



ACPR POLICY PAPER NO. 101
THE EU AND THE SYRIAN TRACK: ISRAEL ENSNARED

*Christopher Barder**

Contrary to the international media portrayal, a treaty with Syria involves many dangers and no real advantages for Israel.¹ Yet invariably it is represented as intrinsically worthwhile, likely to further genuine peace. This deception seems part of the world's angry reaction to the survival of Israel in 1967 and 1973.² Arab propaganda about "recovering Arab land" has become representative of truth.³ UNSCR 242 has not been accepted internationally to mean security for Israel and *some* land for peace (and as thus fulfilled). There is therefore a history into which the current determination to cut Israel down in size and defensibility fits. Hence "The vast majority of the world press likes Israeli leaders who make concessions."⁴ This means the world's leaders have an agenda of assertive opposition towards those whose interpretation of Israel's interests differs from theirs.

The importation into Israeli politics of such avowed enemies' views has naturally served to blunt national perceptions in a way so alarming as to justify an outsider issuing the most

* **Christopher Barder** read history at Cambridge where he won a Foundation Scholarship. After research and postgraduate work, he became head of history and politics at a tutorial college in Oxford and went on to specialize in the Arab-Israel conflict and Middle East security issues. He has been interviewed on a number of radio shows, by an Italian news agency and appeared on TV. He has also tutored part time for Bath University and has written a number of articles, published in the UK, the US and Israel. **Mr. Barder** is a frequent contributor to *Nativ*.

CB is author of a number of ACPR publications including Policy Paper No. 101, "The EU and the Syrian Track: Israel Ensnared" (2000), a chapter in *Israel and a Palestinian State: Zero Sum Game?* (Zmora-Bitan Publishers and ACPR Publishers, 2001), of which he was Assistant Editor and also the books *Oslo's Gift of "Peace": The Destruction of Israel's Security* (ACPR Publishers, 2001) and *"Enough of Blood and Tears" Yitzhak Rabin A Statistically Based Survey of the Oslo Process, Its Agreements and Results* (ACPR Publishers, 2002).

¹ The limitations of past "peace" endeavors have been well explored by Professor Eliyahu Kanovsky in **Arab-Israel Peace Agreements Since Camp David: A Look Backward and a Look Ahead**, Ariel Center for Policy Research, Policy Paper Number 16, 1997.

² "Suddenly Israel and the Jews had Become Fair Game for Attack and Criticism". John Laffin, **Israel – Always in the Wrong?**, Anglo-Israel Association, March, 1988, p.2.

³ The dangers of this were already apparent before 1974. See for example Terence Prittie, **The Fourth Arab-Israeli War: The Propaganda Battle**, Anglo-Israel Association, March, 1974, passim.

⁴ David Bar-Illan, "Total Mobilization", **Jerusalem Post**, December 24, 1999.

solemn of warnings through a brief survey. “It lasted six days and has never stopped.”⁵ And the Golan Heights, the world is told,⁶ are “now a major stumbling block in the Middle East peace process” and should never have been seized. Such appears to have been the inference drawn by Shimon Peres who offered to recognize Syrian rule over the Golan as early as 1992.⁷

Furthermore it is put about that President Asad of Syria is a person who keeps his word so that this means a deal cut with him will supposedly last. This article seeks to stress the importance of this point in order, partially at least, to highlight the deception inherent in US and European pressure on Israel to surrender the Golan “for peace”. It has been well put that: “Continued overlooking of Assad’s violation of commitments would add to a false sense of short-term security. It may facilitate quick conclusion of an agreement with Syria. But it would jeopardize the long-term survival of Israel and the pursuit of a durable peace.”⁸ This untruth, that Asad can be trusted, repeated as a propagandistic “great lie”, further distorts and manipulates popular appraisal of the advantages or not of caving in to Damascus’s demands for the Golan.⁹ It stands to lure Israel into territorial surrender, with all that involves for the bonds of society and political cohesiveness, (“We have ignored the destructive influence that a national trauma would have on the *soul* of the Jewish people, even though this issue is the most decisive of all...there is no response and no antidote to the danger of *spiritual* annihilation threatening the *People* of Israel if the blow is delivered in the *Land* of Israel itself by none other than the *Government* of Israel.”)¹⁰ And to lure Israel into military and strategic catastrophe.

There is a “cultural and territorial significance, and this has to be subsidized because it cannot be measured in western market prices”, if a nation is concerned about its existence.¹¹ To withdraw from the Golan would therefore involve a gambling flight into irrationality based on a foreign re-mapping of the region heedless of Israel’s most basic security, water and historico-religious requirements. The country would thereby be exposed to further incalculable Iranian, Arab (and therefore Syrian), European and United States political pressures against whose negative effects it could not adequately equip itself. This leap into the unknown amounts to a governmental abuse of its citizens even beyond their sufferings as “victims of peace” so far. The international driving force of Islamic anti-Semitism, which has

⁵ Judy Dempsey, “No Place Like Home”, **Financial Times**, Weekend, May 24/25, 1997, p. I.

⁶ Serge Schmemam, “Firestorm over the Golan / An Israeli Myth Punctured? General Dayan Speaks from the Grave”, **International Herald Tribune**, May 12, 1997, p.2.

⁷ Eldad Beck, “Book: Peres Offered to Recognise Syrian Rule over Golan in 92”, **Jerusalem Post**, December 8, 1996.

⁸ Yoram Ettinger’s conclusion from his list of Asad’s numerous betrayals. Yoram Ettinger, “But Assad is an Honorable Man”, **Jerusalem Post**, December, 28, 1999. Further lists of examples appear in works cited in the footnotes herein.

⁹ A sad and impressive list of examples has been gathered together by Daniel Pipes in “The Word of Hafez al-Assad”, **Commentary**, October, 1999. They range across Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, Ehud Barak, Uri Saguy, Yoel Marcus, the Editor of the New York Times, and Assad himself. To these may be added others also, not included in Pipes’s list,

¹⁰ Cf. Elyakim Ha’etzni, **The Shock of Withdrawal**, English Edition, Dawn Publications, Quebec, Canada, 1987. These quotations are from pp. 9 and 10 respectively. The italics are in the original.

¹¹ Arnon Soffer, “‘One Dunam and Then One More’ to ‘Territory for Peace’”, Ariel Center for Policy Research, Policy Paper Number 4, 1997, p.10.

seemingly, free rein in international fora, is very powerful on a governmental and media level.¹²

The background of international pressure to surrender the Golan and of international opprobrium is important because it reveals the degree to which Israel may suffer from a distortion of its true interests and a kind of “paradigm shift” from strategic reality, as the context of international manipulation is, superficially at least, apparently unrecognized for what it is. The focus on the European Union herein in no sense should obscure the United States’ equal culpability in this regard,¹³ although there are elements in Congress who substantially differ in their understanding both from the President and from the State Department; equivalent serious dissenting voices in the EU are mute. The EU even more than America is overtly hostile in the United Nations.¹⁴

It is also the case that, at least in American perceptions, the EU may be “softer on terrorism”, an interpretation emphasizing direct US military confrontations with terror while European policy suggests a penchant for wooing and cozying up to terror-supporting states in preference. This rationalization of self-interest is important for explaining the EU’s overt willingness to overlook Damascus’s record on drugs, money forging and laundering, harboring of terror groups, use of chemical weapons on its own citizens, and weapons build-up. Again, there is no equivalent of a Congressional opposition to such deliberate courting and overlooking of evil.¹⁵

There is a necessity, agreed among experts, to put determined economic and diplomatic pressure on those states sponsoring and harboring terror.¹⁶ This pressure is what Europe fails to exert. Bizarrely and sinisterly, Syria is never cited for punitive action,¹⁷ despite its overt terror policies, perhaps because in the 1990s it has chiefly targeted Israel and used proxy forces; the choice of target “allows” its activities to continue without overt international

¹² On this, see Yossef Bodansky, **Islamic Anti-Semitism as a Political Instrument**, Ariel Center for Policy Research in Association with the Freeman Center for Strategic Studies, ACPR Publishers, 1999, for example pp. 168-169.

¹³ An interesting account of American-Israeli relations is Ezra Sohar, **A Concubine in the Middle East**, Gefen, 1999. The late General Meir Zorea referred to its account of the “blatantly deceitful attitude” of the US towards Israel (back cover review).

¹⁴ Evelyn Leopold, “EU Said to Balk at Ending Israel’s Isolation at UN”, **Reuters**, December 3 and , one example sufficing for many, revealing the constant support in the General Assembly, in part due to international Moslem solidarity, for the Syrian diplomatic offensive, “Syria Welcomes UN Resolution on Golan”, **UPI**, December 3, 1999.

¹⁵ On this, see Bruce Hoffman, “Is Europe Soft on Terrorism?”, **Foreign Policy**, Number 115, Summer, 1999, pp. 62-76, and the bibliography there cited.

¹⁶ Boaz Ganor, **Countering State-Sponsored Terrorism**, The International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, The Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya, ICT Paper 1, March, 1997. Thus Benjamin Netanyahu: “...An active policy that would include diplomatic, economic and even military sanctions against these states.”, in his **Fighting Terrorism**, London, 1996, p.67.

¹⁷ For example in the **Statement of EU/US Shared Objectives and Close Cooperation on Counter-Terrorism**, EU-US Summit, London, May 18, 1998; **EU Statement**, Palermo, March 10, 1996; **Testimony** for Under Secretary of State Stuart E. Eizenstat, **House International Relations Committee**, June 3, 1998. Mentions of Libya and Iran do not include their ally Syria. Cf. Ganor, op. cit., pp. 18-19.

recrimination.¹⁸ France and Germany opposed targeting “entire populations” (Paris G7 summit, 1996) on false moral grounds and have suggested their “critical dialogue” approach might help Israel’s MIA problem; Europeans lied (according to Banisader) when they said they could not compel Iran to respect human rights, and adopt disingenuous attitudes to terror-sponsoring states (according to Margaret Thatcher).¹⁹

Of all the EU countries, Greece, with its links to Russian armaments supply, the PKK and Iran, has evinced the most obvious intentions not to become involved in confrontation with terror-sponsoring states. In the 1980s Israel openly accused Greece of tolerating terrorism. Greece was trying to co-operate for intelligence gathering purposes with Syria, Iraq, Libya and the PLO. It has continued to want Arab support for its Middle East investments and for its policy on Cyprus. Thus it belongs in the opposite camp to Israel, Turkey and probably Jordan in Daniel Pipes’s suggested strategic groupings in the region.²⁰

Europe has failed to use its own experience constructively by insisting that economic benefits be withheld unless Syria (and since 1997 Egypt) participate fully in measures which show serious good intentions -- contrastingly, Israel, unilaterally, has tried to demonstrate that Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBMs) should be undertaken.²¹ These could in turn assist the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) multilateral working group (which agreed to create a regional crisis management system -- but Syria refused to join in the discussions). Rather than use its diplomatic, historic and economic weight to demand internal reforms²² and limiting its arms sales to aggressive dictatorships, Europe has done the opposite.²³

The Golan issue has in all seriousness been interpreted as “the dominant theme in regional affairs”, a perception which is a hideous distortion of reality deeply prejudicial to Israel’s interests.²⁴ The acceptance of the Arab arguments by scholars and diplomats is bound to produce a deleterious effect on Israel. In no sense, however, need it involve an Israeli capitulation to such a view. But this is what has tended to occur whenever negotiations have become policy objectives: both “the Palestinian issue” and “the Syrian track” each implicitly adorns the negotiating partner with the dignity of being just that, instead of allowing Israel an alternative strategy and position.

¹⁸ On Syrian terrorism see for example, Reuven Ehrlich (Avi-Ran), **Terrorism as a Preferred Instrument of Syrian Policy**, The International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, The Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya, Israel, website November 12, 1999.

¹⁹ A few examples must suffice to reveal the extent of the problem. Those cited above come from Ganor, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-19, *passim*.

²⁰ On Greece see Spiros Ch. Kaminaris, “Greece and Middle East Terrorism”, **Middle East Review of International Affairs** (MERIA), Volume 3, Number 2, June, 1999. For Daniel Pipes’ article see Daniel Pipes, “The Real “New Middle East”, **Commentary**, November, 1998.

