the terrorists.

Partial Israeli Withdrawal

In the medium and long terms, for the reasons outlined above, partial Israeli withdrawal from the Golan heights will have a low positive effect in reducing terrorism from Israel's northern border.

No Israeli Withdrawal

In the medium and long terms, no Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a low negative effect on reducing terrorism on Israel's northern border. While Syria will encourage the increase of terrorism, Israel will maintain the strategic freedom of maneuver to respond to such threats.

Early Warning

Full Israeli Withdrawal

In the medium and long terms, full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a low negative effect on Israel's early warning capabilities. Israel will have to rely on airborne platforms and third party observers for the majority of their early warning information.

Partial Israeli Withdrawal

In the medium and long terms, partial Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a medium positive effect on Israel's early warning capabilities. It is assumed that Israel will be able to maintain some ground base components and maintain effective early warning capabilities.

No Israeli Withdrawal

In the medium and long terms, no Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a high positive effect on Israel's early warning capabilities as it will be able to maintain all of its ground based early warning stations that it currently has deployed along the Golan Heights.

Strategic Freedom of Maneuver

Full or Partial Israeli Withdrawal

In the medium and long terms, full or no Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a medium negative effect on Israel's strategic freedom of maneuver. Israel's ability to respond to adverse developments will be limited due to the presence of multinational or US forces. The governments of these forces will attempt to limit Israeli responses out of fear of escalation. Consequently, Israeli strategic responses will be delayed and possibly muted.

No Israeli Withdrawal

In the medium and long terms, no Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a low positive effect on Israel's strategic freedom of maneuver. Without the presence of foreign forces, Israel will have the requisite flexibility to respond to adverse developments with minimal outside interference.

Tactical Freedom of Maneuver

Full Israeli Withdrawal

In the medium and long terms, full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have high negative effect on Israel's tactical freedom of maneuver. Any outbreak of hostilities would require that Israel fight below the Golan Heights thereby leaving Israeli forces at a severe tactical disadvantage and exposing Israeli civilian population centers to Syrian attack.

Partial or No Israeli Withdrawal

In the medium and long terms, partial Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have medium positive effect on Israel's tactical freedom of maneuver. No Israeli withdrawal will have a high positive effect on Israel's tactical freedom of maneuver.

Results and Analysis of the Medium/Long Term Israeli Decision Matrix

	Weight	Full	Partial	No	
War Amelioration	6.04	1	7	5	
Winning	4.76	1	6	7	
Casualties	3.26	1	7	7	
Strategic FoM	2.16	2	2	6	
Terrorism	1.43	5	5	2	
Early Warning	1.00	1	6	7	
Tactical FoM	1.00	1	6	7	
Total		28.5	117.1	116.2	Consistency 90.79

Sensitivity Analysis: The optimal Israeli strategy changes from two to three if any one of the following weighted criteria occurs: War Amelioration changes to 5.04; winning changes to 5.76; terrorism changes to 0.43; early warning changes to 2; strategic FoM changes to 3.16; or tactical FoM changes to 2.

Analysis

The results of the Israeli medium/long-term decision matrix illustrates that a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights would be detrimental to medium and long-term Israeli strategic interests. Both a partial or no withdrawal is favored over full withdrawal by a ratio of over 4:1. Consequently, any Israeli government looking at its long-term interests would be compelled to refuse Syrian demands for a total withdrawal. Moreover, all of the criteria, with the exception of casualties, are sensitive to changes in the weighting of the criteria toward no withdrawal. Meaning that the cost to benefit ratio, among those variables measured, between partial and no withdrawal are virtually equal.

The Syrian Strategic Interest Matrix

Determining, and prioritizing, Syrian strategic interests was aided by circulating a questionnaire among various Israeli experts from the Jaffee Center in Tel Aviv University and the Begin – Sadat Center from Bar-Ilan University. The results of the questionnaires were tabulated and added to existing research data.

Defining the Variables

Minimizing Israeli Threat – Defined as those actions taken that will minimize physical, economic, or political threats from Israel.

Dominating the Fertile Crescent – Defined as being recognized as the undisputed leading regional hegemony.

Consolidating and Legitimizing its Rule over Lebanon – Defined as being recognized as the de facto, if not de jure, government in Lebanon.

Regaining the Golan Heights – Defined as securing Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights and reestablishing Syrian sovereignty over the area.

Creating Bridges to the US – Defined as establishing normal diplomatic, trade, and economic relations with the US.

Values

Each of the criteria has been evaluated as to the effect Israeli withdrawal, or no withdrawal, will have on each one. A numerical value has been assigned to each effect as follows:

High Positive Effect – 7

Medium Positive Effect – 6

Low Positive Effect – 5

Neutral – 4

Low Negative Effect – 3

Medium Negative Effect – 2

High Negative effect – 1

Selected Weights Criteria

Minimizing Israeli threat is slightly favored over domination of the Fertile Crescent, favored over legitimizing its rule over Lebanon, and strongly favored over all others. Domination of the Fertile Crescent is slightly favored over legitimizing its rule over Lebanon, and favored over all others. Legitimizing its rule over Lebanon is slightly favored over all others. Regaining the Golan Heights is favored over building bridges to the US.

