

SYRIA

When Sharif Hussein ibn Ali's son rode into Damascus in triumph alongside Lawrence of Arabia in October of 1918, he didn't hesitate for a moment before declaring himself King Faisal I, King of Syria. But his triumph was short lived. In June 1920, a French occupation force moved in demanding the expulsion of Faisal, and in 1920, the League of Nations approved the texts of the French Mandates for both Syria and Lebanon. Politically, "Syria" shrank considerably under these mandates, having to accept the loss of Transjordan, Lebanon, and Palestine.

The French now assumed responsibility for creating and controlling an administration, developing Syria's resources, and preparing it for self-rule. They set up a number of local governments: one for the Jebel Ansariyah, where the majority belonged to the 'Alawite sect, one for the Jebel ad-Duruz, where most of the inhabitants were Druzes, and eventually one for the rest of Syria with its capital at Damascus. French administration actually achieved quite a lot. Roads were built, urban planning advanced, urban infrastructure developed, land tenure was reformed in some districts, agriculture was modernized, particularly in the fertile al-Jazirah, and the University of Damascus established.

Preparing Syria for self-rule was another story. French and Syrian ideas about this were very different. Most French officials and representatives of Syria's various ethnic minorities thought in terms of a slow, deliberate process. The French were also determined to protect Syria's Christians. The majority of Syria's urban population, in particular the educated elite, however, wanted independence immediately and were determined that the Druze and 'Alawite districts be included in the new state, along with Lebanon, Palestine, and Transjordan, if possible.

Faisal wasn't going to give up without a fight. He resisted the French vigorously, but by 1922 his forces were defeated and he was forced to flee to Iraq where the British installed him as king! This was followed by a Druze uprising in 1925 that delivered a severe pounding to the French. It was two years before they were able to put it down.

After twenty-five additional years of wrangling, a treaty was agreed upon in September 1936 that provided for an independent Syria including the Druze and 'Alawite districts, and Franco-Syrian consultation on foreign policy. A Parliament was elected and Hashim al-'Atasi was chosen as president of a nationalist government. The French, however, never actually ratified the treaty. In fact, by the end of 1938 it was clear that they never would! In July 1939 the president and government resigned, suspending the constitution.

World War Two

In June 1940, after the Franco-German armistice, the French in Syria announced that they would recognize the authority of Vichy. Political uncertainty, a growing scarcity of vital commodities, and rising prices soon led to unrest, led by Shukri al-Kuwatli, a well-known nationalist. Then, in May 1941, Vichy agreed to allow German aircraft to land and refuel in Syria en route to Iraq, which was in revolt against British rule. In June, British, Commonwealth, and Free French forces invaded. Vichy troops resisted for about a month, but Damascus was occupied on June 21st and hostilities ceased at midnight on July 11th. From then until 1946, Syria was jointly occupied by the British and French. At the moment of invasion, the Free French had proclaimed Syria and Lebanon as independent states. The British agreed to this, provided France seriously intended to follow through on this proclamation. Elections held in 1943 resulted in a nationalist victory. Shukri al-Kuwatli became president of the new republic.

Two years of disagreement followed, concerning the transfer of authority from French to Syrian administration, culminating in a crisis in 1945. At this point, the French simply refused to transfer control of the local armed forces to the Syrians. Damascus was bombarded and the British were forced to intervene. After protracted debate in the UN Security Council, agreement was reached on a simultaneous British and French withdrawal, which was completed in April 1946. Syria now joined both the UN and the Arab League as a sovereign and independent state.

Early Difficulties

By 1948, the Syrian Army consisted of approximately eight thousand men. When the British gave up their Palestinian mandate in May 1948, Syria invaded the new state of Israel with an infantry brigade, adding it to contingents from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq. In the end, despite huge advantages in both numbers and equipment, their efforts came to nothing. By July of the following year, UN representative Ralph Bunche was able to produce a series of effective cease-fire agreements. The existence of an independent Jewish state had become a bitter reality.

The humiliating failure of Arab military intervention against Israel brought serious discredit to the governments involved, but nowhere was defeat more politically dangerous than in Syria. Fundamental to the Syrian problem were the ethnic, religious, and social divisions within the republic. There were the 'Alawis and Druze, the Sunnis of Damascus, Hims, Hamah, and Aleppo, and of course, large communities of Christians, also mostly in the cities.

In addition, there were equally important social divisions between townspeople, peasants, and nomads, three groups with little in common. Economic inequalities made the situation even more complex. In the cities, the ostentatious wealth of a few contrasted sharply with the grinding poverty of the masses and there were large agricultural estates on which the peasants were practically serfs. When Syria gained its independence, Sunni landowners were the first to take power. But by 1949 the small but rising middle class, among which new social ideas were developing, and minorities, who resented too much central authority, were increasingly opposed to the government. The Sunnis, after struggling so long for independence, refused to enact concessions that might have saved them. Moreover, they appeared to be more dedicated to "Pan-Arabism" than to solving Syria's problems.

The ruling "National Bloc" quickly divided into two new parties. The "National Party" headed by Shukri al-Kuwatli, represented Damascus businessmen and supported Saudi Arabia. The "People's Party" represented those in Aleppo and supported Iraq. In addition to these, there was the "Ba'th (progress) Party", representing the socialists and secular Arab nationalists. This was the party of choice among students and young army officers. 'Alawis and other minorities were heavily represented in both. Defeat at the hands of the Israelis meant that confidence in Syria's newly formed political institutions was seriously weakened.

One Damn Coup After Another!

Civilian rule came to an abrupt end in March 1949, when Colonel Husni az-Zaim overthrew the Kuwatli government in a bloodless coup. Five months later, Zaim was overthrown by Colonel Sami al-Hinnawi. A third coup, led by Colonel Adib ash-Shishakli, followed in December. In November 1951, a fourth coup removed Shishakli! None of these officers adhered to any particular ideology. In fact, the only things they had in common were conservatism and a propensity to attach themselves to veteran politicians. Those who did show some sort of political preference were generally Pan-Arab "Ba'th" Socialists. Opposing the Ba'thists were followers of the "Syrian Social Nationalist Party" (SSNP), an authoritarian group devoted to Pan-Syrian nationalism.

Shishakli was overthrown in February 1954 by Colonel Faisal al-Atasi, who brought back Parliament. The SSNP lost all its influence the following year and the Ba'thists were back in charge. But "in charge" did not mean "secure". Civil disorder continued to smolder just beneath the surface of Syrian politics, and prevented their participation in the 1956 Arab-Israeli War. Syrian leaders could not bring themselves to allow the army out of their sight. In fact, a certain amount of political anarchy was a fact of life in Damascus throughout this period. By the time Hafez al-Assad established a stable regime in 1971, Syria had suffered through a total of nine coups in just over twenty years

The UAR

The overthrow of Shishakli was coincidental with the rise of Nasser in Egypt and his dominance of the Pan-Arab movement. The Ba'thist dream of a single united Arab state looked to be about to come true. In February 1958 the Party surrendered Syria's sovereignty and became the "Northern Province" of Nasser's United Arab Republic (UAR). The UAR was a bitter disappointment for Syria, however. The Egyptians tended to treat them as subordinates and failed to come to their aid when a series of droughts damaged their economy. In September 1961, Syrian army officers reestablished Syrian independence in (you guessed it) a coup.