²¹ See Gerald Steinberg, “Israel Moves to Reduce Tension with Syria”, **Jerusalem Post**, July 2, 1997.

²² Without democratization true peace may be unobtainable. See Martin Sherman, and Gideon Doron, “War and Peace as Rational Choice in the Middle East”, **Journal of Strategic Studies**, Volume 20, Number 1, March, 1997.

²³ For an argument stressing the constructive role Europe could play in the region (but showing it has not), see Gerald Steinberg, “European Security and the Middle East Peace Process: Lessons from the OSCE”, **Mediterranean Quarterly**, Volume 7, Number 1, Winter, 1996, pp. 65-80

²⁴ And doubly so when Israel’s retention of the Golan “ensures continued Syrian control over Lebanon.” [!] George Joffé, “Relations between the Middle East and the West”, in **The Middle East and Europe: The Power Deficit**, edited by B.A. Roberson, Routledge, 1998, p.49.

Indeed, by contrast in terms of its rationality, Professor Adi Semach's analysis asserts: "...there is no moral reason to consider giving the Golan to Syria, but only a business-like one. A question of profitability."²⁵ A business exchange is profitable when what is given is not so valuable to the giver but very valuable to the receiver. This is plainly not the case with the Golan, on which Israel places a far higher value than does Syria. Arab honor code cannot rank, must not rank, as an element of value, or Israel would actually *have* to cease to exist altogether. Dore Gold has even suggested that the Golan ranks as merely third among Asad's priorities behind Lebanon and improving ties with the West.²⁶ Dr. Semach exhorts: "Do not pay for what you can have for free" since Syria's economic problems will, in time, impose restrictions on her military capability. Plainly, Syria's economy is very close to collapse²⁷, perhaps, paradoxically, encouraging EU and US advances towards the Asad regime.²⁸ In fact it has been well observed that making inherently aggressive regimes in the region more prosperous (contrary to Shimon Peres's dream of a "New Middle East") actually makes them more powerful.²⁹ This, along with seeing the folly of their determination to weaken Israel through demands for territorial concessions – which also increases the probability of war -- is a lesson the US and EU need badly to learn. Such financial assistance may also bolster such regimes against making the liberal democratic reforms which may themselves assist the possibility of limiting war.

Professor Semach also stresses the need to know when to sell. After Asad has gone, it is likely that the dispute with Israel will become of importance secondary to the civil war and/or internal strains which will probably follow. Finally, do not sell under threat. Since there will always be missiles in the Middle East, "If the fear of missiles will force Israel to give up territory – Israel will remain without territory and with missiles..." This latter principle holds true in the case of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons as well. The Gulf War Scud attacks showed strategic depth, and wide population spread, to be crucial, and all the more so if those in the metropolitan Dan region are to escape from a chemical/biological attack by moving to the Golan and Yesha.

The point here is both simple and profound. Various underlying attitudes and motivational well-springs color the reasoning of the negotiators. The reportage then makes these public and, varyingly, respectable or not. But where the press is overwhelmingly of one hue, as in

²⁵ "The Golan Heights: This is No Legend", **Yediot Acharonot**, May 2, 1994.

²⁶ See Dore Gold, "Will the US and Israel Sacrifice Lebanon for an Israeli-Syrian Peace?", in the **Jewish Political Chronicle**, Volume 1, Number 7, October 1996, p.9. (Reprinted from **Moment**, April 1996). Syria's area is nine times bigger than Israel's but its population only one and a half times.

²⁷ On the collapse of the Syrian economy see Steven Plaut, "The Collapse of the Syrian Economy", **Middle East Quarterly**, Volume 6, Number 3, September, 1999, pp. 1-14.

²⁸ Cf. Professor Eliyahu Kanovsky, **A Look at the Political Economy of Syria: Its Impact on Israel-Syria Peace Prospects**, The Center for Defense and Peace Economics, Department of Economics, Bar-Ilan University, Israel, who thinks, for a number of very valid reasons, that Israel should withdraw from talks with Syria forthwith and observe events carefully for a reasonable period of time (unspecified). A shorter version was published by Aaron Lerner (IMRA), December 25, 1999, under the title "Prof. Kanovsky: A Peace Agreement with Syria Means Strengthening Syria's Armed Forces".

²⁹ By Martin Sherman, **Paradigms of Peace for the Middle East**, Ariel Center for Policy research, Policy Paper Number 19, 1998.

Israel,³⁰ and generally reflects somewhat fixed and limited interpretations throughout the western world, the capacity of citizens to read a range of opinions and assessments is limited, perforce. Thus does the stance of negotiators stand to “educate” the public on what is feasible, the art of the possible, which in fact is supposed to be the result of wide-ranging scholarship, research and varied insight. In Israel the media do certainly appear to slant and in respect of the need for even-handed encouragement of debate (mis)lead.³¹

Yohanan Ramati has also assessed the basis for successful negotiations: enhancing the chances for survival is the bottom line. He stresses “A country's value to the world powers is determined by its geopolitical and economic strategic assets, and not by the concessions it makes to its enemies”. He also provides principles for negotiations which expose the folly of surrendering the Golan Heights³².

Do not accept temporary expedients like “gradual withdrawal”, “leases”, or “demilitarization”, with or without foreign guarantees. Sovereign states have the right to abrogate such measures, and the world will support them. Foreign powers' interests are subject to change. They can no more be relied upon to meet long-term obligations of this nature than can the Arabs.

History has proved this also. Do not be concerned about press or media reactions anywhere. In months, weeks, or days they will be forgotten. The strategic situation will remain.

Do not make concessions because you fear war. War is most likely when a state has shown weakness by making concessions. So questions like: “Do you want the Golan, or peace with Syria?” and statements like “We can make peace because we are strong,” are balderdash. War is far more likely if we cede the Golan to Syria than if we don't. And if we sign the “peace treaties” the Arabs want, we will then indeed be weak.

President Asad unstintingly demands however that talks resume where the unwritten promises of Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres left off (and therefore Ehud Barak is involved in an enterprise which is a continuation of the previous stances which were also a prelude to capitulation). Thus is Israel being rendered useless to the west by European and American demands for its own weakening; and thereby they are losing what has been characterized as an alternative strategic balance of forces which would be greatly to their advantage.³³ Whether this is through ignorance and myopia or wilful and culpable malevolence is hard to say, but it is damaging to European and American interests as well as to those of Turkey and Israel.

On the one hand stands a core alignment of Turkey and Israel (possibly including Jordan) and on the other Syria and Iran. Each has wider relations (such as those between Israel and India). However, very significantly, with rather staggering short-sightedness, Europe and America, says Daniel Pipes, demur: “Washington officially supports and encourages the Turkish-Israeli bond, but there is no blinking the fact that in some quarters it causes discomfort, if not downright disapproval. When pro-Western states like Turkey, Israel, and Jordan begin to work together, Western analysts inevitably begin tsk-tsking. Thus, according to a *Washington*

³⁰ For example, it has been observed that the winter 1999-2000 campaign of Ehud Barak to “sell” the surrender of the Golan to the Israeli public has resulted in the media in the use of the term “settler” for the Golan residents – something of a pejorative connotation which implies their temporary status and an appellation never before used of them.

³¹ See the thorough analysis of Yisrael Medad and Eli Pollak, Israel's Media Watch, **Israel's Electronic Broadcasting: Reporting or Managing the News?**, Ariel Center for Policy Research, Policy Paper Number 50, ACPR Publishers, 1998.

³² See Yohanan Ramati, “Weakness Will Bring War”, **Jerusalem Post**, July 11, 1995, p.6.

³³ On this, see Daniel Pipes, “The Real “New Middle East”, **Commentary**, November, 1998.

Post editorial that almost sounds as if it could have been written in Damascus, the trouble with Turkish-Israeli ties is that they may “reduce Israelis’ perceived need to negotiate settlements inside that perimeter with the Palestinians and Syria.” The London *Economist* goes further, snidely dubbing the Turkish-Israeli “affair” an “inappropriate relationship” and chastising Prime Minister Yilmaz for visiting Israel, “the Jewish occupant of Islam’s third holiest city.” Pipes concludes: “The question still waiting to be answered is whether we have the wit, the far-sightedness, and the courage to seize the opportunity before us and, instead of hindering or standing aside, help these partners withstand their enemies and fashion a future they and we can live in.” What is particularly significant in the present context, is the absurdity of US and EU support for Syria rather than the other grouping.

In the earlier phase of the Golan debate, the *Jerusalem Report* slanted its coverage to make it seem like the Golan residents were opposed to withdrawal, but would eventually have to come to accept the reality, stuck as they were on the fringe of political thinking; whereas the military strategists were healthily divided about the extent of withdrawal and type of peace to be reciprocated by Syria, as well as about the overall desirability of the whole scheme; whilst the Americans and Premier Rabin could see a bright and peaceful future.³⁴ In another issue, that magazine explored the possibility of (then) Premier Peres cashing in on the assassination of his predecessor, in order to speed up the outcome.³⁵ There was no clarification of the *level* of the Israeli public’s desire for a cession of the Golan (which would involve sophisticated analysis of the opinion poll questions and sampling), or of the *level* of *certainty* of peace and safety after the deal, only it appears a risky gamble to pursue a treaty with President Asad. Why if it was so controversial and needed rushing through in the wake of left-wing sympathy after the Rabin assassination, was a peace treaty with Asad so determinedly sought by the Europeans Americans and Israeli political left, without a national consensus in Israel, or strategists’ approval? Why is Ehud Barak in such a hurry? (And if it has anything to do with the schedules for elections in the US – that is a deplorable reason for drastic diplomacy and negotiations concerning Israel’s future).

The *Report* has seemingly not chosen to signal a shift in its position under Ehud Barak, as shown, for example, starkly, in the headline “The Golan or Peace?” which is utterly misleading as far as the options go and have gone since 1973, and which is overtly biased towards one side of the current debate.³⁶ It can also be rather mocking.³⁷ It can, in a sweetly reasonable way, suggest “the prospect of normalcy”.³⁸ And it goes so far as to assert “The calls for a special majority on the Golan deal are racist”.³⁹ It is easy enough for both sides to

³⁴ **Jerusalem Report**, February 10, 1994, “The Next Handshake?”, with articles entitled “Putting an End to the Arab-Israeli Conflict” (Ehud Yaari); [N.B. The lack of question mark]. “A Huge Price to Pay for Peace”, “A Ridge Too Far?”, “Rabin’s Preemptive Strike” [on the referendum *after* a deal has been struck]. An interesting debate occurred between the then Editor-in-Chief, Hirsh Goodman, “The Golan Heights Security Myth”, **The Jerusalem Report**, October 20, 1994, p.56 and Col. Yoash Tsiddon-Chatto, “The Golan Security Reality”, **The Jerusalem Report**, December 1, 1994, p.54. The contrast is illuminating.

³⁵ “The Great Golan Gamble”, **The Jerusalem Report**, December 28, 1995; article p.18.

³⁶ Leslie Susser, “The Golan or Peace?”, **The Jerusalem Report**, January 3, 2000, pp. 8-11.

³⁷ As in the review of Hallie Lerman, **Crying for Imma: Battling for the Soul on the Golan Heights**, Night Vision Press, 1999, by Daniel Orenstein, “When Strength and Faith Sufficed”, **The Jerusalem Report**, August 30, 1999, pp. 16-17

³⁸ David Horovitz, “Israel’s Moment of Truth”, **The Jerusalem Report**, January 3, 2000, p.4.

³⁹ David Horovitz, “Keep It Simple”, **The Jerusalem Report**, January 17, 2000, p. 4.

claim victory (over what many conceive as a national tragedy!) because of the ambiguity of the pre-1967 border!⁴⁰

Thus it is not uninformative to picture the kind of debate which ensued the last time the issue of Golan surrender occurred openly. Whereas past *Jerusalem Report* accounts reveal the controversial nature of this, there was very little *serious* analysis of the strategic and tactical issues. The material seems insufficiently in-depth to inform the public about, for example, the nature of the Syrian governing regime, its (absolute) lack of reliability in keeping agreements, and about Israel's early warning requirements, the dangers of hair-trigger responses and the necessity of ground based systems rather than relying on airborne early warning. Nor was Syria's educational program (an essential preparatory for serious peace) suitably explored and publicized by appropriate experts.