Discussion of Variables

Minimizing Israeli Threat

Full Israeli Withdrawal

Full Israeli withdrawal will have a high positive effect on minimizing the Israeli threat. Withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Golan Heights will remove the threat that those forces pose to the Syrian capital.

Partial Israeli Withdrawal

Partial Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a low positive effect on minimizing the Israeli threat. Presumably, any partial Israeli withdrawal would still leave Israel in control of those areas deemed critical to its security. By definition those areas that enhance Israeli security threaten Syrian security. However, by reaching an agreement, the threat of hostilities will abate.

No Israeli Withdrawal

No Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights would have a high negative effect on minimizing the Israeli threat. Israeli forces would remain deployed on the Golan Heights in close proximity to the Syrian capital. These forces could easily obtain strategic surprise and pose an existential threat to Syrian President Assad's regime.

Dominating the Fertile Crescent

Full or Partial Israeli Withdrawal

Full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have high positive effect in allowing Syria to establish hegemonic regional leadership in the Fertile Crescent. Full Israeli withdrawal would enable Syria to redirect its resources to Lebanon and Iraq. While the accompanying Syrian – Israeli peace treaty would cause consternation among Syria's more extremist allies, such as Iran, these problems would than be offset by the accompanying economic benefits that Assad would extract for a peace treaty. Moreover, Assad is well versed in the knowledge that treaties between countries are ephemeral in nature any highly volatile to changing strategic conditions. Given Assad's almost legendary political astuteness, he would be well positioned to exploit the advantages offered by the peace treaty with Israel while minimizing the adverse regional political fallout.

No Israeli Withdrawal

No Israeli withdrawal will have a medium positive effect on Syria's ability to establish hegemonic regional leadership in the Fertile Crescent. Syria is the only Arab nation with a contiguous border with Israel that has not signed a peace treaty with Israel. Consequently, Syria is the front-line, banner carrier for the Islamic extremist and anti-Israeli states. As such, Syria can exploit its position and compete, with Iran, for leadership of the rejectionist states.

Consolidating and Legitimizing Its Control over Lebanon

Full or Partial Israeli Withdrawal

Full, or partial, withdrawal of Israel from the Golan Heights will have a high positive effect in allowing Syria to consolidate and legitimize its control over Lebanon. Any peace treaty between Israel and Syria will probably include recognition of Syria's strategic interest in Lebanon and will include probably leave Syria in de facto hegemonic control over that country.

No Israeli Withdrawal

No Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a medium positive effect in allowing Syria to consolidate and legitimize its control over Lebanon. Syria will remain in Lebanon under the pretext of protecting that country from Israeli aggression.

Regaining the Golan Heights

Full Israeli Withdrawal

Full Israeli withdrawal will have a high positive effect on allowing Syria to regain the Golan Heights. Israeli agreement to full withdrawal would be formal recognition of Syrian sovereignty to full withdrawal would be formal recognition of Syrian sovereignty over the Golan Heights.

Partial Israeli Withdrawal

Partial Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a low negative effect on allowing Syria to regain the Golan Heights. Any agreement on partial Israeli withdrawal, unless otherwise agreed, would be perceived by Israeli leaders as formalizing the international boundary between the two countries, thereby

making it highly unlikely for Syria to regain all of the territories. However, such an agreement partial withdrawal would probably include an Israeli withdrawal from a significant portion of the Golan.

No Israeli Withdrawal

No Israeli withdrawal will have a high negative effect in allowing Syria to regain sovereignty over the Golan Heights.

Establishing Bridges to the US

Full Israeli Withdrawal

Full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a low positive effect in allowing Syria to build bridges to the US. The US will probably offer Syria numerous incentives to procure an Israeli – Syrian peace accord. However, protracted major US economic aid will be contingent upon Syrian cessation of its support for terrorism. This will create a unique paradox for Syria, in that regional extremist pressure will mount for Syria to increase its support for Islamic extremist terrorism as compensation for its treaty with Israel. Moreover, the United States will be inclined to be less forthcoming in its rapprochement with Syria since it will view full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights as sufficient compensation for Syria.

Partial Israeli Withdrawal

Partial Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a high positive effect in allowing Syria to build bridges to the US. The US will offer Syria enormous economic and diplomatic incentives to secure a Syrian Israeli peace treaty in return for a partial Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. Moreover, the United States would view Syrian agreement to a partial withdrawal as a major concession, which would be looked upon favorably.

No Israeli Withdrawal

No Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights will have a high negative effect in allowing Syria to build bridges to the United States. Once Syria is fully convinced that Israel will not be forthcoming, and decides to forsake further negotiations, it will attempt to play a spoiler role and derail the current peace process. Syria will continue, and probably accelerate, its support terrorism as long as Israel remains on the Golan Heights. Syrian actions will prompt the US to keep Syria on its list of state sponsors of terror.

Results and Analysis of the Syrian Strategic Decision Matrix

	Weight	Full	Partial	No	
Minimizing Israeli Threat	5.86	7	5	1	
Dominating Fertile Crescent	3.65	7	7	5	
Consolidating Rule over Lebanon	2.17	7	7	6	
Regaining the Golan Heights	1.55	7	3	1	
Building Bridges to the US	1.00	5	7	1	
TOTAL		97.6	81.7	39.7	Consistency 90.3

As with the short-term Syrian decision matrix, the Syrian strategic interest matrix reinforces the prevailing perception that it is in Syria's long-term interest to press for full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. However, it is critical to note that as with the Syrian short-term matrix, it would serve Syria's long-term interests to achieve a partial Israeli withdrawal than no Israel withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

Conclusions

The decision matrices accurately reflect current Syrian and Israeli negotiating positions. Unfortunately, it also reflects how difficult it will be to reconcile Israeli and Syrian interests concerning resolution of the territorial issue of the Golan Heights. The decision matrices confirm that it is in Syria's short-term and long-term strategic interest to secure full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. In this respect, Syria's negotiating position has not wavered.

