THE ROAD TO GENEVA

Exploring American Diplomatic Relations with Syria in 1977

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Master’s Thesis in History
Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History (IAKH)
University of Oslo
Spring 2017
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Summary

The American diplomatic relationship with Syria was in 1977 mainly focused on achieving a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The peace agreement was planned to be made at a reconvening of the Geneva Peace Conference, with the U.S. and Soviet Union as co-hosts. In all dealings with Syria, this was the ultimate end goal. During the first half of 1977, Syria was seen as pivotal in making or breaking a peace agreement. They were believed to have the power to persuade the PLO to accept UN resolution 242.\(^1\) It was belied that the other Arab states would follow Syria’s lead because they represented a united Arab front. The U.S. did however underestimate the animosity Assad felt towards Sadat after the 1973 October War, and it turned out that Sadat wanted to make a deal separate of the other Arab nations. A deal that would be much easier for Israel to accept because they had very few common interests. In the late summer of 1977, it became obvious that Israel could not make any deal with Syria and Syria could not get the PLO to accept UN resolution 242. It was Israeli pressure, and refusal to make any compromise, that created this situation. The initial position of the Carter administration was closer to the Syrian but Israeli pressure, both domestic and abroad, made the U.S. favor a deal with only Egypt. The Carter administration’s handling of the situation in Lebanon also indicates that Israeli pressure shaped their policy towards Syria. The U.S. accepted Syria as a major player in Lebanon letting them do as they pleased, as long as they did not cross any Israeli interests. If they did, the U.S. would take action against Syria through Israel. The primary sources indicate that it may have been Israeli pressure and power rather than the actual will of the Carter administration that made this foreign policy.

In the fall of 1977, U.S. policy towards Syria shifted towards isolation. It became impossible to combine U.S. commitment to Israel with getting Syria to make steps towards any kind of peace treaty. When Anwar Sadat was willing to make a separate deal with Israel, the hopes of reconvening the Geneva Peace Conference died and the idea of the Camp David Accords was born. Syria went from an important and pivotal part of any peace agreement to being totally left out in the cold. The primary sources reveal that the Carter administration’s relations with Syria was in large parts based on Israeli interests, and a result of Israeli pressure at home and abroad. The case of the Syrian Jews further enhances this theory, where Israel forced the Carter administration to act as their herald rather than the negotiator Jimmy Carter actually wanted it to be.

\(^1\) See appendix A for UN resolution 242
Preface

There is so much I wish I had known before starting this project. What started out as one thing ended up as something completely different. The project was started over three years ago, it is finally finished.

It demonstrates that if you are goal-oriented anything can be accomplished, no matter the obstacle standing in your way.

I wish to thank my thesis counselor, Professor Hilde Henriksen Waage, who guided me through the first 1.5 years. During her time as my thesis counselor she gave me invaluable advice. Because the thesis was delayed by almost two years and exceeded the period of guidance, she bears no responsibility should this thesis present any shortcomings.

Without the support of my family, this thesis would never have seen the light of day. Thank you.

Hans Arne Trovåg

Charlottenberg, May 1, 2017
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In my work with the huge number of available primary sources from 1977, three issues stand out. The U.S.-Syrian diplomatic relationship can in 1977 be described as focused on; Getting the PLO and Syria to the planned Geneva Peace Conference, handling the situation in South Lebanon where Israel and Syria were heavily involved, and the case of the Syrian Jews. The road towards Geneva took almost all the focus, then there was the situation in Lebanon which was dealt with carefully so not to disrupt the peace initiative. Lastly there was the case of the Jews in Syria, almost completely shaded over by the prior two, which was of great interest to Israel and its friend’s in America. Through my work I have realized that U.S. foreign policy is so intricate and complicated. I have come to the conclusion that it is like an octopus, where each tentacle has its own agenda and mind.

This thesis explores the American diplomatic relationship with Syria in 1977, and gives an answer to my primary questions. These questions are as follows:

- How did the U.S.-Syrian diplomatic relationship develop in 1977?
- What were the primary motivators behind the Carter administration’s foreign policy towards Syria?

Because no comparable study exits, this thesis gives the reader a basic introduction into serval topics pivotal in the understanding of the U.S.-Syrian relationship under Jimmy Carter. These topics are:

- The Jimmy Carter Administration.
- U.S. national interests in the Middle East.
- The history of Syria and U.S.-Syrian relations.
- The Lebanese civil war and the Syrian involvement in it.

This thesis is an empirical account of the U.S.-Syrian diplomatic relationship in 1977, the first year of the Jimmy Carter Presidency, based on primary sources collected from the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum. In addition, the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) series on the Jimmy Carter presidency have been very
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helpful in providing much needed context. Mainly because the FRUS series also uses other available primary source archives. I wish to point out that this thesis focus is on the American relationship with Syria, not the Syrian relationship with the U.S.

This thesis serves the purpose of making the way and laying the grounds for a project accounting for the U.S.-Syrian diplomatic relations during the whole of the Jimmy Carter Presidency. It also gives the reader a basic understanding of the Carter administrations initial policy towards Syria. It is my intention to present a sound empirical description, and not to expect any lessons on international politics. The driving reason behind the thesis is that, as far as I know, no comparable study exists.

1.1 Primary Sources

The basis of this thesis is primary source documents gathered at the Jimmy Carter Library and Museum in Atlanta, Georgia. It is part of the of the Presidential Library system administered by the National Archives and Records Administration, a Federal government agency. These records provide the best source of information on any subject related to the Jimmy Carter presidency, it is like going into a time capsule. The Jimmy Carter Library actively solicits material of Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, material of major figures in the Carter administration or among the Carters' political or close personal friends, material of similar figures of secondary importance when they document significant aspects of the Carter administration, and material of President Carter's family. For documents related to Syria the National Security Advisor files, NSA 1 through 31, are by far the richest ones. The NLC 41, 43, 126, 128, 131, and 133 also contains documents with valuable information. Sadly, files related to Syria were few in relation to other Middle Eastern countries. The declassified material that existed was in large part related to the Carter peace initiative in 1977, that eventually led to the Camp David Accords. Declassified documents from 1978-1981 were often without context, and more often heavily redacted. A recurring example are briefing papers sent to the White House where only the part about Syria is redacted, with the exception of the heading “Syria” making appear when searching for documents regarding Syria. A huge number of files were listed as under “classification review”, but according to the employees at the Carter archive this process could take over two years.
What this translates into, is that in the near future more documents will be available for research, making it possible to continue the study on the Carter administration and Syria.

1.2 Literature

Information regarding American diplomatic relations with Syria during the Jimmy Carter administration is challenging to research. There are no previous studies on a scholarly level on this topic, and the primary sources are stacked away in different government archives. There are however plenty on literature on the Carter administration and the Cold War era in general, allowing me to create a framework for the thesis. There are two recent studies on the US-Syrian diplomatic relationship that are of excellent scholarly quality, Lars Hasvoll Bakke’s master thesis “Facing Assad. American Diplomatic Relations with Syria, 1969-1976” and Jasmine K. Gani’s doctoral thesis from 2011 Understanding and Explaining US-Syrian Relations: Conflict and Cooperation, and the Role of Ideology. Bakke’s thesis is restricted to the Nixon era, but Gani presents a timeframe from Harry Truman to Bill Clinton. Curiously, she stops in 1975 and jumps to 1990 and the Gulf War. Such is the case of most literature on the subject. The Carter administration’s dealings with Syria are hidden in American government archives, mostly still classified.

1.3 The Jimmy Carter Presidency

When James “Jimmy” Earl Carter Jr. was elected president of the United States in 1976, he was seen as a fresh start for American politics. No previous contact with the White House and unassociated with the tired policies of the past, the former Georgia governor was the people’s choice. Carter was perhaps ill prepared to manage the foreign policy of the world’s greatest power. For some it was terrifying that Carter had no experience in international relations, especially with Cold War tensions in mind.

Carter’s intentions were to end the Cold War, and he denounced the realpolitik of the preceding administration. Just like Woodrow Wilson half a century before he proclaimed the USA’s intention to return to its ideals. Insistence on the respect for human rights would be the center of his administration’s foreign policy. However,
Carter slowly comprehended that his criticism of Soviet performance on human rights complicated his efforts. His principal advisers on foreign policy—Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, and National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, pulled him in opposite directions on Soviet issues in particular.

The Camp David Accords were a series of agreements between Israel and Egypt. The Camp David accords are one of President Carter’s greatest triumphs, but the agreements provoked the Soviets who had been excluded from the talks. This was because the Egyptian president Anwar Sadat chose closer ties with the Americans at the expense of Soviet support. Before 1977, Egypt was the Soviet Union’s most important ally in the Middle East. Because the Soviet Union’s exclusion from the Camp David accords, détente became virtually impossible to strengthen. Now the Soviets had far greater cause to support radical Arab political movements.

1.3.1 From High Expectations to a political reality

President Carter’s decision-making style contrasted with that of Richard Nixon. He would have no “all powerful palace guard” in the White House, the cabinet system would be restored to prominence in the government, and the staff would have free access to him.\(^2\) Carter also set up his staff so that no one or two people could cut him off from dissenting opinions, meaning that no one in his staff could conceal opinion dissenting from their own.\(^3\) Once in the White House, he could not live up to several of his promises. Most importantly, the staff, around 500 people, was so large that most aides lacked the kind of access Carter had envisaged. In addition, Carter wanted to be his own chief of staff, and inner circle started to emerge around Carter in the absence of a chief of staff.\(^4\) These inner circles made up a totem pole in which the top circle had the most access to the president. The foreign policy inner circle was composed of National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, and Vice President Walter Mondale. There was also a domestic,


\(^3\) Ibid. 7.

\(^4\) Ibid. 8-9.
economic and “our of formal government” inner circle surrounding Carter. What this meant was that not all of Carter’s staff had free access to him. See tables 1-5 for a complete list of the major players inside and outside of the Carter cabinet. Outside the foreign policy “inner circle” there was a second ring of people who had frequent access to Carter, but mainly in the presence of their superiors, among them aides William Odom and Michel Oksenberg. Several issue specific advisors also had access to Carter when their expertise was needed, like ambassadors and junior staff. The members of the inner circle served Carter in a number of ways. At an instrumental level, advisors shaped the policy alternatives sent to him, winnowed out the information and number of subordinates going into the Oval Office, and followed through on his decisions. On occasion, aides acted as proxies for Carter, filling in where he did not want to be personally associated. Carter did not engage in the kind of dark operations that had been evident in the Nixon administration.

1.3.2 The Foreign Policy Team

Carter’s experience in foreign policy had been limited to a few trips abroad and efforts to sell Georgia business to foreign investors and his education had been primarily technical. Carter would however spend long hours reading books and discussing foreign policy in depth. Carter was a devout Christian in his private life, but any tendency to overplay his religious hand was checked by the good advice of Jody Powell.

To aid in the policy process Carter chose an experienced person for secretary of state. Cyrus Vance, was a lawyer with a prestigious New York firm and several years of dedicated government service. Vance even welcomed the appointment of Zbigniew Brzezinski as national security advisor, saying the infusion of new ideas would help the administration. Brzezinski had been Carter’s chief advisor and mentor on foreign policy during the presidential campaign, as well as consultant on the makeup of the foreign

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5 Ibid. 11.
6 Several people close to the president was outside of formal government, like his wife Rosalynn, Charles Kirbo, Robert Strauss, and Patrick Cadell.
7 Ibid. 13.
8 Ibid. 14.
9 Ibid. 19-20.
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policy team. Both men brought relevant experience and expertise to their positions. Vance had served as general counsel for the Department of Defense under Kennedy, and as secretary of the Army and deputy of defense secretary under Lyndon Johnson. He also had experience as a negotiator, among other things, dealing with Fidel Castro during the Bay of Pigs invasion and as Johnson’s special envoy to mediate peace over Cyprus in 1968. Walter Mondale noted that Vance avoided disputes and backbiting more than any other member of the cabinet, yet maintained his matter of principle.10

Brzezinski, a Columbia University professor with a PhD from Harvard University, brought the intellectual skills that potentially suited him to the role of a foreign policy broker. At Columbia University, he founded and directed the Research Institute on Communist Affairs (now the Research institute of International Change) Brzezinski had served during the Johnson administration on the Policy Planning Staff in the State Department (1966-68). He had also advised Presidents Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon on foreign policy matters.11

Two other men would also play major roles in Carters foreign policy making. Harold Brown, president of California Institute of Technology when Carter named him as choice for secretary of defense, was a brilliant nuclear scientist who earned his PhD in 1949 when he was only twenty-one years old. Carter chose him because he thought Pentagon needed some discipline. Vice President Mondale, a US senator since 1964, brought the political skills which would help Carter in selling his policies to Congress and the American public. Mondale spent more time with the President in 1977 than any other advisor or staff aid did.12

On the surface, it seemed that Carter had assembled a team that would work in harmony on the foreign policy front. But there was difficulty brewing underneath the harmonious exterior. On the crucial issues, relevant to US-Soviet relations and arms limitation, there were portents of difficulties ahead. Several officials had taken very diverse stances on the Vietnam War, and the presence of many Vietnam War critics in policymaking positions became an issue behind the scenes. Concerned he saw too many doves being

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10 Ibid. 19–21.
11 Ibid. 21.
12 Ibid. 24.
placed in key foreign policy positions, Brzezinski moved to create a counterbalance to them at the NSC and the Department of Defense. Most relevant to this thesis was Brzezinski’s and Vance’s divergent belief on the nature of the Soviet Union and the use of force in foreign policy. Vance viewed the Soviet Union as a state that the US could deal with on the basis of their complimentary interests in matters such as the limitation of the arms race. As secretary of state he stressed the use of diplomacy as a foreign policy instrument.

In contrast, Brzezinski saw the Soviet Union as a megalomaniac state bent on world domination, and he viewed US military power as the most important factor in shaping Soviet policies. Related to these profound ideological stances were elementary differences in their personal styles. Both men had similar, aristocratic, backgrounds but were otherwise quite different. Vance had a pleasing personality and was a very hard worker. He was noted for his integrity, his dedication to detail, and cooperative spirit. His strengths were that he was a fair, prudent and patient man. Brzezinski, on the other hand, was a fighter. He relished verbal dueling, debated to win and gave the intellectually weak no sympathy. Some observers expressed their concerned that Brzezinski would overwhelm Vance. Former secretary of defense, Clark Clifford, actually advised Carter against picking Brzezinski along the lines that he “...was too much of an advocate and not enough of an honest broker to fill the post...” Carter argued that Vance told him that he could work with Brzezinski.

The organizational philosophy Brzezinski pressed on the president provided an environment where competition flourished. His initial commitment to the team approach made it clear that secretary of state would not be the dominant part in the foreign policy process. However, Brzezinski went beyond that by making himself the architect of foreign policy. Thus, model himself after Kissinger as national security advisor. Still, conflicts between Brzezinski and Vance were muted for some time. In tune with Carters desires, in 1977 Vance and Brzezinski developed a collaborative

13 Ibid. 25-26.
14 Ibid. 28.
15 Ibid. 28-34.
and good working relationship, and became good personal friends. Both men, and their families, also enjoyed a good relationship to Carter and his family. The policy differences that arose between the two men were in the beginning mediated by Vice President Mondale and Defense Secretary Brown. Every Friday morning there was a foreign policy breakfast. The initial members of the breakfast club were Vance, Brown, Brzezinski and Mondale. At these meetings they would discuss relationships between foreign policy decisions and domestic matters. In addition Vance, Brzezinski and Brown held their own lunch meetings once a week (“the VBB meetings”) where no note takers or aids were present. There was no formal agenda, but when they agreed on a recommendation it would be sent directly to the president, the Policy Review Committee, or Special Coordinating Committee for approval.

Understanding US national interests in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf are crucial for understanding US policies towards Syria. The relationship between the US and Israel has been characterized as special. The origins of this relationship antedate to the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948 and the relationship has been defined by continued US support for the survival and security of the state of Israel.

1.4 American National Interests in the Middle East

The US Congress has always played a significant role in the US-Israeli relationship. Formally, Congress is vested with the spending authority and therefore retain substantial decision-making power when it comes to foreign aid, deciding how much and to whom. Therefore, the Congress decides how much Israel gets and how much the Arab states get. Congressional influence also extends beyond its formal authority, as Congress issues its opinions though resolutions and declarations. Since 1922, with the


Lodge Fish Resolution supporting the Balfour Resolution, the Congress have been concerned about a Jewish state and later Israel. The rhetoric in the Congressional statements have particularly recognized Israel’s right to defend its security, and secures the bond with Israel even at times of disagreement. The Congress does not only act on its own volition, a major source of congressional power stems from the American public opinion. Israel might be the most important US ally in the Middle East, but the access to oil resources is definitively as important as the friendship with Israel.

1.5 The United States in the Persian Gulf

US interests in the Persian Gulf region have been simple and consistent. First, to ensure access to the vast oil recourses of the region, and second, to prevent any hostile power from acquiring political of military power over these recourses. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union was the immediate threat. Other objectives were implicit and derivative from the two grand ones. The Persian Gulf arena sporadically influenced US policy in the Arab-Israeli conflict (and vice versa) due to the close ties between the Arab-regimes in the Gulf and the Middle East. The Nixon administration undertook a major review of the US Persian Gulf policy in 1969. This resulted in the Nixon Doctrine that placed primary reliance on security cooperation with regional states as a means of securing US interests. In the Persian Gulf, Saudi Arabia and Iran were the states in which the US relied heavily upon. This became known as the Twin Pillar Policy. The Twin Pillar Policy died with the Islamic Revolution and the collapse of Shah’s regime in Iran in 1979. The impression that the US had lost its capacity to influence regional events was reinforced by the invasion of North Yemen by Marxist South Yemen in 1979, and the assignation of the US ambassador in Kabul in 1979. When Turkey and Pakistan withdrew from the Central Treaty Organization, it further strengthened the impression of a less powerful US. The US responded with a military presence in the Persian Gulf, emergency military aid to North Yemen, and an airborne warning and control system to Saudi Arabia. The Carter administration also undertook an effort to

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19 Ibid. 221.
20 Ibid. 327.
21 Ibid. 328-331.
develop a new strategic framework for the Persian Gulf. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 reawakened fears of a Soviet drive to the Persian Gulf. This invasion terminated efforts of the Carter administration to seek mutual accommodation with the Soviet Union, including support for a SALT II Treaty. President Carter articulated this policy change on January 23, 1980: “Any attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.” 22 This declaration came to be known as the Carter Doctrine, and reflected US intentions.