More recently, there have been a number of clear-cut examples which, if widely known, should shed much light on the true nature of Syrian attitudes and none suggest peaceful intentions appropriate for any kind of "normalization" or even "cold peace". For example The Zionist Organization of America urged the Clinton administration to condemn the publication by a Syrian government newspaper of an article calling Jews "evil" and "Shylocks" and claiming that Jews use the blood of Christians and Muslims in their Passover matzohs.⁴¹ The Syrian Defense Minister, Mustapha Tlass's Ph.D thesis "proving" the blood libel of 1840 in Damascus goes unretracted. Syria boasts one slogan ridden radio station, television station and news service. Each is leaden and dull and faithfully reflects the propaganda issued by Damascus.⁴²

Where the issues have been raised this time, there is still a noticeable spin, for instance in the headline "How to Safeguard a Pullout" when the whole point is whether the measures discussed in the ensuing article would be enough to provide just such a safeguard – not therefore a case of "how to" but "whether".⁴³ Even the discussion about Asad's succession seems to try and suggest that the gamble it discusses (an Israeli-Syria deal) will itself help a smooth succession -- whereas it might do the reverse. (Do the people of Syria really want a deal as Professor Maoz suggests according to the article?)⁴⁴

Previously, the electorate seemed to have been somewhat severed from political involvement in an informed level of debate and so the Golan residents were made to appear a fringe, minority interest group. This marginalization technique (Rabin famously said those opposing

⁴⁰ Leslie Susser, "Changing the Golan Map", **The Jerusalem Report**, January 17, 2000, pp. 16-17.

⁴¹ The article, entitled "Shylock of New York and the Industry of Death", was authored by Jbara Al-Barghuthi in the Nov. 27, 1999 issue of **Al-Ussbu' Al-Adabi** [The Literary Magazine], a weekly periodical published by the Syrian government-controlled Arab Writers Association. (Translation courtesy of Middle East Media Review and Analysis).

⁴² According to Steve Rodan, head of MENL, Middle East Newline, publisher of **Eye on Syria: Timely Report on Developments**, from which this comes, Volume 1, Issue 1, December 26, 1999.

⁴³ Peter Hirschberg, "How to Safeguard a Pullout", **The Jerusalem Report**, January 17, 2000, pp. 14-16.

⁴⁴ Isabel Kershner, "The Asad Dynasty", **The Jerusalem Report**, January 17, 2000, pp. 24-30. For clear evidence of the deep, entrenched hostility toward Israel, see Hilal Khashan, "Partner or Pariah? Attitudes Toward Israel in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan", **The Washington Institute Policy Papers**, Number 41, 1996. Also by the same author, "Are the Arabs Ready for Peace with Israel?", **Middle East Quarterly**, Volume 1, Number 1, 1994 and "Polling Arab Views on the Conflict with Israel – The Levant: Yes to Treaties, No to Normalization", **Middle East Quarterly**, Volume 2, Number 2, 1995.

him could spin like propellers) produced an ugly division in Israeli society and government condescension, characterized, for example, by Yossi Beilin whose comments (“Nobody knows what wins or loses elections, especially where painful concessions are involved. Our policy is to make peace. If that wins elections, well and good. If not, we will at least have made peace – and that’s what really matters”)⁴⁵ seemingly suggest that domestic social and political fabric hardly counts in comparison with the drive for policy attainment, heedless of on behalf of whom – or not – the politicians are supposed to be carrying out the policy. The cynicism of democratic electors toward politicians is exacerbated by just such insensitivity, which, given the opinion polls, surrender of the Golan still represents. It would involve further loss of identity, cohesion and direction in the Israeli body politic, another trauma in its political culture and collective experience, and would provide further evidence of the high-handedness of the political echelon. Under Ehud Barak there have been rumours of police and GSS investigations into groups allegedly determined to blow up the river bridges leading to the Golan. These rumors serve to characterize Golan residents as including “lawless extremists”, labeling which helps marginalization and delegitimization once again.

In the event of a referendum, the problem of its phrasing, and of the funding of the public debate, become of paramount importance, as does the status, binding or not on the Knesset, of the referendum. Ideally there should be government disinterest because the notion behind a referendum must be that, in Winston Churchill’s terms, “the people is sovereign”. Arguably, Eretz Israel has a significance in terms of the Biblical basis of Zionism even above so lofty a political theme as this. Therefore, every kind of significance to the Land should be given to it – not simply Rabin’s sense of “tank land” which automatically delegitimizes those who perceive a higher significance: belittling reductionism is divisive and attempts to be exclusive of areas which should legitimately lie within the boundaries of serious debate. For so serious an abrogation of sovereignty, what kinds of majorities and procedures would be acceptable? Yet President Weizmann, who could be in a constitutional position to insist upon careful procedures and opposed to rushed gambling with the nation’s security, water and inheritance, has charged ahead with his own political framework. Instead of pursuit of objectives unrelated to his own political sympathies, President Weizmann appears further to have split the political nation. On December 16, 1999 Likud Knesset members formally urged him to stay out of the arena of debate concerning the Israel-Syria talks. A petition is under way for impeachment proceedings, negotiating positions have been undermined and the very presidency has been imperiled.⁴⁶

Inexpertly second guessing where the nation’s best interests lie is more likely to occur when there is so powerful an element of international demand for a certain policy direction. Indeed, it is part of the object of this paper to suggest the irrational quality of listening to such siren voices. The acceptance of arguments which directly contradict those long recognized as right is unlikely to be a rational phenomenon per se. Such reversals suggest superficiality of treatment of the theme and lack of sincerity of argument. To make matters worse, they also undermine public confidence in what it is being told – or should.⁴⁷ The fact indeed remains:

⁴⁵ Yossi Beilin in the “The Great Golan Gamble”.

⁴⁶ See Evelyn Gordon, “Diving into the Fray”, **Jerusalem Post**, January 4, 2000.

⁴⁷ A classic example is that of Maj.-Gen. (res.) Ori Orr interviewed by Emmanuel Halperin, host of Channel 1’s late-night news. This was commented upon by David Bar-Illan in “Total Mobilization”, **Jerusalem Post**, December 24, 1999. However an even more serious and dramatic reversal concerns that of Prime Minister Barak himself whose previous senior IDF position found him of a quite different persuasion. As Chief of Staff he strongly maintained the absolute necessity for Israel’s strategic survival of retaining the “Golan Heights West of Quneitra” (i.e., everything

“The Israeli government is offering to gamble on the future of the state, in return for no more than a useless piece of paper. Israel is creating a precedent the likes of which should never be allowed in international relations.” And the gains are all to Syria in such a deal.⁴⁸ The actual financial costs are further proof of the flight from reality involved in giving way to Syrian demands with Israel also likely to suffer considerably in this area.⁴⁹

When the Europeans espouse a cause, it is for reasons of their own benefit, as they, however myopically, perceive it at the time. Thus there is very little scruple about easing towards a real departure from the official American position towards Syria. Morality and even perhaps good sense are allowed little sway where economic gain is concerned. “European foreign ministers are considering offering Syria a funding package that could be worth more than Ecu 10 billion (\$12.4bn) in soft loans over the next five years.”⁵⁰ There is apparently (perhaps pan-Arab, Greater Syria) Arab imitative admiration for the EU – a movement which President Assad has put himself at the head of.

Arab parliamentarians...recommended that their governments establish a joint Arab assembly similar to the European Union parliament in Strasbourg....[Nabih] Berri said Syrian President Hafez al-Assad had already donated a plot of land in Damascus to be used as the headquarters of any future parliament. The committee includes representatives from Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the Palestinian territories, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq and Mauritania.⁵¹

The desire to meddle is peddled as furthering “peace”⁵² which it does not necessarily do (“We also discussed at length the EU’s contribution to the talks and how to facilitate the positive outcome of the negotiations...The EU will be always ready to offer its own contribution in several areas to help preserve peace in the region when a deal is reached ” declared EU envoy Miguel Angel Moratinos describing his discussion with Farouk al-Shara’a.) And so the EU ignores absolutely the crimes of the Syrian regime and its instability – even despite the claims of an “ethical foreign policy” as advertised by for example Robin Cook, Tony Blair and (over Kosovo particularly) Bill Clinton. Nor are the EU’s pretensions modest.

The EU has enormous potential to benefit all tracks in the Middle East peace process, through its established political will, economic means, cultural sensitivity, and intellectual creativity in working to foster trust and to create solutions in the region. EU mechanisms such as the “Barcelona process” will continue to allow the global problems of the Middle East to be dealt

Israel presently controls). The same switch was of course true of Yitzhak Rabin who declared publicly at a large election rally just two weeks before the 1992 election: “Whosoever gives up the Golan Heights, abandons the security of the State of Israel.” For these two quotations see Yedidya Atlas, “The Golan Heights and Israel’s Survival”, **Arutz Sheva Israel National Radio**, August 2, 1999 reprinted in **The Maccabean**, August, 1999.

⁴⁸ The quotation and assessment of imbalance of gains are those of Professor Moshe Sharon, in his “Talking ‘Peace’ – Preparing for War”, in Arieh Stav, Ed., **Israel at the Crossroads**, Ariel Center for Policy Research, 1997, p.190.

⁴⁹ See for example the discussion and figures used by Yoash Tsiddon-Chatto in **At What Price the Golan Heights?**, Ariel Center for Policy Research, Policy Paper Number 5, 1997.

⁵⁰ According to a report in **The European**, February 10-16, 1995, “The European Union is working to strengthen economic ties with Syria, a country until recently seen as a pariah state by many nations, as part of its policy to draw the Middle East and North Africa into a closer partnership.”

⁵¹ “Arab MPs call for EU-Style Joint Arab Parliament”, **Reuters**, Beirut, December 14, 1999,

⁵² Issam Hamza, “EU Cautiously Optimistic on Syria-Israel Talks”, **Reuters**, Damascus, December 29, 1999.

with in an interactive way. Furthermore, by developing a “complementary agenda” with the United States, the EU will continue to contribute positively and productively to solving existing and future problems in the Middle East. There will be no division of labor on the separate tracks to peace. Instead, the EU, together with the United States, will work toward solutions on all issues through a variety of political and economic means.⁵³

Fundamentally, Israel’s essential best interests are made of no account when European and American *realpolitik* are involved. *The Times* in the summer of 1998 ran a large headline “Assad Urges EU to Fill Void in Peace Process”.⁵⁴ It reported that President Asad warned on French television that “If we achieve nothing, war will break out and spread to several countries, directly or indirectly”. However true, this appears hardly the outlook of a negotiating partner seeking peaceful relations: it represents blackmail and coercion. It is, sadly, a line that Ehud Barak has accepted and therefore endorsed!⁵⁵ Instead, it, like Syrian Foreign Minister Shara’a’s remarks at the Washington talks (winter 1999), should have given clear warning of the folly of action empowering Damascus by removing the deterrence offered by possession of the Hermon positions and the Golan. As Jeff Jacoby expertly pointed out, Israel stands to gain nothing, Syria everything – this was Shara’a’s underlying message.⁵⁶

In *The Times* article Asad also commented: “France and the European Union have a right and even a duty to play a role. It is in their interest.” The Syrian press was apparently full of praise for President Chirac, and not surprisingly. The previous month Chirac had said that Damascus was “entitled to the return of the Golan Heights.” Quite what qualifies the former colonial power, which had once negotiated with Britain an illegal control over the region, to pronounce and interfere remains a good question. Furthermore, *The Times* reported British ambassador to Syria, Basil Eastwood, as commenting “Our decision to send two of the most modern ships in the Royal Navy to visit Latakia is intended to symbolise our determination to build a relationship of partnership between Syria and the United Kingdom.”⁵⁷ He also made clear that negotiations on Syrian-European partnership agreements opened during the British presidency of the European Union would consolidate a technical framework for the partnership between Syria and the EU.⁵⁸

The failure of France to use this visit by President Asad to any advantage was assessed by Professor Steinberg who stressed Asad’s gains and how he circumvented American demands.⁵⁹

⁵³ Special Policy Forum Report, “The Role of the European Union in the Middle East Peace Process”, PeaceWatch, Number 120, February 12, 1997, rapporteur’s summary, **Washington Institute for Near East Policy**.

⁵⁴ July 16, 1998.