Conversely, the Israeli decision matrix is somewhat more complicated, and reflects how both the previous Israeli government, and current Israeli government, could take seemingly antithetical positions concerning Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, while maintaining that they were both pursuing a coherent strategy. Review of the results of the Israeli decision matrices explain the willingness of the previous Israeli government to agree in principle to a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, and to understand the seemingly antithetical positions taken by the present Israeli government.

The Israeli short-term matrix reflects that the optimal Israeli strategy is a partial Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. However, this strategy was only narrowly better than a full Israeli withdrawal and was sensitive to changes in the weighting of two critical criteria. Either an increase in the change of casualties or terrorism shifted the optimal strategy from a partial Israeli withdrawal to a full withdrawal. These two inter-related issues were precisely the ones that rose to the fore of the Israeli consciousness during the peace process. It is probable that the previous Israeli government's sensitivity to these issues, and its desire to alleviate the political pressure created by terrorism and its accompanied casualties, led it to agree to a full withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

However, the previous Israeli government's negotiating position may have been shortsighted when viewed from a long-term perspective. In the medium/long-term matrix, the optimal strategy is still a partial Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. However, unlike the short-term matrix, the medium/long-term matrix is extremely sensitive in favor of no withdrawal, rather than full withdrawal. A change in all but one of the criteria (casualties) changes the optimal Israeli strategy from partial withdrawal to no withdrawal. In fairness to the Rabin/Peres government, their apparent decision to agree to total withdrawal from the Golan Heights may have been motivated by a favorable weighing of factors other than those measured in this study. Moreover, under the Rabin/Peres government, there was a sense of optimism that the implementation of the peace process, coupled with mutual confidence-building measures would create a new set of dynamics. This new set of dynamics could conceivably change the importance and values of the criteria measured.

Be that as it may, the results of the matrices confirm the prevailing conventional wisdom that resolution of the Golan Heights issue is extremely complicated. Ironically, Syrian President Hafez Assad, in an act viewed incomprehensible by many regional observers, apparently missed his chance to secure a full Israeli withdrawal by not accepting the previous Israeli government's offer. Assad's refusal to agree to Israeli conditions for its total withdrawal from the Golan Heights reinforces perceptions that securing Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights may not be high on Assad's list of priorities. For one brief period there appeared to be a convergence between short-term Israeli interests and Syrian interests. That window of opportunity seems to have closed given the results of the May 29, 1996 Israeli elections

However, Assad's apparent rejection of Israel's willingness to fully withdraw from the Golan Heights in return for full peace and normalization of relations can be explained looking at a decision matrix concerning the impact of peace with Israel on Syria's strategic interests. Applying the same criteria, weighting, and value system from the previous Syrian strategic matrix, we arrive at the following matrix:

	Weight	No Peace	Peace	
Minimizing Israeli Threat	5.86	7	7	
Dominating Fertile Crescent	3.65	7	2	
Consolidating Rule over Lebanon	2.17	7	3	
Regaining the Golan Heights	1.55	7	7	
Building Bridges to the US	1.00	5	7	
TOTAL		97.6	73.7	Consistency 90.73

Sensitivity: None of the variables are sensitive.

The results of the decision matrix supports claims by opponents of a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights that it Syria may not be interested in achieving a full and comprehensive peace and resolving the Arab – Israeli conflict. Indeed, full peace with Israel would create a number of regional problems for Syria. Peace with Israel would lead to a deterioration of relations between Syria and its neighbors. Syria would then find itself bordered by a hostile Iraq and Iran. Its control in Lebanon would be challenged as any Syrian attempts to prevent attacks against Israel would be challenged by Hizbullah. Rather than being able to vie for regional hegemonic leadership by championing the anti-Israel cause, Syria would be regulated to “second class” status as one of the West’s regional allies. Additionally, Syria lacks the petroleum resources to be of intrinsic value to the West. Syria’s value to the West is measured in a negative context, by the damage it can cause to Western regional strategic interests, not by the contribution it can make to those interests. Consequently, Syrian strategic interests are best served by obtaining a full Israeli withdrawal without obligating itself to full peace. By doing so, Syria extract concessions from Israel and the West without sacrificing its intrinsic strategic interests.

Conversely, Israel cannot agree to a full withdrawal from the Golan Heights without achieving a much deeper and more comprehensive peace than it achieved with Egypt. Unlike the Sinai, the margin for strategic error is much narrower concerning the Golan Heights. Consequently, since such a peace is a non-starter with Assad, it would be prudent for Israel to pursue its long-term strategic interests.