This coup paved the way for a return to the old power structure. Though parliamentary elections were duly held, the "secessionist" regime, for all its civilian trappings, was still dominated by the army. They quickly undid all the socialist programs introduced by Egypt, including land reform and the nationalization of large industries. By March 1963, everything was back where it was in 1958. The Ba'thists slipped quietly back into the driver's seat.

Iraqi Ba'thists had seized power in Baghdad only a month before their fellows in Syria. A Ba'thist union between Syria and Iraq seemed imminent, but it was opposed by pro-Nasser Arab unionists in both capitals. Ba'th leaders flew to Cairo for unity talks with Nasser, but he refused to cooperate except on his own terms. The talks failed. Syria was on its own again.

Serious problems began to crop up. The Syrian Ba'thist party was only part of a larger movement with branches in Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan. Continued subordination of the Syrian branch of the party to the Pan-Arab central committee gave non-Syrian Ba'thists far too much say in Syrian affairs. As a result, the Syrians established their own Pan-Arab central committee, thereby creating a deadly rivalry with Iraq, each country claiming to be the rightful seat of the movement. The Syrian Ba'thists crushed domestic opposition, set up a police state, and appealed to residents of small towns and villages, who resented the power of "big-city" politicians, for support. For a while, Colonel Salah al-Jadid ran things until he was replaced by General Hafiz (Hafez) al-Assad, a former Air Force pilot, who was sworn in as president on March 14, 1971.

The "Six Day War"

Despite internal turmoil, Syrian foreign policy was remarkably consistent, never straying far from the problem of Israel and how to eradicate it. In May of 1967, Syria announced that Israel was massing troops on its border, giving Egypt the rationale needed for launching a general war. The Israeli's, however, refused to wait for the Arabs to get their forces in motion and attacked first. Things began to go badly right from the start, with Israeli armored units tearing across Sinai at lightning speed! Egyptian forces were cut off, isolated, and destroyed in one of the most lopsided campaigns in modern history. Jordanian forces were, at first, hotly engaged in the West Bank, then driven back into Jerusalem itself. In less than a week, the Israeli's were transferring troops to the Golan, ready to go over to the offensive against Syria.

The Golan Heights is a mass of volcanic rock, rising over nine thousand feet in just a few miles, from the eastern shore of the Mediterranean to the top of Mount Hermon. In 1967, the Syrians used their commanding position atop this mountain mass to dominate Israeli settlements in Galilee. They had been fortifying their positions here for years with concrete bunkers, minefields, dug in tanks, and anti-tank weapons, closely guarding the three viable routes through it.

Four Syrian infantry brigades made up the garrison, backed up by four armored brigades in the more open ground to the East. Any Israeli force would have to attack frontally across steep and rocky ground swept by a murderous crossfire from the heights above. In addition, the nature of the terrain here made effective air support impossible. The Syrians, therefore, saw no reason to act impulsively and contented themselves with shelling Israeli settlements in the valley below and launching only one faint-hearted attack against a couple of Israeli collective farms (Kibbutzim).

On June 8th, the Israeli Airforce shattered the almost peaceful atmosphere with a series of bombing raids, not on the heights themselves, but on the armored units stationed behind them. The effect was disastrous. All four units were literally destroyed in place! Casualties were horrendous. The Syrian positions around Mount Hermon were now cut off from outside assistance. But the concrete emplacements on the mountain slopes frustrated all attempts to destroy them from the air. Losses from anti-aircraft fire were heavy. The Israeli's had no choice. If they wanted the Syrians out, they would have to dig them out! The unit chosen for this mission was the "Golani Brigade", Israel's most elite infantry formation. In support, was the "8th Armored Brigade" (one armored infantry battalion in half-tracks and two under-strength battalions of Sherman tanks). In addition, they could call on the remnants of another armored brigade at need.

The tactics used were simple and effective, but relied heavily on high levels of courage and unit cohesion. The tanks and half-tracks led the advance until Syrian mines and heavy fire stopped them. The infantry would then dismount, deploy, and assault the Syrian positions. Once these were taken, they repeated the process again and again until they stood on the high plateau above the Jordan and the Syrian defense collapsed. The Israeli's never let up. The survivors were driven hard, back toward Damascus, thirty miles away. At this point, the Soviets intervened on the Syrians' behalf, and called for a cease-fire. The Israelis were at the end of their tether anyway, and it is hard to imagine what their tiny and exhausted army could be expected to accomplish against a city the size of Damascus! They agreed. On June 11th, the war was over.

The "Yom Kippur War"

Syria's goals in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War were modest. They intended to retake the crest of the Golan Heights, especially around Mount Hermon. The main limiting factor in their calculations was to be the effective limit of their new anti-aircraft "umbrella". The "umbrella" concept had been invented by the Egyptians during their "War of Attrition" with Israel during 1969 and 1970. The idea was to turn the sky over their combat units into "killing zones", saturated with SAM and AA artillery fire. In this way they believed they could significantly reduce the effectiveness of Israeli air power. In the past, American ECM technology had made Israeli planes nearly invulnerable to normal AA tactics, but the Egyptians believed that if they could fill the air with SAMs and Flak, the resulting "shotgun" effect would overwhelm this defensive advantage.

Israeli positions along the Golan Heights included two weak points at Quneitra and Rafid. These were to be where the Syrians struck on October 6th. Their attack began with a massive artillery bombardment and a series of air strikes. The object was to cover the advance of their engineers. These quickly cut through Israeli barbed wire, cleared minefields, and threw temporary bridges across the anti-tank ditches. Then, two Syrian infantry divisions pinned down the Israelis and held open the gaps created. Through these rushed two Syrian armored divisions with a total of 1,300 tanks, to widen the gap even further and wreak havoc in the Israeli rear.

The Israeli's inflicted serious casualties on the Syrians despite being taken by surprise and heavily outnumbered. But the Syrians advanced with courage and determination regardless of casualties, broke through the Israelis, and were soon hammering on toward Galilee. The Israelis replied with tenacious holding actions all along the line and called for reinforcements. The 7th Armored Brigade was concentrated against the Quneitra thrust and the "Barak" Armored Brigade against the Rafid breakthrough. Concentrated Arab anti-aircraft fire caused severe losses among Israeli supporting aircraft. In addition, surprise prevented the Israelis from taking out Syrian anti-aircraft assets by their normal tactic of preemptive air strikes.

Tank battles raged up and down the line with a savagery unmatched even in the Middle East! Tank fought tank at ranges of less than two hundred meters! The Israelis were overwhelmed by waves of determined Syrians and their traditional tactical superiority and sophisticated weaponry could not save them. In a few hours, the "Barak" Brigade was smashed! The Syrian advance continued unchecked. Israeli reserve units were thrown in as they arrived and driven back in disorder. The Syrian "Juggernaut" swept on.

But soon the offensive began to wind down. Israeli reserve units were arriving in strength and the exhausted and decimated Syrians could do no more. Their forward elements were driven back. Two Israeli armored divisions brought their advance to a halt on October 7th, and began their counter-offensive. They reached the 1967 cease-fire line by October 10th, but could go no farther. The Syrians, for their part, decided they could not make a stand here and fell back into Syrian territory the next day.