The US national interests in the Middle East prior to 1977 were composed of three parts. Firstly, the containment of Soviet influence in the region. Secondly, securing oil supplies from the region to the US and its allies, and finally facilitating Israel’s national security.23

22 Ibid. 330-331.

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Chapter 2: Background

2.1 The French Mandate of Syria and Lebanon

The Syrian Arab Republic, a vast desert landscape, is an arbitrary construction. With the Mediterranean Sea as its only natural border, the rest was for the most part drawn by European powers. Syria shares its borders with Turkey in the north, Iraq in the east, Lebanon in the west, Israel in the south-west and Jordan in the south. As four-fifths of Syria is desert, 80 percent of the population live in the western 20 percent of the country, with the bulk living in a north to south line of cities (Aleppo, Hama, Homs and

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The borders that became modern Syria were cut out of many traditional mercantile and cultural links into neighboring countries, thus creating several cross-border affinities and ties. These ties are most apparent in the Syrian mantra regarding Lebanon: “two lands, one people”.26

The province of greater Syria was under Ottoman rule until the end of World War 1, when it in 1920 became a French protectorate. Victors of the Great War, Great Brittan and France, drew the borders of modern Syria. They drew these borders based on British and French interests, as put down in the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916.27 The Sykes-Picot agreement was the result of secret negotiations between Great Britain, France and Russia during 1915, defining spheres of influence and control in the Middle East after the end of World War One. France would get direct control of the northern coastal areas of Syria, a Great-Lebanon, and a big part of southern Anatolia. Today’s Syria and northern Iraq were given to France as spheres of influence.28 Thus, from the beginning modern Syria was an artificial state, created for western purposes. One of the first French actions was the creation of the province of Lebanon in 1920, and then they divided the rest of Syria into several separate political units. This was a pre-emptive strike against the formation of a Syrian national identity. With these actions the French divided Syria and let the rich and conservative rule Syrian political life. The turbulence following the independence in 1946 was largely due to the French divide and conquer tactic.29 The Syrian military academy was founded in 1920, and educated officers for the new Syrian Army. The social structure of the Syrian officer corps would become an important factor in future Syrian politics, because the military increased social mobility for ethnic and religious minorities. Thus, when Syria became independent in 1946 the

26 Ibid. 257.
29 Cleveland and Bunton, A History of the Modern Middle East. 220-222.
minorities were overrepresented in the officer corps, and underrepresented in the civil bureaucracy. The grounds were laid for an unstable political environment.\textsuperscript{30}

\section*{2.2 From Independence to Isolation}

When the French left Syria in 1946, the Syrians did not associate the US with imperialism. Low-level diplomacy for 120 years alongside the ideal image of presidents Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt made the American look far less imperial than France and Great Britain. By comparison the British and French governments were far more visible in influencing their own policies into foreign governments.\textsuperscript{31} The first Syrian president, Shukri al-Quwatli, was pro-American but his relationship with the Truman administration ebbed out after 1946. Historian Sami Moubayed points out three main reasons. Firstly, Quwatli allowed a significant role for the Syrian Communist Party (CSP) in national politics, making Washington anxious that Syria might become a Soviet client. Secondly, he infuriated the Americans when he refused the construction of the Trans-Arabian Pipeline through Syria. Finally, Syria and the US bitterly disagreed over the partition of Palestine.\textsuperscript{32}

Syria refused the partition plan for the British Mandate of Palestine passed by the UN on November 29, 1947. Thousands of angry demonstrators stormed and torched the American Embassy in Damascus. Syria went to war in Palestine just as the Zionist leader David Ben Gurion announced the creation of the state of Israel.\textsuperscript{33} Syria experienced three \textit{coups d’état} in 1949, and American complicity has been alleged in the first and second. The Americans were somewhat pleased with the last leader, Colonel Adib al-Shishakli, who was seen as a potential pro-American.\textsuperscript{34} At this point, Syria sought arms to counter the Israeli threat. However, the US was not willing to

\textsuperscript{30} Cleveland and Bunton, \textit{A History of the Modern Middle East}. 222-229.


\textsuperscript{33} Moubayed. \textit{Syria and the USA}, 75-77.

\textsuperscript{34} Moubayed. \textit{Syria and the USA}, 77-94.
supply them when Shishakli could not guarantee that they would not be used against Israel.  

The administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower, spearheaded by secretary of state John Foster Dulles had a more hands on approach to the Middle East. Dulles visited Damascus, as the first Secretary of State to do so, in May 1953. Despite a public posture against Eisenhower, Shishakli proved forthcoming in private talks with Dulles. Shisakli was willing to take a stand against communism, but demanded US weapons. Dulles gave the same answer as Truman. Israel stood as a constant wedge between Syria and the US, as the Syrians could not accept US terms. The US could not ignore its ties with Israel to gain Syria as an anti-communist state, and the Syrian leaders could not ignore its people’s fear of Israel to gain US backing. After the condemned Israeli attack on the Jordanian ruled village of Qibya on the West Bank in 1953, the wedge between Syria and the US were widened. Dulles halted aid to Israel. After pressure on the US State Department from the American Israeli lobby, aid resumed after a month. Eisenhower’s regional defense structure facing the Soviet Union, with closer US ties to Iran and Turkey pushed Syria further away from the US. Syria saw Eisenhower’s new Middle East policy as new imperialists merging together with its sinister neighbors, Iran and Turkey. Not long after Syria bought weapons for $23 million from Czechoslovakia, this in fact preceded Nasser’s Czech arms deal in 1955. Egyptian President Nasser was already popular in Syria and following the Suez War, where Nasser won a massive PR victory, his popularity in Syria exploded. The uncovering of Operation Straggle further enhanced Nasser’s success in Syria. Operation Straggle was part of a British-American-Iraqi plot to overthrow the Syrian regime at the end of 1956. The Eisenhower doctrine of 1957 which misread the Syrian population made US-Syrian relations even worse. Under the Eisenhower Doctrine a country could request American economic assistance and aid from US military forces if it was being threatened by

35 Moubayed. *Syria and the USA*, 77-94.
38 Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*. 324-326.
another state, and Eisenhower singled out the Soviet threat. This doctrine misread Syria because the Americans believed Syria was a Soviet satellite state, which it in fact was not. The Syrian American Crisis of 1957 even brought about a new low-level in Syrian-American relations. Syrian authorities uncovered *Operation Wappen*, which was a Washington approved CIA plot to prohibit Syria from becoming a full-fledged Soviet Satellite. The US was on the verge of using military force on Syria from keeping it from becoming a Soviet satellite, but feared reprisals.\(^{40}\) However, the Syrians no more desired Soviet domination than the Americans did. The Syrian politicians, not wanting any foreign power to dominate them, looked to Nasser. A Syrian-Egyptian union, the United Arab Republic (UAR), was announced on February 1, 1958. Nasser took charge of UAR foreign affairs, and the US Embassy in Damascus was downgraded to a Consulate and its Ambassador moved to Cairo.\(^ {41}\) The Syrians felt like subjects rather than equals in the union. Eventually a group of Sunni officers staged a coup on 28 September 1961 and ended the union with Egypt. The new Syrian military regime was perceived by the Americans as pro-western compared to previous Syrian standards. When President John F. Kennedy succeeded Eisenhower on January 20, 1961, the Kennedy administration quietly backed and recognized the independent state of Syria, but the focus was on Nasser and Egypt. Meanwhile, a group of displeased Syrian officers secretly worked on a plan to seize power in Syria, and in 1963 their plan was realized.\(^ {42}\)

2.3 The Ba’ath Party and Hafez al Assad

The Ba’ath party was founded by two Syrians in 1947 and its ideology was Arab-unity, freedom and socialism. Ba’ath ideology may seem similar to communist, but the Syrians (and Arabs in general) did not trust the Communists because they were seen as servants of Moscow rather than the Arabs. During the UAR a group of Syrian officers, 

\(^{40}\) David W. Lesch. *“When the Relationship Went Sour: Syria and the Eisenhower Administration”* 


the Military Committee, secretly worked to keep the Ba’ath party alive. Nasser had put Assad in a dead-end job in Cairo as he and his likeminded were seen as a threat to a stable UAR. The Military Committee became one of several groups fighting for power in Syria following the break of the UAR. One of the officers in this group, a 30-year-old air force captain named Hafez al-Assad, quickly became one of the leading figures in the Ba’ath party. Assad was born in a poor mountain village in North-Western Syria and belonged to the Alawi sect. The Alawi’s are a religious minority of heterodox Shi’a Muslims. He got his education from the military academy, like many other from minority background, because tuition there was free. Assad excelled at the academy, and became an officer. He was from young age a member of the Ba’ath party, and his officer status allowed him to carry on with high stake politics. His main political rival was Salah Jadid, a Syrian general and the de facto ruler of Syria from 1966 to 1970.

The Ba’ath party took power through a coup in 1963, and with the Ba’ath the Alawi’s came to power. Hafez al-Assad, the lion of Damascus, assumed total power in Syria in 1970, and remained president until his death in June 2000. When the Iraqi branch of the Ba’ath Party took power in Baghdad on February 8, 1963, it inspired the Syrian party to try the same. One month later the Ba’ath party took power, and the Military Committee was instrumental in this takeover. The coup was purely a military affair. The Ba’ath party had monopolized power in the armed forces through sectarian recruitment of officers in the armed forces. They could do so because the Ba’athist Military Committee supervised the military organization. From 1963 to 1969, the Ba’ath party almost completely removed all non-Alawi (or Alawi friendly) officers in the military, and thus created sectarian polarization in the armed forces. The Ba’ath party was internally unstable and power struggles within the party roamed from 1964 to 1966. The Military Committee staged a successful and bloody coup on February 23 1966. With the new regime, Assad became Minister of Defense at age 35. This new regime was

43 Cleveland and Bunton, A History of the Modern Middle East. 398-401.
46 Van Dam. The Struggle for Power in Syria. 34-61.
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extremely violent in its purging of political enemies and the old elite. The regime was very skeptical of the Soviets, but received aid, weapons and training of officers from the Soviet Union. After the Israeli invasion on Sinai in 1956 and provocation of small battles along the border since 1948, there was a deep-rooted fear of an Israeli invasion in Syria. Israel attacked Egypt, Syria and Jordan on June 5, 1967. The Israelis acted after receiving, what they presumed was, a go-ahead from US President Lyndon B. Johnson. An emerging consensus among scholars is that this was the result of misunderstanding and mistrust, and that none of the parts really wanted the war. This may be new information for readers who are not up to date on research regarding the Arab-Israeli Conflict, or for those relying on mass media as their source of information. Syria lost the Golan Heights and Mount Hermon to the Israelis, but Soviet and US pressure on Israel prevented the Israelis from expanding further into Syria. The war drove 120,000 Syrians from their homes and soon after the war Syria broke of official diplomatic contact with the US. The consequences of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War are seen today, as the essence of Syrian foreign policy has for decades been to regain the territories lost in 1967. The loss of the

Golan Heights became a symbol of what had gone wrong in Syria since its independence. The war transformed Assad’s aspirations for ultimate power in Syria. Assad blamed the loss on Jadid and strongly disagreed with his choice of distancing Syria from the rest of the Arab world. Assad built an independent powerbase and was especially successful with the military rather than the civilians. Inspired perhaps by the Ba’athist in Iraq, Assad knew that all he needed was the military and so he gradually stripped Jadid’s power. In November 1970, Assad arrested Jadid and his supporters in the government. Early in 1971, Assad was elected to a seven-year term as president.\(^{52}\)

After the Six-Day War in 1967 Assad concluded that Syria needed to strengthen its military and that there had to be a united Arab front against Israel. Egypt was an important part in Assad’s united Arab front and it became his goal to improve Egyptian-Syrian relations, and so a new chapter in the US-Syrian relationship opened after when Assad became president. The Syrian-Egyptian relationship was characterized by mistrust and suspicion, but Assad and the Egyptian president Anwar al Sadat agreed early that they could unite against Israel. However, Syria had to wait for Egypt to improve relations with the Soviet Union and finish negotiation with Israel on the Suez Canal. Egypt and Syria met in August 1973 to plan a united war on Israel, but the Egyptians were ambivalent in trusting the Syrians after 1967.\(^{53}\)

### 2.4 US-Syrian relations 1969-1976

US President Richard Nixon’s National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger described Syria in 1969 as a “Sleeping Dog best left undisturbed” and such was American attitude towards Syria at the time. Hafez al-Assad’s regime was thought to be relatively moderate compared to his predecessors. Kissinger sought to defeat Arab opposition to Israel though a stalemate. This likely reinforced the sleeping dog attitude. Following the Syrian dispute with Jordan in September 1970, the Americans were forced to consider asking Israel to intervene and save Jordan. This meant a dangerous showdown with the USSR. The Jordanian forces drove the Syrian invaders back without direct Israeli

\(^{52}\) Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*. 398-400.
involvement. The Americans could have derived several lessons from this incident. However, Lars Hasvoll Bakke, in his MA-thesis found evidences pointing that the lesson learnt, at least for Kissinger sake, was that Israel proved a strategic asset for projecting US power against Soviet clients.\textsuperscript{54}

President Hafez al-Assad did attempt to improve relations with the US, and American analysts saw him as moderate compared to his predecessors. However, nothing indicates that this translated into serious diplomatic \emph{rapprochements}. When the Syrian government wished to purchase 4000 Chrysler trucks in 1972, Nixon denied the sale after Kissinger’s advice. In addition, the Syrian Prime Minister had a secret meeting at the US-embassy in Beirut where the Americans apparently promised the start of a dialog. It seems as though the Americans tried to ignore the Syrians. When the 1973 October War broke out, Kissinger struggled to find a way to contact the Syrians. The US Ambassador to Syria, Hugh H Smythe, departed during the Arab-Israeli war of 1967 due to worsening US-Syrian relations, and no US ambassador was stationed in Syria before 1974. Therefore, direct contact with the Syrian government was difficult for US officials during the 1973 October War with Israel. This shows the extent of the break between Syria and the US. After the 1973 October War Kissinger found Egypt a more willing and flexible partner.\textsuperscript{55}

The 1973 war made tackling the Arab-Israeli conflict one of the US central foreign policy objectives. This made Syria a more preferable to Washington, but mainly for achieving an improvement of Egyptian-Israeli relations. Of all Arab states, improving Egypt’s relationship with Israel could drastically improve Israel’s security. Kissinger repeatedly advised Israel to make a deal with Egypt, as this would isolate Syria. Syria was by then far too dangerous to ignore, and proved difficult to isolate. Therefore, containment was the strategy.\textsuperscript{56} The containment continued when the US was unable to change Israel’s position on the Golan Heights. During Nixon’s visit to Damascus, he

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid. 112-113. Bakke never got the memocons from this meeting as one of the two copies are in Kissinger’s private collection at Yale, and the application for the other copy was never processed.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid. \emph{114}. 
apparently promised Asad a return of the Golan Heights. Strangely, neither the Americans nor the Syrians pressed for a fulfillment of this oral promise.\textsuperscript{57}

Hafez al-Assad personally wanted a good relationship with the US, and when Israel did not stand in the way, the Syrian-American relationship improved.\textsuperscript{58} However, Syrian-American relations were dominated by the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Cold War. Balancing both Israel and the Arab states became an increasingly difficult task for the US government, and US-Syrian relations worsened. Syria, unlike Egypt, was not seen as a crucial state, and Syria did not possess a lobby in the US, like Israel. Kissinger hoped for a durable peace, but Gerald Ford lost the presidential election in 1976 to Jimmy Carter. Ford’s plans were never realized. By 1976 Syria was left in limbo, being neither fully isolated nor having its problems with Israel readdressed.\textsuperscript{59}

\section*{2.5 The Syrian society}

Until the end of the French mandate period, Syria had largely self-sufficient agrarian and trade based economy. After World War II, a burst of growth in mechanized agriculture took place, but it exhausted itself by the late 1950s. Due to this failing industrialization and strong economic dependency, a strong feeling emerged among the Syrian people that state intervention was necessary. Therefore, the Ba’ath party undertook large-scale nationalization of banks and big businesses and land reforms to limit the size of great estates during the period of 1963-1966.\textsuperscript{60} This state capitalism resulted in a bloated and inefficient public sector, that served as a support base for the Assad regime. Regime survival drove economic policy, and the public sector was used as a source of patronage by feeding elements of society tied to the state apparatus.\textsuperscript{61} President Assad controlled an authoritarian regime that concentrated personal power in a “presidential monarchy”. The Assad presidency became the main source of public policy and held the power of command, appointment, and ruling over the Ba’ath party.
the armed forces, intelligence agencies, and government bureaucracy. The Syrian president is, and was also then, elected to a seven-year renewable term after nomination by the Ba’ath party and the parliament. Hafez al Assad was in the end elected a total of five times totally unopposed. The Syrian regime rested upon three pillars of power: the party apparatus, the army, and the government bureaucracy. In the years before Assad, the political conflicts within the Ba’ath party was ideological, fought between the left and right wing, settled at the part congress or by intraparty military coups. Under president Assad, they took the form of conflicts over the evolution of economic policy, and the search for both collective and individual redress and privileges through the party and corporative institutions it controlled.

Political Islam provided the strongest opposition to the Ba’athist regime in Syria. The Ba’ath party had its support initially rooted in the rural areas, while the Islamic opposition was concentrated in the urban areas of Syria. Their leaders were the ulema (religious scholars) and the Muslim Brotherhood. In the 1960s, they denounced the secularism of the regime and protested the large-scale nationalization taking place all over Syria. The members of the Muslim Brotherhood were typically picked from urban merchant families who owned large estates and businesses hit by the nationalization. From 1977 to 1982, the Muslim Brotherhood incited a violent uprising against the regime. The uprising was the result of several factors. Among them secularism, corruption, sectarian favoritism, Assad’s confrontation with the Palestinians in Lebanon, and Sunni resentment of minority domination. As we now know, the revolt ended when government troops attacked the Muslim Brotherhood base in Hama in 1982, where between 15 000 and 30 000 people were killed and the Sunni uprising was quelled.

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62 Ibid. 264.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid. 267-268.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid. 267.
2.6 Preparations for a Lasting Peace

Nowhere was the Carter Administration more determined to preserve American Interests than in the Middle East. The U.S. could not risk another Arab-Israeli War, and the U.S. was committed to the security of the State of Israel. This was a domestic minefield given the value of the Jewish community assigned to Israel. After the 1973 October War the American Government was compelled to mediate. Kissinger sought to bring about continuity in American Policy towards Israel, and limited himself to mediate a cease-fire and set of partial withdrawals. It was never an initial step in the pursuit of a peace process that included the whole of the Middle East. In contrast, the Carter administration aimed from beginning to start a peace process in the Arab-Israeli Conflict.\(^67\) In October 1976, Cyrus Vance recommended to Presidential Candidate Carter that they should ultimately urge the parties to reach a final settlement which was to be carried out in stages.\(^68\) Vance admired Kissinger’s shuttle diplomacy, but saw that it had reached its limit of effectiveness. The new administration had to face the big issues: Arab recognition of Israel, return of territory taken by Israel in 1967, and a settlement for the Palestinians. Everybody knew the Israelis would not give up any territory or make concessions on the Palestinian issue unless the Arabs, including the Palestinians, were ready to recognize Israel. Vance and President Carter both agreed that a lasting solution in the Middle East could not be reached unless a just answer to the Palestinian question could be found.\(^69\) However, Israel had no intention of conceding this and PLO’s refusal of recognizing Israel had played right into their hand.

Two Middle East Specialist in the Department of State, Alfred Atherton and Harold Saunders, together with William Quandt on the NSC staff were asked to prepare a paper setting fourth options for the NSC Policy Review Committee. They argued that the

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\(^68\) Ibid. 164.

\(^69\) Ibid.
extraordinarily dynamic situation in the Middle East was due to the October war of 1973. In their view the war ended a longer period of illusory stability, and dispelled any assumption that the Arab-Israeli problem would stabilize on basis other than a settlement. They thought that the absence of progress towards such a settlement would cause a slide towards an Arab-Israeli confrontation with the extended consequence of a U.S.-soviet collision. The war also created a unique opportunity to generate movement towards such a settlement. The Arab states involved in the dispute moved away from the military solution the Soviets could help them seek, towards the negotiated solution they believed the U.S. could help them achieve. For the Israeli’s, the war dissipated the sense of security in an open ended no-peace, no-war situation derived from their 1967 victory. In the eyes of Atherton, Saunders and Quandt, the situation would not stand still, and they had to find a way to protect U.S. interests in the region. They saw two basic choices:

(1) a temporizing approach that tries through maneuver and limited action to preserve our interests in this dynamic environment, but stops short of committing our full influence to the achievement of a settlement; and (2) a commitment to put our full influence into the scale in an effort to achieve a settlement.