The Prospects for War with Syria

The visit of Madeline Albright to the Middle East in September 1997 sparked hopes that the comatose Syrian-Israeli peace talks might once again be revived. In many respects, this optimism was the residual product of earlier predictions by Middle East prognosticators anticipating the dawning of a new Middle East. Arguably the most optimistic assessment came on September 9, 1993, when Moshe Maoz, Israel’s internationally recognized Syriologist, predicted that a Syrian-Israeli peace treaty was in the offing.¹ Unfortunately, Maoz’s predictions succumbed to Middle East realities as ominous Syrian troop movements in Lebanon and Syria in August 1996, coupled with bellicose statements emanating from Syria, led many Israeli Syriologists to express fears that the chances of a new Israeli-Syrian conflagration had risen to perilous levels.²

Many regional observers and Middle East pundits attributed this sudden deterioration of atmosphere, from peace towards war, to the May 29, 1996, election of Benjamin Netanyahu and a perceived hardening of Israeli negotiating positions on both the Syrian and Palestinian negotiating tracks.

However, a review of Netanyahu government positions on issues relating to the peace process does not support those contentions. Moreover, examination of Syria’s regional strategic goals and interests, coupled with its historical and current perceptions toward Israel, casts serious doubts as to the veracity of claims that Assad has made the “strategic” decision to make peace with Israel.³ The previous sanguineness of Maoz, and scores of other scholars and pundits, that a new Middle East was just beyond the horizon, may have been more a product of wishful thinking and misplaced optimism than an accurate appraisal of the situation.

Moreover, an examination of Syrian strategic goals, coupled with a review of Syrian President Assad’s negotiating behavior over the last four years, suggests that Assad’s desire to regain the Golan Heights may not be as important to Syria as conventional wisdom dictated. Indeed, an examination of Syrian regional and domestic priorities reveals that the benefits in regaining the Golan Heights far exceed the price Assad would have to pay in regional and domestic prestige and influence.

Few military and strategic analysts have disputed the strategic importance of the Golan Heights. Indeed, even those Israeli leaders willing to contemplate a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights have stressed its strategic importance.⁴ The Golan Plateau sits above the densely populated Hula Valley and eastern shore of the Kinneret. Additionally, it provides Israel one of only three sources of fresh water. From an Israeli strategic perspective, the Golan Heights provides the IDF with unparalleled early warning and observation

facilities that cannot be replicated by other proposed alternatives. Moreover, should any future Israeli-Syrian peace treaty fail and the two countries drift towards war, then the removal of Israeli forces from the Golan will have left Israel in a much more tenuous position. Nor has the advent of new, more sophisticated weapons systems mitigated the strategic importance of the Golan Heights since most of these systems are dependent upon electromagnetic ray transmissions which require high-ground, line-of-sight locations provided by the Golan Heights.⁵ The Golan Heights also provides Israel a deterrent capability in that the close proximity of its forces to Damascus (67 km.) poses great risks to the Syrian regime should it initiate hostilities.

Syrian Perspectives on Israel

As with most Arab states, Syria has traditionally viewed Israel as a foreign and expansionist entity forced upon the Arab world by the former European colonial powers. Syria defines its conflict with Israel in existential terms and believes the Arab-Israeli conflict is a struggle for survival between two irreconcilable movements.⁶ Additionally, Syria views Israel as an obstacle to fulfilling its ambition of expanding to what it considers its historical, rightful, and natural boundaries. These boundaries include present-day Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel. This Syrian view of Israel as an unwanted, alien, regional entity has been a constant theme in the government-controlled press.⁷ Finally, Syria regards itself as the leader of Arab pan-nationalism, and sees the existence of Israel as an anathema to that movement.⁸

The belief that Assad's willingness to negotiate with Israel is not a fundamental change in regime policy toward Israel is strengthened by a review of the manner in which Assad has approached negotiations. Assad has rejected most ideas of normalizing relations with Israel. Assad views a peace treaty as the price he has to pay in order to regain the Golan Heights. His concept of a final agreement does not include any of the trappings of normalized relations such as trade, open borders, or full diplomatic relations. In short, Assad's concept of peace is different than Israel's, and more closely resembles a non-belligerency agreement than a peace agreement.⁹

Syrian Strategic Objectives

On June 6, 1996, the Head of the Mossad, Shabtai Shavit, departing from the belief of many Israeli Syriologists that Assad has made the strategic decision to make peace with Israel, expressed his reservations concerning Assad's desire to achieve peace.¹⁰ Be that as it may, Assad's departure from Syria's traditional confrontational strategy concerning Israel is designed to achieve three primary objectives:

1. Establish and consolidate its power and dominance in the Fertile Crescent in light of new political realities.
2. Build bridges to the United States in order to facilitate goal #1 and weaken United States support for Israel.
3. Legitimize its rule in Lebanon.¹¹

It is important to remember that Syria, as with most of the region's Islamic countries and organizations, takes a long-term view of its conflict with Israel and sees the Arab-Israeli conflict as another phase in the historical clash between Islam and the West. By frequently equating the current Arab struggle with that of the Crusades, and inculcating this notion throughout the Syrian population, Assad makes it clear that Israel's presence in the region is ephemeral and that Israel will ultimately follow the way of the Crusaders. Assad, in accordance with his historical view of the struggle, is confident that the regional balance of power will shift in favor of the Arabs and the eradication of Israel from the region will ultimately be achieved. To facilitate this end, Assad has chosen to enter the peace process in order to insure Syria a voice in determining its outcome and to achieve Syria's short-term goals, which are to regain the Golan Heights, consolidate its de

facto absorption of Lebanon, influence the peace process, insure continued foreign aid and investment, and begin to erode traditional US support for Israel.¹²