The SAM umbrella had worked as planned but had simply shot off most of its ammunition. The Israeli air force began to shut it down. The Syrian defenses around Mount Hermon were well built, well sighted, and constructed in depth, but only partially manned. Syrian units, falling back to occupy them, had suffered heavily in the Golan battles. On October 11th, the Israelis broke through. On October 12th, they encountered two Iraqi mechanized brigades and beat them soundly. Except for various inconclusive Arab counterattacks (Arab forces at this stage included Iraqis, Jordanians, Saudis, and Moroccans) between October 13th and 24th, the Golan Front had stabilized.

Lebanon

In the Summer of 1976, after years of civil war and anarchy, it became clear that Lebanon was becoming a leftist republic dominated by the "Palestinian Liberation Organization" (PLO). The Syrians realized that this was likely to bring Israeli intervention, which they did not want. Working in concert with the Israelis, they entered Lebanon with 20,000 troops. The country was then partitioned along the "Green Line", that split it and Beirut into two de-facto states. The Christians controlled the north, a Druze-Muslim-Palestinian coalition the south. A larger force of 30,000 troops (mostly Syrians) moved in to enforce the peace. By the end of November, despite minor clashes, the fighting was over (at least temporarily).

Bashir Gemayel, leader of the Lebanese "Phalangists", making full use of extensive Israeli aid, forcibly united all the Maronite militias, thereby creating a Christian stronghold in East Beirut and along Lebanon's northern coast. The Syrian army was dominant pretty much everywhere else, but a jumble of factions maintained a certain anarchy by fighting among themselves at every opportunity. The Israelis couldn't resist getting in on the 'fun,' bombing PLO headquarters in West Beirut on July 17, 1981 and causing over three hundred civilian deaths.

The United States got involved by arranging a cease-fire between the Israelis and the PLO. It didn't last. On June 6, 1982 60,000 Israelis poured into Lebanon, ostensibly to secure their northern border against PLO raids. In reality, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and his supporters meant to destroy the PLO and establish a more cooperative Lebanese government. They hoped to conclude a peace treaty similar to the one signed with Egypt in 1979. The invasion was successful in defeating the Syrians and driving the PLO into West Beirut. Egypt and the other Arab states protested in vain.

The "Israeli Defense Force" (IDF) was loathe to engage PLO and leftist Muslim troops in densely populated West Beirut. Instead, they shelled, bombed, and blockaded the area to pressure the PLO and Syrian garrisons to evacuate. This they did under international supervision (Frenchmen, Italians, and US Marines). PLO leaders and fighters left Beirut for a number of Arab countries in late August. PLO forces remaining in the north and the al-Baqa' valley could not be compelled to leave, however, because the Syrians continued to support them there.

Israeli victory encouraged the Lebanese Phalangists to elect Gemayel president of the country, but he was assassinated before he could take office. They then secured the election of Bashir's brother, Amin Gemayel, to replace him. Once the Israelis completed their occupation of West Beirut, Phalangist militiamen massacred a thousand or more Palestinians in two refugee camps in Beirut as revenge for Bashir's murder.

On May 17, 1983 Israel and Lebanon concluded a peace treaty of sorts. It called for the withdrawal of Israeli forces, a special security zone in the south, and the establishment of bilateral relations. Israel's power in Lebanon deteriorated, however, as attacks by various opposition groups increased and Israeli casualties mounted. In September, the IDF began to withdraw. On October 23rd, "suicide" bombers shattered the Marine barracks and the French military compound across town. The international peacekeepers left Beirut in March of 1984, filled with frustration and bitterness. The Syrians, Lebanese Muslims, and leftists forced President Gemayel to abandon his previous agreement with Israel, and by June 1985, most of the IDF had gone home. Soon, Lebanese Christian, rightist, Shi'ite, Druze, and PLO leaders were squabbling over the question of accepting or rejecting Syria as the overseer of Lebanese affairs.

Life Beyond Lebanon

While President Assad's attention was fixed on Lebanon, opposition to the Ba'th-Military-'Alawite triumvirate festered, primarily among Syria's Sunni Muslim population. In 1982, Syrian troops were called upon to suppress an uprising of the outlawed (Sunni) "Muslim Brotherhood" in the city of Hamah. The entire center of town was leveled. Estimates of civilian casualties ran as high as ten thousand. Syria's Pan-Arab credentials and its friendly relations with the Soviet Union were strained by Assad's support of non-Arab Iran against Iraqi Ba'thists during the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s as well.

Despite growing revenues from oil exports and increased irrigation resulting from the building of a new Euphrates Dam, Syria's economy began to stagnate. Rapid population increases hindered economic growth, while intensified agriculture ran into natural barriers like the limited supply of fresh water and the high cost of desalination. Industrial development was slowed by production

bottlenecks. Inflation, corruption, smuggling, foreign debt, bureaucratic paralysis, and limited private investment also posed severe economic problems, as did the enormous cost of intervention in Lebanon. Assad hoped to overcome some of these problems by obtaining assistance from his rich neighbors. No Luck!

The 1990s

Syria condemned the Iraqi invasion and annexation of Kuwait in August 1990, and sent more than twenty thousand troops to assist the UN coalition in Saudi Arabia. The country also participated in the direct Arab-Israeli peace talks held in Madrid in October and November of 1991. In 1997, Syria assumed a more active role in Middle Eastern affairs than it has in recent years. Confronted by steadily increasing strategic cooperation between Israel and Turkey, the Assad government took steps to construct a countervailing alliance by improving its relations with Iraq, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. A Syrian trade delegation led by the head of the country's chambers of commerce traveled to Baghdad to discuss ways in which Syria might supply Iraq with food, soap, and medicine in exchange for Iraqi oil. The border between the two nations, which had been closed since 1982, was formally reopened at the beginning of June.

Vice President `Abd al-Halim ibn Said Khaddam subsequently welcomed an Iraqi delegation representing their chambers of commerce to Damascus, noting that Syrian overtures had been undertaken as a response to persistent Turkish efforts to seize control of Kurdish areas in northern Iraq. Syrian officials enlarged and upgraded harbor facilities in Latakia and Tartus in anticipation of heightened activity at those two ports once trade with Iraq revived. Meanwhile, Minister of Foreign Affairs Farouk ash-Shara toured various Persian Gulf capitals to assure the leaders of the "Gulf Cooperation Council" that Syria's "new deal" with Iraq would conform to the 1991 "Damascus Declaration", calling for military cooperation and joint economic planning after the Gulf War.

At the same time, Syria moved to smooth relations with Iran, inviting the Iranian foreign minister to discuss the future of Persian Gulf security. In July, Assad undertook a rare official visit to Tehran to offer congratulations to the new Iranian president, Mohammed Khatami. Several of Syria's senior military commanders accompanied him, ostensibly to discuss ways to improve "strategic regional cooperation and coordination" with their Iranian counterparts.

Syrian officials invited the eight signatories of the Damascus Declaration to Latakia for talks concerning the creation of an Arab "common market". In the wake of the meeting, Syrians took the lead in publicly criticizing the US-sponsored "Middle Eastern" economic summit that was planned to convene in Qatar at the end of November. Damascus argued that taking part in a multilateral conference attended by Israeli leaders would convince the government of Benjamin Netanyahu that it could enjoy the economic rewards of peace without resolving issues that continued to divide Israel from Syria and Lebanon.