They argued throughout 24 pages that the latter alternative was the only way to actively preserve U.S. interests in the Middle East. The temporizing approach only appearing in the document to show how U.S. policy in the Middle East from 1967 through 1973 and how it failed in preparing a lasting solution in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The active approach presented made the administration participate directly and take the risk of failing. Carter and Vance, with the backing of the State Department, must have thought that American interests could be severely threatened by a new war. On January 21, the President directed that the Policy Review Committee undertook an analysis of policy alternatives on both the short-term issues in the Middle East and broader question of an

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70 NSA Staff Material, Arab-Israeli Dispute, 01.14.77 – NSA 17 “Staff Material: Office”, Box 111, Jimmy Carter Library.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.
Arab-Israeli Peace settlement.\textsuperscript{73} One of the issues, the policy on the reconvening of the Geneva conference\textsuperscript{74}, was of specific importance regarding the future of U.S.-Syrian diplomatic relations. Syria chose not to attend the Geneva conference in 1973 because the U.S. and Israel refused to recognize the PLO as the representative body for the Palestinians at the conference, since the PLO refused to recognize Israel’s right to exist.\textsuperscript{75} In the minds of the Americans, Syria was seen as a key in getting the PLO to the negotiating table. The only sure thing the Carter Administration knew in early 1977 was that Assad had deep suspicions of the USSR, and relations cooled when the Syrians fought the Palestinians in Lebanon.\textsuperscript{76} (See chapter two, part two) The heads of Israel, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi-Arabia were all invited to Washington to meet the new President Carter, and the idea of a meeting between Carter and President Assad was also raised.\textsuperscript{77} Assad was never invited to Washington. The peace initiative was the primary focus of the Carter administration, but the Lebanese civil war forcibly made its way into an important issue on U.S.-Syrian relations.


\textsuperscript{74} The Geneva Conference first convened in 1973 in Geneva, Switzerland, under the co-chairmanship of the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Foreign Ministers from Israel, Egypt and Jordan attended the conference in an attempt to implement U.N. resolution 338, which called for negotiation among Israel, Egypt Jordan, and Syria, aimed to establish a just and durable peace in the Middle East.

\textsuperscript{75} William B. Quandt, \textit{Peace Process, 138-140.}

\textsuperscript{76} NSA Staff Material, \textit{Arab-Israeli Dispute, 01.14.77 – NSA 17 “Staff Material: Office”, Box 111, Jimmy Carter Library. 9.}

\textsuperscript{77} Quandt, \textit{Peace Process, 180.}
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3 Chapter 3: Trouble in Lebanon

3.1 The Syrian intervention in Lebanon

The Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) plays a major role in U.S.-Syrian diplomatic relations during the Jimmy Carter presidency. The war in Lebanon affected the U.S.-Syrian relationship because of the involvement of Israel, and because of international interest in the war. The peace initiative would be the main focus the Carter administration, but the situation in Lebanon was the second greatest point of interest to the U.S.

The Lebanese Civil War started in the spring of 1975 as a conflict between the Phalange party and its allies in the Lebanese Front, and the nationalist and progressive Lebanese National Movement (LNM). The LNM, led by Kamal Jumblatt, fought to replace the group based political system with a secular democracy, with individual voting right. The Phalange party and its allies viewed the LNM cause only as a wish for a Muslim majority rule, and to end Lebanon’s status as a Christian state in the Middle East. Lebanon’s President Suleiman Frangieh (1970-1976) represented the Phalange party as a politician, but he was acting as Lebanon’s president thereby representing everybody. Meaning, the Phalange militia was led by Lebanon’s former president Camille Chamoun (1952-1958), not Frangieh. Further, the Lebanese army was under president Frangieh’s control, not the Phalange party.

The Muslims (Druze, Sunni- and Shia Muslims) outnumbered the Christians in Lebanon, but seats in the Lebanese parliament had featured a confessional distribution where each religious group has an allotted number of deputies in the parliament. In elections from 1932-1972 seats were appointed to Christians and Muslims by a 6:5 ratio. In 1975 there were closer to 350 000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, most of

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78 The Phalange party was a right-wing party mainly supported by Maronite Christians, and the Lebanese Front was a coalition of mainly Christian parties formed in 1976. The LNM was a front of leftists, Pan-Arab, and Syrian nationalist parties that supported the PLO.


80 The Confessional Distribution in Lebanon from 1953 was based on the last official census from 1932.
them Muslims. Despite not being integrated into Lebanese society, the refugees increased Lebanon’s Muslim population and increased political tensions within Lebanon. Back in 1969, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser (1956-1970) made a deal with the Lebanese government that Palestinian guerillas would use Lebanon as base of operations against Israel.\textsuperscript{81} The Palestinian refugee camps were increasingly militarized and politically radicalized. They challenged the Lebanese government in a way which led some to accuse the Palestinians to create a state within the state.

After the Lebanese army (not the Phalanges party militia) used deadly force against Muslim demonstrators and killed Muslim political leader Maruf Sad in the town Saida. Sad’s death inspired Palestinian commandos to fight side by side with a Lebanese leftist militia against the Lebanese army. The conflict spread to Beirut when armed men attacked Pierre Gemayel, founder of the Phalange party and Lebanon’s largest militia with 15 000 armed members, as he exited church. He survived, but three people were killed. Phalange party members took revenge by executing 18 Palestinians travelling through a Christian suburb in Beirut by bus. After the bus massacre became known, the Lebanese people understood that war was coming.\textsuperscript{82}

Lebanon’s president was not able to handle the fighting, and named a military cabinet on 23 May 1975. However, the cabinet had to resign after three days. As Frangieh was forced to name a new government, the Syrians intervened for the first time, as mediators.\textsuperscript{83} Following the failure to solve this political crisis, the conflict escalated. The Lebanese capital Beirut was divided into two halves and in December 1975 the civil war was bloodier than ever before. The divide of Beirut was the result of the militia’s fight for control over Beirut’s strategic points and buildings, resulting in endless killing of innocent people. Now, the Lebanese President Frangieh officially joined forces with the Phalange party militia, and rejected any dialogue as long as “order” was not established. Fighting went on and the Phalange militias started “cleansing operations” in Palestinian refugee camps. The joint forces of the LNM and

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid. 438-439
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid. 440-441
the PLO responded by laying siege and invading the town of Damur, Camille Chamoun’s headquarter, on 22 January 1976. In response, the Phalange militias readjusted their aims, accusing the Palestinians of intervening in the country’s internal affairs. Before, the Phalange party aimed at stopping the LNM not directly the Palestinians. First, they tried to redistribute the Palestinians in Lebanon onto other Arab states. Failing that, the Phalange party accused Sunni Muslims of weakening the power and will of the state.  

In 1976 foreign powers played a more active role in Lebanon because the fighting militias gradually needed more weapons, vehicles, ammunitions, and other expensive wartime commodities. The Phalange militia and its allies received weapons from Israel in its fight against Palestinian militia groups while the LNM got its weapons from Soviet client states such as Libya and Iraq. Thus, the Lebanese civil war became a part of the Cold War through the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the struggle between radical and conservative Arab states. Before its intervention in Lebanon, Syria had been fighting for the rights of the Palestinian refugees and their right to a Palestinian state. In the Lebanese civil war however, they supported the Maronite Christians in their fight against the LNM and the PLO. This was a huge paradox, because at the same time Assad advocated Palestinian rights in the Middle East. On 23 January 1976, the Syrians negotiated a cease-fire and decided to deploy units of the Palestinian Liberation Army (PLA) along the “Green Line” separating the two halves of Beirut. The Syrians created a constitutional charter with the Lebanese Prime Minister Rashid Karami and Frangieh to try and establish parity between Christians and Sunni Muslims, but the LNM rejected the charter, insisting on abolishing political sectarianism and renewing the electoral system. As the crisis continued to unfold, the majority of Lebanon called for Frangieh’s resignation. The Syrian President Hafez al-Assad remained committed to Frangieh but he could no longer hold a legitimized position as Lebanese president forcing Assad to let him go.

85 Rogan. Araberene- Historien om det arabiske folk, 441-444.
86 Traboulsi. A History of Modern Lebanon, 200
On 25 March the Lebanese presidential palace was bombarded, an indication of the breakdown of the government. Another break-through happened at the end of March, when Assad met the Druze leader Kamal Jumblatt. Jumblatt then headed a Palestinian-Lebanese coalition, which controlled 80 per cent of Lebanon’s territory, and was trying to realize his attempt to change the political system. The Maronite Phalange militia controlled less than 20 percent of Lebanon at that time. Assad, gripped by a strategic vision to be a regional counterweight to the Egyptian president, Anwar al-Sadat, was not interested in an internal political change in Lebanon. Additionally, he had already committed himself to supporting Frangieh and the Phalange. Jumblatt pleaded for the departure of Frangieh, the abolishment of sectarianism and electoral reform before the election of the new president. Assad continued to back Frangieh and the constitutional document that confirmed sectarianism. The meeting ended with Jumblatt vowing to seek a military defeat of the Lebanese Front, and Assad revealed his intention to carry out a Syrian military intervention into Lebanon to control the PLO. This was very paradoxical considering Assad prided himself the protector of the Palestinian people, and a big supporter of PLO.

Since January 1976, the U.S. administration had lauded the positive political role of Syria in Lebanon, supporting the constitutional document signed in Damascus by Frangieh and Prime Minister Rashid Abdul Hamid Karami. However, when Syrian Brigadier-General Hikmat Shihabi approached U.S. Ambassador Richard Murphy in Damascus and spoke vaguely of Syria’s intention to intervene in Lebanon, Kissinger instructed Murphy to clarify the matter with Assad. On 18 March, Assad informed Murphy that President Frangieh had requested Syrian military assistance and that he planned to extend a helping hand to their brethren. When Murphy mentioned the sensitive issue of the security of Israel’s borders, Assad answered that he could not guarantee anything concerning Israel. Assad urged that Israel had nothing to do with this internal Arab affair, and hoped the United States would help Israel understand this. The Israeli reaction to this was to inform the United States on 23 March that they would take strategic positions in Lebanon as quietly as possible in the event of a Syrian intervention. The next day, 24 March, the Israeli cabinet would consider a Syrian

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presence over brigade size unacceptable and would not tolerate movement of Syrian forces beyond an area of ten kilometers south of the Beirut-Damascus road.88 This was the famous “Red Line”.89 U.S. Special emissary Dean Brown reported from Lebanon on 1 April that the Christians wanted the Syrians to save them. Frangeieh and the Phalange had already won over to a Syrian intervention, but some hoped for an American lead intervention under UN-auspices. Brown made it clear for them that a military venture, one year after the Vietnam debacle, would not be accepted by the American public.90

In fact, the decision to ask Syria for a military intervention came after failing to directly involve Israel militarily in the Lebanese conflict. The Lebanese Front contacted Israel in 1975 to involve them in the conflict. The Israelis decided to give the Phalange weapons and training, but would not get directly involved in the conflict. During Brown’s Lebanese mission, the U.S.–brokered Syrian military intervention had been arranged. Brown reported to his superiors that he thought perhaps the Syrians would enforce the Cairo agreement against the Palestinians. The Cairo agreement of 1969 was an initial secret agreement signed by Lebanese, Egyptian and Palestinian representatives, and it dealt with the political, social and military dimension of the Palestinian presence in Lebanon. Most important was allowing PLO guerillas access to specified areas along the Israeli-Lebanese border.91 Israel conditionally approved the Syrian intervention on 21 April 1976. After reiterating its policy of non-intervention in Lebanese affairs, Israel made it clear that any movements across the Litani River would be regarded as a threat to Israel’s security. In fact, the “Red Line” had moved several kilometers to the south.92 The so-called red line agreement was an Israeli policy designed to prevent Syrian ADF troops to reach the Israeli unfortified border. Israel threatened to attack Syria if they crossed a line placed with the Litani river. The Americans had every reason to be happy

88 Ibid 201.
90 Ibid 203.
92 Traboulsi. A History of Modern Lebanon, 204.
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with these developments. Syria, the main advocate of the representation of the PLO in the event of any peace talks, was fighting the PLO. Syria’s main ally, the Soviet Union, was turning against Damascus because of the military and political pressure they were exerting on the Palestinians. Brown travelled back to the US right in time for the presidential elections to take place in his absence. The United States supported presidential candidate Iliyas Sarkis, and the CIA and Saudi Arabia spent large sums buying votes for him. President Assad of Syria also preferred Sarkis as president. Sarkis’ main rival, Raymond Edde, boycotted the elections on the suspicion that they were not free, and Sarkis was thus elected president on 8 May 1976.

On 1 June, President Assad, declaring that he was responding to a call for help from several Maronite villages, announced that he had ordered the entry of 6000 Syrian soldiers into Lebanon. After a few days, Syrian troops had reached some 15 000 units inside of Lebanon. Simultaneously, the Arab League decided to send an Arab Deterrent Force (ADF) to Lebanon, a preparation for granting Syrian military intervention pan-Arab cover and legitimacy. The Joint Forces of the LNM and the PLO declared a general mobilization against the Syrians.93

On 23 September 1976, Sarkis replaced Frangieh as president as the Syrian forces launched their final offensive against the Joint Forces. The combined efforts of Syria and Israel turned the balance of the war for the Phalange and its allies, and so the LNM head Jumblatt went on a tour of Arab states and France. His aim was to balance the Syrian troops in the ADF with contingents from the major Arab countries. No one would help Jumblatt and if that was not enough, a few days later on 16 October a mini-Arab summit in Riyadh sealed reconciliation between Assad and Sadat. The Syrian troops were renamed the Arab Deterrent Force and they were given a free hand in Syria with the symbolic participation of detachments from Saudi Arabia, the two Yemens and the United Arab Emirates. The eighth Arab Summit in Cairo on 26 October ratified Assad’s free hand in Lebanon.94 In mid-November the ADF made its unopposed entry into West Beirut. At the end of 1976 Sarkis had the support of 30 000 soldiers from the

93 Ibid 206.

ADF. The Israeli issue of Syrian ADF forces in southern Lebanon would become one of the Carter administration’s obstacles in its quest for a renewed Geneva peace conference in 1977.

3.2 The Political Marshland of the Lebanese Civil War

The Carter administration was put right in the middle of the Lebanese Civil War and the tense situation it created between Israel and Syria. Especially the situation in the south of Lebanon, near the Israeli border, made brokering mutual grounds for a peace agreement between Israel and Syria harder. Further, the primary source material examined unfolds far more complex situation than first imagined. As read in chapter two, Israel and Syria both supported and contributed to the success of Iliyas Sarkis and the Phalanges and its allies. On the surface, Israel and Syria was fighting the PLO together in Lebanon but the reality was more complex. Syria first appears in the source material when Israel wanted the Carter Administration to pressure President Assad of Syria to call back ADF forces from South Lebanon. This section examines U.S. policy towards Syria in relation to the Lebanese civil war in 1977. It also sheds some light on why Israel and Syria actually were in a serious conflict in Lebanon.

During the first days of the new administration, the Lebanese civil war made its entry into Jimmy Carter’s office trough pressure from Israel to prevent Syrian troop movement further south than the Red Line. The issue presented by Israel in late January was an objection to planned ADF force movement towards the Sothern Lebanese province Nabatiyah. The U.S ambassador in Damascus, Richard W. Murphy, reported to Secretary Vance that both “Jerusalem and Damascus have quickly talked themselves into a corner about the ASF [ADF] in Nabatiyah”95 He further advised Vance that Israel should move or abandon their “Red Line” since it no longer served a useful purpose.96 Two days later, the Israeli ambassador to the U.S., Simscia Dinitz, wanted the

95 Telegram, Richard Murphy to Cyrus Vance, 01.27.77, NSA 6 Country file, Box 74, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library. 2.
96 Ibid.
Americans to recognize that the troop problem in Lebanon was in the hands of the Syrians, not the Lebanese.\textsuperscript{97} The Syrians did not agree. Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam firmly maintained that the ADF troops were under the command of the Lebanese army and that this was an attempt from Israel to interfere with the internal affairs of Lebanon.\textsuperscript{98} Secretary Vance reported to President Carter that U.S. officials tried to contact Khaddam to urge a withdrawal but he was unresponsive, and accused Israel of creating a situation to impede the movement towards peace in the region.\textsuperscript{99} Israel demanded U.S. pressure to prevent the Syrian troops to move further south. President Sarkis tried convincing the Americans that Syrian troops were moving southwards to “prevent the depravations of Palestinians”.\textsuperscript{100} Vance reported to President Carter that they had provided the Israelis with an account of their talks with Sarkis and Khaddam, and that they recognized Syria as a major actor in Lebanon.\textsuperscript{101} To Khaddam and Sarkis Vance said that they could not guarantee that Israel wouldn’t refrain from action if Syrian troops moved as far south as Nabatiyah.\textsuperscript{102} On January 30, Ambassador Murphy instructed his deputy to say to Khaddam that Syria should consider using “non-Syrian ASF units vice Syrians [in southern Lebanon closer to Israel]”.\textsuperscript{103} Murphy tried to explain why Israel was anxious about Syrian ASF troops, but there was no obvious pressure made on the Syrians from the Americans.

During the first ten days in office, the Carter administration contacted by the Israelis who requested they put pressure the Syrians in Lebanon. Perhaps Israel wanted to test

\textsuperscript{97} Memo, Cyrus Vance to Jimmy Carter, 01.29.77, NLC 128 Plains File, BOX 12, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

\textsuperscript{98} Note: Khaddam was both Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister from 1970-1984. Telegram, Embassy Damascus to SECSTATE WASHDC, 01.28.77, Presidents Correspondence with Foreign Leaders, Syria, Box 18.

\textsuperscript{99} Memorandum, Cyrus Vance to Jimmy Carter, 01.29.77, NLC 128 Plains File, BOX 12, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

\textsuperscript{100} Memorandum, Cyrus Vance to Jimmy Carter, 01.29.77, NLC 128 Plains File, BOX 12, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid. 2.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid. 2.

\textsuperscript{103} Telegram, Richard Murphy to SECSTATE WASHDC, 01.30.77, Presidents Correspondence with foreign Leaders, Syria, Box 18.
the Carter administration on how committed they were to the security of Israel. The Americans did as asked and mediated the Israeli message, as seen in the January 29 memorandum. However, the Americans had no problems with Assad’s position of power in Lebanon as long as he did not move too close to the Israeli border.

3.3 A bad taste in Damascus

A response from Syria on this issue came on February 8, after Assad had met with Sarkis on February 2. Khaddam thought the Nabatiyah problem was a fictional problem created by Israel to challenge the new Carter administration, but never the less said that Assad urged Sarkis to reconstitute a “minimum of regular Lebanese forces for deployment in south Lebanon as quickly as possible.” Thereby denying any control over ADF in Lebanon, and making this Israel’s problem with the internal affairs of Lebanon. Ambassador Murphy suggested that the time was ripe for Sarkis to make a public statement where he reiterated the ADF mission and “his full control over its ASF[ADF] mission” It was Syria’s firm belief that Israel was testing the new Carter administration and that if Carter would give in to the pressure from the Government of Israel, Israel would then be able to block any movement towards peace in the Middle East. The Israelis of course, were using the same argument about Syria, that they were testing the capacity of the Carter administration and the government of Israel. When Khaddam was faced with these accusations he merely stated that if Syria was to pressure Israel it would do so at the Golan Heights. He further stated that any movement done by the ADF was planned by the ADF command at Riyadh and the Cairo Summit. Therefore, the ADF were under Sarkis command, not Syrian. Assad wanted the U.S. Government to exert pressure on Sarkis to send more Lebanese troops south towards the Israeli border, because Syria could not “direct Lebanese policy and has no right to do

104 Telegram, Richard Murphy to Secretary Vance, 02.01.77, Presidents Correspondence with foreign Leaders, Syria, Box 18. Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.
105 Telegram, Richard Murphy to Secretary Vance section 1 of 2, 02.08.77, Presidents Correspondence with Foreign Leaders, Box 18. Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
so”. Ambassador Murphy commented to his superior that he thought the U.S. should pressure Israel to restrain from counteraction and pointing out that this would hurt only Sarkis, not Assad. What would help Israel out of their corner, if they wanted out, was instead Sarkis publicly restating his control over the ADF forces taking the focus away from Syrian troops within the ADF.  