Assad's decision to participate in the peace process was motivated by three significant events: the collapse of the USSR, which resulted in the loss of Syria's primary patron; the defeat of Iraq in the Persian Gulf War, which lessened the prospects of another Israeli-Arab war; and perceived changes in US policy regarding the strategic value of Israel, given the aforementioned events.¹³ The peace process has created an interesting dilemma for Syria. While it is Syria's only viable option to achieve its primary short-term objectives, amelioration of its conflict with Israel will diminish its strategic regional importance as the vanguard state in the existential Arab struggle against Israel and therefore poses a long-term threat to Syrian strategic interests.

The Syrian-Iranian Alliance

To facilitate achievement of its strategic goals, Syria has entered into a de facto regional alliance with Iran. On the surface, the Syrian-Iranian alliance is an enigmatic relationship. The Syrian secular, pan-Arab vision of an "Arab integrated nation" seems incompatible with the Iranian view of creating a "unified Islamic world". While these two visions are destined to clash in the long term, the Syrian-Iranian alliance currently provides ideological and tangible benefits to both countries. The alliance reflects a mutual convergence of interests as both Syria and Iran oppose the goals of the American-inspired "new world order".¹⁴ For both countries, the goals articulated within that order are viewed as antithetical to their regimes. US support for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the elimination of terrorism, and the promotion of democracy and human rights in the region is considered to pose potential existential threats to the ruling regimes.

Success of the Arab-Israeli peace process will greatly diminish the influence and ability of both countries to achieve their long-term strategic goals. Both countries gain much utility from their vociferous opposition to the Jewish State. Peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict will diminish their importance while simultaneously increasing the regional strength of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. Additionally, a reduction in regional terrorism will cost both countries their main tool for exerting regional and international influence. Finally, regional democratization, coupled with its associated concerns for human rights issues, could result in the eradication of the ruling regimes in both countries.¹⁵ The regimes in Teheran and Damascus view their alliance as a counterbalance to regional threats posed by the other major regional powers. Both countries view the alliance as conducive for obtaining their respective strategic goals concerning Lebanon.¹⁶ Syria serves as a conduit for the flow of Iranian weapons to the Hizbullah terrorist group. In return, Hizbullah has proven useful in helping Syria consolidate its hegemony over Lebanon. Moreover, Syria has also used Hizbullah terrorist attacks against Israel as leverage in its peace talks with that country.¹⁷ Finally, Iran has assisted Syria in its arms buildup by providing much-needed cash.

Syria's alliance with Iran may also afford it the opportunity to exploit residual influence should Iran fulfill expectations and obtain offensive nuclear capabilities in the short term. In addition to the immediate benefits afforded by the alliance, both countries see it as facilitating a number of medium and long-term objectives such as:

1. Creating an Arab-Islamic bloc to counter US hegemonic influences in the region.
2. Building up a significant military capability to deter any potential threat.
3. Creating a geo-strategic sphere of influence until Egypt, Turkey, and Algeria succumb to Islamic radicalism.
4. Developing a worldwide terrorist network to facilitate the expansion of their influence.¹⁸

The Syrian-Iranian alliance represents a potential shift in the regional balance of power. Both countries have devoted significant resources to developing and strengthening their military capabilities in both conventional and non-conventional weaponry. Moreover, there are indications of cooperation between the two countries in the development of military technology. For example, intelligence sources suspect the two countries of

cooperating in the development of cruise missile technology.¹⁹ Notwithstanding their long-term antithetical objectives, the alliance poses a major impediment to the peace process and directly threatens many of the smaller countries in the region. The ultimate success of this alliance in reshaping the region and thwarting the current regional movement toward peace will be largely dependent upon the success of Islamic extremism to proliferate throughout the region.

Military Capabilities

On paper, Syria presents a formidable military threat to its neighbors and has devoted significant resources toward building its military. In a futile attempt to achieve strategic military parity with Israel, Syria has devoted upwards of 65 percent of its yearly budget to the military. The drive to achieve strategic military parity with Israel has reached such proportions that it has precipitated a severe economic crisis in the country.²⁰

Syrian additions to its military since the Persian Gulf War include purchases of 150 SCUD-C missiles from North Korea, 600 T-72 tanks from Russia and the former Soviet bloc states, 48 MIG-29s and 24 SU-24s from Russia, and the formation of two new active armored divisions.²¹ Funding for these additions was provided by a \$2 billion grant from Saudi Arabia for Syria's participation in the Gulf War.