The potential for Syrian-Israeli conflict escalated in late August when Israel announced that it planned to build a dam across the Yarmuk River at a point on the Syrian side of their pre-1967 border. Damascus immediately charged that the proposal "proves that Netanyahu does not want peace and wants only to escalate tensions in the region." At home, Syrian authorities launched a highly publicized campaign to eradicate corruption in public-sector enterprises. Credit for directing the campaign was given to the president's son and heir apparent, Bashar.

Father...

When Hafez al-Assad died on June 10, 2000, Syrian national television went into a veritable paroxysm of mourning. Classical music played, Kouranic verses were recited, and prayers were chanted by the hour. Cameras captured weeping members of the Syrian parliament mourning the onetime air force pilot who had taken a poor nation of seventeen million and made it a pivotal player in the Middle East.

Assad was born in Qardaha, Syria in 1930, to comfortably solvent 'Alawite parents. The 'Alawites represent a rather small community within the larger Shi'i population, that through the centuries has had no national affiliation or real political power. Among Syria's Sunni majority, many would say they are heretics.

This meant that Assad never had a strong natural power base, and that his success as a political leader has rested on controlling and suppressing those of his rivals. Very early on, he made sure that many of the more important positions in Syrian society and government were awarded to fellow Alawites. In this way he guaranteed that his subordinates would have no problems with mixed loyalties. It is also believed that his identification with such a small minority caused him to advocate strict state control over Syria's economy. Economic liberalization would have meant that other groups within Syrian society, particularly Sunnis and Christians, would have greater economic influence, and through this, political influence.

Assad built a political system whereby the army was both a symbol of Syria's international power and an instrument for domestic political control. On several occasions, the army was pitted against Syria's own population in order to maintain political stability and Assad's personal dominance. He also saw to it that Syria had an effective state police infrastructure, but without the power to act independently. Assad's regime could boast fifteen separate and competing intelligence agencies. (that we know of!)

Throughout the Soviet years, Assad was their most valued ally in the Middle East. But after their collapse in 1991, he became slightly more pro-Western. Despite this, he was never considered "friendly" by the West, and remained an outcast in their eyes, primarily due to allegations of Syrian involvement in international terrorism. His record on human rights was always problematical and tales of torture and political oppression within Syria were widespread and fully documented.

Assad worked on making Syria a leading nation in the Arab world, but he was never fully successful in this. He is more remembered for his feuds with Saddam Hussein of Iraq and King Hussein of Jordan, as well as his support for Muslim terrorists based in both Syria and Lebanon. While accusations against him have been many, few have accused him of lacking political cleverness, intelligence, or charisma. He was one of the best informed, and hardest working politicians in the Middle East. Henry Kissinger noted, "His favorite tactic was to open with a statement of the most extreme position to test what the traffic would bear. He might then allow himself to be driven back to the attainable, fighting a dogged rear-guard action that made clear that concessions could be exacted only at a heavy price." He was also well known for his modest life style, living in an average villa in a residential neighborhood in Damascus.

For three decades, Hafez al-Assad ruled Syria, and confounded the world. Six American Presidents found him frustrating and remote. An austere man who neither smoked nor drank, he would summon aides at all hours to discuss issues, then closet himself for days before abruptly announcing his decisions. He never came to America. US presidents from Nixon to Clinton either traveled to Damascus or met him in Geneva. He was legendary for marathon negotiating sessions and infuriating refusals to compromise. But it was his actions far more than his words that drove American leaders crazy.

Under his leadership, Syria was a major combatant in the 1973 war against Israel. In 1976, he marched his troops into Lebanon and they never left. Syria's name has been on the US list of terrorist nations since its inception in 1979, but it was also part of the anti-Iraq coalition in the Gulf War.

As the world changed around him, shifting from the cold war to capitalist expansion, he stood alone, more worried about how to hold on to power than what to do with it. Richard Haas, the Brookings Institute foreign-policy expert said, "He missed out on globalization, missed out on democratization. And he missed out on peace."

...And Son

Bashar al-Assad was born in Damascus in 1965, and it may be said of him that he was led to power, almost against his will! Initially he was not thought of as his father's successor, a role promised to his brother Basil. But Basil died in an accident in 1994. It was then that his father called him back to Syria from London, where he was a practicing ophthalmologist, and gradually groomed him for the post he now holds.

Opinions of Bashar vary. Some say he is not as strong or autocratic as his father or his late brother Basil. Some friends have admitted that he often appears meek and awkward. Others describe him as friendly and polite. Most agree that he is pragmatic and open to reform, that he embraces high technology and can see the possibilities in its application. This is well reflected in his involvement in bringing computer literacy, the Internet, and cellular telephone networks to his country. He is also reported to be patient and a good listener.

But Syria and its problems may be too much for him. There are many unresolved questions: quarrels with Turkey, which controls Syria's main supplies of fresh water; Lebanon, which still is very much under Syrian control; Israel, which continues to occupy the Golan Heights; and a long-lasting animosity between Syria and the leaders of Jordan and Ba'thist Iraq. Internally, Syria is just as divided as ever. There is the large Sunni majority, there are all the people who resented his father's nepotism and special favors for 'Alawites, there are the Islamic fundamentalists, and then there are Bashar's own enemies.

He has been quick to replace older officers from the top ranks of Syria's army with ones more amenable to his progressive outlook. Still, he must be careful not to antagonize his father's traditional military allies, who along with his 'Alawite supporters, kept him in office for over three decades. But, Bashar has his own agenda and priorities. His enthusiasm for computer technology, internet access, and cellular telephones have already been mentioned. But he has earned the most respect for his ruthless pursuit of corruption and economic double-dealing. To what extent this will continue is still uncertain, but it has resulted in the fall of several leading figures in Syrian society. He has also lifted the restrictions that have hindered Syrian media from exercising any form of critical journalism. Stay Tuned!

FOREIGN WEAPONS

"Otter" - CA; 65mm/75mm Lorraine 37L, 75mm Mle 1936, Lorraine 38L, R-35, R-40, Panhard 178B - FR; 150mm Hummel, StuG IIIG, JgdPz IV, PzKfw IVH, PzKfw V - GE; 65mm Mountain Gun - IT; 25lbr Howitzer, Bren Carrier, Marmon Herrington, Staghound, "Milan" ATGM - UK; M8 Armored Car, M3 Scout Car - US; All other foreign weapons - RU

TABLES OF ORGANIZATION AND EQUIPMENT

SYRIAN FORCES: 1948

Generation: II, Air Superiority Rating: 20, Class: Militia, Base Determination Factor: 20%

Infantry Company:	3xTL1 Infantry(C)
Support Company:	3xTL1 Infantry Support(B)/Bren Carrier, 0-1x25mm SPAT
Tank Company:	2xR-35 <u>or</u> 2xR-40
Anti-Tank Company:	3x37mm "Dodge" SPAT
Recon Company:	1xGM15T "Otter"[R], 1xMarmon Herrington III <u>or</u> IV, 2xPanhard-178B

Infantry Battalion:	1xTL1 Infantry(C) HQ, 3xInfantry Company, 1xSupport Company
Artillery Battalion:	2-3x75mm Mle1936(2)/Truck

Infantry Brigade: 1xTL1 Infantry(C) GHQ/Truck, 3-4xInfantry Company, 1xTank Company, 1xAnti-Tank Company, 1xArtillery Battalion, 1xRecon Company

Notes: 1) The Syrian Army at this time consisted of four brigades.
 2) Syrian recon units may also contain M-8 Armored Cars, Staghound Armored Cars, or M3 Scout Cars.
 3) Artillery may also include 65mm M1906 "Mountain" Guns towed by Lorraine-38Ls and 25lbr Gun/Howitzers towed by trucks.
 4) Syrian TO&E information in this period is often sketchy and anecdotal.