⁵⁵ Danna Harman, “Barak Warns of Scuds if Talks Fail”, **Jerusalem Post**, December 20, 1999. Former Cabinet Secretary Dan Naveh MK (Likud) responded: “Prime Minister Who Tries to Scare His People is One Who Shouldn’t be Conducting Such Fateful Negotiations”, accusing Barak of a “campaign of fear”.

⁵⁶ Jeff Jacoby, “Golan-for-Peace: A Reckless Gamble”, **The Boston Globe**, December 23, 1999.

⁵⁷ The ships, the first since 1950 to visit Syria from Britain, were to host several receptions for Syrian officials and be open to the public. The Syrian naval commander was to present medals to crew members.

⁵⁸ “UK Determined to Build Solid Relations with Syria”, **ArabicNews.com**, July 10, 1998.

⁵⁹ Gerald Steinberg, “Equality! Liberty! Terror!”, Opinion, **The Jerusalem Post International Edition**, Week Ending August 1, 1998, p.13: Arguably, with Ehud Barak Israel’s Prime Minister,

...in Paris, Assad was allowed to hold a press conference exclusively in Arabic and open only to Arab journalists, thereby protecting him from difficult questions. As a result of this visit, Assad comes away with enhanced prestige and acceptance, both in Europe and in the Middle East. At the end of the visit, Syrian Foreign Minister Shara cited “the strategic partnership between Syria and France” that served the interests of both countries. The Syrians gave up nothing, and other than tweaking the US, the French also achieved little that will advance the Middle East peace process and help to prevent attacks against Israel. While the Americans continue to demand that Syria change its behavior before normalizing relations, Paris provides an opening to the West, without the need to change policies.

EU-Syrian mutual gain is exclusive of Israel’s requirements of water, security, land, retention of historic links and investments in enterprise – “painful sacrifices for peace”.⁶⁰ Arguably, with Ehud Barak Israel’s prime minister, President Clinton’s “baby”, even the Americans have lost the will to demand changes from Damascus as a condition for acceptance. The result of US removal of Syria from the list of states supporting terror could be American sales of arms – a further incentive for war with Israel. There would also follow European competition in this profitable field.

The huge Syrian armaments expenditure makes nonsense of the objectives stated in the *Cooperation Agreement between the European Economic Community and the Syrian Arab Republic*.⁶¹

Article 4 1. The purpose of cooperation between the Community and Syria shall be to promote, in particular: Participation by the Community in the efforts made by Syria to develop its production and economic infrastructure in order to diversify its economic structure. Such participation should be connected, in particular, with the industrialization of Syria and the modernization of its agriculture...

The Syrians know the Europeans are determined to assist them even though they are one of the great terrorism sponsoring states with a major involvement in drug trafficking.⁶² Closer political, not just economic, relations are intended by Europe.⁶³

President Clinton’s “baby”, the Americans also have lost any will to demand changes from Damascus as a condition for acceptance.

⁶⁰ The water problems are potentially very acute indeed. They are well discussed in Martin Sherman, **The Politics of Water in the Middle East** An Israeli Perspective on the Hydro-Political Aspects of the Conflict, Macmillan, 1999 and also given publicity by Dr. Arnon Soffer in Zvi Lavi, “Researcher: Return of Golan Puts Sea of Galilee in Grave Danger of Pollution”, **Globes**, December 12, 1999. There have also been reports of Jordanian complaints in Egypt about Syria giving contaminated water to Jordanian – a message which should not be lost on Israel. “**Yediot Ahronot**: Jordan Says Syria Supplying Them Contaminated Water”, February 5, 2000, as reported by Aaron Lerner, **IMRA**, February 6, 2000.

⁶¹ Document 277A0118(05), 1977.

⁶² “The European Business Center (SEBC) has announced the first issue of its press release which introduces its activities and objectives. The SEBC is providing the business sector in Syria with a variety of services. These include the Business Development Units, the European Information Center, and the Administrative Training Program.”, **Syria-On-Line/Arabia-On-Line**, 1999. “Syria’s Trade with Europe: an up-date” declares: “The balance of Syria’s foreign trade with Europe is currently in Syria’s favor. Syria’s imports from the European Union’s countries have increased from 1.0801 Billion Syrian Pounds (SP) in 1990 to 13.747 Billion SP in 1997: an increase of 12.667 Billion SP in seven years. Exports: to those countries for the same period have increased from 19.615 Billion SP to 23.972 Billion SP: an increase of 4.357 Billion SP. Germany is Syria’s largest trading partner, followed by France and Italy, while Luxembourg comes at the bottom of the

In a statement to ArabicNews.com the head of the delegation of European Commission in Damascus, Alan Waddams, said one key element in the association agreements is to have free trade between Syria and the EU, within twelve years after signing the agreement in order to enable Syria to adjust to be able to compete with Europe. He further noted that the objectives of such agreements are to develop and provide an appropriate framework for political dialogue, *allowing the development of closer political and economic relations between the two sides.....*He concluded that since he came to Damascus five years ago, increasingly warm and developing relations are linking Syria with the EU.

Apparently British Airways were keen to hold a conference in Damascus because of: "...the position Syria enjoys among the countries of the region in the *political*, economic and tourism fields as well as for its promising future prospects for a revival of tourism."⁶⁴ Indeed, Britain's man in Damascus has not been backward in proclaiming what is probably the British Foreign Office line on the cession of the Golan (presumably he foresaw how his phrases would be taken). At a press conference in Damascus before Foreign Secretary Robin Cook's visit, he declared that all building on "occupied Arab land" was "illegal and illegitimate" and he declared that all activities of settlement building must be halted.⁶⁵

By 2010 the European and Syrian economies are supposed to be working together; unsurprisingly, the Syrians prefer to work with EU officials than those from the World Bank or IMF. Herein lies one of the reasons for the diplomatic and political closeness to Syria desired by the EU.⁶⁶ The intention is also to arrive as an important international power-broker which is reflected in the Barcelona Mediterranean programme,⁶⁷ providing the only multilateral grouping in which Syria has been willing to participate. The French hope, during their forthcoming presidency,⁶⁸ "to reach agreement on a Charter for Peace and Stability in the Mediterranean Region" as part of the further development of the Common Foreign and Security Policy. Informed by Israeli left-wing intellectuals, Europeans therefore take up stances very favourable to the Arabs; most blatantly on a range of critical issues,⁶⁹ even appearing tolerant of militant Islamic viciousness. They also emerge more willing to sell arms and dual use items to the Arabs than to assist Israel while failing to demand CBMs or ACRS measures where the history, manpower and statistical balance makes the Arabs the major potential aggressors. Preparations for Foreign Ministers' meetings tend to produce opportunities for pressuring Israel while the partiality towards the Arabs tends to raise

list." "Promotion of Syrian European Business Partnership", **Syria-On-Line/Arabia-On-Line**, 1999.

⁶³ "Euro-Mission Chief: Syria has Self-Sustaining Economy, Needs Modernization", **ArabicNews.com.**, June 12, 1998. Italics are the present author's.

⁶⁴ So said British Airways travel agent in Damascus Nashaat Sanadiqi, "British Airways to Convene Conference in Damascus", **ArabicNews.com**, May 28, 1998. Italics are the present author's.

⁶⁵ "British Ambassador in Damascus: Israeli Settlements are Illegal, Illegitimate", **ArabicNews.com**, March 19, 1998.

⁶⁶ "Syria Modernizes its Economy to Comply with European Partnership Agreement", **ArabicNews.com**, July 16, 1998

⁶⁷ November 1995.

⁶⁸ From July 2000 onwards.

⁶⁹ The Europeans supported the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva call for Palestinian self-determination on the basis of the UN partition resolution of 1947 (181) and for the "right of return" for refugees (UNR 194) and made plain the unacceptable nature of the Israeli view of the future of Jerusalem.

expectations which Israel cannot meet so exacerbating the situation.⁷⁰ The nakedness of its ambitions and its failure to modify Arab attitudes towards Israel mean that Europe stands somewhat flagrantly as immoral and callous in its involvement in the “peace process”.⁷¹

The seriousness of the Left’s near obsession with securing a “peace” with Syria was demonstrated by a sophisticated assessment of MK Haggai Merom’s remarks.⁷² Merom had put it about that the intelligence services believed there was a fresh danger of war with Syria. Shimon Peres and then Yossi Beilin said that the government “freeze” in talks would militarily endanger Israel. In fact, all three knew that the Syrian military build-up, and thus its war intentions, preceded the Netanyahu election victory. Jane’s Defence Weekly was cited as giving Syria Scuds in underground bunkers with which to attack Israelis on the Golan, and air capabilities beyond the simply defensive. Jane’s Sentinel was cited as pointing out that Syria had the most advanced chemical weapons programme in the Arab world, the largest stockpile in the third world, and the necessary missile delivery capability. Plainly no such position could have been attained just since the Likud gained power. Politicking with Israel’s sense of security, and negotiating position, testifies to the untrustworthiness of the Left’s analysis of the need to placate by concession. These three politicians, the Jerusalem Post declared, “demonstrated a reprehensible readiness to sacrifice the nation’s interest to narrow partisan concerns”.

It is almost impossible not to regard Ehud Barak’s statements and headlong rush to negotiate with Syria as more than somewhat in the same vein, not least since he is looking at an ailing dictator from a minority religious grouping with extremely uncertain succession, leading a bankrupt country with nothing less than expansionist aims and a long history of terror and violence in the so-called international community. Nothing could be further from the truth than that reported by Patrick Seale as Barak’s assessment of Asad’s legacy: “His legacy is a strong, independent, self-confident Syria — a Syria which, I believe, is very important for the stability of the Middle East.”⁷³ How much of this is deliberate disinformation, how much part of some new “concept”, is difficult to be definite about. What is not is the danger it constitutes for Israel .

If Asad *truly* wanted peace, given Syria’s poor economic position, would he spend the reputed at least \$2 billion from the Gulf war on weapons? If he could see that peace with Israel *and* the Golan were in his grasp, why should he go on spending in this way? As the *Jerusalem Post* pointed out, from the Golan and Mt. Hermon, Israel can target Syrian troop movements, and Damascus itself. So if there are serious war intentions by Syria, the last thing Israel should do is give up the Golan. Making Israel afraid of *not* having a peace treaty appears to be a stratagem shared by Asad and the Israeli Left. But succumbing to terror-as-blackmail is not a good basis for treaties, diplomatic manoeuvrability, or security. Since Asad knows that Israel has politicians who will argue his case, those doing so weaken Israel’s negotiating stance. Furthermore, by Israelis arguing in this way, according to Professor Anthony

⁷⁰ Barcelona in 1995 was followed by Malta in 1997, Palermo in 1998, and Stuttgart in 1999.. The above initials stand for Confidence Building Measures and Arms Control and Regional Security measures.

⁷¹ A good deal, but not all, of the above paragraph owes much to Gerald Steinberg, “The European Union and the Middle East Peace Process”, **Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs**, Jerusalem, Letter Number 418, November 15, 1999.

⁷² By the **Jerusalem Post**: “Dangerous Hysteria”, August 23, 1996, p.4.

⁷³ Cited in Joseph Millis, “Syria’s Assad Praises Ehud Barak”, **Jewish Chronicle**, (London), June 25, 1999.

Cordesman,⁷⁴ Syria can interpret the Israeli fear as likely to prompt a pre-emptive Israeli strike. Although the present author cannot accept that Syria genuinely believes in the likelihood of this, it does furnish excuse for an attack by Syria (pre-emptively!) on Israel, at least in the eyes of an international ‘community’ eager to make Syria appear less unacceptable.⁷⁵ Professor Cordesman points out: that the Syrians cannot seriously contemplate an attack on Israel because it would be suicidal; hence change weakening Israel on the Golan would offer encouragement to a Baathist Pan-Arabist regime to launch an attack, *currently* deterred, by Israel’s position on Mt. Hermon and the Golan.

