

**BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS SYRIA:
ITS IMPORTANCE, ITS DISTINCTIVENESS AND ITS RELATIONS TO
THE POLICY OF OTHER ACTORS IN THE REGION**

Sarah Scott

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews**



2016

**Full metadata for this item is available in
St Andrews Research Repository
at:**

<http://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/>

Please use this identifier to cite or link to this item:

<http://hdl.handle.net/10023/9903>

This item is protected by original copyright

British foreign policy towards Syria: its importance, its
distinctiveness and its relations to the policy of other
actors in the region

Sarah Scott



University of
St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews

11 May 2016

1. Candidate's declarations:

I, Sarah Scott, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80, 000 words in length, has been written by me, and that it is the record of work carried out by me, or principally by myself in collaboration with others as acknowledged, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in September 2009 and as a candidate for the degree of PhD in May 2016; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2009 and 2016.

(If you received assistance in writing from anyone other than your supervisor/s):

I,, received assistance in the writing of this thesis in respect of [language, grammar, spelling or syntax], which was provided by

Date 12 September 2016 signature of candidate ...S Scott.....

2. Supervisor's declaration:

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of PhD in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

Date ...12September 2016... signature of supervisor...R Hinnebusch

3. Permission for publication: (to be signed by both candidate and supervisor)

In submitting this thesis to the University of St Andrews I understand that I am giving permission for it to be made available for use in accordance with the regulations of the University Library for the time being in force, subject to any copyright vested in the work not being affected thereby. I also understand that the title and the abstract will be published, and that a copy of the work may be made and supplied to any bona fide library or research worker, that my thesis will be electronically accessible for personal or research use unless exempt by award of an embargo as requested below, and that the library has the right to migrate my thesis into new electronic forms as required to ensure continued access to the thesis. I have obtained any third-party copyright permissions that may be required in order to allow such access and migration, or have requested the appropriate embargo below.

The following is an agreed request by candidate and supervisor regarding the publication of this thesis:

PRINTED COPY

a) No embargo on print copy

Supporting statement for printed embargo request:

ELECTRONIC COPY

a) No embargo on electronic copy

Supporting statement for electronic embargo request:

Date 12 September 2016 signature of candidate ...S Scott... signature of supervisor.. R Hinnebusch

Please note initial embargos can be requested for a maximum of five years. An embargo on a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Science or Medicine is rarely granted for more than two years in the first instance, without good justification. The Library will not lift an embargo before confirming with the student and supervisor that they do not intend to request a continuation. In the absence of an agreed response from both student and supervisor, the Head of School will be consulted. Please note that the total period of an embargo, including any continuation, is not expected to exceed ten years. Where part of a thesis is to be embargoed, please specify the part and the reason.

Abstract

This thesis explores the dynamics involved in shaping the Anglo-Syrian relationship. It argues that to understand UK relations towards Syria over the past century, they have to be viewed in the broader context of British policy on Middle East regional issues, and wider foreign policy priorities. With no direct interests invested in Syria, it is both Britain's continued involvement in Middle East affairs and Syria's standing as a key regional power that assures a continuing relationship. Consequently, the stance of leading UK politicians on the issues of post-World War regional order, international terrorism, military interventionism, arms sales, dictatorship and democratisation have circumscribed UK policy options in relation to Syria.

Using the tools of Neoclassical realism this study considers British foreign policy behaviour, in terms of Britain's attempt to mobilize the power to protect its interests. It reviews Britain's international behaviour in part by how it is affected by changes in the international system, as Britain has declined from being a great imperial power, to a European power. Alliances are a key tool Britain has used to manage its decline, and this study identifies the impact that this has had on Anglo-Syrian relations with particular reference to the US and EU. Finally, it demonstrates that understanding how the foreign policy process works in Britain is key to understanding its international behaviour. In this it takes into account elite perceptions both of what these interests are and how best Britain can achieve them. This adds a layer of understanding as to why

foreign policy outcomes do not always conform with what would be predicted purely in terms of the pursuit of the national interest.

Acknowledgements

There are a number of people who have assisted me and made my studies more enjoyable over the last few years.

I would like to thank my Supervisor, Prof Ray Hinnebusch for his advice and support and occasional push at the right time!

I would like to send my thanks to those people who have taken time out of their busy schedules to answer my questions and provide me with their valuable knowledge and insights.

To my family, thank you for your support I definitely would not be here without you.

And to my friends – thank you for putting up with me, I promise, that's it!

Contents

Declaration	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Introduction	p1
Literature review	
Theory & Framework	
Framework of Analysis: UK Policy toward the Middle East & Syria	
Foreign Policy Outputs	
Summary of Approach	
Chapter One: Historical Context of Anglo-Syrian Relations	p88
Britain, the Levant and the First World War	
Impact of World War Two	
The Arab League and Baghdad Pact	
The Syrian Crisis	
Chapter Two: British Foreign Policy Toward Syria in the Thatcher Era	p142
The Middle East Peace Process	
Lebanon	
Thatcher, the US & the Libyan Crisis	
Thatcher, terrorism & Anglo-Syrian relations	
Taking a stand, Thatcher & her allies	
Resumption of Diplomatic relations	

Chapter Three: New Labour's Foreign Policy and Syria before Bashar p216

New Labour and the Making of Foreign Policy

New Labour: New Priorities?

Ethical Foreign Policy and the British Arms Industry

Ilisu Dam Project

The Blair Doctrine

Britain a "Pivotal Power"?

Impact on Anglo-Syrian Relations

Chapter Four: Blair and Bashar: A New Relationship? p269

The War on Terror

Targeting the Taliban

Iraq

Impact on Syria

Syria, the UK & the EU Association Agreement

Lebanon & the Hariri Assassination

Britain and Syria

Chapter Five: Arab Spring & The Syrian Crisis p342

A Short Rapprochement

Arms Exports

Intervention and the Responsibility to Protect

The Syrian Crisis

A Lack of Strategy

The Red Line?

Conclusion

p405

Overview of Neoclassical Realism & British foreign policy

Impact on Anglo-Syrian Relations

Bibliography

p459

Introduction

The Middle East has been, and continues to be an area of priority for British foreign policy. Syria is a key state to consider in bringing stability to that region. Syria, for the British, could have impacted on major parts of other Middle East issues, central to British foreign policy throughout the past century: its control by hostile Vichy regime in World War Two could have significantly reduced Britain's ability to protect its interests in the Middle East. Its failure to join the Baghdad Pact, cost the West an ally against Soviet influence in the region; engaging it on the issue of the Arab-Israeli peace process could have radically changed the dynamics of that process. It has played a pivotal role on issues from the war on terrorism to Western conflicts with Iraq and Iran. All interaction between Syria and Britain should therefore be seen with an eye on these other major policy issues.

This study considers the history of Anglo-Syrian relations, the context and events that colour British foreign policy toward Syria, and how these relations are expanded and/or constrained by the pursuit of other British interests in the region. It considers the effect of Britain's alliances or other commitments, such as the so-called special relationship with the US and British membership of the European Community, on the pursuit of its foreign policy toward Syria and whether there is a distinctively British approach in this. In this context, the

study will look at a series of junctures in time at which Syrian and British interests overlapped and the effect on the Anglo-Syrian relations. It looks at the early decades of the 20th century when two world wars placed British troops on the ground across the Middle East, forced interaction between policy makers and Arab leaders, and the lasting legacy the short term wartime policy had for Britain's long term policy making toward the region and Syria. It reviews the Margaret Thatcher period (1979 – 1990) as international terrorism and the hostage crisis took centre stage, putting the British Government and the Syrian regime at odds. The study continues with the foreign policy of Tony Blair's government (1997 – 2007) billed as a significant change from the past, as Blair's emphasis on the need for international intervention into conflicts led the country to participate in the intervention in Iraq, bringing it into conflict with the interests of Syria. Finally, it analyses the consequences of the Blairite foreign policy for Britain's reaction to the Arab Spring and specifically, how this shaped the Coalition government's (2010 – 2015) response to the crisis in Syria.