Syrian ground forces are currently configured into the Golan Corps and Lebanon Corps. They consist of 11 divisions that include: six armored divisions, three mechanized divisions, a republican guard division, and one Special Forces division. I Corps is deployed in the Golan region and consists of the 1st, 3rd, and 9th armored divisions as well as the 5th and 7th mechanized divisions. II Corps is deployed in the Lebanon region and consists of the 10th Mechanized Division, 11th Armored Division, 14th Airborne Division, and seven Special Forces regiments. The Republican Guards Division and 569th Armored Division are deployed around Damascus for capital and regime security. Syria fields a 408,000-man military, with another 400,000 in reserve, along with 4,500 main battle tanks, over 640 combat aircraft, and 100 attack helicopters.²²

However, despite its numerically formidable size, the Syrian military is plagued by logistical and operational problems. Syria's lack of hard currency reserves, coupled with the collapse of the Soviet Union, has left much of Syria's military machine ineffective. Approximately 25 percent of Syrian armor is not fully operational and has been placed in static defensive positions, and Syria is having difficulty obtaining replacement parts for its combat aircraft.²³ Moreover, it appears that Syria's drive for conventional military parity with Israel has lost its steam as Syria reduced its armed forces by some 88,000 personnel in 1994, and is currently spending approximately 20 percent less than in 1990.²⁴

Syria lags far behind most of the major regional powers in the quest for nuclear weapons, opting instead to concentrate on its conventional capabilities and "poor man's nuclear weapons" such as biological and chemical weapons. However, in 1988, Syria embarked on a \$3.6 billion program to construct six nuclear reactors, and *Jane's Defense Weekly* reported in 1994 that Syria had "joined the drive to acquire nuclear weapons".²⁵

Syria has made up for its modest nuclear program by obtaining a chemical warfare capability estimated to be greater than that of pre-Gulf War Iraq.²⁶ Syria began its domestic production of chemical missile warheads in 1985 and currently produces several hundred tons of mustard gas and Sarin nerve gas each year.²⁷

The primary conduit for Syria's nonconventional weapons is the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherche Scientifique (CERS), purportedly a civilian research center that has official ties with a myriad of research centers throughout the world.²⁸ The center was instrumental in facilitating the import of Chinese missile components to Syrian factories.²⁹

Moreover, Syria has succeeded in obtaining an impressive array of ballistic delivery systems for its chemical and biological weapons. In addition to the 150 Korean SCUD-C missiles with a range of 600 km., the

Syrians have 100-200 SCUD-B missiles and have reportedly begun local production, having obtained assistance in constructing the plants from North Korea, China, and Iran (for SCUD-C missiles).³⁰

Towards War?

In September 1996, Syria redeployed the 14th Airborne Division and 10th Mechanized Division to the northern slopes of Mount Hermon, thereby precipitating a spiraling of tensions between it and Israel. The fact that the 1973 Yom Kippur War was initiated by a Syrian commando attack on Mount Hermon was not lost on Israeli military analysts.³¹ This sudden escalation of tensions led those Israeli Syriologists who endorsed the notion that Assad had made the strategic decision to make peace with Israel, to express their belief that Assad's actions were motivated by a sense of frustration over the stalled peace process. They drew attention to the fact that the 1973 Yom Kippur War was initiated by a Sadat frustrated that his 1971 peace initiative was not taken seriously. Conversely, those Syriologists who were skeptical of Assad's metamorphosis from the banner carrier of pan-Arabism to peacemaker, contended that Assad's deployment was not due to frustration over progress in the stalled peace process. Rather, it was due to his sense that preoccupation with the Israeli-Palestinian track was regulating Syria to a subservient role and, therefore, the Syrian movement was designed to return Syria to the center of the regional peace process.

However, regardless of the intent of the Syrian military deployment in the fall of 1996, it is important to note that the collapse of the USSR, coupled with Iraq's military defeat in the Persian Gulf War, has reduced Syria's ability to launch a sustained military offensive against Israel. While the possibility of a limited war is possible, it is improbable given the enormous disparity in the cost-to-benefits ratio. If Syria achieved strategic surprise, it could possibly make limited territorial gains in the Golan Heights and try to obtain a cease-fire before an Israeli counter-offensive. Measured against these potential gains is the probability that Syria would receive limited support from its neighbors and would have to face the full brunt of Israel's military virtually alone. In the event of such a war, Syria would be isolated and without the material or political support of a major power.³² Without such support Syria would be militarily devastated by an Israeli military unencumbered by superpower geo-political constraints. Such a loss would destroy Syria's military, end Syria's ability to achieve its primary strategic objectives, and would probably result in the overthrow of the present regime. It is unlikely that Syria would risk losing its control over Lebanon and weaken its future ability to exercise hegemonic control in the region in such a risky military venture. The subservience of regaining the Golan, as compared to its interests in Lebanon and Iraq, was underscored by a senior Jordanian official who stated that "Lebanon is ten times more important to Syria than the Golan, and Iraq is ten times more important than Lebanon. Syria can live without the Golan forever, but it cannot afford a situation in which Iraq falls under the influence of the US or its regional allies."³³

Consequently, it is far more likely that Assad will emulate the pre-1973 Soviet strategic objective of leaving the region in a state of "no war and no peace", rather than follow Sadat's strategic decision to initiate a limited war. Such a strategy would best serve Syria's strategic interests in the region. By maintaining the region in an atmosphere of "controlled tension", Assad is able to exploit and manipulate Western fears of a regional war to exert international pressure on Israel and force it to be more forthcoming to Syrian demands. Such a strategy will allow Assad to maintain Syria as the standard bearer in the pan-Arab struggle against Israel while leaving him the flexibility of building bridges to the West. More important, a state of no war and no peace will enable Assad to circumvent the detrimental effects that peace in the region would have for the Syrian regime, such as marginalizing Syria as a regional actor, strengthening Jordan at the expense of Syria, freeing the Palestinians of Syrian influence, and allowing Israel to gain regional acceptance and become a regional rival to Syria.³⁴