Although Israel is repeatedly called upon to negotiate with a foreign power actively sponsoring hostile military action against her, harbouring groups sworn to destroy her, and arming hugely, this behaviour is not appropriate for prospective good relations or for advancing policy away from belligerent intentions.⁷⁶ Why *has* Syria gone so far in missile and chemical weapons technology? Could this provide a way to damage Israeli civilian centres, target airfields and army reserves muster points, and inflict chaos and economic damage, whether before or after cession of the Golan, in pursuit of “Greater Syria” ambitions, and hegemony within the Arab world, and act as an inducement to Egypt’s and Arafat’s armies? The then outgoing head of the Mossad postulated that Asad may not even *want* peace.⁷⁷ Shabtai Shavit disagreed with (then) military intelligence chief Uri Saguy that Asad had opted for peace and urged realism, caution and wisdom. This does not suggest, and he did not, that the “process” was really going anywhere except towards bringing Asad favour and money from the West.⁷⁸

Syria has carried out a reorganization of its surface-to-surface missile units since 1982. At the end of 1988 the Syrians had more than 36 launching systems for SS-21 missiles, 24 launchers for FROG 7, 18 launchers for SCUD-B, and launchers for the SS18 and SSC-3 missiles which are designed for coastal defence. The Syrian surface-to-surface missile forces are organised in

⁷⁴ Ibid. referring to **Ha’aretz**, August 22, 1996. Professor Cordesman has a reputation as an expert on military affairs in the region, is a former US Defense Department official, and is currently a senior research fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

⁷⁵ A clear example is the UN General Assembly 87th. Session, December 24, 1999 resolution: 146 votes to three against (the US, Israel and the Marshall Islands), the resolution stresses the principle of not taking lands of others by means of force and the UN Security Council resolutions concerned, especially UN resolution 497 for 1981, which views the Israeli annexation decision of the Golan as null and void. The decision expresses the concern of the international community towards Israel’s exploitation of the natural resources in the Arab territories occupied since 1967, stressing the inalienable rights of the people of the Golan and the Palestinian people to their natural resources including the lands and the waters. It also indicates the realization of the international community to the damaging economic and social consequences of the Israeli settlements on the natural resources in the occupied Arab territories. This can [with acknowledgment to Rachel Gold] be found at: <http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/991224/1999122407.html>. Compare also: “With Majority of 146 Votes, UN General Assembly Stress Syria’s Sovereignty over Golan Resources”, **ArabicNews.com**, December 24, 1999.

⁷⁶ Let alone, as Shimon Peres once averred, for suggesting that Syrian negotiations represented a breakthrough!

⁷⁷ Steve Rodan, “Outgoing Mossad Chief: Assad May Not Want Peace”, **Jerusalem Post**, June 7, 1996, p.5.

⁷⁸ Translated and broadcast by Dr. Aaron Lerner, [I]ndependent [M]edia [R]eview and [A]nalysis, October 23, 1996, from an article “Review of Syria’s Missile Strategy” which appeared in the October 22, 1996 edition of the London publication **Almashad Alsiasi**. Of course since then Syria’s arsenal has grown considerably.

three surface-to-surface missile brigades and one brigade which is in the process of being formed....

.... The changes in the Syrian missile units did not include only growth in forces, because Syria sees the ground to ground missiles as a way to overcome Israeli air superiority, and as a platform for delivering weapons of mass destruction.

This strength in the missile field enables Syria to deal with Israel's lethal weapons and can be used to attack Israel's air force bases and mobilisation centers. The Syrian army increased the extent of their exercises in the area of battle in a nuclear, chemical and biological environment after American sources advised in 1984 that Syria was engaged in intensive activity in the field of the production and use of nerve gas and other gases since the Lebanon War of 1982. It appears that Syria has made improvements in the Soviet ZAB shells so that they can be armed with chemical material. It is possible that the Syrians have made improvements in the PTAB-500 cluster bomb so that it can carry a chemical warhead...

Dr. Dany Shoham has commented on the excellence of the Syrian chemical weapons program.⁷⁹ Over the last ten years “a broad and excellent arsenal of chemical weapons” has been produced. “The crowning moment in the upgrading of this arsenal was the development of nerve agent-loaded long-range SSM warheads”. There are currently moves afoot to have the strategic range of these missiles extended. Syria has avoided being limited by the factors applicable normally to countries classified as developing. Iran’s pursuit of its own weaponry program suggests that Damascus may augment its arsenal from that source, just as Hizbullah in Lebanon is supplied by Iran through the good offices of Syria.⁸⁰ Not only has Syria a more studied determination, through chemical and biological weapons, to reach strategic parity with Israel, than any other country, but it has also sought underground storage and production facilities, so making it hard for Israel to detect and destroy them.⁸¹ There is a cooperation in biological and chemical weapons acquisition with Iran and possibly with Egypt and Libya, too. Assistance in up-grading and up-scaling these weapons is given by former Soviet states, India and by European companies – different sites in Syria may be disguised as civilian buyers. Efforts (help from Russia, China and North Korea) are being made to ensure that the longer range surface-to-surface missiles are enlarged for carrying the warheads for these weapons.⁸²

The Syrian-Iranian alliance, occasionally shaky, appears symbiotic. Arguably, any peace Syria achieved with Israel would damage Israel’s security: it would be temporary until Iran had nuclear weapons and the long range delivery system to threaten Israel directly. Iran has accepted that to stop Israeli “expansionism”[!], Syria may have to make a deal, but both countries have agreed that that is a means to an end. Therefore to argue, openly or implicitly,

⁷⁹ Dany Shoham, “Chemical Weapons in Syria: Development, Capability, Control”, *Nativ*, Volume 9, Number 1, January, 1996, (Synopsis), p.III, article thereafter.

⁸⁰ Avigdor Haselkorn has postulated a “Club MAD” (a group concentrating on fostering and developing mass destruction weapons) comprised of Iran, Libya, Syria and North Korea, close ties with which Hafez al-Asad has described as: “An indomitable friendship capable of overcoming any outside pressure”. Avigdor Haselkorn, **The Continuing Storm Iraq, Poisonous Weapons, and Deterrence**, Yale, 1999, p. 193 for the quotation. The whole argument of the book adds a great deal to an understanding of the capabilities for blackmail and WMD intimidation sought by these countries.

⁸¹ Dany Shoham, “The Chemical and Biological Threat to Israel”, in Arie Stav, Ed., **Ballistic Missiles: The Threat and the Response**, Brassey’s, 1999, especially pp. 126-128.

⁸² These insights are those of Dany Shoham, “Chemical and Biological Weapons in Syria”, *Nativ*, Volume 13, Number 1, January, 2000.

as have Peres, Rabin and Barak, that in a missile age strategic depth is unnecessary, and peace treaties can solve security problems, would be directly to play into enemy hands.⁸³ Furthermore, as well as Hizbullah seeking recruitment in Europe, they represent anything but “freedom fighters” who will stop when, after an Israeli withdrawal, they can liquidate the Christians of south Lebanon: they are determined to destroy Israel,⁸⁴ and as such stand for present and future Iranian and Syrian ambitions.

So the list of technological and other developments in Iran’s WMD arsenal represents a readiness to assist Syria to prepare for, or join it in, war -- not for even a “cold” peace.

Western intelligence reports note that Iran will succeed within one year to manufacture catastrophic nerve gas [including “Sirin”]. If Iran produces such gas, the Gulf States will be in danger and this will threaten the stability of the Middle East. Sources point out that in the course of the last years Iran has invested efforts in order to independently manufacture weapons of mass destruction. The Iranian activities...are advancing in three areas: nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.... Much money was devoted to the purchase of new technology from the countries of the world in addition to the productive use of the services of international experts. The intelligence reports note that Iran needs several years in order to produce nuclear weapons...⁸⁵

Since the Rabin/Peres/Barak Golan concessions have been so far-reaching, there are good reasons for supposing that Assad has feared “normalisation” as his dictatorial regime would suffer from exposure to democracy and liberalism. So Assad once hesitated over the Golan offers and did not jump to accept, allowing the interpretation of a state readying itself for war. Yossef Bodansky did not accept that Syria necessarily saw benefit in war, but made it plain that Assad was not pursuing a policy of peace with Israel, and Israel must not act as if he was. He concludes the passage cited below: “...to be ready to withdraw from the Golan Heights in the name of this self-delusion is criminally insane.”⁸⁶

The reason Damascus was so quick to reiterate its commitment to Tehran and their joint strategy and alliance while at the same time risking Tehran's wrath by persisting in the negotiations with Israel and the US, is because Hafiz al-Assad has major interests in the negotiations process... not in the outcome of the peace process but in the peace process itself. Damascus is committed to maintaining the peace process at the present stage of non-decision. The Assad regime considers the alternatives facing them: If the region returns to war, Iran and Egypt will be the dominant powers. If the peace is established in the region, Israel and Iraq will be the dominant powers because of their technologic development and wealth, respectively. Moreover, in a peaceful and normalised Middle East, the Syrian elite will lose its huge illegal profits from drugs and counterfeit distribution.

In contrast, Assad presently dominates the regional diplomatic dynamics simply because everybody is desperate to get his support for the peace process -- not because of Syria's military or economic performance or potential. He is being honoured by leaders from all over the world,

⁸³ Moshe Zak, “Damascus-Teheran Axis”, **Jerusalem Post**, June 28, 1995, p.6.

⁸⁴ See Danieal Leshem, “The Teheran-Damascus-Hizbullah Axis”, **Nativ**, Volume 12, Number 6, November, 1999.

⁸⁵ “Iran Expected Manufacture Nerve Gas within a Year”, **Al Hayat** (Jordan), 19 October, 1996, Translated and supplied by Dr. Aaron Lerner, [I]ndependent [M]edia [R]eview and [A]nalysis, 24 October, 1996.

⁸⁶ Yossef Bodansky, “Syria’s Strategic Posture”, **The Maccabean**, Volume 4, Number 2, February, 1996, p.13. Mr. Bodansky is an internationally acclaimed expert on international terrorism, and is the Director of the Republican Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare of the US Congress. The italics are mine.

and Syria enjoys a flow of foreign aid aimed to “smooth” the road to peace. The moment a decision is reached, Syria and Assad will be relegated to their natural role in the regional dynamics. Moreover, the only development Assad really fears is ensuring the existence of the Allawites' power after his imminent death. Assad knows that Iran and Sudan constitute the key to a Sunni Islamist challenge to the post-Assad regime, and he has no intention to alienate them. Presently, he continues on a delicate manoeuvring, including angering Tehran, just to preserve the “momentum” of the peace process and not to risk the Syrian-Iranian strategic relations.

Thus, while Jerusalem is rushing to create expectations for a quick resolution of the negotiations with Syria, once the few remaining obstacles are overcome, Damascus is going out of its way to convince Tehran and its allies of the opposite. The close examination of the evolution of Syria's strategic posture in recent months, and more so since the Islamists' victory in the elections in Turkey, leaves no doubt as to where Syria's ultimate interests are. To assume otherwise is self-delusion...

Not much has altered since those lines were written, except perhaps in Turkey. In response to the frequent rumours of Syria's readying for war, is Israel better able to deter and/or defend herself from the Golan Heights, or from under the slopes again occupied by Syria? That this question can even seriously be raised in strategic and political circles, seems bizarre. The issue is, to some extent, contingent upon the interpretation placed on the goals, ambitions and political character of President Asad and his regime. A senior Jordanian diplomat warned that Syria planned a surprise attack to seize what of the Golan Heights it could in the period between the November 1996 US elections and the presidential inauguration, counting on the then relative weakness in the Israeli army and the international community's support for Syria's claim to the Golan.⁸⁷ Further serious concern derived from large-scale Syrian troop movements, including positioning elite forces whence they could again assault the crucial monitoring stations on Mt. Hermon. These ideas seem to militate against Professor Shai Feldman's Jaffee Center *The Middle East Military Balance 1999-2000* findings of a decade of decline in Syrian military capability. Indeed, in opposition to the Jaffee analysis, “Syria's army is upgrading under the direction of a dynamic chief of staff and has ground-to-ground missiles that threaten Israel, defense officials...told a Knesset committee on the defense budget.”⁸⁸ This seems to have been a trend since the Gulf War, with tank (T-72, T-80), aircraft and other conventional weapons purchases, 1991-1995 alone, amounting to approximately \$2 billion.⁸⁹ It is neither safe nor necessarily accurate to assume that these purchases were made without any eye on future parts and maintenance capabilities.