This study, thus, considers British foreign policy over a time period spanning from the First world war to the current day, to demonstrate key points of Anglo-Syrian interaction, how the assessment of threat and interest by decision makers has impacted foreign policy outlook, and how pursuit of Britain's foreign

policy toward the MENA area in general and Syria in particular, has been affected by international pressures.

Literature Review

There are a number of issues to consider when reviewing the literature available relating to the topic of recent British foreign policy toward Syria. The first of these is that literature on and about this subject matter is virtually non-existent. Current work on British policy in the Middle East tends to concentrate on more traditional areas such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, oil, Iraq, terrorism and Iran. However, because these issue areas reflect British foreign policy priorities, and past imperial relationships, analysing Britain's relations with Syria require an attention to these topics and of how Anglo-Syrian relations are affected and defined by these issues.

The second challenge is finding work on current British foreign policy itself relevant to the study of Anglo-Syrian relations. Though some literature is available, much of the work being done in the area of British foreign policy tends to concentrate on important figures involved, such as Rentoul's 2001, *Tony Blair: Prime Minister*, or Kampfner's *Blair's War* (2004), works which tend to be more narrative, historical accounts of Blair's premiership than analytic reviews of policy. Work on the making of British foreign policy, in many

instances written by ex-diplomats, foreign affairs advisers or civil servants, such as, for example, Percy Cradock's *In Pursuit of British interests*, are informative but highly personalised accounts. They are invaluable in giving insight in how the British System works since they are written by insiders with an intimate knowledge of the system but they carry all the associated bias or reflect bureaucratic rivalries that come from having been on the inside.

Thirdly, the focus (though not exclusively) of this thesis on recent foreign policy adds another degree of difficulty in that official government documents are hard to come by. Official government documentation, particularly in foreign affairs, is in many cases restricted information and it will be a number of years before it is released for general consumption. Documentation on the Middle East, being a particularly sensitive policy area, is more often than not deemed too sensitive to be released to the public and even under the freedom of information act many documents are withheld for reasons of national security. Given these constraints, however, there is still a wealth of material available which provide context and information on which to base this study, including the Hansard text published online, statements given to the press, government policy documents, and reports to and from the Select Committees.

Literature on foreign policy

For providing understanding of foreign policy analysis and specifically foreign policy process in Britain a number of texts are available. Of particular interest are Clark and White (eds) *Understanding Foreign Policy*, which provides a good introduction to the foreign policy systems approach and Christophe Hill's *The Changing Politics of Foreign Policy*. These works underline the difficulties in analysing foreign policy in today's international system. The discussion of approaches, methods and level of analysis discussed in *British Foreign Policy: Tradition, Change and Transformation*, Michael Smith, Steve Smith and Brian White (eds) further compliments this work, and underlines the particular trends in approaches to British foreign policy, with Christopher Hill's chapter on "The Historical Background" focusing on the importance of history and tradition both to the psyche of British foreign policy making, and the processes of making that policy. The impact of this on the Middle East is perhaps particularly important in that Britain felt need to have a continued presence there for reasons of colonial guilt and in defining our role in the world.

Foreign Policy making in Britain

To understand better how foreign policy is made in Britain, and the influences upon it, Charles Carstairs' and Richard Ware's (eds) *Parliament and International Relations* offers insight into the working of the House of Commons and the House of Lords in both terms of formal and informal procedures in the

discussion of foreign affairs and making of foreign policy in Parliament. With regard to the workings of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and its impact on policy making a number of accounts are available. An in depth look into both the way foreign policy is made and Britain's changing role is provided by John Coles' *Making Foreign Policy: A Certain Idea of Britain*. Sir John Coles, a retired diplomat who was Permanent Under-Secretary at the FCO until 1994 – 1997, captures well the complexity of the policy making process, providing a detailed account at how the system within Whitehall should work, as well as the difficulties and challenges that it was facing at the time he left. The work demonstrates that foreign policy today is far more complex than even half a century ago; indeed, with globalisation no state is in a position to make unilateral policy decisions with Britain "incomparably more reliant on the behaviour of other states and non-state actors to secure its aims"¹. Sir John provides a clear overview on the impact of both internal processes and external influences have on policy issues, but it is clear also that on "the involvement of No.10 in major overseas issues was close". This work contributes to any consideration of how foreign policy is constructed, and also why British foreign policy activity does not always seem to clearly link to stated priorities and objectives.

¹ J Coles, *Making Foreign Policy*, London: John Murray (Publishers) Ltd, 2000 p107

John Dickie's *The New Mandarins: How British Foreign Policy Works* picks up the story from 1997 and discusses the changing role of the FCO. This continues to explain the role and problems faced by the FCO in this new age of media, and also, the impact of the events of 9/11 on policy making and how even now this event left an enduring impact in sharpening the focus on foreign affairs in Parliament. In doing so, the work argues the need for the FCO to change to meet the challenges of an ever changing world and details the efforts made by the Blair government to do so, but also the dangers of imposing change or the difficulties that ignoring the advice from a highly skilled and established diplomatic service. It both challenges some of the assumptions of how the Blair government worked with the FCO whilst helping to explain how errors in judgement in foreign policy making were made.

Carne Ross's account in *Independent Diplomat: dispatches from an unaccountable Elite* offers a highly personal, highly critical and at times slightly irreverent look at the inside workings of the FCO and the diplomatic service. What is distinctive about this is the picture of the FCO as a struggling, ill equipped, moribund organisation, so enmeshed in its own worldview of the "national interest", of what "we" want, that it failed to question the assumptions all its policy making is based on. While the author is writing from the standpoint of almost a personal epiphany, and this does very much dictate the theme of the book, it adds to the understanding of how British foreign

policy works abroad and the negative potential this can have on its effectiveness. The work adds a layer of understanding to why some Prime Ministers may try to operate "around" the FCO when pursuing major foreign policy priorities in that they are unable to significantly challenge its inbuilt world view and bring it on board with new policy direction; the sense of the FCO having its own priorities to the extent of working against what an incoming government attempts to achieve is evident in both the Thatcher and Blair period.

Ross' work also adds a layer in the understanding of foreign policy processes now often being carried out on a multilateral basis. Whilst many looking to analyse foreign policy argue that organisations such as the UN and other international institutions are loosening the grip of state centric foreign policy, the reality is somewhat different. Not every state within the organisation is equal. Furthermore, he argues that these institutions make the process of foreign policy making more elitist not less, less accountable and democratic not more. This then is an arena where the states that currently hold the power can essentially prioritise their own interests and are not held accountable and adds further understanding to British foreign policy decision within such institutions.

This theme of increasing complexity as to how foreign policy is made, who makes it and the problems with holding policy makers accountable is further

explored in Paul Williams article "Who's making UK foreign policy?" which particularly looks at foreign policy making in Blair's government and the impact that government had on the policy making process. Again this is a valuable contribution into showing how foreign policy is made and how contradictions in policy are almost inbuilt into the system. Again in the case of the Blair government it demonstrates how the British system allows a particularly strong personality to dominate foreign policy making, and the affect this has on good policy decision making.

For historical context, a useful account of key influences in British Foreign policy making is found in Otte's (Ed) *The Makers of British Foreign Policy: From Pitt to Thatcher*, this concentrates mainly on individuals in any given time period.

Prevalent in accounts of later leaders is the struggle with declining British power and influence in world affairs. One struggle highlighted it the difficulty to find a balance between economic priorities in line with Britain's membership in Europe and strategic priorities in line with the US alliance. A more general approach can be found in Joseph Frankel's *British Foreign Policy 1945 – 1973*, which analyses both the decision making approach and major foreign polices followed in this time period. In considering these, some degree of consistency in Britain's overarching priorities and challenges can be identified, notably the continuing idea of a world role for Britain. The tensions between a European

focus and the importance of the American alliance is another reoccurring issue demonstrated in the texts.