Israeli pressure on the U.S. to force the Syrian ADF forces in southern Lebanon to withdraw was causing unnecessary tensions before the visit to Damascus February 20-21. The State Department sent a telegram to Damascus requesting that Syrian troops in Lebanon did not enter any Palestinian camps in the general area of Secretary Vance’ travel route. Vance was traveling by car through southern Lebanon to visit Beirut February 18, and the entering of Palestinian camps was the ADF mission there, forcing the Syrian ADF forces to withdraw for the safety of the U.S. Secretary of State. The Americans made sure to point out to the Syrians that they would not interfere in the Syrians tactical handling in Lebanon, but they did required the ADF forces to withdraw from Nabatiyah, as Israel had wanted. Evidence to whether or not this was a planned solution to the “Lebanese troop problem” is hard to find in the declassified written record, but the Syrians did perceive it as such. The Syrians were disappointed in the United States government’s handling of the Israeli pressure, and a Syrian official told Murphy that this situation had left a “bad taste in Damascus”. As mentioned above, Vance traveled to Damascus February 20-21 to meet with the Syrian Government. During the meeting with Assad on February 20, the Syrian relationship with the Soviets came up. Syrian-Soviet relations were passing through a state of “frigidity”, because of the Soviets bringing up differences regarding the situation in Lebanon. Syria did not

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109 Telegram, Richard Murphy to Secretary Vance section 2 of 2, 02.08.77, Presidents Correspondence with Foreign Leaders, Box 18. Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.  
110 Ibid.  
111 Telegram, Cyrus Vance to Ambassadors Murphy and Parker, 02.15.77, NSA 6 Country File, Box 74, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.  
112 Ibid.  
113 Telegram, Richard Murphy to American Consul in Jerusalem, 02.16.77, NSA 6 Country File, Box 74, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.  
114 Ibid.
want to be a Soviet puppet state, and the two countries could only be friends when the Soviets respected Syria’s national decisions.\footnote{Howard. \textit{Foreign relations of the United States, 1977-1980}. Document 15, \textit{Memorandum of Conversation}, Damascus, February 20, 1977.} At no point during the meeting in Damascus did Vance question Syria’s role in Lebanon, nor Assad’s relationship with Sarkis.\footnote{If this was in fact discussed, it is classified or not written down in the summary of the meeting.} Vance indicated that the U.S. would support Sarkis in his effort to reunify the country. On the issue of Syrian troops in South Lebanon Assad said that “it was not logical that Israel should have a right to say which troops could move where inside Lebanon.”\footnote{Ibid.} Assad was very clear and frank on the issues they discussed, as Vance himself reported on the National Security Council meeting on February 23.\footnote{Telegram, Ambassador Richard W. Murphy to Cyrus Vance, 02.24.77, NSA 6 Country File, Box 74, Syria, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.}

### 3.4 August trouble

President Carter sent Secretary Vance on a trip to the Middle East in early August to discuss progress towards a Geneva Peace Conference. See part chapter three, part three for a more detailed account of these meetings. While the Carter Administration tried to find a way for Syria and Israel to make peace or at least meet as equals at Geneva, Israel and Syria were close to a collision in Lebanon. Israel threatened to send regular combat troops into Southern Lebanon to support Christian militias against Palestinian militias allegedly supported by Syrian army officers. Such an action would make American peacekeeping efforts in the Middle East harder. Israeli pressure on the American government would eventually solve this situation. During Secretary Vance’s trip to the Middle East in August, he visited Damascus twice, on August 4 and briefly on August 11. These meeting are described more in detail in part three of this chapter, and were part of the effort to bring the Arabs including the PLO and Israel to the negotiating table at Geneva. The Americans were hoping that Assad would be the link that could bring the PLO to Geneva, as they themselves could not negotiate directly with them.
After the meetings in Damascus on August 4 were finished, Vance headed to Beirut August 5. In Beirut, he brought up roughly the same issues on the situation in Lebanon with Sarkis as he had done with Assad a day earlier. Indicating American knowledge, and perhaps acceptance, of Assad’s involvement in Sarkis government and the Lebanese war.119 Vance had scheduled meetings with the Israelis on August 10. On August 9, the American ambassador to Israel, Samuel W. Lewis, warned Secretary Vance that Israel was very close to a major military incursion in Southern Lebanon.120 Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan informed Lewis that Israel could no longer tolerate “…increasing Palestinian pressure on the Christian forces[.]”121 The Israelis would not be in Lebanon more than a few hours and would just “clean things out”.122 The record from Vance’s meeting with the Israelis on August 10 reviles the Israeli strategy on the war in Lebanon. According to themselves, the Israeli policy on the war in Lebanon followed two parallel strategic lines: help the Christians and fight the PLO.123 Israel did this by supplying ammunition, helping them maintain equipment, shelling the militias who shelled the Christians, and sometimes (often at night) sending in forces to attack Arab enclaves.124 The Israelis were concerned that the recent agreement between the Palestinian militias in Lebanon and Syria, would put the lives of the Christians in danger. Furthermore, the Israelis now claimed that Syrian officers and ammunitions helped the Palestinian militias to shell Christian militias.125 Israel now wanted secretary Vance to bring the Israeli message to Assad at their meeting the next day. By doing so, the U.S. would not look any good in Syrian eyes and thus harming the peace initiative.

Document 69. Telegram From the Department of State to the White House. Washington, August 5, 1977, 1220Z.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
125 Ibid.
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Perhaps this was the Israeli strategy, to pressure the Carter administration into harming themselves. Planned or not, Vance was given instructions by the Israelis to bring up five points with Assad at their next meeting to “stop an Israeli “clean up” in Southern Lebanon.\(^{126}\) One, the tense situation in Southern Lebanon where Christian militias were under increasing pressure from Palestinian militias. Israel believed Syria beared responsibility for the continued instability in Southern Lebanon. Both the Americans and the Israelis believed the Syrians had made a secret deal with the Palestinians exempting them from the Shtaura agreement in Southern Lebanon. Also, Israeli intelligence had spotted Syrian officers with Palestinian forces in areas close to Christian enclaves.\(^{127}\) Secondly, Israel felt “morally obligated” to “take care” of the threat to the Christian enclaves in southern Lebanon if the Syrians could not enforce a ceasefire.\(^{128}\)

The third issue was how they could pacify Southern Lebanon, preferably through Syrian pressure on adherence to the ceasefire, and the introduction of a Lebanese security force. Also, should they move the Palestinian away from the area close to the Israeli border. Fourth. Israel did not oppose a UN peacekeeping force, but thought a Syrian action would be quicker and more decisive.

The fifth point was that Israel stressed that the Christians had to have the means to be able to defend themselves.\(^{129}\) Instead of bringing the message themselves, Israel used the U.S. as their herald, thus conveying the impression to the Syrians that Israel had great power over U.S. foreign policy. At that time, this was (said once again to underline the impression this made to the Syrians) damaging to U.S. credibility in Syria as

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\(^{127}\) Ibid. A Meeting in Shtaura, Lebanon where Lebanese, Syrian, and PLO military leaders concluded an agreement on July 25 1977. Known as the Shtaura Agreement or Accord, it reduced armaments at 14 Palestinian camps, imposed a freeze on cross-border raids by the Palestinians, whose forces were to remain 15 miles north of the Lebanese-Israeli border, and called for Lebanese troops to patrol that area.

\(^{128}\) Ibid.

\(^{129}\) Ibid.
peacemaker in the Middle East. Vance returned to Damascus August 11 and had a two-hour meeting with Assad.\footnote{Howard. \textit{Foreign relations of the United States, 1977-1980}. Document 88. \textit{Telegram From Secretary of State Vance to the Department of State and the White House}. August 11, 1977, 1940Z.}

Assad denied any Syrian presence with the Palestinians within Southern Lebanon and said the problem would solve itself when recent agreements go into effect.\footnote{Ibid.} Assad was outraged by the Israeli statement of “moral responsibility”, and claimed that it was in fact the Israelis who were responsible for keeping the fighting going.\footnote{Ibid.} Vance notes that Assad understood the “possibility of Israeli military action- well enough to dampen the fighting.\footnote{Ibid.} In late September 1977, there was a cease-fire in South Lebanon after Lebanese Government troops was posted there. At the same time the U.S. signed an agreement to give 25 million dollars in equipment to the Lebanese Government army.\footnote{Howard. \textit{Foreign relations of the United States, 1977-1980}. Document 115.} In 1977, the U.S. foreign policy towards Syria in relation to the Lebanese civil war was clear. The U.S. accepted Syria as a major player in Lebanon letting them do as they pleased, as long as they did not cross Israeli interests. The primary sources indicate that it may have been Israeli pressure and power rather than the actual will of the Carter administration that made the foreign policy on this specific area.

### 3.5 The Syrian Jews

Since the mid 1970’s the Jewish community in the U.S. had been, usually through quiet diplomatic channels, to make living conditions better for Jews in Syria. When President Carter was elected president, the Jewish community used its power to make some real progress. The case of the American interest in the Syrian Jews, naturally, fall in the shadow of the road towards Geneva and the Lebanese civil war. It may not seem as an important matter but it sure was for Israel and her friends in the U.S. The Arab-Israeli
conflict had left the conditions for Jews in Syria quite bad, but in the time of the Carter administration the conditions had become much better. Congressman Stephen J. Solarez sent several letters to President Carter in where he described how terrible he though the conditions were for the approximate 4,500 Jews in Syria.\textsuperscript{135} Worst of all, he writes, was it that they were denied to emigrate from Syria “for a life of freedom and fulfillment abroad.”\textsuperscript{136} Solarez wanted President Carter to ask Assad to let them depart to America, where they could be united with “25,000[...] Syrian Jews”\textsuperscript{137} President Carter received several similar letters from political figures during the first month of his administration, and several information memorandums were sent around on the Jews in Syria. Solarez met with Carter before the Assad meeting and President Carter promised he would mention the Syrian Jews to Assad during their meeting at Geneva May 9, which he did.\textsuperscript{138} Strangely, documents surrounding this subject are few, and many of the available are somewhat redacted. Carter managed to persuade Assad to issue passports to 540 Jewish maidens, so that they could find “suitable husbands [...] in the American Syrian Jewish community.”\textsuperscript{139} The only condition was that the whole process was done in quiet and that the destination immediate destination was the U.S. This process was started, but no declassified record shows how successful it was.

\textsuperscript{135} Letter, \textit{Syrian Jews}. From Congressman Steven J. Solarez to President of the United States. 04.13.77
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{138} Memorandum of information, \textit{Meeting with Congressman Stephen Solarez May 4, 1977}. 05.04.77.
\textsuperscript{139} Letter. \textit{June 17, 1977}. To Secretary of State Cyrus Vance from Chairman of the Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, and International Law Joshua Eilberg. 06.17.77. NLC 43: Counsels office, Box 6.
THE ROAD TO GENEVA

American Diplomatic Relations with Syria in 1977
4 Chapter 4: The Road to Geneva

4.1 The Road to Geneva

As you are aware, the Syrians are in a crucial position to help or hinder the peacemaking process.140

A new Geneva Peace Conference in September of 1977 was by the Carter administration seen as a possible solution to the Arab-Israeli Problem. Every part in the conflict would attend at the conference, with the Soviet Union and the U.S. as co-chairmen. Secretary Vance did not expect every issue to be discussed in a plenary session and so each issue would first be discussed by the parties directly involved first. This was the only way the U.S. could hope to achieve a settlement legitimized by the Arab states.141 This was recognized as an incredibly difficult task, but if all pieces would fall in place they hoped it could be achieved. The Carter administration hereby had hopes to lift the legacy of humiliation felt by the Arab states, and the isolation felt by Israel. Getting the parties to attend a new Geneva Conference was part of a strategy that first involved identifying each government minimum terms for a Middle East settlement. Only when maximum concessions had been made on each side would the U.S. make its recommendations.142 At a meeting on February 4, the Policy Review Committee of the National Security Council recommended that Middle East should be dealt with as a matter of urgent priority and that Secretary Vance should go to the area and begin discussions on procedures and substance.143 The three general objectives for Vance’s trip was, one: to seek to reach agreement on broad principles of a settlement, two: to obtain a more explicit Arab definition of “peace”, three: to separate the question

140 Memorandum, William Quandt to Zbigniew Brzezinski, 03.31.77. NSA 25: Staff Material Middle East, Box 88. Jimmy Carter Presidential Library


142 Ibid.

143 Howard. Foreign relations of the United States, 1977-1980, 5-19. Meeting also referred to in Quandt, Peace Process, 180. Notes from the meeting is declassified in the above cited Howard, but the 20 page review requested from the President to this specific meeting is still classified.
of secure defense lines from that of final recognized borders. Enno Knoche, the acting director of the CIA, informed to the Policy Review Committee that the Egyptians, Syrians and Saudi Arabians all want to be constructive and are pressing the PLO to adopt a moderate position. With high hopes of getting the PLO to the negotiating table through the Syrians, Secretary Vance left for an exploratory round of talks in the Middle East capitals February 1977.

A good relationship with Syria was seen as important for the Carter administration because it was thought to be next to impossible to reach a settlement in the Middle East without Syria. President Carter, through his advisors, stated that Syria was a key in their efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. This was probably the result of the belief that Egypt and Syria had good relationship, and that Syria was seen as key to getting the PLO to accept UN resolution 242. Had the relationship been good between the two Arab states, the possibility of a bilateral agreement between Egypt and Israel would not exist. Secretary Vance visited Jerusalem February 15-18 and met with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Foreign Minister Allon to review the Middle East Peace process. The result was not encouraging when Rabin made it clear that Israel would never accept an independent Palestine state on the West Bank, arguing that the only aim for such a state would be the re-conquest of Israel. However dark this made a peace agreement look, Vance and his advisors actually saw this as a possibility of a peace between the Arab states and Israel on boundary and territorial

145 Ibid.
147 Memorandum, Arthur A. Hartman to Jimmy Carter, 02.15.77, NSA 25 – Staff Material: Middle East, Box 88, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.
148 Memorandum, Presidential Determination no. 77-12 To Cyrus Vance and the Secretary of Agriculture, 02.19.77, NSA 25: Staff Material Middle East, Box 88, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.
149 Rabin was leader of the Israeli Labor Party.
issues. Vance was scheduled to visit Damascus February 20-21 after he had been to Lebanon, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, making Syria his last stop.

Securing American economic support to Syria before the secretary’s arrival in Damascus was an important step on the way to gain Syrian trust in U.S. intentions. Their intentions with Syria was described in their own words as “…intention to develop a broad and constructive bilateral relationship…” Only five days before Vance’s arrival to Damascus acting Secretary of State, Arthur A. Hartman, asked President Carter to sign a paper approving a 15 million assist program selling tobacco and rice to Syria, despite Syrian trade with Cuba. Carter signed the document February 19th giving Secretary Vance the opportunity of a positive opening to his visit.

4.2 Meeting Assad, February 20

Upon Vance’s arrival February 20 1977, Vance met with President Assad. Assad was clear and brief in his speech to Vance, saying that he was once soldier and soldiers had a tendency to be brief. Assad criticized previous American diplomacy by saying that U.S. diplomacy had helped drive wedges between the Arabs, as that was the objective of the Kissinger policy. Kissinger had denied this when confronted by Assad, but Assad stated that action had to be judged by result. Assad’s fundamental belief was that peace could only be achieved with the Arabs united. Especially pointing out that

151 Ibid
152 Memorandum, Presidential Determination no. 77-12 to Cyrus Vance and the Secretary of Agriculture, 02.19.77, NSA 25: Staff Material Middle East, Box 88, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.
153 Ibid.
154 Memorandum, Presidential Determination no. 77-12 to Cyrus Vance and the Secretary of Agriculture, 02.19.77, NSA 25: Staff Material Middle East, Box 88, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.
156 Ibid.
157 Ibid.
division between “Egypt and Syria could never be conductive to peace or result in genuine success.”

Assad saw the settlement made a Geneva containing three fundamental elements. First, the Syrian (Assad actually said the “Arab” position) position was that Israel had to withdraw from all territory occupied during the 1967 war. The second point concerned the rights of the Palestinians, and the third was termination of the state of war. Assad specified that when Israel demanded recognition as a prerequisite for peace, they aimed at placing obstacles in the way of peace. In the minds of Assad peace was one thing, recognition a completely other. Assad favored a reconvening of the Geneva Peace Conference, but he was not very optimistic about the conference and therefore not very excited about it. Elaborating further that Syria and Israel had two different views on peace, and Assad wanted peace not “capitulation”. The Syrian president was especially critical towards U.S. arms sales to Israel, questioning which use such weapons would have in a defensive capability. Assad saw one great issue when discussing the Palestinians within a final settlement. Namely that all parties had to agree on what the rights of the Palestinians were, then other issues could be solved more easily.

When asked, Assad said that the Arab states had agreed that the PLO had to represent the Palestinians at Geneva. Further, a united Arab delegation at Geneva could resolve the Israeli issue of PLO participation. Assad admitted that dealings with the PLO was not good, but that the contact was still good.

February 21 1977, Vance and his entourage met with Syrian Prime Minister Abdul Rahman Khulayfawi and Foreign Minister Khaddam. Prime Minster Khulayfawi expressed his concern of having to spend large amounts of money on the defense and

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158 Ibid.
159 Ibid.
160 Ibid.
161 Ibid.
162 Ibid.
163 Telegram, Ambassador Richard W. Murphy to Cyrus Vance, 02.24.77, NSA 6 Country File, Box 74, Syria, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.
not investing them to develop Syria economically for a better future.\textsuperscript{164} Syria, Khulayfawi said, was turning to agriculture as a basic priority and was very keen to get U.S. help in evaluating Syrian agricultural possibilities.\textsuperscript{165} No doubt, had the U.S. agricultural assist program mad the Syrians optimistic in the regard of U.S. economic support. Khaddam made the point that U.S. investment and assist in Syrian land reclamation would enhance détente since the “Soviets has built the Euphrates dam”.\textsuperscript{166} Syria, Khaddam pointed out, had the potential “as a food producing nation for the entire area”.\textsuperscript{167} Vance did not confirm anything regarding further U.S. support or policy towards Syria (at least in the written record). Only did he try to convince Khaddam and Khulayfawi of his genuine conviction that a fair settlement between Israel and the Arab states would help current and future generations to live a more comfortable life.\textsuperscript{168} Meanwhile, Iraqi radio was accusing Vance of meddling in the affairs of other nations, and that he should go home. Khaddam, who referred to the Pike Committee’s public unravel of U.S. covert ops in Iran, said that the U.S. had contributed to this themselves.\textsuperscript{169} The general feeling in Syria was that the U.S. did this to help Iran and Iraq in their ideological fight against Syria. Khulayfawi did however state that U.S. action would overcome this. Philip Habib, Secretary for Political Affairs, quickly acknowledged the truth of U.S. covert ops in Iran but stated that the U.S. did not intend to harm Syria in any way and that the articles that had been written about these operations and its aftermath had misinterpreted U.S. actions and intentions.\textsuperscript{170} The Syrians were positive to participation in a renewed Geneva Conference, but categorically denied participation without an invitation of the PLO.\textsuperscript{171} They did not

\hspace{1cm} \begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{164} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{165} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{166} Ibid 4. The Euphrates Dam/The Tabqa Dam opened in 1973 is the largest dam in Syria which led to the creation of Lake Assad, the largest water reservoir in Syria
\item \textsuperscript{167} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{168} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{169} https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/winter98_99/art07.html accessed 08.31.2015.
\item \textsuperscript{170} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{171} Telegram, Richard W. Murphy to Cyrus Vance, 02.25.77, NSA 6 Country File, Box 74, Syria, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
specifically state this to Vance, but the French Ambassador reported this to Murphy after pushing Khaddam to amplify his position. The Americans hoped that Assad would help them by getting the PLO to accept the UN Resolution 242. The PLO strongly criticized the resolution, which it said reduced the question of Palestine to a refugee problem.¹⁷²

Back in Washington, Secretary Vance reported to the National Security Council on February 23 that all parties with whom he had met professed to be ready for a peace agreement. They all agreed to go to a Geneva Peace Conference in September and to discuss content prior to those talks.¹⁷³ In Vance’s meeting with President Assad, Vance had said that the Arab states had to come to an agreement on the Palestinian question. Assad had agreed and replied that the Arab had lots of work still to do.¹⁷⁴ Two major procedural problems still stood in the way of a Geneva Conference. The first problem was PLO participation, and Vance stated that the Arabs were divided on this issue. Syria in particular had cool relations with the PLO. The second issue was whether the Arabs would go as a unified delegation or as separate national delegations. Assad had told Vance in their private (still classified) meeting that he strongly felt that there must be one single delegation, while President Sadat of Egypt preferred the opposite.¹⁷⁵ Vance had the impression that Assad would not go to Geneva if that could not be resolved.¹⁷⁶ President Carter was eager to get the wheels rolling towards the Geneva Conference and asked if Vance could set a deadline on solving the procedural problems. Vance’s judgment was earliest four-six weeks after the Israeli elections in May, but realistically as late as August.¹⁷⁷ Carter was not happy about that estimate, leaving only one month before Geneva. The core problem that delayed a collective movement

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.
¹⁷⁵ Ibid.
¹⁷⁶ Ibid.
¹⁷⁷ Ibid.
towards Geneva was still the PLO refusing to approve U.N. resolution 242, and Israel denying recognition to the PLO. Israel also opposed a single Arab delegation, and preferred (like Egypt) bilateral negotiations. When Carter finally asked Vance “The major problem is with Israel?” Vance replied “Yes sir.” The reason that Assad wanted a united Arab delegation with the PLO in Geneva is easier to understand in hindsight. Assad wanted to be the representative for both the Palestinians and the Arab states at Geneva. Least of all did Assad like nor trust Sadat of Egypt. President Carter shows through his dialogue in this meeting little sympathy towards the Arabs refusal in making peace with Israel.  