This example is but one of many: “The Head of the Research Division of Military Intelligence appeared before the Knesset Subcommittee on Intelligence, and testified that Syria may soon take military measures against Israel. Chaim Falk, chairman of the Youth Wing of the National Religious Party, demands that MK Uzi Landau (Likud), chairman of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, begin an investigation to find out who leaked this testimony to the press. Members of the subcommittee include MKs Landau, Gideon Ezra (Likud), Ori Orr (Labor), and Ehud Barak (Labor)”.⁹⁰ Such accounts scarcely suggest that Syria intends becoming friendly: even if Syria was solely applying military pressure for

⁸⁷ “Jordanian diplomat: Syrians Planning Surprise Attack”, **Jerusalem Post**, 25 October, 1996, p.1.

⁸⁸ Zvi Zrahiya, “Syria's Army Getting Stronger, Officials Say”, **Ha'aretz**, December 24, 1999.

⁸⁹ Louis Rene Beres, **Israel's Survival Imperatives: The Oslo Agreements in International Law and National Strategy**, Ariel Center for Policy Research, Policy Paper Number 25, 1998, pp. 51-52, citing Gerald Steinberg, “Israel, Egypt and Nuclear Policy”, **Jerusalem Letter/Viewpoints**, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, June 15, 1995, p.5.

⁹⁰ “Who Leaked Syria Threat?”, **Arutz 7 News**, 16 October, 1996.

negotiating advantage, this represents a decidedly belligerent attitude, calculated to increase, not diminish, mistrust. Nothing currently exists to make future, similar, maneuvers and aggression improbable.

Professor Walid Phares has suggested that Asad might use Lebanese forces to take South Lebanon, forcing Israel out and extending his frontier; Hizbullah would attack the Israelis who would be forced to leave the security zone because widely perceived as fighting Lebanese nationals. Thereupon, the Golan border zone with Syria would take on an enhanced strategic significance. Its cession would mean further extending a still drastically hostile border, with Islamic fundamentalists, and their regional power protectors, in a position of utter mastery.⁹¹

Syria's strategic preparations in Lebanon indicate clearly a determination to take over the security zone.... Syria's ultimate strategic goal is to reach the international Lebanese-Israeli borders and gain a hundred kilometres of high grounds, encircling the northern Galilee from the north and the West. The Israeli presence on the Golan will become less efficient, when Syrian or Syrian controlled tanks and forces are deployed from Ras Nakura on the Mediterranean to the eastern valleys of the Hermon. Israeli military presence on the Golan will be greatly jeopardised if Syria's forces deploy north of Rosh Hanikra.

There is, then, a clear strategic link between the Golan and the South Lebanese security zone: the importance of retaining the Golan becomes all the more crucial given the wide hostile front Syria could present against Israel. The effects of the Golan “encircled from behind” and also a Christian-free south Lebanon “supported by a huge hinterland from Beirut to Teheran” would be a disaster for the entire north of Israel, subjecting it to very large numbers of determined enemies.⁹² To add the Golan and Lebanese high ground to the control of Syrian forces or their proxies, in the context of these wide strategic frontiers, would be an act of utter folly. And if indeed the collapse of the post-Asad regime affords greater opportunity for the Christians of south Lebanon, then indeed Israel would have squandered everything that could be gained at such a time by surrendering either “the security zone” or the Golan.⁹³

An article in **Ha'aretz** pointed out that Syria was, in October 1996, poised to wage war imminently. So prevention of war might have to supplant peace talks because however variously Syrian troop movements had been interpreted, what really mattered was that “the lack of balance in the structure of the two militaries on both sides of the border makes any Syrian logistical move a strategic threat to Israel...any glitch in monitoring Syrian forces is likely to activate warning bells and ignite a dangerous spark.”⁹⁴ This means that an assessment has to be made. Should Israel try and make an arrangement which it hopes, against all the available evidence, will shield it from the immediate likelihood of war, so gambling on the beneficial effects of weakening itself, (more “risks for peace”), or should it face the degree to which this peace is possible only according to the will and whim of President Asad, almost heedless of Israel's moves? “...leaders that take such risks, by depreciating, or ignoring,

⁹¹ Walid Phares, “Analysis: Reading Syria's Move in South Lebanon”, 18 October 1996, appeared in **Israeli and Global News** for October 27, 1996, and was quoted extensively in the **Washington Jewish Week** for that week.

⁹² For these points and others, see Walid Phares, **Israel's Alternative Policy in Lebanon**, Ariel Center for Policy Research, Policy Paper Number 78, 1999, p. 24 for the quotations.

⁹³ Mordechai Nisan, **Christian Decline and Models of Lebanon**, Ariel Center for Policy Research, Policy Paper Number 83, 1999.

⁹⁴ Aluf Ben, “The War is Already in Our Living Rooms”, **Ha'aretz**, October 25, 1996, p. B1.

legitimate security concerns, or by accepting data that supports preconceived notions of preferred political decisions, are abrogating their responsibility as leaders.”⁹⁵

The **Ha’aretz** writer concluded:

The primary lesson from the tension in the north is that the schism between Syria and Israel is too dangerous and must not be accepted. Israel must condition the resumption of talks with the Syrians on the creation of a military liaison and co-ordination network to relay messages and dispel fears of war. The United Nations force on the Golan cannot fulfill this mission since it is weak and restricted to a limited area around the Separation of Forces lines.

Only on the last point is the writer really accurate since Syrian designs cannot be allayed by pieces of paper; and fears of war result primarily from assessments of foes’ intentions, and the threat they pose. Thus if Syria wants the Golan Heights, all Lebanon, and the fulfillment of “Greater Syria” ambitions, does not a strong signal that it will keep the Golan best serve Israel’s interests?

This question has been thoroughly answered by Bernard Smith. He has emphasized that deterrence depends on superior military force and a willingness to use it against an aggressor. War comes as a result of a state having limited military options and/or willingness to use them Syria has, therefore, to be made aware of Israel’s resolution to defend itself.⁹⁶

Deterrence depends on capability – superior military force – and credibility, a perceived willingness to use it. An aggressor must be convinced that he will be denied success on the battlefield, and that the cost of an attempt will be devastating. Yet there are those who counsel a minimum of preparedness for Israel. Such members of the “peace” camp seem to consider Syria, Iraq, Iran and Egypt no longer a threat to Israel's existence, now or in the future. They discount what is obvious: the Arab attempt, led by Egypt and Syria, to degrade components of Israel's deterrence, including land and armaments. Convinced that a peace treaty is adequate replacement for strategic territory, they reject anything they view as an impediment to that single goal....[including attention given to Syria’s drug-trafficking, torture, mass murder, terrorism use and abetting, brutal occupation of another country, regional destabilisation and other crimes]..... War will come when the goal of decisively defeating Israel is made plausible by the perception of an irresolute, disunited Israel, lacking the will and/or the capability to act militarily. Israel can learn from Britain's mistakes prior to two world wars. In order to deter a war, Israel must possess overwhelming military superiority. It is, moreover, crucial to make it unmistakably clear to Syria – quietly, through diplomatic channels – that Israel is willing to react with massive destructive force should the Syrians choose to initiate war, exacting from them a price they are in no way prepared to pay.

The preservation of the current state of non-aggression depends on the certainty in Syrian minds of Israel's intentions and capability.”

Simply: Syria has ambitions which need deterring. If indeed the Jaffee Center report is wrong, then Israel is looking at a regime with rather little to lose or at a new one potentially willing to risk a good deal on an attack. If the new regime wants peace, then now of all times (winter 1999/2000) is the time not to negotiate.

In any case, how willing is President Asad to keep to treaty arrangements? If he is unwilling, any peace treaty, and its pursuit, would be worthless. A security apparatus, as advocated by

⁹⁵ Shawn Pine, “Myopic Vision: Israeli Withdrawal from the Golan Heights and the Prospects for War with Syria”, Ariel Center for Policy Research, Policy Paper Number 75,1998, pp. 42-43.

⁹⁶ Bernard Smith, “Soft Words, Big Stick”, **Jerusalem Post**, October 23, 1996.

Dr. Dore Gold,⁹⁷ and Aluf Ben, is no guarantee against war. Crucially, those suggesting that Asad's word can be trusted are, whether by wilful design or not, deceiving Israel as to the reality. It is they who should therefore be forced to account for their distorted view of reality, not those who urge the futility and folly of cutting a deal.

Asad's record on fulfilling commitments, like Arafat's, remains so appalling it demands explanation why anyone should bother to make a deal with them, let alone advocate doing so to a vulnerable, democratic electorate. In the analysis of Daniel Pipes,⁹⁸ discounting the 400 or so violations of the 1949 Armistice Agreement (up to 1967), Asad has seriously broken his agreements with three neighboring states, Turkey, Lebanon and Israel.

All three "red line" provisions brokered by the US in 1976 concerning Syrian deployment in Lebanon were broken, and the existence of the agreement was even denied. Three agreements to leave Lebanon, made with other parties, have been ignored.⁹⁹ Syria has blatantly failed to adhere to the 1987 and 1992 security protocols made with Turkey over Syria's sheltering of the Kurdish PKK. In July 1993 Warren Christopher brokered an "agreement" in which it was agreed that Syria would prevent Katyusha attacks from South Lebanon which has borne no fruit. In 1974 an agreement was reached in which Israel surrendered not only territory taken in the 1973 war, but also some taken in 1967, and which promised a return of Syrian civilians to areas evacuated by Israel. But the reality was very different,¹⁰⁰ apparently without attracting any serious Israeli government response. Morton Klein has pointed out that much would have to change before Israel could consider a deal, not least 50% of Syrian gross national product being spent on armaments.¹⁰¹

If Syria expects to convince the Israeli public that it is prepared to sincerely live in peace with Israel, and will not use the Golan Heights to shell northern Israel as it did during 1948-1967, then it will have to take some concrete steps to prove that it has really changed from its old ways. Syria must honour the treaties it has previously signed. Terrorist groups must be expelled from Syrian territory. Syria's involvement in drug trafficking must cease. The Syrian military buildup must slow down. And a Syrian transformation from dictatorship to democracy must

⁹⁷ Naomi Levitsky, "Netanyahu's Syrian Document", **Yediot Acharonot**, August 16, 1996, 24 Hours, page 6; reproduced by Murray Kahl, **Global and Israeli News**, August 18, 1996. She says the title of Dr. Gold's paper is "Plan for Regional Defense System in the Mideast". .

⁹⁸ Daniel Pipes, "Does Assad Keep His Word?", **Jerusalem Post**, August 19, 1994.

⁹⁹ They are the October 1978 Riyadh-Cairo Accords, the September 1982 Fez Declaration and the October 1989 Taif Accord.

¹⁰⁰ In 1992, commandos were moved into Quneitra, heavy artillery was placed in the demilitarised area and 21 SAM missiles and eight missile launchers were brought into the zone 25 kilometres from the Israeli border.

¹⁰¹ Morton Klein, **Zionist Organisation of America** op-ed, "Can Syria Be Trusted?", reprinted in **The Jewish Political Chronicle**, May 1996, pp. 21-22. His article is based on the following, as very kindly supplied by Reuben Shechter of the ZOA: Syrian violations of the Red Line Understanding (1976) are documented in Itamar Rabinovich, **The War for Lebanon, 1970-1983**, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984, pp. 117,118,122. Syrian violations of the Separation-of-Forces Agreement on the Golan Heights (1974) were acknowledged by then-Prime Minister Rabin in the **Jerusalem Post**, September 5, 1994. Syria's violations of the treaties regarding withdrawal from Lebanon [Riyadh-Cairo (1978), Fez (1982) and Ta'if (1989)]; Syria's violations of agreements it signed with Turkey to stop supporting the PKK (1987, 1992); and Syrian violations of its agreement with Secretary Christopher to restrain Hezbollah (July 1993), are all documented in Daniel Pipes, "Does Assad Keep His Word?", **Jerusalem Post**, August 19, 1994, and in US Congressman Eliot L. Engel, "Syria's Foreign Policy Must Change", **Washington Times**, December 29, 1995.

begin. Until then, there is good reason for concern that giving Syria the Golan Heights may not bring about peace with Israel.