Peter Byrd's, *British Foreign Policy under Thatcher*, contains a set of essays looking at key points of Thatcher's foreign policy including an interesting, though not particularly critical, narrative on Thatcher's Middle East policy by Sir Anthony Parsons. Percy Cradock's *In Pursuit of British Interests* complements this work, presenting a personal account of his time as Thatcher's foreign affairs advisor. Whilst the tensions of hostages in the Middle East and state sponsored terrorism were on the British radar, Cradock still asserts that the Middle East was not a high priority of Thatcher's government. Further supplementing the literature on this time period, Christopher Tugendhat and William Wallace's *Options for British Foreign Policy in the 1990s* provides a contemporary outlook of British foreign policy issues. These works add to the story of British foreign policy, providing insight into how policy decisions were made in the Thatcher period, and how, in particular, Thatcher's own beliefs and views influenced the process. Further insight is given as to the primacy given to economic and security issues in this period to explain sometimes contradictory or challenging decision making such as the primacy given to the special relationship when it came to security issues, and how this affected British Middle East policy.

For more recent British foreign policy making there are a number of sources available including Mark Curtis' *Web of Deceit: Britain's real role in the World* (2003), the main argument of which is that the public claims of the Blair government and its actual foreign policy were often miles apart. This work, though perhaps overly sensationalised, is unstintingly critical specifically of Britain's role in the international community, attacking British foreign policy as little more than a tool of the elite to upkeep their own interests, with little or no regard to either ethics or international law. Despite claiming all his information is from open source data, Curtis argues that British governments, along with the media, conspire to keep the public unaware of the policy being pursued in their names. This work certainly challenges the reality of New Labour's explicit rejection of *realpolitik*.

Steven Kettell in his work, *Dirty Politics? New Labour, British Democracy and Invasion of Iraq* offers a similar argument to Curtis in terms of the control of the elites over British politics; it argues that the British political system has evolved into a highly centralised system of government where authority is wielded, but wherein there is little oversight of that central power to allow for scrutiny or accountability. It is this strong executive that defines and pursues the 'national interest', and the British public have been "conditioned" to accept this as "strong, decisive and responsible" governance.² Both works contribute

² S Kettell, *Dirty Politics? New Labour, British Democracy and Invasion of Iraq*, (London, 2006) p12

to understanding of why British foreign policy, in its pursuit of what elites see as British interest, pursue policy which does not necessarily reflect what recent governments, at least, term "British values". They highlight that while Britain has been seen to pursue economic liberalisation as a way to promote political reform, the terms are not always favourable to the states which they are targeting, such as Syria. They highlight the way conflicting priorities are pursued means Britain presents an unpredictable face to states in the Middle East. The pursuit of the short term goals of these elites, damages the long term security of the Middle East region, and the prioritising of these and traditional ties constrains British policy in the region, something further demonstrated in British failure to act in the recent Syrian crisis.

Three particularly relevant works on this period are Paul Williams' *British Foreign Policy under New Labour 1997 – 2005*, Johns Rentoul's *Tony Blair: Prime Minister*, and John Kampfner's *Blair's War*. Paul Williams asserts that New Labour had four main foreign policy commitments which were a commitment to multilateralism, to "Atlanticism", to neoliberalism and to "moralism". Williams then goes on to explore New Labour's foreign policy, Britain's relationships in the period and a selection of issues Blair's government faced in this time period with reference to these four commitments. While, in essence, he finds these commitments were not necessarily contradictory, neither are they particularly complimentary, and at times prioritising one

commitment over another resulted in gaps between rhetoric and action, and accusations of hypocrisy. Also clear is the central role played by Blair in foreign policy making, and his frustration at those who did not share his clarity over the issues. Williams account offers explanation for Blair's attempts to personally engage with Bashar al-Asad, but also his impatience with Syria in not coming into line after 9/11 and also offers a reason for why a more nuanced approach to relations with Syria was not taken after the Iraq invasion. The intrinsic tension he describes in Britain's two key relationships, with the US and EU, are also of interest in explaining British behaviour, for example, how Britain's insistence on conditions demanded by the US in the EU Association Agreement negotiations with Syria blocked the agreement.

John Kampfner's *Blair's Wars* concentrates on Blair's use of the military arm of foreign policy complements the work above. This is something also explored in Michael Clark's chapter on foreign policy in Seldon's (ed) *Blair's Britain 1997 – 2007* which sets out the determinants internally for Blair's policy and also highlights how external factors crystallised Blair's thoughts on how the international community needed to act in the face of atrocities and how 9/11 resulted in a shift in Blair's perception of international relations. Kampfner considers Blair's central role in the decisions for military action, his growing confidence in the legitimacy of intervention and his close relationship with the military due to his early successes in Kosovo and Sierra Leone, which help

explain his later policies with regard to Iraq. Early signs of his dissatisfaction with the UN's ability to react to situations as they happen can be clearly seen in the events leading to intervention in Kosovo. His willingness to go ahead with that action without UN ratification, and his surety that the action was legitimate as it was taken by the NATO coalition, not to mention that it was so clearly the "right thing to do", all lay the foundation for later action in Middle East.

The central role of Blair to Labour's foreign policy is further explored in Rentoul's *Tony Blair: Prime Minister* which considers the relationship between the Prime Minister, his Cabinet and the FCO. It leaves the impression that these relationships were not particularly warm throughout Blair's time in office, while his selected group of foreign advisors and personal staff were of vital importance – with Blair taking his foreign affairs advisors with him into important meetings while the official FCO representative was left to sit outside.³ All three works support the assertion that Blair's was a "presidential" style of leadership. They suggest that, far from demonstrating a new open style of politics, in major foreign policy priorities the traditional elitism and the clandestine nature of policy making remained. None of these works deal specifically with the Anglo-Syrian relationship at this time. What they contribute is the context in which British policy toward Syria was being carried out. This is significant both in their description of how foreign policy was being made at this

³ J Kampfner, *Blair's Wars* (London, 2004) p195

time, and how that affected the Anglo-Syrian relationship, and the constraints put on it. As they explain the process by which British foreign policy became more entwined with American policy they further demonstrate how this became a determinant in British foreign policy and served to limit its options toward Syria, putting Damascus and London on separate sides when it came to the crucial issue of Iraq.

A number of key figures from the Blair period also have now published their own autobiographies including Blair's own autobiography *A journey* (2011), Jack Straw's *Last Man Standing* (2012), Clare Short's *An Honourable Deception?* (2005), Lord Levy's *A Question of Honour* (2009), Peter Mandelson's *The Third Man* (2010) and Alistair Campbell's *The Blair Years* (2011). These offer an invaluable insight into the personalities and dynamics of the Blair government, and the justifications they give for the decisions they made, though the deeply personal perspective provided by these works must be kept in mind. They provide key insights into how central figures in the British Government perceived key events and how it affected their decision making and behaviours in the policy making process.

British Foreign Policy in the Middle East

The historical context of British foreign policy making in the Middle East is provided in David Sander's *Losing an Empire, Finding a Role: British Foreign Policy since 1945* (1990) which contains a good overview of British Foreign Policy since losing its status as a major power. Of particular interest for this study is Eyal Zisser's work on "Britain and the Levant, 1918-1946: A Missed Opportunity?" This reviews British foreign policy toward the Levant, an area in the Middle East which British policy makers largely ignored before World War One only to find itself significantly invested after the war's outbreak but unable to turn this investment into tangible successes long term. These failures have led to a frosty relationship with Levant states with some impact to the current day.⁴

Zach Levey's article "British Middle East Strategy: 1950-52: General Brian Robertson and the "small" Arab states" adds another dimension to this story, explaining British interest in these states to create a line of defence against a Soviet invasion, of which Syria alongside Iraq and Lebanon would be a part, whilst still holding onto their view that Egypt and the Suez base was a vital interest. The article details the specific difficulties the British government had with involving Damascus in this plan: the instability in the Syrian government

⁴ E Zisser, "Britain and the Levant 1918 – 1946: A Missed Opportunity?" in Z Levey, E Podesh (Eds) *Britain and the Middle East: From imperial power to junior partner* (Brighton, 2008) p146

and the necessity it would have to supply arms to a country less concerned with the Soviets than with Israel and professing a position of "armed neutrality."⁵ Importantly it demonstrates the difficulty, even at this point, that the British had in convincing the Syrians that they were credible partners, and the lack of overlap in the interests of each state.