SYRIAN FORCES: 1956

Generation: II, Air Superiority Rating: 30, Class: Conscripts, Base Determination Factor: 25%

Infantry Company:	3xTL2 Infantry(B)
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Support Company: 3xTL2 Infantry Support, 1x81mm "Brandt" Mortar(2)
 Tank Company: 3xPzKfw IVH or PzKfw III or xStug III or JgdPz IV or PzKfw V or R-40
 Recon Company[R]: 2xPanhard AMD-178B, 1xJeep/HMG

Infantry Battalion: 1xTL2 Infantry(B) HQ, 3xInfantry Company, 1xSupport Company
 Artillery Battalion: 2x65mm M1906 "Mountain" Gun(2)/Truck or 2x75mm Mle1936(2)/Truck
 Artillery Battalion(SP): 1x150mm "Hummel"(2), 1x75mm Lorraine 37L(1), 1x65mm Lorraine 37L(2)

Infantry Brigade: 1xTL2 Infantry(B) GHQ/Truck, 3-4xInfantry Battalion, 1xArtillery Battalion, 1xRecon Company

Notes: 1) There were enough JgdPz IVs and PzKfw Vs in the army to equip no more than two stands of each in 1956.
 2) There were three Syrian Tank Battalions, but these were never deployed as such.
 3) Syrian tank companies were parceled out individually to the Infantry brigades, of which there were four in 1956.
 5) The "SP" Artillery Battalion was never deployed as a unit. Batteries were assigned to brigades individually.

I know! The Syrians did not participate in the 1956 Arab-Israeli War. They were busy with internal political struggles. However, a historical "what-if" with Israelis fighting Arabs equipped with WWII German and French weapons was so off-the-wall, I couldn't resist!

SYRIAN FORCES: 1967

Generation: II, Air Superiority Rating: 40, Class: Conscripts, Base Determination Factor: 25%

Infantry Company: 3xTL2 Infantry(B)/Truck
 Support Company: 3xTL2 Infantry Support, 1x57mm M43/Truck, 1x82mm M43 Mortar(3)/Truck
 Mechanized Company: 3xTL2 Infantry(B)/BTR-152
 Tank Company: 3xT-54/55 or T-34/85 or PzKfw IVH
 Recon Company: 2xTL2 Infantry(R) BTR-40

Infantry Battalion: 1xTL2 Infantry(B) HQ/Truck, 3xInfantry Company, 1xSupport Company
 Mechanized Battalion: 1xTL2 Infantry(B) HQ/BTR-152, 3xMechanized Company, 1x82mm M43 Mortar(3)/Truck
 Tank Battalion: 3xTank Company

Infantry Brigade: 1xTL2 Infantry(B) GHQ/Truck, 3xInfantry Battalion, 0-1x"Close Support" Tank Battalion, 1xRecon Company,
 1x120mm M43 Mortar(3)/Truck, 1x14.5mm ZPU-4/Truck
 Mechanized Brigade: 1xTL2 Infantry(B) GHQ/BTR-152, 3xMechanized Battalion, 1xTank Battalion, 1xRecon Company,
 1xSu-100, 1x120mm M43 Mortar(3)/Truck, 1x57mm S-60/Truck
 Tank Brigade: 1xTL2 Infantry(B) GHQ/Truck, 3xTank Battalion, 1xMechanized Battalion, 1xRecon Company,
 1xSu-100, 1x120mm M43 Mortar(3)/Truck, 1x37mm M39/Truck

Available Support Units: (One or more of these units or parts thereof, may appear in a particular action at your discretion.)
 Artillery Battalion: 3x122mm M38(3)/Truck or 3x122mm D-30(3)/Truck or 3x152mm D-20(3)/Truck
 Heavy Artillery Battery: 1x130mm M-46(3)/Truck
 Rocket Battery: 1xBM-13(12)

Notes: 1) One stand per Infantry or Mechanized Battalion may contain an attached B10 RcR team (MP).
 2) Six Syrian Infantry Brigades were deployed in or near the Golan Heights, but these were "dug in" and did little maneuvering.
 3) There were two Syrian Armored Brigades (14th & 44th) and one Mechanized Brigade (17th) used against Israel in 1967.
 4) One battalion in the 44th Brigade was equipped with T-34/85s.
 5) There were several independent Syrian Tank Battalions armed with ex-German PzKfw IVHs and Russian T-35/85s in 1967. These were often attached to Syrian Infantry Brigades for "Close Support" purposes.

INFANTRY DIVISION: 1973

Generation: II, Air Superiority Rating: 60, Class: Conscripts, Base Determination Factor: 40%

Infantry Company: 3xTL2 Infantry(A)/BTR-152
 Infantry Support Company: 1x82mm M43 Mortar(3)/Truck, 1x107mm B-11 RcR/GAZ Jeep
 Mechanized Company: 3xTL2 Infantry(A)/BTR-60PB
 Mechanized Support Company: 1x82mm M43 Mortar(3)/BTR-60PB, 1x107mm B-11 RcR/GAZ Jeep
 Engineer Company(A): 2xTL2 Engineer/Truck, 1xBulldozer (Civilian)
 Engineer Company(B): 2xTL2 Engineer/BTR-152, 1xT-55 AVLB or T-55 (Mine-roller)
 Tank Company: 3xT-55
 Recon Company(Infantry Brigade)): 2xJeep/LMG[R], 1xTL2 Infantry(R)/Truck
 Recon Company(Mech Brigade): 2xBRDM-2[R]

Infantry Battalion: 1xTL2 Infantry(A) HQ/BTR-152, 3xInfantry Company, 1xInfantry Support Company
 Mechanized Battalion(A): 1xTL2 Infantry(A) HQ/BTR-60PK, 3xMech Company(A), 1xMech Support Company(A)
 Tank Battalion: 3xTank Company
 Recon Battalion: 3xT-55[R], 3xPT-76[R], 3xTL2 Infantry(R)/BTR-60PB

Infantry Brigade: 1xTL2 Infantry(A) GHQ/Truck, 3xInfantry Battalion, 1xTank Battalion, 1xEngineer Company(A),

1xRecon Company, 1xZSU-23/4, 1x120mm M43 Mortar(3)/Truck, 1x107mm B-11 RcR/Truck,
1xArtillery Battalion

Mechanized Brigade: 1xTL2 Infantry(A) GHQ/BTR-50PK, 3xMechanized Battalion, 1xTank Battalion, 1xEngineer Company(B),
1xRecon Company, 1xZSU-23/4, 1x120mm M43 Mortar(3)/Truck

Artillery Regiment: 2x122mm M38(3)/Truck, 1x122mm D30(3)/Truck, 3x152mm D20(3)/Truck

Infantry Division: 1xMechanized Brigade, 2xInfantry Brigade, 1xArtillery Regiment, 1x(Independent) Tank Battalion, Engineer Battalion,
1xRecon Battalion

Available Support Units: (One or more of these units or parts thereof, may appear in a particular action at your discretion.)
Mortar Battalion: 2x160mm M160(6)/Truck, 1x240mm M240(Truck)
ATGM Battalion: 3xBRDM-2/AT-3
Anti-Tank Battalion: 2x85mm D48/Truck, 1x100mm M44/Truck
SAM Battery: 1xSA-2 or 1xSA-3 or 1xSA-6

Air Support: MiG-21s, MiG-17s, Su-7, Iliushin-28s

Notes: 1) There were three Syrian Infantry Divisions in the 1973 war (5th, 7th, & 9th).
2) There were not enough BTR-152s to equip all Infantry Battalions. Some units made do with truck transport instead.
3) One stand per Infantry or Mechanized Battalion may contain an attached AT-3 "Sagger" ATGM Team (MP).
4) One stand per Infantry or Mechanized Battalion may contain an attached SA-7 "Grail" AAGM Team (MP).
5) After October 7th, Syrian morale collapsed as they fell back in disorder. Reduce their "Base Determination Factor" to 25%.