Dramatically corroborating Asad's unreliability, former Lebanese President Amine Gemayel, has written:

Lebanon's experience with Syria is constructive for the cause of regional peace. Syria, like Iran, has modified its style toward the West now that it can no longer look toward the Soviet Union for support. However, these are tactical and ephemeral shifts; Syria has not changed and its behaviour in Lebanon is the evidence. While president, I reached numerous agreements with Syria, not one of which Damascus respected, always creating incidents to reopen the issue. In Arabic we say, "Take (what you can get), then ask for more". And your own expression recognising such an approach is correct: "Give them an inch and they'll take a mile." "This is the Syrian strategy, which applies as fully in the rest of the Middle East..."¹⁰²

If Syria can behave in such a way with impunity in Lebanon,¹⁰³ then Israel dare not take the risks inherent in a deal with Asad. This is the conclusion reached by research which has been labelled "thorough" and "definitive".¹⁰⁴

No one can reasonably assert that Assad has demonstrated a strategic reorientation...Assad's peace diplomacy has been grudging, not confidence-inspiring. Even if he ultimately signs a peace treaty, ample grounds will remain for doubting his sincerity. *His record for compliance with international treaties is in general poor.* He may view a treaty with Israel as nothing more [than] a tactical maneuver to free Syria from isolation and other difficulties created for it by the collapse of the Soviet Union. Treaty or no, tensions between Israel and Syria will remain high for the foreseeable future and any Golan peacekeeping forces will be squeezed into a narrow area flanked by two heavily armed parties that remain hostile and mutually suspicious.¹⁰⁵

It is all the more dire that the Left, for example Abba Eban, apparently insist that Asad is reliable, as if by constant assertion it might become reality. ("Meanwhile, it is consoling to know that the 1974 Disengagement Agreement which I helped to conclude with Syria has been meticulously respected by both signatories," he has written.)¹⁰⁶ The numbers of attempted infiltrations of Israel through south Lebanon by terrorists from organizations based in Syria shows that Mr. Eban's interpretation ignores the facts of Syria's behavior, and the activities of those acting as proxy for Damascus.

Why should the United States promote a peace treaty between Israel, generally portrayed for reasons of internal policy as an ally, and Syria, whose misdeeds are continually overlooked? Equally why should the European Union? If such advocacy has sinister motives, this is sufficient reason for Israel to eschew its recommendations. Indeed, in what many regard as a uniquely "inside" work, sympathetic to his subject, Patrick Seale has shown Asad's essential

¹⁰² Amine Gemayel, "Give Lebanon a Role in Mideast Talks", **The Wall Street Journal**, August 28, 1991, p. A8.

¹⁰³ Mr. Gemayel has continued to expose the take-over of his country: for example, in **The Wall Street Journal**, "My Country's Sham Elections", September 12, 1996, p. A14 and "A Failed Policy in Lebanon", May 2, 1996, p. A14.

¹⁰⁴ By "Commentary" which, in an exceptional move, published the report by the [Washington] Center for Security Policy in full: "US Forces On the Golan Heights?", **Commentary**, Volume 98, Number 12, December, 1994, pp. 73-88.

¹⁰⁵ Op. Cit. p.87, italics mine.

¹⁰⁶ See Abba Eban, "A 'Golanese' Situation", **Jerusalem Post**, August 16, 1996. See also Edward Siegel's response in the **Jerusalem Post International Edition**, Week Ending October 5, 1996, Letters, p.11, citing Morton Klein and the Jewish Political Chronicle, which Mr. Siegel edits.

fear of Israel and his view that it has no right to exist;¹⁰⁷ and he represents him as attempting a balance of power which includes domination of the entire Levant! Curiously, by a kind of psychological projection, Asad is portrayed as in fear of an over-mighty, expansionist and aggressive neighbor, Israel, keen to dominate and overawe the entire region.

Mr Seale's position as the conduit for Asad's position matters. It has a seemingly direct bearing on British policy and understanding of the region. Peter Hain, a man with a past record of open disavowal of Israel's stance on a number of matters, declared that "Syria does have security concerns".¹⁰⁸ This is something of a direct echo of exactly the point Seale and Asad have been emphasising. It is not that Israel has simply been attacked, but that history shows it sabre rattling at Syria, menacing that country's security. The re-writing of history, accompanied by an inversion of truth by bizarre moral equivalence, serves to seem sweetly reasonable and so lulls the unwary.

Mr. Seale concludes his book by asking Asad how he would like it to end. "Say simply that the struggle continues" he responded.¹⁰⁹ This struggle is: to bring Israel to heel. The overall interpretation of Asad's attitude to Israel throughout the work delineates what psychologists call "projection", whereby a person characterizes aspects of another in terms entirely applicable to themselves, without realizing it. What is most dangerous for Israel is if this portrayal truly represents Asad. Professor Moshe Maoz has characterised Asad thus: "adhering to the notion that the end justifies the means, Asad shrewdly used manipulation, ambiguity and deceit..."¹¹⁰ This is scarcely a trustworthy man. Is it an innocent matter of "mere propaganda" that the tourist brochure for Palmyra shows "Palestine" on its two maps but no Israel? But in any case, if, for instance, a Sunni seizure of power were to overthrow Asad's Alawite replacement, how would Israel fare then?

In the Center for Security Policy study, five main areas of exceptionally important strategic advantage are attached to the Golan.¹¹¹

1. The provision of strategic depth, [no less important today than in days gone by, and arguably in a 'missile age' all the more so, especially in a small country like Israel. The Gulf war showed the truth of this all over again].
2. Surveillance and warning [because of the high ground and the views into Syrian territory. Especially important when this allows small forces to hold at bay much larger ones while reserves are called up].
3. There is still a large advantage in not having to fight up hill [many will recall the difficulty of taking the Golan in the first place, and will have been moved for example by Avigdor Kahalani's book **The Heights of Courage**].

¹⁰⁷ Patrick Seale, **Asad**, 1988, pp. 344 et seq.

¹⁰⁸ Barry Schweid, "British Want Syria Security Ensured", **Associated Press**, December 13, 1999. The minister in question sought to be judged "by his performance as a minister — not by his previous support for the replacement of Israel by a secular Palestinian state." referring to "a 1976 **Guardian** article in which he called for the "Israeli Zionist state" to be "dismantled". Bernard Josephs, "Hain: 'Don't Judge Me on My Anti-Israel Past'", **Jewish Chronicle** (London), August 6, 1999.

¹⁰⁹ Seale. p. 495.

¹¹⁰ Moshe Maoz, **Asad, The Sphinx of Damascus**, 1988, p. 196.

¹¹¹ To these more can certainly be added.

4. The Golan allows Israel all the deterrent effect of being within easy striking range of Damascus, which would allow attacks in response to a missile strike on Israel's cities, and against staging areas were Syria seen to be mounting an attack.
5. There are strategic consequences to controlling the watershed which the Golan comprises.

These represent a clear case that the Golan Heights are nothing short of an essential asset, more likely to guarantee peace than any piece of paper which can be successfully abrogated at will by any signatory, and which can be violated with impunity (the analogy with the "Oslo accords" is all too telling). It is fitting that there should be serious debate about the best way to defend them¹¹² – but not about their surrender.

In 1973, the Golan topography allowed just 250 Israeli tanks to hold up Syria's 2,500 tanks long enough for the reserves to arrive. It is hard to see how, if Israel withdrew, it could even move troops to the area, as the Hulah valley, and indeed all the Galilee, would easily be picked off by artillery fire. This cannot be managed with the same precision from behind the Golan wall. Airforce bases like Ramat David are much safer now than faced with accurate fire from a future Syrian Golan. Equally the sophisticated electronic surveillance on the Golan and Mount Hermon allows for a speedy, effective response which the costs and technical limits of AWACS and other airborne early warning systems cannot match.¹¹³ Such issues are of the essence given the unreliability of Asad, the surprise element of the Yom Kippur war, and Syria's enhanced capability gained through her domination of Lebanon, which would allow her to attack Israel on a broad double front *unless Israel held on to the Golan*. Daniel Pipes has observed that the Golan under Israeli control is "not just a quiet place, but perhaps the safest in the Middle East".¹¹⁴

The Golan is simply essential for Israel's basic defence needs, a large number of experts who have studied the area, such as Irving Kett, have deduced:¹¹⁵

A short time after the Six Day War, the President... Lyndon Johnson, ordered the Chief of the Joint Staffs, General Earl Wheeler, to assess what would be the optimal borders which could deter an attack against Israel. Wheeler's strongly recommended that Israel continue to hold on to all the territories of which it had taken control, except for a large part of Western Sinai, which Israel could give back to Egypt without endangering itself. It should be noted that, up to now, Israel has already given up two basic principles established by those leading American officers: in giving back to Syria, under the separation of forces agreement of 1974, the strategic line of hills near the area of Kuneitra; and to Egypt – the whole of Sinai, even though Eastern Sinai had always been a cornerstone of Israel's strategic thinking .

¹¹² Elliot Cohen et al, "The Israeli Revolution in Security Affairs", **Nativ**, Volume 12, Numbers 4-5, September, 1999.

¹¹³ The planes and the ground based command and control centres with their visible antennae are vulnerable and it has been reckoned by an expert that airborne warning is only 60% as effective as ground based equivalents (such as those on Mt. Hermon). See Yoash Tsiddon-Chatto, "'Peace Now' or Durable Peace? Discussion on Deterrence as a Guarantee of Peace", originally published (in Hebrew) in **Nativ**, for July 1994. In this English translation, very kindly supplied by the author, pp. 22-23.

¹¹⁴ In "Does Assad Keep His Word?", Op. cit.

¹¹⁵ Irving Kett, a former colonel in the US Army, and a retired professor of civil engineering, in "To Stay on the Golan", **Ha'aretz**, January 5, 1993. Italics are the present author's.

Despite the clear message of the US Joint Staffs' memorandum and of every study conducted since then, the declared and consistent policy of the government of the USA has always been that it would only suggest minor changes in Israel's pre-Six Day War borders.....

In 1988, a study of Israel's security situation, proposed by more than 100 retired American generals and admirals was published in the USA..." It was unequivocal and definite in its declaration of Israel's absolute necessity for retaining post 1967 defensible borders, ending "*To expect Israel to repeat the military miracle of 1967 is to place too much reliance on luck*".

Despite this, in the face of the dangers threatening Israel – dangers for which there are no easy solutions – the predominant trend in the thinking of the policy makers is towards appeasement. The failure of Israel's public to heed the considered and reasoned opinion of prominent American military personnel is, in effect, to play Russian roulette with the very existence of the State of Israel. That country has no longer any scope for making mistakes or taking faulty military decisions. There is no other country in the world, existing in an atmosphere of endless hatred similar to that directed at Israel.

Despite its present military strength, Israel's existence is extremely fragile – a fact which its citizens must never forget or belittle.

This purely military analysis deliberately speaks of the miraculous. It does so to emphasise the irrationality of surrendering so important an asset, so dramatically gained in the first place.

Col. Kett has pointed out¹¹⁶:

Defendable borders are not borders which cannot be breached, but borders which provide early warning and some measure of strategic depth... After having repelled attacks on its population from that area (the Golan Heights) and having taken control of it in a defensive war, Israel is under no obligation – legal, political or moral – to give it back.. . Missiles, artillery and planes can do much damage but they cannot maintain control of territory. Only infantry and armored corps can invade, and forces of this kind are vulnerable to natural boundaries... In the case of the Arab armies, which are at least four times bigger than they were 20 years ago, this assessment is even more valid now than it was then. To expect Israel to repeat the military miracle of 1967 is to place too much reliance on luck.

On the strategic level, for stability, and to deter future attack, it is better to depend upon "a power equilibrium than on a political agreement" and "[m]aking peace with Assad's Syria, even if it was a realistic possibility, is a political but also a moral question for the Jewish state of Israel."¹¹⁷ It should, by the same token, be a moral issue for the EU and USA to try to coerce Israel into a position of extreme vulnerability at the hands of its enemies, especially considering the nature of their regimes, means of acquiring funds, arming, and culture.

Professor Ifraim Inbar has reached a perceptive conclusion about wooing Syria:

There is insufficient reason to solicitously court a weakened and unrepentant Syria, which has joined the peace process primarily to please Washington. Certainly not at the going price. The status quo seems a much more sensible option, at least for the foreseeable future.¹¹⁸

One time General Security Service chief, Ami Ayalon, provides the proper framework of reference: "*It is important that the military adopts the worst case scenario interpretation of every security incident [in the Mideast], even if the trend seems to be positive. Politicians*

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Mordechai Nissan, "The Assad Regime: A Political Profile", **Bulletin of the Jerusalem Institute for Western Defence**, Volume 6, Bulletin Number 2, June, 1993, p.19.