Adding further insight to British policy toward Syria specifically, is Ivan Pearson's "The Syrian Crisis, the Anglo-American 'special relationship', and the 1958 landings in Jordan and Lebanon" showing an early joint Anglo-American approach to Syria. Common interests such as its strategic location and concern over left wing political organisations in the region (above all the most active Communist Party in the Arab world) combined with the fears that the instability of Syrian government made it particularly susceptible to Soviet influence⁶ propelled the American and British governments to collude in measures to address this.

While it is not the purpose of this particular study to provide a complex history of British relations in the Middle East an overview is useful both to understand

⁵ Z Levey, "Britain's Middle East Strategy, 1950-52: General Brian Robertson and the 'Small' Arab States" *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Mar., 2004), p75

⁶ I Pearson "The Syrian Crisis of 1957, the Anglo-American 'special relationship', and the 1958 landings in Jordan and Lebanon" *Middle Eastern Studies*, 43:1 (2007) p45

the history of the Anglo-Syria relationship and provide a context for present relations. A vast number of works exist considering the involvement of Britain in the Middle East and demonstrating the constraints and reasons for the current involvement including D.K Fieldhouse's *Western Imperialism in the Middle East 1914 – 1958*, though the section referring to Syria is more concerned with the French relationship. Further background reading in this area is found in Louis's *British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-51: Arab Nationalism, the US and Post War Imperialism*. Other works available include Roger Owen's *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Middle East* and William Cleveland's *A History of the Middle East*. All describe a declining British role in the region, a role which at all times was defined by a pragmatic realpolitik. A major issue for Britain has been that, while its role may have declined, the Middle East area's potential to impact on national interests and security did not similarly decline. Hence both the desire to ensure US engagement in the region in support of British interests and the need, though not necessarily the ability, to influence this policy in whatever small ways that may be possible.

Rosemary Hollis's work *Britain and the Middle East in the 9/11 era* brings the story further up to date, demonstrating the Blair era as a definite change in British relationship with the Middle East. Up to the Blair era, Hollis identifies four distinct phases of British relations with the Middle East and how New

Labour with its new world view and foreign policy outlook impacted on this relationship. Combining in depth knowledge of the historical context of Britain in the Middle East with an in depth look at New Labour, its beliefs and its policy making process, Hollis identifies and explains what put Britain on the path to war with Iraq after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, and the consequences of this for following British Middle East policy, in terms of an over identification with the policy of the Bush administration, which damaged British relations in the Middle East from which Blair's successors struggled to recover.

For the purposes of this study these sources offer an understanding of the historical context of British relations in the Middle East, the legacy of which has resulted in the current Middle East predicament and arguably continue to place constraints on British foreign policy in the region. Policy documents and statements will be used to supplement this reading.

Britain's relationship with America and Europe

Among the literature available assessing the impact pursuing a European-American balance has on British foreign policy are a number of key texts. Michael Smith contributes a significant chapter in *British Foreign Policy under Thatcher* presenting an interesting analysis of the relationship. One of the most enduring perceptions of the Thatcher government was the importance placed

on the “special relationship”. Whilst Smith does not reject this, he presents a fuller picture of the relationship demonstrating that on a number of occasions Thatcher skilfully managed pursue to British objectives successfully in the face of US pressure to do otherwise without incurring too much recrimination.

Robin Niblett’s (2007) “Choosing between America and Europe: a new context for British foreign policy” argues that the balancing of these priorities needs to continue, though with a more considered approach to perhaps overly-close relations with the US. Inderjeet Parmars’s article “‘I’m Proud of the British Empire’: Why Tony Blair backs George Bush” examines why Blair so religiously followed Bush’s foreign policies, lying it at the feet of Blair’s “Liberal imperialism.” In a speech given at the Chatham House Foundation Annual Member’s conference discussing new foreign policy directions for Britain, Lord Wallace of Saltire takes another look at this policy, challenging its assumptions and pointing out that our interests are not necessarily the same as America’s. This literature will aid in understanding if and how Britain’s relations with the EU and US, and its perceived bridging role between the two entities, impacted on UK policies towards Syria.

The question of the special relationship is examined in almost all substantial works on British foreign policy since the Second World War, and finding a balance between Britain’s relationship with the US and Europe is always a topic

of interest. Interestingly, while the majority of Prime Ministers since the end of World War Two have tended, inadvertently or not, to lean closer to American policies, many analysts acknowledge that the future needs to be European for Britain. In the Middle East there is particular tension, with British interests, realistically, closer to those of her European partners. Nevertheless, the most defining act of British foreign policy in the region in recent times, the Iraq war, was firmly and unashamedly linked to US foreign policy. In relation to Syria the dichotomy of this approach, and its impact, needs to be further investigated. Britain's relationship with the US has often put British interests at odds with Syria, for instance, support for Reagan's intervention in Lebanon, or Blair's decisions to back Bush over Iraq, putting a constraint on Britain's ability to pursue an independent policy on Syria. Balanced against this, the British interest in advancing the Middle East peace process (MEPP) has resulted in attempts to influence the US in ways which could benefit the Syrians; here Britain's special relationship with the US could enhance the Anglo-Syrian relationship, but only if the British government is able to balance its relationships in such a way to exert this influence.

Literature on Syria and its relations with Britain

A number of texts are available to inform research into Syria, its regional and its international relations. For anyone studying the early years of Syria's independence as it struggled to consolidate as an independent state, Patrick

Seale's work *The Struggle for Syria* provides a detailed picture of the external forces vying to bring Syria into their sphere of influence, with contributions from a number of figures involved showing just how convoluted the politics of the time could be. Of particular interest is the British interaction with Syria and her neighbours, and British collusion particularly with Iraq in trying to influence Syria to align with the West. The centrality of Syria to the success or failure of British attempts to shore up a Cold War defence pact against Soviet influence, and the fact the failure to do so contributed to hastening the withdrawal of Britain from the area underlines the often-underestimated importance of Syria for British interests in MENA. This further adds to the understanding of an antagonistic history on Anglo Syrian relations.

Seale's follow up work *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East* provides a history of the development of Syria from its creation to the late 1980s and the central role of Hafiz al-Asad, with much insight provided from interviews with key figures involved. This work provides insight into how Hafez al-Asad set and sought to pursue his foreign policy agenda with its central criteria to achieve strategic parity with Israel, with the ultimate aim of recovering the Golan Heights from Israeli occupation. Underlining Hafiz's goals of ensuring that Syria was not overlooked in outside powers' intervention in the Arab-Israeli conflict and peace process, and his central tenet that the Arab states should never enter into any negotiation either individually or when they would be bargaining

from a position of weakness, Seale's work provides much insight into Hafez's regional manoeuvring, and provides further insight into the Hindawi affair during the Thatcher period.

When looking at the motivations and goals of Syria under Bashar again there are a number of valuable works to take into account. Volker Perthe's *Syria under Bashar al-Asad* looks at the early successes of Bashar in trying to meet the demands of modernisation in terms of social, economic, political and foreign policy. This describes a Syrian leader looking to Europe to support this process of reform, providing opportunity for Britain to work with European partners to build a stronger relationship with Syria. David Lesch's *The New Lion of Damascus* also looks at the advent of Basher to power in Syria and the new modern context the regime found itself in, evaluating Bashar's role in pursuing a reformist agenda and prospects for the future, perhaps somewhat uncritically. A possibly more balanced account can be found in Flynn Leverett's *Inheriting Syria* which reviews Bashar's role, but also the constraints he faces within, caught between trying to pursue the policies he inherited from his father in terms of his own character, other regime figures and the failure of western policies to engage with and support his reformist leanings. These works demonstrate that there was a potential window of opportunity for a British government looking to promote good governance and democracy, to use its influence and, with the EU, support a process within Syria for reform. They add

substance to the decision by Blair to attempt to engage more constructively with the Syrian regime.

On the complete opposite end of the spectrum is Barry Rubin's *The Truth about Syria*, highly critical of the Syrian regime, unfailingly sceptical about its intentions to reform, or come to terms with Israel in a peace deal, and disparaging of Western attempts to engage with the regime. While perhaps overly sceptical, the work highlights the challenges for any British government trying to pursue a different kind of relationship with the Syrian regime, in terms of accurately assessing whether or not the regime had real desire to modernise or change its behaviour.