ARMORED DIVISION: 1973

Generation: II, Air Superiority Rating: 60, Class: Conscripts, Base Determination Factor: 40%

Mechanized Company(BMP): 3xTL2 Infantry(A)/BMP-1
Mechanized Company(BTR-60): 3xTL2 Infantry(A)/BTR-60PB
Mechanized Company(BTR-50): 3xTL2 Infantry(A)/BTR-50PK
Recon Company(Tank Brigade): 2xBRDM-2[R], 1xPT-76[R]
Recon Company(Mech Brigade): 2xBRDM-2[R]
Engineer Company: 2xTL2 Engineer/BTR-152, 1xT-55 AVLB or T-55 (Mine-roller)

Tank Battalion(T-62): 9xT-62
Tank Battalion(T-55): 9xT-55
Mechanized Battalion(BMP): 1xTL2 Infantry(A) HQ/BMP-1, 3xMech Company(BMP), 1x82mm M43 Mortar(3)/BTR-60PB
Mechanized Battalion(BTR-60): 1xTL2 Infantry(A) HQ/BTR-60PK, 3xMech Company(BMP), 1x82mm M43 Mortar(3)/BTR-60PB
Mechanized Battalion(BTR-50): 1xTL2 Infantry(A) HQ/BTR-50PK, 3xMech Company(B), 1x82mm M43 Mortar(3)/BTR-50PK,
1x107mm B-11 RcR/BTR-50PK
Recon Battalion: 3xT-55[R], 3xPT-76[R], 3xTL2 Infantry(R)/BTR-60PB

Tank Brigade(A): 1xTL2 Infantry(A) GHQ/BTR-50PK, 3xMech Battalion(BMP), 3xTank Battalion(T-62), 1xRecon Company,
1xEngineer Company, 1xZSU-23/4, 1x120mm M43 Mortar(3)/Truck
Tank Brigade(B): 1xTL2 Infantry(A) GHQ/BTR-50PK, 3xMech Battalion(BTR-60), 3xTank Battalion(T-55), 1xRecon Company,
1xEngineer Company, 1xZSU-23/4, 1x120mm M43 Mortar(3)/Truck
Mechanized Brigade: 1xTL2 Infantry(A) GHQ/BTR-50PK, 3xMechanized Battalion(BTR-50), 1xTank Battalion(T-55),
1xEngineer Company, 1xRecon Company, 1xZSU-23/4, 1x120mm M43 Mortar(3)/Truck,
1xAnti-Tank Battalion
Artillery Regiment: 2x122mm M38(3)/Truck, 1x122mm D30(3)/Truck, 3x152mm D20(3)/Truck

Armored Division: 1xTank Brigade(A), 1xTank Brigade(B), 1xMechanized Brigade, 1xArtillery Regiment, Engineer Battalion,
1xRecon Battalion

Notes: 1) There were two Syrian Armored Divisions in the 1973 war (1st & 3rd).
2) One stand per "BTR" equipped Mechanized Battalion may contain an attached AT-3 "Sagger" ATGM Team (MP).
3) One stand per Mechanized Battalion may contain an attached SA-7 "Grail" AAGM Team (MP).
4) After October 7th, Syrian morale collapsed as they fell back in disorder. Reduce their "Base Determination Factor" to 25%.

Available Support Units: (One or more of these units or parts thereof, may appear in a particular action at your discretion.)
Mortar Battalion: 2x160mm M160(6)/Truck, 1x240mm M240(Truck)
ATGM Battalion: 3xBRDM-2/AT-3
Anti-Tank Battalion: 2x85mm D48/Truck, 1x100mm M44/Truck
SAM Battery: 1xSA-2 or 1xSA-3 or 1xSA-6

Air Support: MiG-21s, MiG-17s, Su-7s, & Iliushin-28s

SYRIAN 1ST ARMORED DIVISION: (LEBANON) 1982

Generation: III, Air Superiority Rating: 50, Class: Conscripts, Base Determination Factor: 25%

Mechanized Company: 3xTL3 Infantry(B)/BTR-60PB
 Recon Company(Tank Brigade): 2xBRDM-2[R], 1xPT76[R]
 Recon Company(Mechanized Brigade): 3xBRDM-2[R]
 Anti-Aircraft Company: 2xZSU-23/4, 1xSA-9
 Anti-Tank Company: 3xBRDM-2/AT-3

Mechanized Battalion: 1xTL3 Infantry(B) HQ/BTR-60PB, 3xMechanized Company, 1x120mm M43 Mortar(3)/Truck
 Tank Battalion(T-62): 1xT-62 (HQ), 9xT-62, 0-1xZPU-23/2 (SP)
 Tank Battalion(T-55): 1xT-55 (HQ), 15xT-55, 0-1xZPU-23/2 (SP)

Tank Brigade: 1xTL3 Infantry(B)/GHQ/BTR-60PK, 3xTank Battalion(T-62), 1xMechanized Battalion, 1xRecon Company, 1xAnti-Aircraft Company, 1xAnti-Tank Company

Mechanized Brigade: 1xTL3 Infantry(B)/GHQ/BTR-60PK, 1xTank Battalion(T-55), 3xMechanized Battalion, 1xRecon Company, 1xAnti-Aircraft Company, 1xAnti-Tank Company

Available Support Units: (One or more of these units or parts thereof, may appear in a particular action at your discretion.)

Mortar Battalion: 2x160mm M160(6)/Truck
 Artillery Battalion: 2x122mm D30(3)/Truck or 2x152mm D20(3)/Truck
 Artillery Battalion: 2x130mm M46(3)/Truck or 2x180mm S28(3)/AT-T
 Rocket Battalion: 2x122mm BM-21(12) or 2x240mm BM-24(12)
 Anti-Aircraft Battalion: 3x57mm S60/Truck or 3xZSU-57/2
 Engineer Company: 2xTL3 Engineer/BTR-152
 Mobile SAM Battery: 1xSA-2 or SA-3 or SA-5 or SA-6 or SA-8
 Attack Helicopter Regiment: 3xMi-24 "Hind D", 12xSA342 "Gazelle"

Air Support: MiG-21s, MiG-17s, Su-7s, Su-17/22s, & MiG-23s

Notes: 1) One stand per Mechanized Company may contain an attached AT-3 or AT-4 ATGM Team (MP).
 2) One stand per Mechanized Battalion may contain an attached SA-7 "Grail" AAGM Team (MP).
 3) Approximately twenty mobile SAM batteries were deployed in Lebanon in 1982. Few survived the first weeks of fighting.
 3) The Syrian 1st Armored Division consisted of two Tank Brigades (76th & 91st) and one Mechanized Brigade (58th). This division was actively engaged against Israeli forces in 1982.