4.3 Assassination

While the U.S negotiated, and prepared the Geneva Conference, the CIA got information of a Libyan assassination plot against President Assad. On March 2, Vice President Mondale asked William B. Quandt whether the U.S. should inform Assad. Quandt advised that the information was not reliable enough to pass on to the Syrians and that doing so would damage U.S. credibility with Assad. However, if the information was more specific “they probably should pass it on”. Brzezinski agreed, and they did not inform Assad, but asked the CIA for additional information. No documents indicate if this info was passed on or not, but it definitively shows the fragility of the US-Syrian relationship at the time. The only objective was a viable pace in the Middle East, and no loss of credibility could be risked before the talks in Geneva had started.

The Brzezinski memorandum points out the three important American issues with Syria before a final settlement. Firstly, they wanted Syria to help get the PLO to the

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178 Ibid.
179 Ibid.
180 Memorandum, Top Secret Action-Libyan Plot, William B. Quandt to to Zbigniew Brzezinski, 03.02.1977, NSA 25: Staff Material Middle East, Box 88, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.
181 Ibid.
negotiating table. Syria should help the U.S. to get them to accept UN resolution 242. The PLO had to accept this resolution before a Geneva Conference because neither Israel nor the U.S. would negotiate with them otherwise. Secondly, the strong need of a formal peace agreement with Israel. A peace agreement would benefit the future of both countries. Syria should come to an agreement with Israel on a border security-agreement at the Golan height. Last, if peace was to be achieved it was time for both parties to look forward instead of constantly raising frustrations and grievances of the past.

On March 22 President Carter got confirmation that President Assad would meet him at Geneva in Switzerland on May 9. At this meeting Carter and Assad would discuss a final peace settlement, borders security, the Palestinian question along with how to get the Palestinians represented in the upcoming negotiations. President Carter was thoroughly prepared by his advisors before his meetings with all foreign leaders, and the meeting with Assad in Geneva was no exception. Carter received a package containing briefing memorandums from both Brzezinski and Vance, and from these documents U.S. goals and attitudes prior to May of 1977 stand clearer. The Vance memorandum give a rare insight into American attitude towards Assad prior to the Assad meeting May 9, as they represent one of very few documents that reveal actual American attitude towards Assad. These reflections emerged during his talks with Assad in Damascus and during Khaddam’s visit to Washington in April. Vance saw Syria as the most negative of the three Arab confrontation states towards the kind of Arab commitment Israel “(and we) would like to see”. Syria would only end the state of

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182 Memo, Your meeting with President Hafiz al-Assad May 9, 1977, in Geneva, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, 04.29.77, NSA 25: Staff Material Middle East, Box 88, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

183 Ibid.

184 Telegram, Richard Murphy to Brzezinski, 03.22.77, NSA 3 Presidents Correspondence with Foreign Leaders, BOX 18 South Africa through Syria, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

185 Memo, Briefing Papers for the President’s meeting with Hafiz al-Asad of Syria, William B. Quandt to Zbigniew Brzezinski, 04.29.77, NSA 25: Staff Material Middle East, Box 88, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

186 Memorandum, Your meeting with Asad May 9, Cyrus Vance to Jimmy Carter, 04.29.77, NSA 25: Staff Material Middle East, Box 88, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.
war and move towards a genuine peace when a Palestinian state was established.\(^{187}\) The Americans recognized the Palestinian problem the essence of the conflict and that a viable pace in the Middle East, with Syria, was impossible without addressing this issue.\(^{188}\) Vance specifies that “In the absence of resolution of this issue, they say, stability in the area is impossible.”\(^{189}\) The Americans did at this point not see a peace in the Middle East without Israeli flexibility on the “Palestinian problem”. Assad preferred, but did not insist, that the Arab states (and the PLO) attended Geneva as a single, unified, delegation. However, any working groups or committees formed within the Geneva framework should not be formed on the basis of geographical areas (e.g. Egypt/Israel).\(^{190}\) Vance thought the Syrian position would make Israel and Egypt try to work out separate deals and thereby undermine Arab unity and Syria’s bargaining position in the negotiation process.\(^{191}\) Border security and security guaranties were important issues for Syria due to the state of war and the current state of the Golan Heights. Syria, as well as the other Arab states, were very negative to U.S. unilateral security guarantees to Israel and would rather see an UN arrangement. The Vance memorandum warns that any guarantees by the U.S. to Israel would only increase the power polarization, forcing the Arab states to seek guarantees from the Soviets.\(^{192}\) On the issue of a Palestinian homeland or entity, the Americans though that Assad wanted this to be established on the West Bank. Not as an independent state, but rather with some constitutional linkage to Syria or Jordan.\(^{193}\) All in all, U.S. official seemed to be well informed.

President Carter were advised to bring four U.S. goals to the meeting with Assad, the very first being that Carter gained Assad’s confidence. Again, here we see the mistrust and lack of credibility the U.S. thought Assad and Syria had to them. Vance called Assad the “…shrewdest, most skeptical, and in many ways the pivotal Arab leader

\(^{187}\) Ibid.
\(^{188}\) Ibid.
\(^{189}\) Ibid.
\(^{190}\) Ibid.
\(^{191}\) Ibid.
\(^{192}\) Ibid.
\(^{193}\) Ibid.
among the negotiating countries”. Here was Quandt’s previous statement to Brzezinski emphasized: Assad might hold the key to peace in the Middle East. Secondly Carter was to persuade Assad to demonstrate Syria’s commitment to peace with Israel by actions as well as words, this to help U.S. efforts with Israel. Thirdly, on the specific issues of a final peace settlement, the U.S. wanted more concrete and detailed consideration by the Arabs of the Palestinian question, both with the representation issue and an ultimate solution. Further, the U.S. wanted greater Syrian flexibility on the establishment of relations with Israel. Carter was also supposed to probe Assad’s thinking about a practical solution of Israeli security concern and Syrian sovereignty of the Golan Heights. The final U.S. goal in the meeting with Assad was to impress on Assad “…our strong wish to improve and broaden our warming bilateral relations.” From these four points we learn that U.S. foreign policy towards Syria in the period up to May 9 was mainly focused on gaining the trust of president Assad, persuading them to make peace with Israel, and as we learned earlier using Syria as means to get the PLO to accept UN resolution 242.

On May 5, four days before Carter met Assad at Geneva, diplomat Robert Pelletreau met with President Assad at his house in Damascus, to prepare for the Geneva meeting. Assad’s biggest concern was that the U.S. would not be able to mold its “own” Middle East policy. Assad recalled many discussions with Secretary Kissinger in which the latter had detailed him “why USG was unable to mold its ME policy as it

194 Memorandum, Your meeting with Asad May 9, Cyrus Vance to Jimmy Carter, 04.29.77, NSA 25: Staff Material Middle East, Box 88, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

After consulting William B. Quandt about this package of documents, he said that the memo from Vance most likely was written by Atherton or Saunders. The Brzezinski memo was most likely written by Quandt. Further, he said that he did not recall “no serious difference of opinion between Vance and ZB on Middle East issues at this time.”

195 Ibid.

196 Ibid.

197 Ibid.

198 Telegram, Assad-Carter Meeting- May 5 Discussion, Richard Murphy to Cyrus Vance, 05.06.77, NSA 4 Trip File, NLC 41457, Jimmy carter Presidential Library.
desired because of constraints imposed on it by domestic Jewish opinion[.].”\(^{199}\) Assad now had the impression that Carter would act independently, comparing him with Eisenhower in 1956. All in all Assad seemed hopeful before his meeting with Carter, but still critical to U.S. motives. The May 9 meeting in Geneva brought clarity to the Syrian preconditions for a Geneva conference in September.

Assad’s opening speech underlined their deep mistrust of Israel as well as Egypt. Assad felt betrayed by Egypt and swindled by Israel in the 1973 October war.\(^{200}\) When Syria accepted U.N. resolution 338 on October 24 1973 with the condition that the Palestinian rights were restored, Israel said to the world that Syria did not accept the resolution. This gave Israel strong moral support, and when Egyptian forces retreated leaving the Syrians alone, Syria had to accept the resolution without the precondition.\(^{201}\) The Syrians had three basic issues before the Geneva Conference: borders and occupied territories, Palestinian rights, and prerequisites for peace.\(^{202}\) On the Golan Heights, Assad could only accept demilitarized zones under an U.N. umbrella. Assad saw the Palestinian question as two parts, the Palestinian refugees and Palestinian state. Assad did not think that the West Bank and Gaza, with its 6000 square miles in total, would be big enough for the approximately two million Palestinian refugees. The only way, in Assad’s mind, to solve the Palestinian problem was to go back to the U.N. resolutions and restore Palestinian rights. Assad emphasized on return or compensation for the Palestinian refugees.\(^{203}\) Carter wanted Assad to define a Palestinian homeland, and whether he wanted them to be an independent entity. Assad admitted that the Palestinians themselves wanted to be independent, but gave no obvious answer on what he himself thought.\(^{204}\) The most concrete answer Carter got from Assad was that Syria (and Jordan) was moving in the direction of a confederation including the West Bank.\(^{205}\)

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\(^{199}\) Ibid.


\(^{201}\) Ibid.

\(^{202}\) Ibid.

\(^{203}\) Ibid.

\(^{204}\) Ibid.

\(^{205}\) Ibid.
On the issue of the PLO accepting U.N. resolution 242, Carter probed the possibility of removing the part of the Palestinians being dealt with as refugees. Assad told Carter that the PLO might accept such an agreement, but it would only solve part of the problem. It all would depend on what the PLO would gain from accepting the resolution.\textsuperscript{206} Carter agreed with Assad that the Palestinians must have the right to a homeland, and in his own preference tied to Jordan or a larger confederation, but the U.S. were committed to the security of Israel and its right to exist in peace.\textsuperscript{207} In this conversation an interesting fact surfaces, that explains why Syria was so pivotal in laying the grounds for a Geneva Conference. Kissinger promised the Israelis that the U.S. would not negotiate with the PLO until it recognizes Israel’s right to exist.\textsuperscript{208}

The final and most important issue Carter addressed was the nature of peace, and how to make a lasting agreement.\textsuperscript{209} Assad had only two concrete answers. One, demilitarized zones, economic development and reconstruction would help end the state of belligerency, making it possible to enter a new era of peace. Two, Syria would not trade with Israel, and that this was not an integral part of peace.\textsuperscript{210} At last, Jerusalem was a sensitive issue for all sides in the conflict. Assad preferred the pre-1967 situation of sovereignty, and wanted guaranteed access to Jerusalem. He further implied that if Israel insisted on keeping Jerusalem, it proved that they did not want peace.\textsuperscript{211} The meeting with Assad was not as encouraging as the one with Sadat. While Assad stated that trade was no integral part of peace, Sadat was willing to entail normal relations with Israel after a final settlement.\textsuperscript{212}

American attitude towards a final settlement revealed themselves late in May. In their eyes, any comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict would involve the withdrawal of Israeli military forces to near the 1967 border situation. However, they anticipated that a final settlement required the principal Arab states, and the

\textsuperscript{206} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{207} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{208} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{209} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{210} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{211} Ibid.
Palestinians, to accept all demands put forward by Israel. Their impression was that Assad was willing to end the state of belligerency, but not to normalize its relationship with Israel. Further, the Palestinians were prohibited by necessity from moving ahead of Syria in making concessions to Israel. Israel most needed nonmilitary assurances from Syria, because Israel both had great difficulty negotiating with them in the past and because of the strategic risks was greatest to Israel on the Golan front. The strategic risks to Israel were less with Egypt, and Jordan and Israel had limited common interests and behind the scenes negotiating, so long as the Hashemite monarchy lasts.

Soon, it was obvious that the Syrians had misunderstood the language change in U.N. resolution 242 proposed by Carter at their meeting in Geneva. On June 11, the Syrians reported to the Americans that they had discussed U.N. resolution 242 with Yasser Arafat, leader of the PLO. Prime Minister Khaddam said he had discussed a language modification of U.N. resolution 242 from “refugee” to “National Rights of the Palestinian People” with Arafat. Now, Prime Minister Khaddam wanted to discuss the subject with other Palestinian leaders. Khaddam ignored Ambassador Murphy’s comment when he said that the subject was not discussed by the two presidents in quite that manor. The Americans wanted to clarify this with the Syrians and American diplomat Robert Pelletreau met with Khaddam on June 14, bringing with him notes from the Geneva meeting. Khaddam repeated that their “notes differs on this point”. Khaddam thought the Palestinians would not accept the resolution without a language modification. He reported that Assad had discussed the language modification with Arafat, and that Arafat’s reaction had been good. This misreading of the American

214 Ibid.
215 Ibid.
216 Cable, Embassy Damascus to SECSTATE, UNSC RESOLUTION 242 AND THE PALESTINIANS, 06.11.77, NSA 6 Country File, Box 50, Syria, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.
217 Ibid.
218 Ibid.
219 Ibid.
proposal could do more damage than good, Israel would never go along with such terms and it could increase resistance to more realistic terms. Vance forwarded a telegram on June 22, to clarify the U.S. position. On June 29, the Syrians were again informed that any misunderstanding could both damage the U.S. Syrian Relationship and the quest for peace in the Middle East. Assad’s political advisor, Daoudi, who received this message via American diplomat Pelletreau did not think the Palestinians would accept the resolution without a modification of language. The Americans were very concerned of the Syrian impression that a modification of treaty language was possible, it could very well make negotiating with the PLO even more difficult. More trouble was in sight for Carter’s diplomatic relationship with Assad when a new head of state took office in Israel.

On June 21, Menachem Begin from the Likud party became Prime Minister of Israel. Begin was relatively unknown in the U.S., however two important political views were known. He opposed Israeli territorial compromise as means of dealing with the Palestinian question and the West Bank, and he was in favor of an expansion of Israeli settlements. These two views became obvious issues in Jimmy Carter’s quest for a final settlement in the Middle East. The election of Menachem Begin as Israel’s president created an uncertainty with the Americans regarding the outlook for a lasting peace in the region. Begin, the former leader of the Zionist militant group Irgunn, now head of political right-wing party Herut (Later Likud) represented a harsher view of the Arabs with leaders far more determined to Israeli rule on the West Bank. At his arrival in Washington, July 18 1977, President Begin made his position clear. He called for an unbending opposition to a Palestinian state, and expressed every intention of increasing the number of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories.

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220 Telegram, Cyrus Vance to AMEBASSY Damascus, UNSC RES, 242 AND THE PALESTINIANS, 22.06.77, NSA 6 Country File, Box 50, Syria, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.
221 Telegram, AMEBASSY Damascus to SECSTATE, UNSC RES, 242 AND THE PALESTINIANS, 22.06.77, NSA 6 Country File, Box 50, Syria, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.
222 Ibid.
From a slightly positive spring, American diplomatic efforts in Syria took a more negative turn in the summer of 1977. The Americans had a hard time getting real results from the Syrians. The Syrian government had spoken to Arafat but had gotten no answers; they said they would rather speak more broadly and that Arafat was in no position to make any decisions on his own. The signs pointed in the direction that relations between the PLO and Assad were not as good as they were before the Syrian intervention in Lebanon. It was impossible to get Palestinian representation with the PLO at Geneva if the PLO did not accept U.N. resolution 242, and a Geneva without Palestinian representation would never gain any real results. Whilst Assad favored a unified Arab delegation, with the PLO as Palestinian representation, Sadat wanted separate Arab delegations and an Arab League delegation which would include the PLO. He feared that a unified Arab delegation would restrict their freedom of action. What seemed even further away, than getting the Palestinians represented in a peace initiative, was the locked situation between Syria and Israel. Israel rejected all of Assad’s demands on borders and occupied territories, Palestinian rights, and the prerequisites for peace. Assad would not budge on any of his.

Begin’s stand on the U.S. role in the peacemaking-process was that the U.S. should not be involved in the substance of Arab-Israeli talks and should limit its role in to getting the parts together. Obviously, Begin feared that U.S. stands on several issues would be closer to the Arab position. The Carter administration had already moved past not being involved with the substance of the talks. In July, the Carter administration drafted and presented (after several rounds of discussions within the government and with Israel) five principles that should be agreed up on by the participants prior to a Geneva

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224 Telegram, Cyrus Vance to AMEBASSY Damascus, UNSC RES, 242 AND THE PALESTINIANS, 22.06.77, NSA 6 Country File, Box 50, Syria, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

225 Memorandum, for the President from Cyrus Vance, Talks with the Arab and Israeli Foreign Ministers, 08.30.77. NSA 6 Country File, Box 55, Syria, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

The five points were as follows.

One: The goal of negotiations is a comprehensive peace settlement.

Two: The basis of negotiations is Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. Three: It is understood that the peace called for in Resolution 242 will consist of an end to belligerency and the establishment between Israel and its Arab neighbors of the relations of peace.

Four: It is understood that the withdrawal called for in Resolution 242 will be to mutually agreed and recognized borders on all fronts. The withdrawal and the establishment of peaceful relations can be phased over a period of years in parallel and synchronized stages. The security of the stages and of the final settlement will be enhanced by mutually agreed security arrangements on the ground and by external guarantees.

Five: A settlement must include provision for a Palestinian entity and for means of assuring Palestinian adherence to the terms of the peace agreement. The Palestinian entity will not be militarized, and there will be provision for an open economic and social relationship with Israel. Means should be sought to permit self-determination by the Palestinians in deciding on their future status.