Syria will rely on its deterrent capabilities, afforded by its ballistic and nonconventional weapons, and fortify its defenses to deter a potential Israeli attack. Syria will continue its participation in the peace process, albeit on its own terms, while simultaneously continuing its quest to achieve a viable military option, should the peace process fail to return the Golan Heights to Syrian sovereignty. To make Israel more amicable to Syrian

demands, Assad will use terrorist surrogates in Lebanon to pressure Israel into making concessions or to force Israel's unilateral withdrawal from southern Lebanon. Despite its participation in the peace process, Syria will not sacrifice any of its core values to secure the return of the Golan Heights. It is important to remember that the Syrian regime rejects fundamental principles of normalization with Israel and views manifestations of peace, such as political democratization and economic interdependence, as threatening to regime longevity and stability. Consequently, under the present Syrian regime, the duration and success of any Syrian-Israeli agreement will be predicated upon Israel's ability to maintain the perception of tactical and strategic military superiority, rather than on fundamental changes of Syrian attitudes and perceptions toward Israel.

Whither the Peace Process?

The peace process has only marginally improved Israel's acceptance in the region. In addition to historical, cultural, and religious animosities, the majority of Arab states still view Israel as a hegemonic economic and military threat to inter-Arab competition for regional supremacy. The major states in the region have vested economic and political interests in not allowing Israel to become a fully integrated regional actor. Israeli withdrawal from the territories will not diminish Arab perceptions of Israel as an alien and unwelcome regional interloper and will not resolve any of the fundamental core problems of the conflict. Israeli withdrawal from the territories will not significantly decrease the prospect of a future Arab-Israeli war. It is the general consensus of most regional scholars and experts that deterrence of a future Arab-Israeli war is a function of Arab perceptions that the balance of forces greatly favors Israel. Should this perception change, then the prospect of a future Arab-Israeli war will be high regardless of continued Israeli presence in territories captured in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.

Ironically, Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights may accelerate a future Arab-Israeli war. The presence of Israeli forces on the Golan Heights, and in close proximity to Damascus, is a powerful deterrent to potential Syrian aggression. The removal of these forces would decrease Israel's strategic advantage and lower the threshold in which Syria, in a coalition with other forces, might perceive it has gained military parity with Israel. In the final analysis, the probability of a future war will be greatly determined by the success or failure of Islamic extremism to proliferate throughout the region, rather than substantial progress on resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

A strong argument put forth for signing a peace agreement with Assad is the perception that he honors his agreements. However, the premise that Assad adheres to agreements is somewhat spurious. In the past, Assad has broken agreements deemed not in Syria's best interest on numerous occasions. These include:

1. The "Red Line" understandings reached with Israel in April 1, 1976. Under these agreements Israel acquiesced to Syrian forces entering Lebanon and Assad agreed not to deploy aircraft, surface-to-air missiles, or more than one brigade of soldiers in Lebanon. Assad violated all three agreements when he ferried troops by helicopter and deployed surface-to-air missiles in the Zahle area in 1981.³⁵
2. Three commitments to withdraw Syrian forces from Lebanon: the Riyadh-Cairo Accords of October 1978, the Fez Declaration of 1982, and Syria's 1989 commitment to the Lebanese to begin negotiations on the redeployment of troops from Beirut and the Bekaa valley.³⁶
3. At least 16 agreements with Turkey concerning Syrian aid to Kurdish rebels fighting Turkey.³⁷

Consequently, given this track record, it is highly unlikely that any Syrian-Israeli agreement would stand the test of time. This is especially true pertaining to any demilitarization or force reduction agreements on the Golan Heights. Assad will view these types of agreements as an infringement upon Syrian sovereignty and may feel compelled to violate them due to shifting strategic interests. Probable factors that could cause the Syrian regime to abrogate any future peace treaty or agreement with Israel include:

1. Failure of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to reach a final settlement on such outstanding issues as the status of Jerusalem, water rights, or the Palestinian right of return.
2. Assad's perception of losing the pan-Arab nationalist banner to another rival state such as Iran or Iraq. It is unlikely that Iran and Iraq will cease their support of Islamic extremist organizations in Lebanon. Should Syria perceive that its control in Lebanon is threatened and is forced to choose between abrogating its treaty with Israel or losing Lebanon, it will choose the former.
3. Failure to obtain expected Western economic assistance.
4. Change in the Syrian regime — a new regime will be greatly tempted to abrogate the treaty in order to demonstrate its adherence to pan-Arab principles.

Conclusions

The “land for peace” formula, which forms the basis for the current peace process, has been complicated by both its ambiguity and inherent asymmetry in negotiating empirically measured territories in return for an ideal that is empirically and conceptually difficult to define and open to differing interpretations. Political decisions, such as territorial compromise, are never made solely for security reasons. Domestic, regional, and international pressures frequently lead political leaders to make decisions exclusive of security concerns. The expectation of immediate social, economic, or political benefits often motivates leaders to take potential security risks. However, leaders that take such risks by depreciating, or ignoring, legitimate security concerns, or by accepting data that supports preconceived notions of preferred political decisions, are abrogating their responsibility as leaders.