SYRIAN 9TH ARMORED DIVISION: 1991+

Generation: III, Air Superiority Rating: 60, Class: Conscripts, Base Determination Factor: 25%

Mechanized Company(Mech Brigade): 3xTL3 Infantry(B)/BTR-60PB
 Mechanized Company(Tank Brigade): 3xTL3 Infantry(B)/BMP-1
 Anti-Aircraft Company: 2xZSU-23/4, 1xSA-9
 Anti-Tank Company: 3xBRDM-2/AT-3
 Recon Company: 3xBRDM-2[R]
 Engineer Company: 3xTL3 Engineer/Truck or BTR-152

Mechanized Battalion: 1xTL3 Infantry(B) HQ/BTR-60PK, 3xMechanized Company, 1x120mm M43 Mortar(3)/Truck
 Tank Battalion(Mech Brigade): 15xT-62M or 15xT-72
 Tank Battalion(Tank Brigade): 9xT-62M or 9xT-72
 Artillery Battalion: 3x122mm D-30(3)/Truck or 3x152mm 2S3(3)
 Rocket Battalion: 3x122mm BM-21(12)
 Anti-Aircraft Battalion: 3xAnti-Aircraft Company

Tank Brigade: 1xTL3 Infantry(B) GHQ/BMP-1, 3xTank Battalion, 1xMechanized Battalion, 1xAnti-Tank Company, 1xRecon Company, 1xAnti-Aircraft Company, 1xEngineer Company

Mechanized Brigade: 1xTL3 Infantry(B) GHQ/BMP-1, 1xTank Battalion, 3xMechanized Battalion, 1xAnti-Tank Company, 1xRecon Company, 1xAnti-Aircraft Company, 1xEngineer Company

Artillery Regiment: 2xArtillery Battalion(122mm), 1xArtillery Battalion(152mm), 1xRocket Battalion

Armored Division: 2xTank Brigade, 1xMechanized Brigade, 1xArtillery Regiment, Anti-Aircraft Battalion

Notes: 1) One stand per "BTR" equipped Mechanized Company may contain an attached AT-3 or "Milan-1" ATGM Team (MP).
 2) One stand per Mechanized Battalion may contain an attached SA-7 "Grail" AAGM Team (MP).
 3) Tank units serving within Syria may be equipped with T-72s, T-62s or T-55s.
 4) Syrian reserve Armored Divisions are supposed to receive a third Tank Brigade upon activation.
 5) The SA-13 was not deployed to the Persian Gulf, but may be used by units stationed in Syria.
 6) It is not clear at the time of this writing whether Syrian T-62Ms in the Gulf were armed with the AT-10 ATGM system or not, since it did not become widely available until around 1990.

In June 2002, Syrian Ground Forces Consisted of the Following:

2xCorps Headquarters (One in Golan, One in Lebanon), 6xArmored Divisions, 1xRepublican Guard Armored Division, 3xMechanized Divisions, 2xIndependent Tank Brigades, 4xIndependent Mechanized Brigades, 6xArtillery Brigades, 7xParachute Brigades, 10xSpecial Forces (Commando) Battalions, 3xSurface-to-Surface Missile Brigades, plus various service and support assets.

TACTICAL NOTES

Even more than their mentors, the Soviets, Syrian military leaders have embraced "tanks" as the answer to every tactical question. Despite the fact that most of Syria's wars have been fought in mountainous, difficult terrain, Syria's generals have ignored this and sought victory by wedging masses of armored vehicles into narrow passes, restricted battlefields, and congested urban mazes like Beirut. Any scenario you design for this army should be done with this in mind. This is not to say that Syrian tactics are never sophisticated. Their performance in the opening stages of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War proved this. But you must never forget that, when in doubt, a Syrian general will "send in more tanks!" Keep your objectives simple.

The key to accurately simulating battles involving Syrians is to think "Mass". In fact, of all the countries included in these pages, Syria is probably the greatest proponent of the application of mass to overcome tactical superiority. Battles involving Syrian forces can be great fun. Since the tactics are clear-cut and direct, large numbers of figures can be deployed making the games visually impressive. Remember that players should not be required to juggle complicated victory conditions or diplomatic objectives. Think "Crusades"! Think "Agincourt"! Think "Balaclava"! Charge!

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

In 1998, Syria undertook a major troop redeployment in Lebanon to appease local critics and improve Lebanese co-operation in future talks with Israel. It involved the redeployment of 9,000 Syrian troops including 2,000 intelligence personnel from around Beirut and Mount Lebanon to northern and eastern Lebanon. It was conducted in stages and was designed to accommodate Lebanese Christians and others opposing Syria's domination of their country. The Beirut garrison included a Special Forces divisional headquarters group, elements of an armored brigade and units of their 5th Special Forces Regiment. It is not clear how many of these remain. Israeli officials claim the commando units took up residence around strategic Mount Hermon, highest peak of the Golan Heights, where the borders of Syria, Lebanon and Jordan converge.

Israeli military analysts reminded UN observers of a similar withdrawal in May of 1997, when Syria pulled numerous armored vehicles out of eastern Lebanon. Tank transport vehicles were observed moving from the Bekaa Valley back across the border into Syria via Masnaa. They concluded the redeployment was linked to tension between Syria and Turkey, tension that had escalated following the Turkish military incursion into northern Iraq that same month aimed at crushing Kurdish separatists.

Syria may have decided to strengthen forces along its Turkish and Iraqi frontiers. Since the Israeli-Turkish military co-operation agreement in 1996, Syria has been increasingly wary of Turkish military strength. Despite the formation of an Islamic government in Ankara, cooperation between Turkey and Israel has grown in recent years. From Turkey's point of view, an alliance with Israel strengthens its hand vis-a-vis Syria, whom it accuses of supporting the Kurds.

For Israel, the alliance means that Syria must focus on both Israel and Turkey. Syrian withdrawal from the Bekaa Valley means this Israeli tactic worked as planned. The withdrawal also lessens Israeli fears of a sudden Syrian armored thrust toward the Golan Heights. The Israelis are more concerned about the movement of some ten thousand commandos of the 14th Special Forces Division from Beirut to the Golan Heights. They remember Syrian commandos seizing Mount Hermon in the 1973 "Yom Kippur War".

The Golan Heights: Today

At the time of this writing, Syrian forces are entrenched in the southwestern corner of their country close by the Golan Heights. Israel has moved through here on the way to Damascus before. In the event of another war, they may again. Both sides' forces are ranged along the official "Area Of Separation" (AOS), that runs for fifty miles from Mount Hermon in the north (where it is nine miles wide), to the Yarmuk River in the south (where the width is only a few hundred yards). This stretch of ground (administered by Syria but with a United Nations presence) represents the current border. After the Yom Kippur War, it was agreed to limit numbers of tanks, artillery, and SAMs in the area as a precaution against surprise attack by either side. Improvements in weaponry since then mean that these precautions are no longer effective, since some of Israel's weapons are easily within range of Damascus, over a hundred miles away. Each side is permitted to maintain a force of 6,000 men within its respective exclusion zone, but keeping track of numbers is difficult. UN officers accept lists from both sides and, twice a month, physically count tanks and artillery for verification.