¹¹⁸ Ifraim Inbar, "Israeli Negotiations with Syria", **Israel Affairs**, Volume 1, Number 4, Summer 1995, pp. 89-100.

point, properly, at the lack of stability in the region. Military persons should assume, under such circumstances, that those who may be friends today, may not be friends tomorrow.”¹¹⁹ Politicians ignore this at their peril. Clearly “Israel is indefensible without the Golan Heights – and therefore no use as an ally.... to the State Department, Israel may well be expendable...”¹²⁰ But not to the Jewish people. It is from such realities above any others that the value of retention of the Golan becomes crystal clear, and the gamble on a deal with Syria becomes all the more absurd -- and potentially suicidal. The best that even Professor Rabinovich can say is that now is as good a time for a gamble as any, even if the various parties, including President Clinton, have their own agendas. For all the cleverness of his case, it remains just that, and very fuzzy.¹²¹

The EU/US support for a Palestinian state has been emphasised elsewhere,¹²² and this has an important bearing on assessment of the close working relationship between Yasser Arafat and his forces and the Syrians. Considering Arafat’s missile stock-pile, underground bunker systems, and joint Arafat-Damascus offices in Beirut and Gaza, that the Syrians have been training PLO personnel in anti-aircraft weapons use and have been distributing arms in the refugee camps in south Lebanon, the idea of pursuit of a treaty seems strange. With Palestinian identity documents, military/intelligence teams are going into the PA controlled areas and acting as military attaches for training the Palestinians. This is some measure of the close cooperation maintained by Syria with the PLO since their agreement towards the end of 1996.¹²³ Syrian intelligence personnel, under PLO protection, in the Gaza and Judea-Samaria areas under the Palestinian Authority, are controlling Hamas and Islamic Jihad. They are also going to deal with any remnant of the GSS security infrastructure, and gather intelligence data about targets and movements within Israel. The function of such operatives in time of war needs little spelling out. The link between the Iran-Syria axis and the supply of arms of sophisticated kinds to the PLO means that as soon as Gaza port and Dahaniya airport can be made operative, there will be an ease of supply even greater than the Egyptian route.¹²⁴ In any case, the Golan in broad terms, stands against making the area between the yet more heavily armed PLO and the Syrian border even more vulnerable, which it would be with the Syrians already down to the Kinneret or at the very least on top of the Golan escarpment. Strategic depth and distance, as well as the advantage of height, are of the essence.

In open criticism of the Clinton administration, the Saxton Report comments “Instead of pressuring the democratically-elected government of Israel to deviate from the policies it was elected for, the US should concentrate on helping Israel meet the growing threat of war.”¹²⁵ In

¹¹⁹ **Yediot Acharonot**, December 29, 1995, (**Jerusalem Insider**, Number 57). Italics mine.

¹²⁰ Yohanan Ramati, “The Cold War is Back!”, **Bulletin of the Jerusalem Institute for Western Defence**, Volume 9, Bulletin 2, June, 1996, pp. 4-5.

¹²¹ David Makovsky, “The Road to be Taken”, **Jerusalem Post**, December 24, 1999, p. B5.

¹²² By Christopher Barder, “The EU View of a Palestinian State”, to appear in **Israel and a Palestinian State: Zero-Sum Game?**, Ariel Center for Policy Research, forthcoming in 2000.

¹²³ The really serious effects of the enemy in Judea and Samaria, due to the “Oslo Process”, on Israeli surveillance facilities and infrastructure, mean that observation from the Golan is even more important as a consequence. On these results see Yuval Steinitz, “When Palestinian Forces Attack the Outskirts of Tel Aviv”, **Nativ**, Volume 8, Number 6, November, 1998.

¹²⁴ For their interpretation of the Saxton Report, see Uri Dan and Dennis Eisenberg, “The Syria-PLO Axis”, **Jerusalem Post**, February 13, 1997 and **The Maccabean**, Volume 5, Number 3, March, 1997, pp. 35-6.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* (**The Maccabean**), p.36.

an interview with Congressman Saxton, Yedidya Atlas brought out in his interviewee refreshing candor about the way that President Clinton's administration seemed willing to ignore the report findings. There was a clear dichotomy between the interpretation of reality revealed in the report and that pursued by the US administration which determined to ignore it. One part of the interview is as follows¹²⁶:

SAXTON: The way this Report depicts reality, there is a clear and present danger to Israel and to the Israeli people. By watching the policies of the former Israeli government, and the current policies of the United States government, one would think that things are just wonderful and that we don't have anything to worry about in the Middle East. And all we have to do is make agreements like Hebron with the Palestinians or other Arab parties, and everything will work out fine. But those of us [in the US Congress] who belong to the Task Force believe the facts as we know them, are presented in this Report. And that parties who are concerned about long term peace in Israel should have these facts at their disposal and that our [American] government should respond accordingly, recognizing the reality may not be the same reality that the Clinton administration would prefer to see.

If the American position is based on deliberate misunderstanding and disinformation, and tolerates willfully deceptive, deceitful and cynical policies, then the Israeli side needs to grasp the significance of the report just as much as the American public and legislature. It mentions, for instance, the way in which Iraq, Syria and Iran have combined and included the Palestinian Authority in their plans "in case of an escalation in the north".¹²⁷ The significance of this must not be overlooked.

In the Spring of 1996, Hafez al-Assad and Saddam Hussein met secretly for a summit to ensure joint pursuit of regional objectives creating the conditions for the revival of the Eastern Front [with Iran as the third party].....In late May 1996, Iran conducted its largest military exercise ever – Velayat – to confirm Iran's ability to send a strategically effective expeditionary force to contribute to a regional war against high-quality armies. The primary intended objective of the exercise [being] Israel.....In mid June, Iran and Syria signed a major agreement specifically for the codification of their military, cooperation against Israel.By mid August, Iraq was brought into this framework with the establishment of a tripartite "joint command" specifically aimed to expedite the preparations for, and conduct of, "a major war against Israel". And then "in late September, the Palestinian factor was added to the joint preparations when the Palestinian Authorities (PA) entered into a major military agreement with Syria.. The essence [being] for the Palestinian "police" forces and other armed elements (terrorist organizations) to flare-up the Israeli interior in case of an escalation in the north."

Nor is this all. The authors of the report know their Arab sources well enough to use them to show that the issue is when, not if, there will be a war with Syria.¹²⁸ If that is the case, then the retention of the Golan Heights is not only essential, but is arguably the most obvious means Israel has for deterring Syria. The argument put forward that not all the Arab states would combine together because of pieces of paper, bearing in mind the specific clauses of the Camp David accords which allow Egypt to join other states attacking Israel, seems sheer dangerous

¹²⁶ Yedidya Atlas, "Exclusive Interview with Rep. Jim Saxton", **Arutz 7**, Posted: February 12, 1996.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ The report was written by Yossef Bodansky and Vaughn S. Forrest for The Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare, US House of Representatives, Washington, December 10, 1996 and is printed in **The Maccabean**, Volume 5, Number 2, February, 1997, pp. 27-34, "Approaching the New Cycle of Arab-Israeli Fighting".

fantasy.¹²⁹ Such an attack could unite the entire Arab world in Jihad, in spite of it knowing Israel is being told differently -- such as by Uri Saguy: “Saguy stresses that peace will not eliminate the strategic threats to Israel, but will prevent their materialization”.¹³⁰ The distinction seems somewhat obscure! Or perhaps all the more because of Israel’s and the West’s deception.¹³¹ Yossef Bodansky has shown the necessity for Yasser Arafat to proclaim his Islamist credentials, meaning that Fateh and associated groups will maintain a high profile of militant confrontation with Israel, but in a strategy learnt from the North Vietnamese in a trip to Hanoi in 1970, the appearance of moderation is solely for the deception of the US. This is exactly what the PLO have applied successfully also in Europe, and is something Assad has also used effectively. The moderate appearance, however superficial, has a way of bewitching and beguiling western liberal minds.¹³²

Ever since the 1956 Suez crisis, Britain and France nurture a deep resentment against US policy in the region. Their preoccupation with profits from oil, arms sales to Arab states, contracts, etc. prevents serious attempts to play the Israeli card. The knowledge that the US State Department, as well as important circles in the CIA, FBI and Pentagon, are anti-Israeli and are therefore less likely to resent anti-Israeli policies from others, reinforces this attitude. Therefore, West European efforts to gain influence in the Middle East have been based on trying to be more anti-Israeli than the US and are usually concerted with Arab states.¹³³

On the basis of the above, a serious question remains. The destruction of Israel may serve a useful purpose in European and American courtship of oil purchase from and arms sales to Arab countries. There may be much to be looked forward to in the final removal of Israel with Syria, like Egypt, in the west’s orbit and a Palestinian state in place of Israel, as the EU and USA restructure the region’s economic and political frameworks. But why should Israel seek her own indefensibility and succumb to policies designed to weaken her beyond even usefulness as an ally? For this act of self-abnegation, the idea that weakness will bring other than destruction, for this double-think and deception, is indeed a death-wish,¹³⁴ in contravention of the command, this day, to choose life and not death.

¹²⁹ The idea may be found, for example, in Aaron Lerner, “IMRA Interviews **Ha’aretz** Correspondent Amir Oren”, **IMRA**, January 13, 2000 and Aaron Lerner, “Interview: Prof. Shai Feldman – Head of Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies on Peace with Syria”, **IMRA**, December 23, 1999.

¹³⁰ Ze’ev Schiff, “A Window into a Negotiator’s Mind”, **Ha’aretz**, January 20, 2000.

¹³¹ Yossef Bodansky, **Arafat’s “Peace Process”**, Ariel Center for Policy Research, Policy Paper Number 18, 1997, *passim*, but especially pp. 3-7.

¹³² A point brought out in Christopher Barder, “Huntington’s ‘Clash of Civilizations’ and its Bearing on Israel’s Security”, **Nativ**, Volume 12, Number 6, November, 1999.

¹³³ Yohanan Ramati, cited from his speech given in Washington, Autumn 1998, in a letter to the author dated November 4, 1998 and to be found in Yohanan Ramati, “The Dangers Facing Israel”, **Jerusalem Institute for Western Defence**, Volume 11, Bulletin 4, December, 1998, p.6.

¹³⁴ Arie Stav has explored aspects of “the systematic destruction of the national existential purpose” (p.1) in **The Israeli Death Wish A Study in the Jewish Attitude Toward National Sovereignty**, Ariel Center for Policy Research, Policy Paper Number 53, 1999.

Appendix: Lionel Jospin's Visit

As this paper was going to press, Lionel Jospin's remarks concerning Hizballah's terrorism were causing a furore. They have significance since they challenge Arab interpretations of Hizballah as a legitimate resistance fighting a foreign occupier. This mythology assists Arab dialogue with the west, by rendering Israel's security zone and the SLA anti-Lebanese rogue entities (although this is baseless). Generally, no western official denounces Hizballah -- they refer to violence (and its cycle) and escalation, calling for restraint "from both parties", as if Israel were morally equivalent to Hizballah; and so avoiding denunciation of Iran and Syria.

In the Arab world, language, exaggeration and violence are associated, hence the violent student response from Bir Zeit University to Jospin's comments -- for western purposes, condemned by Yasser Arafat and, revealingly, by Jibril Rajoub, since it would "...spoil our relations with France and the French government."

Jospin's accompanying documents referred to Jerusalem as the "capital of the Palestinian Authority", to Tel Aviv as the capital of Israel. Egyptian fear of changes in French policy further reveal association of the French with the Arab position. Jospin appeared to challenge President Chirac: "...The Prime Minister put all the blame for the lack of progress in the peace process on Syria. That's unacceptable. That has never been France's position," declared former Prime Minister Alain Juppé.

Exposing terror has a potential to endanger relations between France, the Arabs and Iranians.

* I should like to thank the following for their help with this paper or previous work having bearing on it; the mistakes are mine alone: Bill Grundy, Professor Walid Phares, Stan Goodenough, Mark Langfan, Col. Yoash Tsiddon-Chatto, Professor Gerald Steinberg, the London bureau of the Wall Street Journal, and Nerys Webster of the EU department, LSE Library, London.