While the “land for peace” formula may be the best, if not the only, formula for ultimate resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the present time is not propitious. The hopes of former Prime Minister Shimon Peres of creating a Middle East “much like Scandinavia” is still a distant vision. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the end of superpower rivalries, regional alliances have become more problematic. In this respect, the post-Cold War Middle East more closely resembles 18th century Europe in which hegemonic ambitions, balance of power rivalries, and the security dilemma prevailed, rather than reflecting part of a “new world order”. Under these conditions, and until Israel's neighbors prove capable of resolving their core social and economic problems that have provided the momentum for Islamic extremism, Israel has no choice other than to give precedence to its security concerns■

Endnotes

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- ¹ Maoz, in a September 9, 1993, editorial in the **Jerusalem Post**, predicted that in return for a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, Syria would agree to full diplomatic relations, a phased withdrawal over seven years or more, and demilitarization of the Golan.
 - ² For example, in October 1996, Brigadier General Amos Gilad told the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that “the Syrians are talking about a military option, are preparing for it, and it will be implemented in accordance with developments.” October 15, 1996, Israel Channel 2. Additionally, Professor Ze'ev Maoz, head of the Tel Aviv University Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, warned that the policies of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu had created a greater prospect that Syria would initiate a war. August 18, 1996, Israeli daily newspaper **Ha'aretz** (Hebrew).
 - ³ Proponents of the “strategic” decision concept assert that Assad's decision to participate in the peace process represents a fundamental change in Syria's attitude toward Israel and its willingness to recognize the right of Israel to exist in the region under certain conditions. Skeptics reject the notion that Assad has undergone a metamorphosis. They hold a more traditional meaning of the concept and see Assad's willingness to participate in the peace process as a maneuver to facilitate his short-term objective of regaining the Golan Heights.

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4. For example, Yitzhak Rabin declared, "Whoever considers withdrawal from the Golan Heights forfeits Israel's security." **Jerusalem Post**, October 26, 1992. Rabin's remarks were echoed nearly two years later by former Defense Minister Ehud Barak, **Jerusalem Post**, August 18, 1994.
 5. Retired US Col. Irving Kett. **Jerusalem Post**, March 3, 1993.
 6. Michael Eisenstadt, **Arming for Peace? Syria's Elusive Quest for Strategic Parity**, (Washington: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 1993), p. 2.
 7. For example, the government-controlled newspaper *al-Ba'ath* reiterated that the "future of the region will be nothing but an Arab future". **Jerusalem Post**, June 26, 1996.
 8. M. Zuhair Diab, "Have Syria and Israel Opted For Peace?", **Middle East Policy**, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 78. Washington 1994.
 9. Moshe Maoz, "Syrian-Israeli Relations and the Middle East Peace Process", **Orbis**, Vol. 31, No. 2, Summer 1987, p. 13.
 10. In addition to Moshe Maoz, the belief that Assad was ready to make peace with Israel was initially expressed by former IDF Intelligence Chief Uri Saguy. Shavitt believed that Assad's decision to negotiate with Israel was a tactical, rather than strategic, decision. Shavitt made his remarks during a June 7, 1996, interview on Israeli radio.
 11. These goals were articulated during interviews with Amos Gilboa.
 12. Syria's desire to weaken US support for Israel was articulated by Israeli Brigadier General Amidror, **Jerusalem Post**, June 12, 1996.
 13. Eisenstadt, p. 10.
 14. Walid Phares, "The Syria-Iran Axis", **Global Affairs**, Vol. VII, No. 3, Summer 1992, p. 83.
 15. Phares, p. 83.
 16. The strategic importance of the Syrian-Iranian alliance was underscored by the Syrian Ambassador to Teheran, Ahmad al-Hassan, when he stated that Syria's participation in the peace process would not come at the expense of its relationship with Iran. **Tehran Times**, January 1, 1996.
 17. **Jerusalem Post**, April 12, 1996.
 18. Phares, pp. 85-86.
 19. **Jerusalem Post**, April 12, 1996.
 20. Moshe Maoz, **From War to Peacemaking**, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 189.
 21. Eisenstadt, p. 40.
 22. International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) 1993-94, London, UK.
 23. Anthony Cordesman, as quoted in the **Jerusalem Post**, November 1, 1996.
 24. 1995 report of the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.
 25. **Jerusalem Post**, August 7, 1994.
 26. Former Israeli Chief of Staff Ehud Barak, quoted in the **Jerusalem Post**, December 8, 1991.
 27. Center for Defense and International Strategic Studies, 1996 country report on Syria.
 28. The 1995-96 Military Balance.
 29. Center for Defense and International Strategic Studies, August 19, 1996.
 30. Reported by Israeli Channel 2 news on August 19, 1996.
 31. **Jerusalem Post**, September 19, 1996.
 32. Soviet Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov announced that Russia would not support Syrian military action against Israel. Reported by the Israeli Broadcast Authority, November 1, 1996.
 33. **FBIS NES-96-88**, May 6, 1996, p. 16.
 34. Barry Rubin, **Modern Dictators**, (New York: New American Library, 1987), pp. 226-7.
 35. These observations were made by Daniel Pipes in an editorial in the **Jerusalem Post** on August 19, 1994.
 36. *Ibid.*
 37. **Jerusalem Post**, November 9, 1994, and January 15, 1996.