Static, dug-in positions have been progressively upgraded here since the 1980s. Armored vehicles are arrayed alongside the main road, as are heavily fortified Syrian Army camps. No photographs are permitted and minefields are numerous. A UN spokesman in Damascus said that mine casualties are common here, particularly among smugglers. The extent of these minefields remains the biggest problem facing the UN Command. Officials in both Israel and Syria are unsure how many minefields there are or where. The UN would like to clear, or at least mark them. However, the view of one of the Canadian UNDO (UN Disengagement Observer) Force is that Israel is content with the situation. Dense minefields, in their eyes, are a powerful countermeasure to any Syrian attempt at regaining their lost territory.

Terrorist Connections

The following terrorist groups have operated with Syrian support in the past:

- The Abu Nidal Organization (ANO)
- The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLPGC)
- The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)
- The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)
- The Popular Struggle Front (PSF)
- The Abu Musa Group
- Al Sa'iq
- The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)
- Hamas
- The Kurdish Revolutionary Workers' Party (PKK)
- The Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA)

The Japanese Red Army (JRA)

All these groups have offices in Damascus and training installations either in Syria itself or in the Syrian-controlled Bekaa valley from where they have carried out operations against Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, and US targets, with at least the tacit support of the Syrian government. In addition to these, Syria supports the following Lebanese groups and militias:

Hezbollah

The Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP)

The Arab Ba'th Socialist Party (ABSP)

The Arab Democratic Party (ADP)

New Weapons

In October 1999, the Russian ambassador in Damascus disclosed that Moscow was prepared to supply Syria with a range of advanced weapons systems to boost its defense capabilities. This, despite warnings that Washington opposes any arms sales to that country. Syria remains on the US State Department's list of states that sponsor terrorism. Under US law, the government can withhold economic aid to states that sell lethal military equipment to countries on this list.

The Russian ambassador's words were clear, "Russia is ready to supply any sort of sophisticated military technology that Syria asks for, as well as new defensive weapons and to upgrade its old military equipment that was made in Russia to help it develop its defensive capabilities. Selling sophisticated weapons to Syria is legitimate since it does not threaten regional security and is not subject to any international sanctions."

Syria has been desperately seeking to upgrade its weapons systems but has been unable to improve its aging Soviet-era equipment for more than a decade. This is due in part to economic difficulties, an uneven balance of power in Israel's favor, the strong opposition of the US and its allies to arms sales to Damascus, and rapid advances in military technology that have made a large part of Syria's arsenal obsolete. Syria is reportedly seeking US\$2.5 billion worth of equipment including S-300 low-to-high altitude surface-to-air missiles (which would challenge Israel's long-held air superiority), Sukhoi Su-27 multi-role aircraft, MiG-29 fighters, T-80 tanks, and improved ATGM systems. The Syrians have also been eager to acquire night-fighting equipment (the lack of which would be a major disadvantage against Israel).

Russia is desperate for hard currency, and wants to resume arms sales to Syria, but only on a cash basis. Syria's military debt of around US\$11 billion to the former Soviet Union remains a stumbling block to further extensions of credit. Some Russian officials have expressed reservations about the resumption of arms supplies before issues concerning this debt are resolved. A source close to the Syrian leadership said some officials do not accept the US\$11 billion figure, stating it is "exaggerated". Some Syrians have told Russian officials that they owe them nothing because they were the USSR's strategic ally at the time and were therefore serving joint interests. Moreover, they point out that part of the disputed debt is for Russian engineering projects in Syria that did not meet the standards agreed upon before work began. Thus, Damascus should not have to pay for them. The Russians don't accept this view and the issue remains unsolved. A number of proposals have been put forward, including slashing the debt by eighty per cent and allowing the remainder to be paid in the form of commodities and manufactured goods.

Improving military capabilities would certainly help Syria in negotiations with Israel. Most experts and officials in Syria, including the new president, have highlighted the need to achieve some sort of military parity in order to establish "genuine trust and ensure a long-lasting peace settlement." Bashar Assad has his work cut out for him, especially given the current atmosphere of political mistrust and military tension.

Summation

The history of modern Syria is a history of war. Since first gaining independence, it has been either fighting a war or preparing for one. Throughout the last half of the twentieth century, Syria has spent a greater portion of its GNP on military hardware than any other Middle Eastern country, and now finds itself in possession of vast numbers of mainly obsolete weapons and deeply in debt to everyone, especially the Russians. During this time, it has managed to antagonize all of its neighbors; Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel, and has no one to turn to in a crisis.

Syria has failed to develop any of the institutions of constitutional democracy, wallows in ethnic and religious prejudices, and suffers all the ills of tribal nepotism, endemic corruption, diplomatic ineptitude, medieval bureaucracy, criminal waste, political instability, social upheaval, economic uncertainty, and a lack of confidence in what the people see as a timid national leader. This truly explosive mixture only requires the right spark to ignite it into civil war.

2002 SYRIAN ARSENAL

Vehicles:	1,400+T-72, 1,000xT-62, & 2,000+T-54/-55 Tanks, 400xBRDM-I & 600xBRDM-2 Recon Vehicles, 2,300xBMP-1, 1,500+BTR-50/-60/-152 & OT-64 APCs
Anti-Tank:	82mm SPG-9 & RPG-7 ATGLs, 3,000xAT-3, 150xAT-4, 40xAT-5, 1,000xAT-14, & 200xMilan ATGMs, 100mm ATGs
Artillery:	2,600xTowed Artillery Pieces (122mm, 130mm, 155mm, & 180mm), 400x122mm 2-S1, & 50x152mm 2-S3 SP Guns, 81mm, 120mm, & 160mm Mortars, 122mm, 140mm, & 240mm Multiple Rocket Launchers
Anti-Aircraft:	1,000+23mm, 37mm, 57mm, 85mm, and 100mm Towed, 300xZSU-23/4 & 10xZSU-57/2 SP AAGs, SA-2, SA-3, SA-5, SA-6, SA-7, SA-8, SA-9, SA-11, & SA-13 SAMs
SSM:	24xFROG-7, 18xSCUD-B launchers w/60 missiles, some SS-12, & 18xSS-21
Combat Aircraft:	20 Su-24, 150 MiG-21F, 110xMiG-23, 40xMiG-29, 36xMiG-25, 40xSu-22
Helicopters:	36xMi-24, 55xGazelle/HOT, 100xMi-8, 100xMi-17, 10xMi-2, 50xMi-25, 16xMi-14, & 5 Ka-25 (ASW)
Small Arms:	7.62mm Tokarev, 9mm Makarov & vz/23/25 Pistols, 7.62mm AK-47, AKM, FN-FAL, Steyr SSG69 Rifles, 7.62mm RPD, RPK, SGM, & 12.7mm DSHK NSV Machineguns

Notes: 1) An upgrade program for Syria's T-72s is being considered.
2) Most of Syria's T-54s and T-55s are in storage. Two hundred are being upgraded to T-55Ms with Ukrainian assistance.
3) A program for procuring state-of-the-art Russian fighters has collapsed due to lack of funds. This has been replaced by a modernization project for Syria's MiG-21s and Su-22s, but no action has been taken on this so far.

POINTS OF CONTACT

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