These final five points were rewritten several times due to Israeli and pro-Israel lobby objections. Begin insisted on that the U.S. should not say publicly or in private (!) that it favored Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 lines, and he completely rejected the fifth point on the Palestinian entity. In a private session Carter agreed to not mention the 1967 lines in public in return for Begin showing restraint on settlements. The compromise showed acceptance of that little real progress could be made before the parts actually talked with each other at Geneva. The gap between Israel and the Arabs (especially Syria) was simply too great to reach agreement on key principles before Geneva, so procedural issues became more important. In American minds Syria was still the key

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228 See appendix B for UN resolution 338

229 Ibid.

230 Quandt, Peace Process, Page 184
state to getting the PLO to the negotiating table, and the issue of how the Palestinians would be represented at Geneva was still unsolved.

4.4 A change in the winds; Sadat and Assad: not so common goals after all

Carter and his advisors leaned towards the Syrian idea of a single Arab delegation with the PLO. Israel refused to negotiate with a separate PLO delegation, but would not oppose Palestinians within the Jordanian delegation (so long as there were no known PLO members). Jordan had no intention of representing the Palestinians and preferred the Syrian idea of a united Arab front, mainly to prevent any unilateral moves by Sadat. Vance took with him the five principles and left on a second trip to the Middle East to speak with the leaders of Egypt, Israel, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia.

August 1, Vance and his entourage met the Egyptian government in Alexandria. Sadat wanted Geneva to be an arena for signing a pre-agreed paper, and was concerned for the resent developments towards procedural discussions. The Egyptians did not want to negotiate with Israel in Geneva, and to encourage his idea Sadat presented a secret draft of a peace treaty which Sadat was willing to sign. The treaty was eyes only for President Carter and his closest advisors, and was not to be shown to the other Arab states. Sadat wanted all the other parties to put down on paper a draft of a final peace treaty, and then all should seek to work out various treaties in advance of Geneva. Rather surprisingly, Sadat wanted Vance to tell the Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan that Sadat was “ready to conclude peace with him”. Assad wanted a united Arab front in negotiating with Israel, both the Americans and probably Sadat knew this. Despite this, Sadat told Vance that he was confident that Assad would negotiate a treaty

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232 Howard. *Foreign relations of the United States, 1977-1980* Document 64. Telegram From Secretary of State Vance to the White House and the Department of State.

233 Ibid.

234 Ibid.
with Israel if Egypt took the lead in signing a treaty with Israel. The only demand Sadat had was that Israel gave up the West Bank, thus leaving the rest of the Palestinian question and Golan to Assad alone, leaving Syria no leverage to negotiate.\textsuperscript{235} Further, the Egyptians were willing to be flexible on most issues, in contrast with the rigid Assad. Sadat probably knew that Israel had no need for a comprehensive peace agreement with Syria if they had one with Egypt, and this left Egypt with a golden opportunity. Sadat also claimed he could get whatever he wanted from the PLO (meaning getting them to accept 242), again removing the need for Syria in a final settlement.\textsuperscript{236} Vance was unsure how to pursue his discussions in the other capitals in the light of this proposal and Sadat’s request to keep this proposal secret.\textsuperscript{237} On August 2, Sadat and Vance held a joint press conference where Sadat suggested (as he had done privately in February) that a working group should be established to address preparations for Geneva Conference.\textsuperscript{238}

August 4, the Americans met President Assad and Foreign Minister Khaddam and their closest advisors.\textsuperscript{239} However, no memorandum of the conversation with Assad exits, but luckily Vance sent a telegram to President Carter with a report from the meeting with President Assad.\textsuperscript{240} Vance and his entourage spent six hours in meetings with Foreign Minister Khaddam first and President Assad last. In Vance’s own words the meetings had thoughtful discussions and they had full opportunity to discuss were matters stood and how the Americans would purpose to proceed to get a settlement acceptable to all parts.\textsuperscript{241} The meeting had six important topics of discussion: A review of Begin’s visit to Washington, Palestinian representation, the five principles, trusteeship of a Palestinian

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{235} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{236} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{237} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{238} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{239} Howard. \textit{Foreign relations of the United States, 1977-1980} Document 66, \textit{Memorandum of Conversation}. Damascus, August 4, 1977, 9:40 a.m.
\item \textsuperscript{240} Howard. \textit{Foreign relations of the United States, 1977-1980} Document 68, Telegram from Secretary of State Vance to the White House and the Department of State. Damascus, August 4, 1977, 2347Z.
\item \textsuperscript{241} Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
entity, U.S. contact with the PLO, and working groups in New York as preparations for the upcoming peace conference.\textsuperscript{242}

Assad and Khaddam saw little in the Israeli proposal to discuss, and talked about them as further evidence that Begin in particular and Israel was not serious about peace negotiations.\textsuperscript{243} It is not hard to follow the Syrian strain of thought. Begin wanted to discuss all of the issues concerning the Syrians without any precondition.\textsuperscript{244} This made bringing the Syrians to the negotiating table at Geneva close to impossible. Assad’s two basic pillars of reaching an agreement presented at the meeting May 9; the restoration of the 1967 borders and a Palestinian state, would never be acceptable to the Israeli politicians. The Israelis probably wanted a peace with Syria on their terms, or none at all. The situation was after all in favor of Israel, especially if they could get a separate agreement with Egypt and Jordan. Begin had said to Carter that he was only prepared to negotiate on the West bank, and the West Bank was Egypt’s only concern prior to Geneva, meaning that both Israel and the U.S. had laid the grounds for leaving Syria in out in the cold.\textsuperscript{245} Vance tried to assure both Assad and Khaddam the Begin left Washington “quite aware that we disagree with some of his positions.”\textsuperscript{246} After discussing the Israeli position on Palestinian representation, and reviewing the Israeli framework draft, Vance presented four U.S. alternatives for solving the Palestinian problem. The first two, that the Palestinians were represented in either a (one) national Arab delegation or a (two) unified Arab delegation, were presented as the

\textsuperscript{242} Carter met with Prime Minister Begin in Washington on July 19 and 20. Begin presented an Israeli draft of the framework for the peace-making process between Israel and its neighbors. See Howard. \textit{Foreign relations of the United States, 1977-1980}, Page 352 for the list consisting of nine points, and two possible alternatives should the Arab states refuse to go along these lines.

\textsuperscript{243} Howard. \textit{Foreign relations of the United States, 1977-1980} Document 68, Telegram from Secretary of State Vance to the White House and the Department of State. Damascus, August 4, 1977, 2347Z.

\textsuperscript{244} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{246} Howard. \textit{Foreign relations of the United States, 1977-1980} Document 68, Telegram from Secretary of State Vance to the White House and the Department of State. Damascus, August 4, 1977, 2347Z.
most realistic.247 Vance conveyed Sadat’s firm opposition to a unified Arab delegation at Geneva, but Assad still preferred a unified Arab delegation.248 Vance proceeded to review the five general principles on the substance of the negotiations with the Syrians. Vance elaborated on principles three, four, and five. On the third principle, Vance stressed that the U.S. envisioned the establishment of normal diplomatic relations with Syria, including trade and free movement of people. On the fourth principle, Vance stated that the U.S. position was unchanged with respect to the Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders with only minor modifications. On the final principle, the U.S. preferred a Palestinian entity linked to Jordan, with self-determination, but under a UN led international trusteeship during the transitional period.249 Vance noted that the only way Israel would accept a third-party trustee who was not from the region was if Israel was one of the responsible trustees during the transition period.250 Assad was pleased to hear the U.S. talking about a Palestinian entity, but wanted details on how it would be established. The Syrians rejected any Israeli participation in the trusteeship, stating that it would legalize Israeli occupation. Vance tried to explain that any transition on the West Bank would be extremely complex, and that they could not close their minds on some sort of Israeli participation. Because Khaddam had such a negative reaction to the word “trusteeship”, Vance switched to the term “transitional administrative arrangements”. Vance recounts that Assad’s reaction was much more reasonable.252

On U.S. contact with the PLO, Vance tried to persuade Assad to get the PLO to accept UN resolution 242 with the understanding that the right of all states in the area to exist

250 Ibid.
applies to Israel. The Syrians were concerned that the Palestinians would be giving something up without getting something in return. Vance asked the Syrians to give any further suggestions or countersuggestions in written form, by so avoiding any misunderstandings.

The Syrians were angry that Sadat had proposed to set up working groups in New York, in preparations for a Geneva Conference, without discussing it with Syria. Even though Khaddam had been in Egypt just a few days earlier. The American saw the negative attitude towards working groups prior to a Geneva conference was because Assad saw them as an effort to evade a formal reconvening of the Geneva Conference, thus excluding PLO participation.

The rest of the long meeting Vance explained that it was important to try to find a set of principles to establish a general framework for discussions, it was increasingly important to state positions concretely, and with this objective in mind, the Secretary said that it would be useful to have from each of the parties a draft of a peace treaty as they would like to see it. Vance wanted the draft to be sent to him only, and after receiving drafts from all the involved parties, the U.S. would put together a series of draft treaties that was fair and equal and could serve as the basis of future discussions. He also promised that such a draft would not be shown to anyone else. Vance said that if something like this were not done there would be no real progress towards a final settlement.

After the meetings Vance felt that there was no lessening in the Syrians willingness to work closely with the U.S. government, but both Assad and Khaddam were pessimistic about the prospects of a peace. He saw the Syrians as cautious and unwilling to stick their neck far out, but also very realistic about assessing the difficulties ahead. Assad remained committed to the PLO out of personal reasons, but Vance thought it was

255 Ibid.
256 Ibid.
257 Ibid.
partly because the Syrians had made a deal with the Palestinians in Lebanon. Vance agreed to visit Damascus after his upcoming talks with the Israelis on August 11, to share his (Vance’s) view on how thing stood based on the talks with Israel.

When Vance met Assad August 11, there was no substantive change in the Israeli position, and Assad still saw with great negativity on the Israeli will to achieve any real progress towards peace. However, Assad decided to send Khaddam to New York in September, and to send their ideas to a peace treaty in written form. This was a turnaround from very negative attitude August 4. Some days later, on August 18, the PLO announced that they would continue to oppose UN resolution 242. Secretary Vance said to Assad and Khaddam that the U.S. could not promise the PLO anything else than a dialogue with them, should they accept UN resolution 242. Assad therefore, wanted the PLO to continue opposing UN resolution 242. As Assad had said, he was concerned the PLO would have to give something and get nothing in return. It was now clearer that Assad would not get the PLO to accept UN resolution 242 without the Americans having to promise more than they could give. The disagreement between Israel and Syria simply made it close to impossible for Carter to broker a deal with Assad. Vance’s meeting with the Israelis, September 26, illustrates how hard the negotiations were for the Carter administration with all the different parties and especially juggling Israel and Syria.

Secretary Vance met an Israeli delegation in New York September 26, led by Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan. The meeting addressed the content of a joint U.S. -Soviet statement for a Geneva Conference, and what Israel and the U.S. agreed and disagreed on. Dayan clarified Israel’s view that all negotiating at Geneva should be bilateral, not

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258 Ibid.
261 Ibid.
with a unified Arab delegation. The U.S. preferred a single Arab delegation. Dayan did not prefer the Syrians participate in any other negotiation than the strictly Israeli-Syrian bilateral issues. When the Americans pointed out that the Syrians wanted to take part in all matters, Dayan simply said that they had no grounds for this. Further, Dayan specified that Israel did not want any Palestinian entity or state on the West Bank, but wanted to negotiate how the West Bank-Arabs and Israel could live together.263 The U.S. view was still that there should be a Palestinian entity (preferably linked to Jordan), but Vance pointed out that the word “entity” rather than “state” left some room. Dayan did not want the Geneva statement to address neither a Palestinian homeland, state, or question, but said that Israel could agree to the words Palestinians, the West Bank, and Gaza.264 The Carter administration and Israel disagreed on several issues, but the Americans did their best to get the parties to reconvene at Geneva. When Dayan brought up the possibility of a separate deal with Egypt, Vance said all such matters should be brought to Geneva. Probably sensing this as a stick in their wheels when trying to achieve a comprehensive peace treaty. Two days later, the Americans met the Syrian Foreign Minister in Washington.

On September 28, the Carter administration met Khaddam in Washington to discuss the proposals President Carter would like Assad to endorse.265 Carter ended the meeting with Khaddam after an hour and gave Vance orders to put proposals to Syria, for achieving a Geneva Conference, to Assad in writing. Vance and Khaddam continued the meeting after Carter left.266 The main issues to be brought up with Syria were; 1. How would the Arab representation look like at Geneva. 2. The working groups. Theme versus geography based discussion, and bilateral versus multilateral negotiations. 3. Who would represent the Palestinians, and how could the PLO be brought in on the negotiation. 4. The Palestinian entity. 5. The Palestinian refugees.

263 Ibid.
264 Ibid.
The Arab representation was a difficult issue for Carter to get all parties to agree upon. The American suggestion was that there should be a unified Arab delegation at Geneva, but they would divide the negotiation into working groups based on geography. Assad wanted working groups based on topics rather than geography. Syria saw the American suggestion as a way to only make them come to Geneva, because the unified Arab delegation would only be symbolic when they were divided into working groups. The American wanted these working groups to negotiate both bilateral and multilateral, meaning for example that the Palestinian issue would be multilateral and the Golan should be discussed bilateral. The Syrians did not agree, and still wanted all matters to be negotiated multilateral as they only saw one common Arab cause/problem. Another objection from Assad to the bilateral suggestion was the fact that the Palestinian issue would be multilaterally negotiated. When Vance said that there were more than one party involved, Khaddam replied that there were only two parts: Israel and the Palestinians.

On the issue of who would represent the Palestinians at Geneva, the Carter administration was not as far apart from Syria as they were from Israel. The meetings did however underscore the difficulties of agreeing on how the Palestinians were to be represented at Geneva. Carter told Khaddam that Israel would not negotiate with a single Arab delegation where the PLO was represented, and that Israel would not discuss all matters multilateral. This made Khaddam especially upset because he perceived it as Israel dictating who the Arab countries would name their representatives, and also Syria did not want bilateral negotiation at Geneva.

Khaddam was agitated when Carter said that they would not negotiate directly with the PLO without an acceptance of UN resolution 242, the Syrian view was that the PLO...
should be present in all matters related to the Palestinians. The current U.S. suggestion was that non-famous or prominent PLO member was to present at the Geneva talks. Khaddam’s argumentation was that no one other than the PLO could represent the Palestinians, and all Palestinians also recognized the PLO as the governing body of the Palestinians. He further pointed out that twice as many countries recognized PLO than the ones recognizing Israel, and the PLO was made an observer at the UN.\(^{270}\) The Syrian position on the Palestinians and the PLO was clear. The only representative for the Palestinians were the PLO, and they objected to an Arab delegation with both PLO and non-PLO members.\(^{271}\) Further, in the Geneva Conference Syria saw the PLO being treated as an Arab state.\(^{272}\) The Carter administration’s view on the Palestinian issue was in the fall of 1977 that there should be a Palestinian entity on the West Bank including Gaza, and that it should be up to them who governed them.\(^{273}\) The Syrians were positive to such a suggestion. Vance emphasized that this was their view and that they could not guarantee any outcome.\(^{274}\) He knew of course that the Government of Israel never wanted to see any Palestinian state. In-fact in their meeting with Dayan only days before, the discussion was very much heated when Vance mentioned the phrase “Palestinian state” and he was forced to use the term “Palestinian entity”. The Israelis did not even want nameplates at the Geneva negotiations because that would put the Palestinians in the same positions as Jordan or Egypt.\(^{275}\)

The question of the Palestinian refugees was split into two issues: resettling and compensation. Syria wanted the Palestinians to resettled in Palestine, and not in


\(^{272}\) Ibid.


\(^{274}\) Ibid.

Syria. Khaddam showed resentment towards previous U.S. Middle East policy several times during the meeting, among other things he said that Carter “should transcend the commitments of Henry Kissinger.”

The Americans urged Khaddam to make Assad change his views closer to the American one on all issues, so that Syria would be able to attend a Geneva Conference. They saw the Syrian stands as very problematic for their Geneva initiative, and had a tough time changing Assad’s mind.

To make a strong statement that carried weight and to put pressure on Syria and the PLO, the U.S. and the Soviets put together a joint invitation for the Geneva Peace Conference and published it on October 1, 1977. In present eyes, the text seems very harmless but the Israeli government and Israeli supports in the U.S. reacted very negative to it. The main issues Israel had with it was the word “rights” in “Palestinian rights”, that non-famous PLO members could attend Geneva, and lack of explicit reference to UN resolution 242. Carter was under large pressure from Israel in early October 1977, and Israel played on this pressure with great skill. Thus, on October 5, after Carter med Dayan in New York, a joint statement from the U.S. and Israel read: “Acceptance of the Joint U.S.–U.S.S.R. Statement of October 1, 1977, by the parties is not a prerequisite for the reconvening and conduct of the Geneva Conference.” When Vance met Khaddam in New York on October 5, Khaddam was not pleased. Vance defended the U.S.–Israeli statement by saying that the communique still represented their views, and that both the Arab’s and Israeli’s had problems with the

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276 Ibid.
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The communique. The Carter administration had shown, not by purpose, that Israel had some degree of influence over American policy. From the Syrian point of view, it definitively looked like that. It is ironic that a document meant to soften up the Syrians did the opposite, and one can wonder if the American inability to withstand Israeli pressure lead way to Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem on November 9, 1977. Moshe Dayan did hint to the possibility for a separate deal with Egypt when he said that Israel could not “go back to the 1967 lines everywhere” and that “the future lied with Egypt”. Israel knew as well as anyone that Syria did not pose any threat to Israel without Egypt and the Golan. Perhaps the Carter administration underestimated the animosity between Assad and Sadat after the 1973 October War, and that the Israeli government knew this very well. A Geneva Conference with Syria died, in reality in the fall of 1977, and the idea of the Camp David talks were born.

Last hopes of a Geneva Peace Conference

The Carter administration used a lot of resource to find a way to get all the Arab countries too Geneva, despite the failure of the communique. They had many different ideas of scenarios that could work. One of them was that the Arab states make their own confidential paper that they all signed before the Geneva. That way, the bilateral working groups would not be a problem.

The Carter administration now made efforts to “make up” for the public setback with the communique, and sent out a revised working paper for the resumption of a Geneva Conference. The message they tried to convey was that the U.S. was just as open to Arab suggestions as Israeli, and that the Arab states should not listen to the “daily

281 Ibid.
One can guess that the 1967 lines Israel could not go back to was in fact the Golan, and that it was easier to meet the Egyptian demands.
press”. 284 In Damascus, the failure of the communique was seen as clear retreat from President Carter’s previous stands. Carter sent a personal letter to Assad and plead him to change the Syrian views closer to the American, so that there could be a Geneva Conference. 285 Should the road to Geneva be paralyzed by “minor differences over procedure…then we would have played right into the hands of those who prefer the status quo”. 286 The “new” working paper was received as a retreat from the previous versions. 287 It was seen as an “Israeli paper” by some in Syria, but Assad did no refuse it outright. In his reply, Assad focused on Carter personally, and tried to convince him that a plenary framework was necessary for Geneva, and that this framework should be based around three important issues; The Palestinian problem, ending the occupation of the Arab territories, and ending the state of war. 288 The Syrian position was still very rigid, and farm away from Israeli terms. Assad still refused bilateral negotiations and still wanted the PLO there. Assad did not want to be left behind by the other Arab states, and probably viewed the American draft paper as something that made separate agreements too tempting. Leaving Syria without any leverage. The Americans believed Assad had two leverages he wanted to “manipulate” at Geneva, for the purpose of not letting Israel lead the discussions. 289 The first was a unified Arab delegation at Geneva, but the Egyptian-Israeli talks made this disappear. The second lever was the PLO. 290 The PLO presence would embody a moral force for the Palestinian cause, and would improve the odds of Arab states not signing up with Israel before Syrian and PLO

284 Cable, SECSTATE TO BRZEZ, Mid-East Peace Process. 10.08.77. NSA 16 Box 41. Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.