This literature helped inform my research in terms of what Syria's priorities have been and are currently, therefore informing why British policy approaches may have failed in the past and may need to change in the future. They also inform as to why Syria is a particularly important state to engage with in any dialogue in the region. These works generally concentrate on Syrian foreign policy decisions in the region and the ongoing fight against Israeli expansionism, or Syrian policy vis-à-vis the US. This is important to consider when looking at British foreign policy making and the constraints placed on it by the actions and interests of Syria itself, and other actors in the region.

Sources of primary information

Primary texts for this period include House of Commons research paper (2008) *British Foreign Policy since 1997*, reports from the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select committee plus several transcripts of speeches and web chats given on policy in the Middle East and Syria that help demonstrate the approach taken toward Syria in this period, though obviously they are highly politicised. These reports provide a record of parliamentary monitoring of the government's foreign policy, even in this, it is mainly the implementation of policy rather than the policy itself which is discussed, and the scope of their inquiries can be determined by the government and how much they cooperate. It should be kept in mind that although committees tend to contain a government majority, they still give insight as to opposing views in parliament and what parliament might see as particular issues. These documents provide an "insider" viewpoint on foreign policy which is informative and useful – although it is interesting to note that many of the footnotes and information sources quoted even in these documents are external media resources rather than internal documentation.

There have been a number of inquiries held relating to the time of the Blair premiership, and these have resulted in an unusual amount of information being made available in the public domain. Though more focused on aspects of British Iraq policy this does hold implications for anyone studying the British

government's interaction with Syria. The FCO also published its key priorities in its December 2003 white paper "The UK's International Priorities," looking at what these will be in the approaching decade, what role the FCO has in relation to these and how they can organise to meet them, followed by the March 2006 whitepaper "Active Diplomacy for a Changing World: The UK's International Priorities" which reviewed progress to date building on the first document.

A further source of information can be found in newspaper archives and currently on line news sites. Whilst it must be kept in mind that these are news items and must be read with the normal caveats in mind – that not all the facts may be available to journalists (or publishable) or that the journalist is not neutral and stories are being written to support a certain point of view or political leaning - items are nevertheless useful in getting a sense of the way in which events were perceived at a particular time and often for summarising the different points of views of actors involved. They also are useful in a practical sense, highlighting times and dates of key speeches or House of Commons debates. Today's news media sites are also useful often providing links to key documents or speeches which have featured articles. A number of them also carry comments sections, such as in the Guardian and the Telegraph. These allow key people and officials in government to comment on current events or policy decisions, and offer opportunity members of opposition and other actors to criticise government policy, providing their own insights to policy decisions.

Again such items are often highly politicised but are useful in trying to obtain a fuller picture of official positions and policies.

A valuable resource is being able to speak to some of the people involved in the making of British foreign policy at the time, or in its implementation. The focus of this thesis has been mostly on quite recent foreign policy which has implications as a number of figures who might be able to provide insight are still restricted in the information that can be shared. However, it has been useful to speak to two former ambassadors to Syria, Henry Hogger and Peter Ford, and engaging in email communication with two others, Basil Eastwood and Ivor Lucas, who have provided more insight into the context in which they were working, the constraints on Anglo-Syrian relations and differing outlook over how relations between Syria and Britain could have been developed. A meeting with an official from the FCO was also informative in terms of expanding on how the informal foreign policy making process can work.

The main difficulty with the literature on relations between Britain and Syria is that there is very little material available specifically looking at the topic. The aim of this study, then, is to consider the position taken in British foreign policy with regard to Syria, whether this has been consistent, sustained and distinct or whether Anglo-Syrian relations are simply subsumed by other British interests in the region.

Theory & Framework

When attempting to explain the foreign policy behaviour of any given state critics of overarching International Relations theories often argue that they offer little assistance in explaining why specific foreign policy decisions are made. In response, a number of IR theorists would argue that that is not the purpose of IR theory, which looks at the systemic level to explain state behaviour. In this sense they seek to explain the environment in which states interact and how factors such as the relative power capacities of states, for realists, affect their behaviour or, for liberals, how economic interdependence constrains the behaviour of decision makers.

Realist theories which hold the state as the main actor in international relations, and consider the concepts of national interest, of power, of competition, of security, often do so without attempting to fully define what these are. When talking of the national interest, for example, it is as if this is a tangible object, something which just is. They often pay little attention to how states define their national interests, and rather describe the mechanisms by which they pursue it in terms of power balancing such as alliance making.

In analyses of British foreign policy towards Syria many of the tenets of the state centric realist school of thought hold true. This argues that states are concerned primarily with security issues and national interests (however these may be defined); the system is anarchic and with many foreign policy decisions based on the power balance. These set the context within which British foreign policy decisions are made, but fail to explain foreign policy behaviour which does not optimize these interests.

For structural realists, little attention is paid to the elites, politicians, interest groups and other individuals who come together to construct foreign policy – though in the traditional viewpoint the assumption, stated or otherwise, is that this is the preserve of the state elites. This is of course the province of a sub-discipline within IR, Foreign Policy Analysis. It is also frequently taken account of in liberal and constructivist frameworks and in neo-classical realism. This thesis will draw on neo-classical realism in explaining the international environment in which British foreign policy is conducted and how features of the state and elite interact with it, on the liberalism's concept of complex interdependencies in considering how Britain's relationships, for example with the EU, feature in its foreign policy toward Syria and use a FPA approach to consider the factors which shape British foreign policy making.

For this study the neoclassical realist approach offers considerable scope for understanding foreign policy decisions. Neoclassical realism accepts the main tenets of Realism as described above but goes further, stating that “the scope and ambition of a country’s foreign policy is driven first and foremost by the country’s relative material power. Yet it contends that the impact of power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening unit-level variables such as decision-makers’ perceptions and state structures.”⁷ In this neo-classical realists consider a state’s power relative to its foreign policy decisions, but look at individual states internal structures to answer the following questions:

- “How do states, or more specifically the decision-makers and institutions that act on their behalf, assess international threats and opportunities?”
- What happens when there is disagreement about the nature of foreign threats?
- Who ultimately decides the range of acceptable and unacceptable foreign policy alternatives?
- To what extent, and under what conditions, can domestic actors bargain with state leaders and influence foreign or security policies?

⁷ G Rose, *World Politics*, 1998 cited in Lobel, Ripsman, Taliaferro, *Neoclassical realism, the State and Foreign Policy*, p 5

- How and under what circumstances will domestic factors impede states from pursuing the types of strategies predicted by balance of power theory and balance of threat theory?
- Finally, how do states go about extracting and mobilizing resources necessary to implement foreign and security policies?"⁸

In answering these questions, this theory of international relations begins to support understanding as to why a state's foreign policy may not reflect the optimum output expected in terms of power capabilities. This theory helps explain Britain's international behaviour in terms of power capacity, and the alliances and relationships it pursues in order to maximise that power in the international arena in order to pursue its interests, but allows that state-level factors are involved in translating this into foreign policy.⁹

For neo-classical realists, taking account of these state level factors provides explanations as to why two states which are similar in terms of power levels and geography may pursue very different goals. Here the concept of "national identity" is significant as it in turn informs what a state, or rather the elites in a

⁸ S Lobell, N Ripsman, J Taliaferro, *Neoclassical Realism, the State and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, 2009) p2

⁹ Beach, *Analysing Foreign Policy*, (Basingstoke, 2012) p64

state, might consider the states national interests.¹⁰ In order to help explain how national identities are created and, over time change, a number of neoclassical realists have turned to constructivism, including theories which look at how groups identities are constructed by depicting what are the differences between that group and other groups (the "self" and the "other")¹¹.

Constructionist theory considers the role history, society and political culture has in creating a specific agent's identity, and the importance of this in the sense that an agent's identity will be associated with a set of norms that will affect the behaviour of a state¹². Furthermore, far from being "absolutes" the elite's notions of national interests are constructed through interactions and discourse, taking into account their perceptions of the world and its issues.

In terms of explaining British foreign policy toward Syria, a simple calculation of relative power does not fully explain the relationship. The strength among Britain's elites of Britain's identity as a power with a traditional world role, a historical relationship with the Middle East and a responsibility towards the Middle East and the peace process all impact on British foreign policy decision making and the Anglo-Syrian relationship in a way that cannot be explained looking at purely security or economic national interests.