286 Ibid.

287 Cable. Secstate to Whitehouse. Message from President Carter to President Assad. 10.15.77. NSA 16, BOX 41. Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.


290 Ibid.
demands were met.\textsuperscript{291} Ergo, the American working paper would not be acceptable to Syria and they knew it. The American fear was now that Syria and the PLO could torpedo the conference from the outside, should the other Arab states ignore Assad’s objections and go to Geneva alone. Especially in Jordan, on the West Bank, and in Lebanon could Assad stir up trouble.\textsuperscript{292} Further, Assad was improving his relations with Algeria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Libya. All this, the Americans though, to be able to unleash a spoiling operation which could “keep Jordan from attending”, should Assad boycott Geneva.\textsuperscript{293} The situation was tough for Carter, and Geneva slipped further away. Even when Carter sent another personal letter on October 30, with another new working-paper, Assad would not budge on his fundamental stands.\textsuperscript{294} The October 30 suggestion only partly met some of Assad’s demands, but had a vague language about what the unified Arab delegation would actually do apart from being a symbolic gesture. One of Assad’s most fundamental points was that all matters were Arab, therefore there were no bilateral or multilateral talks, only Arab and Israeli. The Carter administration did not agree, nor could they get Israel to apply to such a demand. Carter wanted any difference of composition and functioning to be discussed at Geneva, not a pre-agreed upon framework like Assad wanted. Carter wanted to get all parties to Geneva, and then use Geneva as the means of achieving peace, but Assad did not believe that would yield any favorable result. The struggle for Geneva was lost in the makings of a framework generally acceptable for both Israel and Syria. Additionally, Sadat’s willingness to make a separate deal with Israel made the vision of one kind of peace better than a comprehensive peace for all. Although, the American efforts to get Syria to Geneva did not officially stop in the winter of 1977. However, American efforts were more and more focused on getting a separate deal with Egypt and Israel, knowing that a Geneva without Syria was more inclined to fail. During most of 1977, the U.S. tried to get Syria to bring the PLO to the negotiating table, believing Syria to

\textsuperscript{291} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{292} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{294} Cable. Secstate to Washdc To Ruehdm/Amembassy Damascus Niatc Immediate 5286. \textit{Message from President Carter to Assad}, 10.30.77. NSA 16, BOX 109. Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.
be the key to get them to accept UN resolution 242. In the late summer the U.S. realized that this was not going to happen. But, nowhere did I find a declassified document, form 1977, where the Carter administration states this. It is simply just implied. The closet empirical proof comes from a cable sent in October to Brzezinski with the summary form a conversation with the Jordanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Hassan Al-Ibrahim. Ibrahim goes into detail about Khaddam’s last visit to Jordan. In his summary, Ibrahim “confirmed that Syrians said that they did not know what the PLO wanted.” Ibrahim “confirmed” the American suspicion, but the questions asked to Ibrahim are excepted from the cable. This cable also confirms another implied truth, that the Syrians were concerned about keeping the Egyptians “in line”.

4.5 American solution to Assad’s dilemma

Following Sadat’s visit to Israel on November 9, Assad was faced with a dilemma. He needed to decide how Syria would respond to the Egyptian move, and to the announcement for an Israeli-Egyptian conference in Cairo in December of 1977. Assad had many options on how to proceed, the least favorable to the U.S. was a Syrian supported rejectionist front resurrected with allies such as Saudi Arabia and Iraq. The Syrians were shocked by the way Sadat made his decision: striking off alone without consultation, deceiving Khaddam, and embarrassed Syria on the anniversary of Assad’s rise to power. Syrian leadership now announced that Sadat had lost his

295 Just because I did not find it during my short time at the Carter Library, doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist. The primary sources available on the Carter administration peace initiative contains billions of documents, both classified and declassified. In retrospect, I realize that a lot of the material relating to Syria hides in memos and cables tied to discussions with other Arab states and Israel.

296 Cable. Secstate Washdc to White House Immediate, Minstate Ibrahim on Khaddam Visit, 10.19.77. NSA 16, BOX 41. Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

297 Ibid.

298 Ibid.

299 During a conference in Tunis, Khaddam had asked the Egyptian Foreign Minister whether Sadat would actually go to Knesset and he said no.
legitimacy as an Arab leader. The Egyptian move also created a power void in relation to the Palestinians, who now wanted to distance themselves from Sadat. The Americans thought Assad wanted to exploit the void, and try to reduce the influence of Yasser Arafat. Arafat and Assad did not get along very well, and they had now gotten confirmation that he was part of the reason Syria could not get the PLO to the negotiation earlier in 1977. The U.S. did not think it likely Assad would join forces with Iraq and Libya (the rejectionist bloc). Iraq still wanted Assad’s “head” and Assad had denounced the Iraqi regime to sponsor terrorism in Syria early in November. Libya was too “unreliable” too be seen as a real friend. The U.S. therefore thought it likely Assad would reconsolidate with Sadat, if sufficient incentive existed. However, at the UN general assembly November 25, the Syrian UN ambassador called Sadat’s move a stab in the back and a tragedy for every Arab. In a report from November 30, the Americans thought Assad to be distancing himself from the Geneva Peace Conference. Isolation was moving closer.

The American commitment to Israel had made it very difficult for them to bring Syria to the negotiating table at a Geneva Conference and in preliminary discussions in New York. Well, getting them to the negotiation was not the hardest part, Assad did want a peace settlement. However, getting them to actually negotiate a peace with Israel at Geneva seemed more and more unlikely during the fall of 1977. Israel, the PLO, and Syria, three big obstacles for the planned Geneva Conference. To make the conference a real concept, not just an umbrella for a whole series of talks, the American effort was

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301 Ibid.
302 Thousands of cables and telegrams discuss the Syrian-PLO relationship, but that is a subject worthy of a research project of its own.
304 Ibid.
quad-concentrated. They tried to get all parties to write draft peace treaties, so they could work out a general treaty language. Then there was the Palestinian-problem. Especially though Syria, the Americans tried to find ways for the Palestinians to be represented at the Peace negotiations. Another focus area for Carter was to develop an understanding between all parties about the procedures of the Geneva Conference. The final part of the U.S. strategy was aimed at the Soviet Union, who were co-chairman at Geneva. The Americans and the Soviets worked out a joint invitation to the Geneva Conference with relative ease, but when this U.S.-Soviet communiqué was published October 1 it was met with a storm of critique from Israel supports in the U.S. and Israel. So, the Geneva Peace Conference in 1977 never happened, but they fought long and hard to make it happen. What happened instead was the Camp David Accords.

According to U.S. intelligence, there were people inside the Syrian Government seeing Sadat’s move as bold and progressive, but Assad still had the unquestioned loyalty of the Syrian military, and could therefore do as he pleased. 307 In a very redacted memorandum to Brzezinski, we get hints on how the U.S. actually tried affect Arab public opinion. 308 This is one of the few top-secret intelligence strategy reports, not redacted in its entirety, available in relation to Syria. Four strategies were nonredacted; Through guiding the media, the U.S. wanted criticism of the U.S. to be limited to the context of the issues considering Sadat.

Editorials was to avoid alienating conservative Arabs like Saudi Arabia, which Syria hoped to swing to its side opposing Sadat.

Editorials was also meant to point out to the middle class and business that it was not in their interest to establish normal relations with Israel at that point.

Articles was to reflect Syria’s desire that a new government, not headed by Sadat, was to be formed in Egypt. 309

The heading was redacted from the document, but it clearly was some kind of media (or

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309 Ibid.
several) from one or more of the Arab states.\textsuperscript{310} By all accounts it looks like the U.S. tried to isolate Syria, thereby increasing their chances of getting Israel to sign a peace treaty, and being without allies they would keep the status quo in with Israel. If those were the U.S. goals, they got their wish when Assad sent his message to the gulf states December 12.\textsuperscript{311} Assad ruled out any dialog with Egypt because of Sadat’s actions.\textsuperscript{312} However, Assad remained committed to UN resolution 242 and the idea of a comprehensive settlement, and would not stand with the rejectionists.\textsuperscript{313} Though, Syria’s economic ties with the Soviets ruled out cutting the Soviets out of Middle Eastern peace efforts.\textsuperscript{314} During a meeting with Leonid Brezhnev in Moscow, the Soviets had promised Syria to be more forthcoming in military aid.\textsuperscript{315} Thereby bringing Syria and closer to Moscow, forcing them towards isolation. Earlier, in November, they had seen signs that Assad wanted to move away from Moscow. When Assad wanted to buy advanced weaponry from British firms, the U.S. thought Syria was trying to make trade relations with European countries, so not to be totally reliant on Soviet supplies.\textsuperscript{316} Also, they wanted more advanced weaponry than the Soviets, probably recollecting how easily Israel had defeated them in 1973.\textsuperscript{317} Pushing Syria towards Soviet could have been a deliberate strategy, intended to weaken Assad’s power in the region. Cables from early December indicates the U.S. trying to persuade the Saudi Arabian government to be a part of a settlement involving Egypt.

\textsuperscript{310} My subjective analysis is that this was intended for media in Egypt, so relation chilled even more between Egypt and Syria. What the U.S. wanted to gain was redacted, but it is fair to say that this increased the odds of a peace agreement between Egypt and Israel, leaving Syria isolated without strong allies.


\textsuperscript{312} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{313} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{314} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{316} Memorandum. \textit{For the President from Zbigniew Brzezinski}. 11.28.77. NSA 1: Presidents daily report file. Box 4. Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

\textsuperscript{317} Ibid.
Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Palestinians. Excluding Lebanon, Syria, and the PLO.\textsuperscript{318} 1977 was concluded with a clear message to Assad that the Carter administration was committed to support the Israeli-Egyptian dialogue.\textsuperscript{319} The reason given to Assad was U.S. belief that this presented the “best possible hope” of breaking the impasse in the negotiations.\textsuperscript{320} Syria officially stated that Sadat’s initiative “killed the Geneva Peace Conference” in early January.\textsuperscript{321} Khaddam stated that all Sadat could do was “sign a shameful bilateral treaty…not be worth the paper on which it will written.”\textsuperscript{322}

\textsuperscript{318} Cable, Request for comments on draft memorandum “Consequences of a move by Sadat to make a separate peace with Israel”, For Assistant Secretary Atherton from Ambassador West. 12.06.77. NSA 16, BOX 41. Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

\textsuperscript{319} Cable, Your December Talks with Shihabi, From State 308898 to White House. 12.29.77. NSA 16, BOX 110. Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

\textsuperscript{320} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{321} Memorandum, From the Situation Room to Inderfurth for Dr. Brzezinski. 01.05.78. NSA 4: Trip file, Box 7. Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

\textsuperscript{322} Ibid.
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American Diplomatic Relations with Syria in 1977
5 Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 The quest for peace

The Carter administration feared that the absence of a comprehensive peace agreement would lead to new and more serious Arab-Israeli confrontations with the extended consequence of a U.S.–Soviet collision. This situation was, in their view, brought about by the 1973 October War. The war also created the unique opportunity to move towards such a settlement because the Arab states involved in the dispute moved away from the military solution the Soviets could help them seek, and towards the negotiated solution they believed the U.S. could help them achieve. The chosen solution to this situation was by the Carter administration a commitment to put their full influence into the scale in an effort to achieve a settlement. The members of Carter administration wanted to distance themselves from the previous American diplomacy in the Middle East, which in their eyes failed to create a lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The previous administrations had dealt with each country in the region separately (the so-called shuttle diplomacy), and now Jimmy Carter wanted to deal with, and treat, the Middle East as a whole. The reconvening of the Geneva Peace Conference was the ultimate goal for Jimmy Carter. At Geneva, the leaders of the Middle East would, under the co-chairmanship of the U.S. and the Soviet Union, find a lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Syria was seen as a key state to achieve a comprehensive settlement because they had dealings with the PLO, and therefore could get the PLO to accept UN resolution 242. Accepting UN resolution 242 meant that the U.S. could directly negotiate with the PLO. Kissinger had promised the Israel that the U.S. would never negotiate with the PLO so long as they did not accept the resolution, Carter held that promise.

Assad favored a reconvening at Geneva but did not think it very likely to ever happen. Elaborating further that Syria and Israel had two different views on peace, and Assad wanted peace not “capitulation”. Assad thought a comprehensive settlement had to contain three basic elements: Israel had to withdraw from all territory occupied during the 1967 war, the Palestinian rights, and finally the termination of the state of war. Assad said the Arab states had agreed that the PLO had to represent the Palestinians at
Geneva, and that a united Arab delegation at Geneva could resolve any problems Israel had with PLO participation. All the Arab states agreed to go to a Geneva Peace Conference in September of 1977, to discuss content prior to the conference. The biggest issues standing in the way of Geneva was PLO representation and whether or not there was to be a unified Arab delegation at Geneva. PLO participation in a unified Arab delegation, discussing all matters multilaterally, were preconditions if Syria was to attend. Likewise, Israel’s precondition to attend was no PLO participation, and only bilateral negotiations. In the minds of the Americans it was Israel that posed the biggest problem, not wanting to meet the Arabs on any issue, but Carter did not show sympathy towards the Arab refusal in making peace with Israel either. It is safe to assume that Carter felt each side had dug itself into opposite ditches. The reason Assad wanted a united Arab delegation, with the PLO included, at the Geneva Peace Conference is easier to understand in hindsight. Assad wanted to be the representative for both the Palestinians and the Arab states at Geneva. Least of all did Assad like nor trust Sadat of Egypt. At the time, the Americans underestimated the animosity between Assad and Sadat.

President Assad was seen as the most skeptical and most pivotal leader of the Arab Middle East, that could hold the key to peace in the Middle East. Syria was seen as most negative of the three Arab confrontation states towards the kind of Arab commitment Israel would like to see. They thought Syria would only end the state of war and move towards a genuine peace when a Palestinian state was established. Without a solution of the Palestinian issue, it was thought stability in the area was impossible. The Americans did suspect, almost right from the start, that Israel and Egypt would try to work out separate deals and thereby undermine Arab unity and Syria’s bargaining position in the negotiation process. President Carter’s advisors warned that any new guarantees on border security, by the U.S. to Israel, would only increase the power polarization, forcing the Arab states to seek guarantees from the Soviets.323

323 U.S. officials were often very well informed matters relating to Syria, and the fact that few sources of information are visible in the declassified material peaks my interest.
The meeting with Assad on May 9 reviled what the Carter administration wanted with Syria and the Syrian position towards the peace initiative. The administration wanted to gain Assad’s trust, and impress their will to improve U.S.-Syrian relations. Further, they wanted to persuade Assad to, in action rather than words, commit to a peace with Israel. Lastly, they wanted more concrete details on how to solve the Palestinian situation.

During the meeting an interesting fact surfaces, that explains why Syria was so pivotal in laying the grounds for a Geneva Conference. Kissinger promised the Israelis that the U.S. would not negotiate with the PLO until it recognizes Israel’s right to exist.

Assad’s was positive towards a final settlement, but did not think Israel would accept any terms made by the Arabs. On the Golan Heights, Assad could only accept demilitarized zones under an U.N. umbrella. Assad saw the Palestinian question as two parts, the Palestinian refugees and Palestinian state, but did not think the West Bank would be big enough. He wanted a U.N. resolution that restored Palestinian rights, and compensation for the Palestinian refugees. Carter agreed with Assad that the Palestinians must have the right to a homeland, and in his own preference tied to Jordan or a larger confederation, but the U.S. were committed to the security of Israel and its right to exist in peace. All in all, the meeting was not that encouraging, and made it clear that it would be hard to broker a peace between Israel and Syria. Another truth also became clearer at Geneva: the animosity felt by Assad towards Egypt. Assad reviled, in his speech at Geneva, the animosity felt towards president Sadat of Egypt was because he forced Syria to accept UN resolution 338 in 1973 without the precondition that Palestinian rights were restored. Sadat had done this leaving Syria alone in the war against Israel and their supports around the world. The Americans did believe that any comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict would involve the withdrawal of Israeli military forces to near the 1967 border situation. However, they anticipated that a final settlement required the principal Arab states, and the Palestinians, to accept all demands put forward by Israel. Their impression was that the strategic risk of making a deal with Egypt and Jordan was less for Israel, than with Syria. Israel had limited common interests with these countries, and did not risk losing the Golan.
The U.S. assessment of Syria in the spring of 1977 was wrong in two ways. First of all, U.S. officials underestimated the animosity between Assad and Sadat. Its roots lay in the 1973 October War, where they agreed to fight together, but almost immediately they parted ways. Assad was angry at Sadat, and Sadat had little use for Assad. The Americans were also wrong in thinking that Syria would help them get the PLO in the game by getting the PLO to accept UN resolution 242. During the summer and fall it became apparent that this would not happen. The Americans had a hard time getting real results from the Syrians. The Syrian government had spoken to Arafat but had gotten no answers. The signs pointed in the direction that relations between the PLO and Assad were not as good as they were before the Syrian intervention in Lebanon. It was impossible to get Palestinian representation with the PLO at Geneva if the PLO did not accept U.N. resolution 242, and a Geneva without Palestinian representation would never gain any real results.

5.2 A turn for the worse

American diplomatic efforts in Syria took a more negative turn in the summer of 1977. The election of Menachem Begin as new Israeli Prime Minister made bringing Syria and the PLO to Geneva even more unlikely. The former Irgunn leader represented a harsher view of the Arabs far more determined to Israeli rule on the West Bank. He called for an unbending opposition to a Palestinian state, and expressed every intention of increasing the number of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories. At a Geneva conference, he wanted to negotiate bilaterally without any precondition. Meaning guarantees for a no results concerning Golan, the Palestinians and Syria. Assad would not accept bilateral negotiations at Geneva, and he saw the PLO as the only representatives for the Palestinians. The situation was in reality locked. President Anwar Sadat of Egypt would solve this lockdown.

The U.S. did favor a unified Arab delegation at Geneva, but gave that up after Israeli refusal. A later proposal by the U.S. was that the Arabs would attend the opening ceremony in a unified delegation and split up during the negotiations. The Carter Administration’s view on the Palestinian issue was also closer to the Syrian. They believed that there should be a Palestinian entity on the West Bank including Gaza, and
that it should be up to them who governed them. The Syrians were positive to such a suggestion. However, in a meeting between Vance and Moshe Dayan, Dayan had become very angry when Vance used the term “Palestinian state” and forced him to say “Palestinian entity” instead. The Israelis did not even want nameplates at the Geneva negotiations because that would put the Palestinian representatives in the same positions as Jordan or Egypt. Talk about animosity.

In August, Sadat expressed his will to use Geneva as a platform to sign an already agreed upon treaty because he feared a unified Arab delegation would limit Egypt’s possibilities. The only demand Sadat had was that Israel gave up the West Bank, thus leaving the rest of the Palestinian question and Golan to Assad alone, leaving Syria no leverage to negotiate. The Egyptians were willing to flexible on most issues, in contrast with the rigid Assad. Sadat also claimed he could get whatever he wanted from the PLO, again removing the need for Syria in a final settlement. Begin had also said to Carter that he was only prepared to negotiate on the West bank, and the West Bank was Egypt’s only concern prior to Geneva, meaning that both Israel and the U.S. had laid the grounds for leaving Syria in out in the cold. Israel knew as well as anyone that Syria did not pose any threat to Israel without Egypt and the Golan. Perhaps the Carter administration underestimated the animosity between Assad and Sadat after the 1973 October War, and that the Israeli government knew this very well. A Geneva Conference with Syria died, in reality in the fall of 1977, and the idea of the Camp David talks were born.