¹⁰ Ibid, p65

¹¹ Ibid, p67

¹² T Flockhart, "Constructivism and Foreign Policy" in Smith, Hadfield, Dunne, *Foreign Policy*, (Oxford, 2012) p86

Increasingly foreign policy behaviour cannot be explained simply in terms of state to state interaction. Christopher Hill argues that organisations such as the UN, and even more so for Britain, the European Union, blur the line between what is domestic and what is foreign. Communications, trade, agriculture, defence policies to name but a few, all have international elements to them. Liberalism offers insight into how these transnational institutions and interdependencies impact on states behaviours.

Theories of liberal institutionalism and complex interdependence share a similar understanding of the international system to realists in that they too see the international system as essentially anarchic and states as the major actors.

“Weak” liberals argue that interdependence and international institutions can soften the worst effects of the anarchic system, encouraging states to recognise common interests and cooperate for mutual gain. Going further than this

“strong” liberal theories posit that the anarchic international system can in fact be transformed by increased interdependence, institutionalisation and democracy¹³.

¹³ Beach, *Analysing Foreign Policy*, p21

These interdependencies mean that not only do elites interact formally in international organisations such as the EU and the UN, but also at the trans-state level with bureaucracies, NGOs and other forums interacting across state boundaries and affecting the policy process. In fact, many civil servants may find they have more in common with their counterparts in other state governments than with their colleagues in other Ministries in Britain, relationships further solidified by civil servants from Britain taking up placements and secondments in other European capitals. For a trading nation state such as Britain, economic interests are global and have a further powerful constraining effect on policy options. This complex interdependence builds collaboration and cooperation between states, the consequent agreements to abide by overarching norms, principles and rules even while there is no overarching global hierarchy imposes constraints on state behaviour reducing the reliance on the use of military force and balance of power politics.

One of the consequences of these complex interdependencies then is the creation of a zone of peace among liberal states, holding the potential for a more general peace by promoting more liberal democratic governance. This zone of peace, however, holds true only among the community of liberal states, the record against non-liberal states is not as good, with liberal states having been both the aggressor and defender against non-liberal states in numerous conflicts. This theory, then, offers insight into policies which promote good

governance and democracy building, as a way to extend a zone of peace and therefore increase the security for existing liberal democracies. At the same time, it helps explain the more aggressive stance of liberal states towards those not holding similar values or adhering to similar norms.

Building on these two overarching theoretical approaches foreign policy analysis examine in detail the factors which influence the foreign policy decision making process within a state. Within the state's executive, foreign policy analysis considers how decision makers respond to the international environment. FPA offers understanding of unit-level variables and how these affect the decision making process and outcomes, looking at elite perceptions which are shaped by their world views, the role of the leader in making foreign policy and how his or her personality and perceptions may affect the decision making process any interest groups which may hold influence over their decisions, their domestic ability to mobilise the resources to carry out their policies (or constraints that prevent them from doing so) and the role of bureaucratic politics and public opinion in both policy making and policy implementation.

Foreign policy analysis provides the tools to allow scholars to further investigate foreign policy decision making and processes. Considering states as rational actors is a powerful tool for investigation, by focussing on the central assumptions that states act on national interests and make decisions based on

this. Approaching decision making this way, foreign policy can be viewed as a process where an issue is identified, a state may have a number of aims when dealing with the particular issue and will rank them appropriately, then will make decisions based on this, the information available at the time, and the resources they have available enact the chosen course of action. However, for many this is too simple an analysis, for the decision makers also must be taken into consideration, their perception, knowledge, skills and experience will have a bearing on how they view particular issues, and on their opinions on what particular course of action is necessary.

In her work on foreign policy analysis Valerie Hudson, for example, states that there are certain instances which make it more likely that the assessment of a leader's characteristics will "matter" when it comes to foreign policy decision making. For instance, the type of regime provides a constraint to the amount of influence a leader may have of the policy making process, thus it may be more imperative to assess the characteristics of a leader in a dictatorship as their influence may be more direct or in a highly centralized government, such as Britain. Another factor is how interested a given leader is in foreign policy. A leader who is not interested, preferring to concentrate on domestic policy, may delegate substantial authority to a subordinate, the views and perceptions of that delegate then may hold more importance. Policy dealing with crisis situations is by necessity dealt with at the highest levels of government, thus

leaders will be involved in decision making and while some leaders will make an attempt to curb their own predispositions in these situations, it is much more likely they will fall back on old biases and perceptions. Similarly, a leader's influence may be more apparent in ambiguous situations when, if advisors are unable to come to a decision on a course of action for lack of reliable information, a leader may be referred to in order to pass judgement. A leader who possesses diplomatic experience or has expertise in a specific area may also may have a greater influence on particular matters of decision making, and leadership style may also play a role in determining how much a leader will influence foreign policy decision making.¹⁴

As Hudson states above, a leader may well be involved more in foreign policy decision making at times of crisis. Similarly, top levels of government might involve themselves more when the issue at hand is one which they consider a "high" priority for the state, a priority perceived to be crucial to national interests¹⁵. Where this is not the case then some analysts turn to bureaucratic politics models to explain foreign policy decision making. Here foreign policy is not as the output of a unitary actor but "the result of political compromise among competing bureaucratic and political elites¹⁶", this model considers the influence of not just decision makers in government but the bureaucratic

¹⁴ V Hudson *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and contemporary theory*, (Plymouth, 2007) p37-38

¹⁵ C Aran & C Alden, *Foreign Policy Analysis: New approaches*, (Abingdon, 2012) p37

¹⁶ D Sanders, *Losing an Empire Finding a Role* (Basingstoke,1990) p273

departments also involved. Each bureaucracy may have a different perspective on a single foreign policy issue. For example, the FCO may see the sales of arms to a particular country as detrimental to their long term aims of stability in that region, the Department of Defence consider it in terms of national security and the Ministry of Trade purely in terms of national wealth, looking through the lens what is a priority for that department. Added to this is the idea that each of these has an identity, for instance the FCO has been accused of being Arabist in its point of view, leading to it pursuing a certain line of policy in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Adding to the complexity of how bureaucracies impact foreign policy is their potential impact in implementing any decisions made. Their interpretation of a decision and whether or not they approve of the decision may influence how they implement it thus can have bearing on how successful the policy ultimately is. The bureaucratic politics model provides further explanation of foreign policy decision making, particularly in non-crisis situations or where issues are of lower priority.

While the leaders in government and elites in the state may have a more immediate influence on foreign policy decision making, foreign policy analysts also look for wider influences. Looking at public opinion and foreign policy making, Piers Robinson states there are two main perspectives – the pluralist model and the elite model. The first assumes no group or set of interests has priority over another since power is spread evenly throughout society, with

media and public independent of political influence meaning they strongly restrict the behaviour of the executive. The second model posits the opposite, that power is concentrated within political and societal elites making public opinion and media subservient to these elites, and far less independent than the pluralistic model suggests.¹⁷

The role of the media is contested by academics, Christopher Hill remarking that on this “commentators are long on opinion and short on evidence”¹⁸. Hill calls the media role in foreign policy as that of a “gate keeper”, with its influence manifest in two ways, influence over the public and influence over the decision makers.¹⁹ Put another way, the perceived role of the media includes agenda setting, being a (neutral) source of information (here there is a distinct split in Britain between the television news media such as the BBC assumed to perform a function of unbiased reporting versus the print media often affiliated with a particular political party or point of view²⁰) and also, of being a “government propaganda tool”.²¹

One more role can be added to this, sitting adjunct to its agenda setting role, the media is a vehicle by which the government can be held to account – again,

¹⁷ Robinson “The role of public opinion and the media” Smith, Hadfield, Dunne, *Foreign Policy*, p169

¹⁸ C Hill, *The Changing Politics of Foreign Policy*, (Basingstoke, 2003) p273

¹⁹ Ibid, p247

²⁰ Robinson, “The role of public opinion and the media”, p173

²¹ Alden & Aran, *Foreign Policy Analysis* p56-57

to be effective in this role the media must be free of political influence. While demonstrating the roles the media plays in foreign policy making is one thing, assessing its impact is another. It should be noted that, despite the so called "CNN effect", the 24-hour news broadcasts, access to far off corners of the world giving the media the capacity to force action on particular issues²², foreign affairs do not dominate its agenda, even in non-tabloid papers foreign affairs accounts for 33 – 45% of space, with a similar ratio in television news media.²³

Explanation of British foreign policy must be approached on a number of levels to be fully explained. Partly, this is the international system and the constraints that this puts on the policy maker, such as having the power capacity to pursue certain policies. On another level, British international political and economic behaviour must be viewed through the lens of liberal interdependencies, its power to pursue certain policies both enhanced through membership of organisations such as the UN and EU, but constrained by the application of principles and norms this implies, and the need for consensus on policy direction within these institutions. Lastly, the tools of FPA must be used to assess the role of internal state agents have on constructing foreign policy in reaction to the international environment, such as the perception of decision

²² Ibid p56

²³ Hill, *The Changing Politics of Foreign Policy*, p275

makers, potential competitive role of government departments, the role of the media and public opinion.

FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS: UK POLICY TOWARD THE MIDDLE EAST AND SYRIA

FOREIGN POLICY DETERMINANTS

The international system

Over the past century British power capacity has declined significantly, this is the context in which it has pursued its foreign policy. Having entered the 20th century a great power with a significant empire, British foreign policy, initially defined by its attempts to maintain that power position, turned to managing its decline from power. It has done this against a background of having to defend, at first, major international commitments in both its formal and informal empire then, latterly, in terms of maintaining and securing its considerable international interests including its economic interests in the Middle East, and ensuring the security of these through bilateral ties, defence agreements and in encouraging the MEPP, seen as a key to stability in MENA.

As British power has declined, alliances have become central to maintaining security and allowing Britain to “punch above its weight”. The creation and

maintenance of the US-UK special relationship, despite the inherent imbalance of power has been a central tenet of UK foreign policy. Britain has continually sought to engage the US in the international arena in order to bolster its own interests. It was the Bevin government, quick to fear Soviet expansionism following World War Two, that sought to engage the US in taking a bigger role in the Middle East. Originally used to preserve British access to India and defend British interests, UK military bases in the Middle East were maintained long after their original purpose was gone in order to supplement the efforts of the US against the Communist threat and only decommissioned when they could no longer be justified either in terms of cost or maintaining Britain's security. The commitment to the special relationship remained, different governments viewing it as central to their key priorities, for example, the Conservative Thatcher government seeing the US as central to European security. The Labour Blair government justified the decision to back the Iraq war, as necessary in order to ensure the US did not "go it alone", and as an attempt to maintain some influence over US policy.

Despite the closeness geographically and the economic interdependence that ties Britain to Europe, in terms of security it would appear Britain still sees the US as its major ally which has implications for its relations in the Middle East. Close alignment to the US therefore impacts on how Britain behaves internationally, and the close security relationship carries the risk of embroiling Britain in America's often unpopular interventions in the Middle East.

Britain has also sought over time to balance its decline in power through its membership of multilateral organisations, in particular the EU, but also in the UN (specifically its position as one of the five permanent members of the Security Council), the IMF, the WTO and the G8. Membership of international organisations and alliances have been a key component intended to allow Britain to continue to exert influence on international relations allowing it to pursue and protect British interests above and beyond its economic and military capacities. Moreover, Britain's role as a permanent member of the UNSC arguably draws it into international crises, for better or worse, in a way that would not otherwise be likely for a mere middle power.

At the same time membership of these organisations provide a constraint to foreign policy behaviour as influence is indirect, and also membership requires member states accept and maintain certain agreed upon norms. Additionally, to act through these organisations and alliances requires gaining cooperation and compromise from the other members, not always something within in Britain's capacity to influence, and sometimes makes policy less effective. Reconciling policy when two allies or organisations are at odds with each other, when to prioritise which alliance or organisation depending on the issue at hand, and what to do when the interests of other member states within an organisation are completely at odds with what Britain sees as in its interests, is

an additional challenge to membership. Furthermore, making the wrong decision can not only undermine Britain's own position, but the credibility of the organisations of which it is a member. (Such was the case when the Blair government prioritised Britain's alliance with the US over its duties as a responsible member of both the EU and UN). These interdependencies then bring with them their own influence on the foreign policy behaviour of Britain.

Together with Britain's decline in status as a great power with the ability to pursue its goals unilaterally, these alliances and interdependencies have relevance when considering British behaviour in the Middle East. Whilst the methods of achieving them may have changed over the years, British national interests in the Middle East, as seen from Whitehall, have been fairly consistent from the realist perspective. There have been two overarching interests governing British activity in the region, firstly control of the oil resource, secondly, the need for regional stability.²⁴

Access to the immense oil and gas resources is a priority in terms of security, both of energy resources and economic interests. A core concern for security has been a priority, initially in the sense of its physical interests in the Middle

²⁴ M Sedgewick, "Britain and the Middle East: In pursuit of eternal interests" in J Covarrubias, T Lansford (Eds), *Strategic Interests in the Middle East: Opposition or Support for US Foreign Policy*, (Aldershot, 2007) p3

East, latterly in terms of the threat to British security posed by international terrorism and always, in the general sense that maintaining stability in the Middle East protects British interests in that it is better for trade and the economy. Membership of alliances and international organisations has impacted on how Britain has pursued its policies there, most important in this sense however, is the fact that high-level British involvement in such organisations has dictated British involvement in the Middle East region. Britain's status as a permanent member of the UNSC is not reflective of its current power status, for example, but to maintain its relevance and seat Britain must stay involved in the world, and be seen to be working toward resolution of global level issues including those involving the Middle East.

Britain in the Middle East, Regional Context

British foreign policy is driven by the need to protect and promote the national interest. While the scope of what is considered to be "national interest" may have become a more complicated and broader concept over time, central to British national interest, alongside the security of the state, is the protection of its economic interests abroad which, partly as a legacy of empire and British trading history, are extensive. For the most part protecting British interests has meant an active concern in maintaining peace and stability and in the Middle East, generally, this has led to policy designed to preserve the status quo. As a result, there have been numerous and repeated accusations that British

governments act only when their economic interests in the Middle East are threatened, rather than following a fair and even handed foreign policy for the best interests of the region itself (though the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive). This has impacted on the perception of how far Britain can behave as a credible partner in the Middle East.

A further consequence is that British foreign policy has been largely reactionary foreign policy, where action is only taken when a threat to the stability or status quo in the region is perceived which would be detrimental to British interests. This has given even more credence to criticisms that over the years Britain has had no Middle East policy or no consistent policy, as well as numerous criticisms that British policy in the Middle East is unethical or hypocritical. In maintaining the status quo and protecting its economic interests Britain has, for example, maintained relationships with questionable regimes it deems friendly to its interests. This has led to close bilateral relations and trade agreements with states which have questionable human rights records, whilst at the same time criticising other states with similar records but where British interests are not at stake. This behaviour has damaged the Britain's reputation, and the behaviours it demonstrates allows other regimes in the area, such as the Syrian regime, to bolster their legitimacy by using this as an example of imperial arrogance.

The contemporary relationship Britain has with the Middle East, generally, and more specifically with Syria, has been built on and in many ways constrained by the events surrounding the origins of the modern state system in the region. The construction of this state system was considered, not in the light of what was good for the people inhabiting it, but in the first instance, Britain's immediate needs in terms of the British war effort, and in the second instance the longer term protection of British interests in the region and the Far East. In fact, it is the British role in the creation of the modern Middle East, and British machinations in the area as the "great power" in the region--until that mantle was passed onto the Cold War superpowers--that has continued to define relations ever since, both where relations are somewhat more friendly, with states such as Jordan, and more antagonistic, such as the relationship with Syria.

The relationship between Britain and Syria has, to a large extent, been defined by these flawed foundations despite the country never having been a British mandate. Arguably the Levant region, with the exception of Palestine, was never a primary strategic priority of Britain in its own right but only in so far as it affected other British interests in the area, for example, its relationship with Iraq or, more recently, Britain's continued interest in the MEPP. This in itself resulted in a relationship between Britain and Syria which has been for the most part strained and at some points in the last century practically non-existent.