The Syrians were shocked when Sadat traveled to Jerusalem November 9, deceiving the Syrians on the anniversary of Assad’s rise to power. Assad announced that Sadat lost his legitimacy as an Arab leader. The U.S. still thought it likely Assad would reconsolidate with Sadat, if sufficient incentive existed. However, at the UN general assembly November 25, the Syrian UN ambassador called Sadat’s move a stab in the back and a tragedy for every Arab. In a report from November 30, the Americans thought Assad to be distancing himself from the Geneva Peace Conference. Isolation was moving closer.

Top secret documents hint that the U.S. intelligence now tried to affect Arab public opinion by “guiding” the media coverage so that an even bigger wedge was created
between Egypt and Syria. By all accounts it looks like the U.S. tried to isolate Syria, thereby increasing their chances of getting Israel to sign a peace treaty, and being without allies they would keep the status quo in with Israel. On December 12, Assad ruled out any dialog with Egypt because of Sadat’s actions. What this also accomplished, was that Syria moved closer to the Moscow even though they initially wanted a closer relationship with the U.S. and the West. Pushing Syria towards Soviet could have been a deliberate strategy, intended to weaken Assad’s power in the region. Cables from early December indicates the U.S. trying to persuade the Saudi Arabian government to be a part of a settlement involving Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Palestinians. Excluding Lebanon, Syria, and the PLO. Early January 1978, Assad officially stated that Sadat’s initiative killed the Geneva Peace Conference.

5.3 Lebanon

The situation in Lebanon was far more complicated than I could ever imagine. On the surface both Israel and Syria were supporting the Phalange party and President Sarkis, but after examining the available source materials the situation was quite different. At least in Southern Lebanon, along the Israeli border. Palestinian and Christian militias fought intensely in southern Lebanon, so Assad wanted to send the ADF force to calm things down. This was not warmly welcomed by Israel, perceiving this as a move strategic towards Israel’s border and the Golan.

During the first ten days in office, the Carter administration contacted by the Israelis who requested they put pressure the Syrians in Lebanon. Perhaps Israel wanted to test the Carter administration on how committed they were to the security of Israel. The Americans did as asked and mediated the Israeli message, as seen in the January 29 memorandum. However, the Americans had no problems with Assad’s position of power in Lebanon as long as he did not move too close to the Israeli border and so, the U.S. remained committed to the security of Israel. This was one of Syria’s main problems with U.S. foreign policy, namely that Israel through the U.S. meddled in Arab internal affairs. The sources also confirm this issue, that after being contacted by the Government of Israel, the U.S. conveys the message and indirectly pressures the Syrians. The situation in south Lebanon created unwanted tension before Secretary
Vance’s visit to Damascus February 20-21, where they would discuss the road towards the Geneva Peace Conference. To solve this issue Vance was to travel from Israel to Beirut by car though southern Lebanon. The State Department then requested Syrian troops in Lebanon did not enter any Palestinian camps in the general area of Secretary Vance’ travel route. (The ADF mission in southern Lebanon was to chase down fleeing Palestinian militia soldiers.) The Syrians were disappointed of the way the Carter administration was handling Israeli pressure, and that it had left a bad taste in Damascus. Not a great start when trying to make peace in the Middle East, but it was Israeli pressure rather than U.S. will that made this happen. Israeli power over American foreign policy showed itself again in August. During the American effort to find a way to bring both Israel, the PLO, and Syria to the negotiating table at Geneva, the situation in southern Lebanon escalated. Israeli intelligence claimed to the Americans that Assad and the Palestinians had made a secret agreement, allowing Palestinian militias to move closer than 15 miles of the Israeli-Lebanese border. During Secretary Vance’s meeting with the Israelis August 10, he got five issues he promised to bring up with Assad. The issues were formed in such a way that it could have been perceived as a threat not only from Israel, but from Israel through the U.S., thus implying from both. At the very least, Syria was shown that the U.S. relationship with Israel was indeed special. In Secretary Vance’s own words, Assad understood the “possibility of Israeli military action- well enough to dampen the fighting”. In late September 1977, there was a cease-fire in South Lebanon after Lebanese Government troops was posted there. In conclusion, the U.S. foreign policy towards Syria in relation to the Lebanese civil war was clear. The U.S. accepted Syria as a major player in Lebanon letting them do as they pleased, as long as they did not cross any Israeli interests. If they did, the U.S. would take action against Syria through Israel. The primary sources indicate that it may have been Israeli pressure and power rather than the actual will of the Carter administration that made the foreign policy on this specific area. Unfortunately for the peace initiative, the U.S. acted as Israel’s herald and not as mediator, at least when it came the situation in Lebanon.

**Syrian Jews**

When President Carter was elected president, the Jewish community used its power to make some real progress. The case of the American interest in the Syrian Jews,
naturally, fall in the shadow of the road towards Geneva and the Lebanese civil war. It may not seem as an important matter, compared to the war in Lebanon and the peace initiative, but it sure was for Israel and her friends in the U.S. They wanted Carter to pressure Assad to letting Jews in Syria emigrate to a life of freedom and fulfillment abroad. Meaning in the U.S. and Israel. President Carter quietly, outside the record, tried his best to make this happen. Thus, making it part of the U.S. relation with Syria.

5.4 Conclusion

The American diplomatic relationship with Syria was in 1977 mainly focused on achieving a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The peace agreement was planned to be made at a reconvening of the Geneva Peace Conference, with the U.S. and Soviet Union as co-hosts. In all dealings with Syria, this was the ultimate end goal. During the first half of 1977, Syria was seen as pivotal in making or breaking a peace agreement. They were believed to have the power to persuade the PLO to accept UN resolution 242. It was belied that the other Arab states would follow Syria’s lead because they represented a united Arab front. The U.S. did however underestimate the animosity Assad felt towards Sadat after the 1973 October War, and it turned out that Sadat wanted to make a deal separate of the other Arab nations. A deal that would be much easier for Israel to accept because they had very few common interests. In the late summer of 1977, it became obvious that Israel could not make any deal with Syria and Syria could not get the PLO to accept UN resolution 242. It was Israeli pressure, and refusal to make any compromise, that created this situation. The initial position of the Carter administration was closer to the Syrian but Israeli pressure, both domestic and abroad, made the U.S. favor a deal with only Egypt. The Carter administration’s handling of the situation in Lebanon also indicates that Israeli pressure shaped their policy towards Syria. The U.S. accepted Syria as a major player in Lebanon letting them do as they pleased, as long as they did not cross any Israeli interests. If they did, the U.S. would take action against Syria through Israel. The primary sources indicate that it may have been Israeli pressure and power rather than the actual will of the Carter administration that made this foreign policy.

In the fall of 1977, U.S. policy towards Syria shifted towards isolation. It became impossible to combine U.S. commitment to Israel with getting Syria to make steps
towards any kind of peace treaty. When Anwar Sadat was willing to make a separate deal with Israel, the hopes of reconvening the Geneva Peace Conference died and the idea of the Camp David Accords was born. Syria went from an important and pivotal part of any peace agreement to being totally left out in the cold. The primary sources reveal that the Carter administration’s relations with Syria was in large parts based on Israeli interests, and a result of Israeli pressure at home and abroad. The case of the Syrian Jews further enhances this theory, where Israel forced the Carter administration to act as their herald rather than the negotiator Jimmy Carter actually wanted it to be.
5.5 Epilogue

When I started this project, the goal was a thesis that accounted for the U.S.-Syrian diplomatic relationship during the Jimmy Carter Administration, from 1977 to the inauguration of President Ronald Reagan in 1981. The result became something that I could have never imagined. What started out as an attempt to account for U.S.-Syrian diplomatic relations during the Jimmy Carter administration, ended up as an account of the administrations dealings with Syria during the first year of the presidency. There are two reasons for this; not enough available primary source material and no other comparable works of scholarly quality.

When I gathered the primary source material from the archives at the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum in Atlanta, I found that most of the declassified material were from 1977 and was mostly in relation to the preparation for the resumption of the Geneva Peace Conference. After working my way through over 1500 documents, I realized two things. First, this thesis will in large parts account for the U.S.-Syrian relationship in 1977. Secondly, to be able to give an accurate account, with scholarly quality, of the U.S.-Syrian relationship from 1978 to 1981, I need primary sources from the Department of State, the Department of Defense, and from the Central Intelligence Agency. The reason for this is simple. Documents regarding Syria, with the exemption of the peace initiative in 1977, were for the most part still classified at the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum. According to the employees at the archives, this was the unfortunate result of lacking manpower. Further, the documents that were declassified from the period 1978-1981 usually lacks context and were usually greatly redacted. If this thesis had tried to account for the diplomatic relationship between Syria and the U.S. during 1978-1981, based on the sources at hand, it would not have been an empirical work of scholarly quality. It would simply have been a novel. The documents available from the Department of State, the Department of Defense, and from the Central Intelligence Agency would be able to provide context and meaning the ones from the Jimmy Carter Library and Museum.

My starting assumption that the Camp David Accords was the Carter administration’s goal all along, and that U.S. relations with Syria was about something else than the peace initiative was all wrong. Had that been the case, it would have been possible to
just take in consideration the U.S.-Syrian relationship. The reality was very different and very complicated. Yes, the Syrian involvement in the Lebanese civil war did matter to the Carter Administration, but only when Syria crossed paths with Israel. What did matter to the Carter administration was getting the PLO to accept UN resolution 242 though the Syrians, getting the Syrians to give in to Israeli demands.
6  Appendix

Resolution 242 (1967) of 22 November 1967

The Security Council,

Expressing its continuing concern with the grave situation in the Middle East,
Emphasizing the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and the need to
work for a just and lasting peace in which every State in the area can live in security,
Emphasizing further that all Member States in their acceptance of the Charter of the
United Nations have undertaken a commitment to act in accordance with Article 2 of
the Charter,

1. Affirms that the fulfilment of Charter principles requires the establishment of a just
and lasting peace in the Middle East which should include the application of both the
following principles: (i) Withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in
the recent conflict; (ii) Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for
and acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence
of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized
boundaries free from threats or acts of force;

2. Affirms further the necessity (a) For guaranteeing freedom of navigation through
international waterways in the area; (b) For achieving a just settlement of the refugee
problem; (c) For guaranteeing the territorial inviolability and political independence of
every State in the area, through measures including the establishment of demilitarized
zones;

3. Requests the Secretary-General to designate a Special Representative to proceed to
the Middle East to establish and maintain contacts with the States concerned in order to
promote agreement and assist efforts to achieve a peaceful and accepted settlement in
accordance with the provisions and principles in this resolution;

4. Requests the Secretary-General to report to the Security Council on the progress of the efforts of the Special Representative as soon as possible.

Adopted unanimously at the 1382nd meeting.


Resolution 338 (1973) of 22 October 1973

The Security Council

1. Calls upon all parties to the present fighting to cease all firing and terminate all military activity immediately, no later than 12 hours after the moment of the adoption of this decision, in the positions they now occupy;

2. Calls upon the parties concerned to start immediately after the cease-fire the implementation of Security Council resolution 242 (1967) in all of its parts;

3. Decides that, immediately and concurrently with the cease-fire, negotiations shall start between the parties concerned under appropriate auspices aimed at establishing a just and durable peace in the Middle East.

Adopted at the 1747th meeting by 14 votes to none.

326 One member (China) did not participate in the voting.
## Appendix C: The Carter Administration

**Table 1.** The Carter Cabinet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Term(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secretary of State</td>
<td>Cyrus R. Vance</td>
<td>1977-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Edmund S. Muskie</td>
<td>1980-81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary of Treasury</td>
<td>W. Michael Blumenthal</td>
<td>1977-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G. William Miller</td>
<td>1979-81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary of Defense</td>
<td>Harold Brown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attorney General</td>
<td>Griffin B. Bell</td>
<td>1977-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Benjamin R. Civiletti</td>
<td>1979-81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary of the Interior</td>
<td>Cecil D. Andrus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary of Agriculture</td>
<td>Robert S. Bergland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary of Commerce</td>
<td>Juanita M. Kreps</td>
<td>1977-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Philip M. Klutznick</td>
<td>1979-81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary of Labor</td>
<td>F. Ray Marshall</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare</td>
<td>Joseph A. Califano Jr.</td>
<td>1977-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Patricia R. Harris</td>
<td>1977-81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary of Housing and Urban Development</td>
<td>Patricia R. Harris</td>
<td>1977-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maurice E. “Moon” Landrieu</td>
<td>1979-81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary of Transportation</td>
<td>Brook Adams</td>
<td>1977-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neil E. Goldschmidt</td>
<td>1979-81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary of Energy</td>
<td>James R. Schlesinger</td>
<td>1977-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Charles W. Duncan</td>
<td>1979-81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary of Education (post established 1979)</td>
<td>Shirley Hufstedler</td>
<td>1979-81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Central Intelligence</td>
<td>Stansfield Turner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs</td>
<td>Zbigniew Bzrezinski</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2. White House Office Staff: Relevant Actors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs</td>
<td>David L. Aaron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Assistant to Congressional Liaison (House)</td>
<td>Robert G. Beckel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Assistant to the President for Health Issues</td>
<td>Peter G. Bourne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs</td>
<td>Zbigniew Brzezinski</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Assistant to the President</td>
<td>Landon Butler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Assistant for Congressional Liaison (House)</td>
<td>William H. Cable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Director Domestic Council, 1977-79</td>
<td>Bertram W. Carp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Assistant to the President for Administration</td>
<td>Hugh A. Carter Jr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Assistant/Secretary to the President</td>
<td>Susan S. Clough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant to the President for Public Liaison</td>
<td>Margareth Constanza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsel to the President</td>
<td>Lloyd Cutler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Advisor to the President</td>
<td>Hedley Donovan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant to the President for Domestic Affairs and Policy</td>
<td>Stuart E. Eizenstat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Speechwriter</td>
<td>James M. Fallows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Press Secretary</td>
<td>Rex L. Granum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant to the President</td>
<td>Hamilton Jordan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief of Staff of the White House</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsel to the President</td>
<td>Robert J. Lipshutz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant to the President for Congressional Liaison</td>
<td>Frank B. Moore</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3. The Major Players: The Inner Circle.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>Jimmy Carter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs</td>
<td>Zbigniew Brzezinski</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary Of State, 1977-80</td>
<td>Cyrus Vance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary of Defense</td>
<td>Harold Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>Walter Mondale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant to the President, 1977-79</td>
<td>Hamilton Jordan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White House Chief of Staff, 1979-80</td>
<td>Jody Powell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press Secretary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Central Intelligence</td>
<td>Stansfield (Stan) Turner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant to the President for Congressional Liaison</td>
<td>Frank Moore</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Informal Advisors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Advisor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Lady</td>
<td>Rosalynn Carter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta Attorney</td>
<td>Charles Kirbo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former DNC Chairman: Trade Representative, 1977-79</td>
<td>Robert (Bob) Strauss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimmy Carter’s Pollster</td>
<td>Patrick Caddel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Peripheral Advisors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Advisor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Secretary of State</td>
<td>Warren Christopher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Assistant to the National Security Advisor and NSC Crisis Coordinator</td>
<td>William (Bill) Odom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1974-78</td>
<td>George Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs</td>
<td>David Aaron</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs</td>
<td>Zbigniew Brzezinski</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Assistant National Security Affairs</td>
<td>David L. Aaron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Assistant and National Security Council Crisis Coordinator</td>
<td>William E. Odom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Assistant to the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs</td>
<td>Karl F. Inderfurth 1977-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinator for National Security Planning</td>
<td>Samuel P. Huntington 1977-78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press Officer and Associate Press Secretary</td>
<td>Jerry Schecter 1977-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congressional Relations Officer</td>
<td>Madeleine Albright 1978-81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of the Office of Global Issues</td>
<td>Jessica Tuchman 1977-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East and North Africa</td>
<td>William Quandt 1977-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USSR and Eastern Europe</td>
<td>Marshall Brement 1979-81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia and China</td>
<td>Michel Oksenberg 1977-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>Robert Pastor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In telegram 10003 to Tel Aviv, September 29, Vance forwarded the text of the working paper on suggestions for the resumption of the Geneva Conference, which listed three points. First, “The Arab parties will be represented by a unified Arab delegation for the opening sessions at Geneva. Within the delegation there will be Palestinians, who may include not well-known members of the PLO.” The second point read, “The working groups or subcommittees for the negotiation of peace treaties will be formed as follows: A. Egypt-Israel, B. Syria-Israel, C. Jordan-Israel, D. Lebanon-Israel, E. The West Bank, Gaza, The Palestinian Question and the Question of Refugees will be discussed among Israel, Jordan, the Palestinians and perhaps others as determined at the opening sessions of the Geneva Conference.” The third and final point read, “The working groups of subcommittees will report to the plenary.” The telegram noted that the paper would be given to the Israelis, Egyptians, Jordanians, and Syrians in New York on Thursday, September 29. (National Archives, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy File, P840076–0823)327

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6.5 Appendix E- Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski) to President Carter1 Washington, July 19, 1977

DRAFT PRINCIPLES FOR AGREEMENT PRIOR TO GENEVA [Bracketed alternative language suggested by Israelis]

1. The goal of negotiations is a comprehensive peace settlement [embodied in peace treaties.]

2. The basis of negotiations is Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.

3. It is understood that the peace called for in Resolution 242 will consist of an end to belligerency [end state of war] and the establishment between Israel and its Arab neighbors of the relations of peace.

4. It is understood that the withdrawal called for in Resolution 242 will be to mutually agreed [secure] and recognized borders on all fronts. The withdrawal and the establishment of peaceful relations can be phased over a period of years in parallel and synchronized stages. The security of the stages and of the final settlement will be enhanced by mutually agreed security arrangements on the ground and by external guarantees. (Note: Israel will not accept the language on external guarantees.)

5. A settlement must include provision for a Palestinian entity and for means of assuring Palestinian adherence to the terms of the peace agreement. The Palestinian entity will not be militarized, and there will be provision for an open economic and social relationship with Israel. Means should be sought to permit self-determination by the Palestinians in deciding on their future status. (Note: Israel rejects this point in its entirety.)

7 Primary Sources

The Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum, Atlanta, Georgia.
https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/

The sources gathered in the Carter Library were accessed both by using the library’s CIA Research Search Tool (CREST) machines, and manually searching the physical boxes and folders. Not all documents from the physical boxes are in the archive’s computer database and visa-versa. All documents are marked by unique individual numbers, making it easy to find the original document cited.

- NLC 43- Counsel’s Office
- NLC 128- Plaines File
- NLC 133- Donated by Walter F Mondale

National Security Affairs File:

- NSA 1- Presidents Daily Report File
- NSA 2- Presidents Daily CIA File
- NSA 3- Presidents Correspondence With Foreign Leaders
- NSA 4- Trip File
- NSA 6- Country File
- NSA 7- Subject File
- NSA 10- Staff Evening Report File
- NSA 12- General Odom File
- NSA 15- Brzezinski Office File
- NSA 16- Cable File
- NSA 17- Staff Material Office
- NSA 20- Staff Material, Staff Secretary
- NSA 21-Staff Material FOI Legal
- NSA 25- Staff Material Middle East

White House Central File:

- WHC-CO55
8 Digital Resources


https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/carter

  https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v08

The United Nations Security Council


The Sykes-Picot Agreement

  http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Sykes-Picot_Agreement

Map of Syria from 1976

THE ROAD TO GENEVA

American Diplomatic Relations with Syria in 1977

9 Published Sources

THE ROAD TO GENEVA

American Diplomatic Relations with Syria in 1977


THE ROAD TO GENEVA

American Diplomatic Relations with Syria in 1977