Memories of direct impact on Syrian history, of the British having broken their promises over "greater Syria" and the British role in the creation of the state of Israel have created an imperial legacy that has soured Anglo-Syrian relations from the start. The anti-imperialist mandate of Arab nationalism, championed by the Syrian regime and providing legitimacy for its rule, ensured that these strained relations continued.

On the occasions when the pursuit of the British interest has focussed on Syria it has tended to be as an adjunct to other more important imperatives, for example, to counter French or Soviet influence, to preserve access to Iraqi oil or the Suez Canal, to help progress the MEPP and facilitating an Israeli-Palestinian settlement. The perception, not unfairly, being that consideration for the Syrian people in these affairs is at best an afterthought, and certainly less important than the policy priority itself. A lack of real interest in Syria and her people for their own sake, either economically or culturally in the same way as, for example, France cultivated in the years preceding it being awarded the Syria and Lebanon mandate, has led to a dysfunctional relationship. This in many ways has benefitted successive Syrian regimes evoking Arab nationalism as a means to legitimise their rule, more than it has furthered the interests of United Kingdom.

Elites; the construction of national interests and world view.

In Britain, foreign policy is traditionally seen to be an 'elite' arena of policy making in which relatively few people have any input and where there is less political argument in contrast to what is seen in domestic politics. Some of this stems from the nature of foreign policy where often information is limited, access to intelligence is restricted and decisions are made very much in secret. For example, Mrs Thatcher's decision to allow US Air Force to use bases in Britain when carrying out bombings on Libya²⁵ was a decision taken by and known of by Mrs Thatcher and only a few close advisers (at least until after the event). In Blair's government it is alleged a number of foreign policy decisions were formed by a close-knit group of advisors and selected ministers on key issues outwith the more rigid Cabinet process, so much so his way of working was labelled by some observers as a "democracy"²⁶ or "sofa style"²⁷ government.

British foreign policy decisions are taken in light of what is seen, or at least asserted, by policy makers to be the national interest, leaving aside the extent to which these perceptions are shaped by the personal or political interests of the decision-makers. In Britain the structure of politics is such that it is the government of the day that defines British national interest, through their

²⁵ R Ware, "Case Study II: the Libyan rain" in Carstairs & Ware (eds) *Parliament and International Relations* (Buckingham, 1991) p103

²⁶ R Hefferman, "The Blair Style of Central Government" in Dunleavy, Hefferman, Cowley, Hay (Eds), *Developments in British Politics*, (Basingstoke, 2006) p26

²⁷ Kettel, *Dirty Politics*, p22

privileged access to information and their perception of the international system, and their estimation of the power Britain can bring to bear through various alliances and membership of international institutions.

A fundamental factor in this is the perception that Britain *should* have a role in the world. Britain's status as a great power has declined over the past century as its economic and military resources diminished, this saw Britain's physical withdrawal from its empire with policy designed around managing this. Yet the idea still held by many elites of this world role has constrained Britain from a substantial withdrawal from world affairs.

The strength of this perception was still evident after almost three decades of decline when the recommendations of the Berrill Report which reviewed British overseas interests, published in 1978, were rejected by the government. This recommended a significant realignment of British interests; that a large amount of resources in pursuit of the Commonwealth idea was unnecessary; that Britain, a European power on par with three other medium-sized countries in the EC, would increasingly pursue its interests through influencing the policies of that organisation; a refocus away from non-Communist developed countries where there was really no requirement for them meant there should be reductions in diplomatic staff abroad; and a reduction in the deployment of defence staff overseas amongst other recommendations. The general thrust of

the review called for a great reduction in Britain's international presence and was unpopular both within and outwith Parliament, and was rejected by the Government which stated that British interests extended around the world and it had to defend and promote its interests overseas²⁸. A constructivist analysis of this elite discourse, and its dissemination via the press, would go further in understanding what Britain takes to be its "national interest" than a mere examination of geopolitics.

This idea that Britain has something "unique and exceptional" to contribute²⁹ holds sway in regard to its relations with the Middle East. In particular, the belief Britain has a shared history and understanding with the countries of the Middle East. This, the argument goes, gives the British government both a unique role in and a responsibility to the region, thus there is an expectation that Britain has a role to play in events in the Middle East. This is evident, for instance, with regard to the peace process. Despite, or because, of the British role in the creation of Israel there is the perception among certain elites of a continuing responsibility and of a unique understanding of the parties involved. At the same time there is the recognition that Britain does not have the capacity, alone, to make progress on the peace process with the prevailing opinion being that the US needs to be kept involved. This concept was

²⁸ J Coles, *Making Foreign Policy*, (London: 2000) p78

²⁹ L Freedman, "Britain in the world", Freedman & Clarke (eds) *Britain in the World* (Cambridge, 1991) p6

demonstrated in Britain's behind the scenes involvement in the 2000 negotiations with Peter Hain describing Britain's "unique credibility" from being close to both the Palestinian and Israeli leadership at the time.³⁰

It is important, also, to recognise the importance of the school of thought policy makers most relate to as this informs their policy decision. British elites have often been criticised as being from the Realist school, of taking a pragmatic realpolitik approach to foreign policy making. The Cold War period can be seen in this light, with the Western bloc locked in a balance of power battle against the Soviets. Yet Britain is one of an ever growing number of liberal democratic states and for many the end of the Cold War signalled a victory for liberal democracies.

Traditionally Labour elites are associated with the tenets of liberal internationalism, that is:

- States share common interests and values in mitigating worst effects on international anarchy by building international institutions to regulate state interaction
- All states obligation to forgo pursuit of narrow national interests and work toward common good

³⁰ R Hollis, *Britain and the Middle East in the 9/11 era*, (London, 2010) p83

- Foreign policy should be based upon democratic principles and universal norms
- Collective security systems represent a more stable and constructive approach to international affairs than balance of power theories
- Anti-militarism
- Belief in solidarity between workers of the world³¹

The practicality and interpretation of these liberal assumptions have been a source of debate for the Labour party.³² In terms of foreign policy Blair's government did, however, go further than just nodding in the direction of this world view particularly regarding the first four assumptions. Explicitly rejecting the idea of *realpolitik* as a way to guide foreign policy decision making, Foreign Secretary Cook quick to set out his vision "ethical dimension" to British foreign policy. This gave rise to the idea that New Labour would bring a new outlook to British foreign policy not simply based on security and pursuit of national interest.

There are risks of overestimating the effect this actually had on British foreign policy. The most prevalent criticism being that not much of Labour's actual foreign policy, once the spin had been taken off, was actually new. In fact, continued mercantile policies necessary to support the British arms industries

³¹ P Williams, *British Foreign Policy under New Labour, 1997 – 2005*, (Basingstoke, 2005) p25

³² *ibid*

underlines the difficulty for any government, not to mention lack of will, to eschew so-called “national interest” based foreign policies and replace this with ethical or human rights based policies.

For example, supporting the democratically elected government in Sierra Leone ignored the questionable credentials of Kabbah (though in the eyes of many he wasn't as bad as the alternative) and ignored the fact that Kabbah required Nigerian help in order to restore his position, a government notorious for its human right abuses.³³ More significantly supplying arms to the government in exile was in contradiction of a British sponsored UNSCR which had put an arms embargo in place³⁴. This demonstrates a highly selective application of ethical responsibility that led some observers to suggest New Labour foreign policy is business as usual. It is, then, not without justification that the reasoning behind British involvement in the Middle East has been treated with suspicion.

Where Labour's “new” liberal priorities – democracy building and the defence of human rights for example - come in conflict with the more traditional aspects of its foreign policy, economic interests, security of global energy supplies, the tendency seems to have it that Britain's more traditional concerns win out. In

³³ Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, p67

³⁴ J Rentoul *Tony Blair: Prime Minister*, (London, 2001) p424

the Middle East, this is seen in the continued support of states with questionable human rights record in exchange for stability, or resources.

In the case of Syria, while New Labour was abundantly clear on its desire to see political and economic reform in Syria, this clashed with the interest it had in intelligence sharing with Syria (a change to a democratic government would invariably place constraints on its intelligence services). Furthermore, while successive British governments have denounced Syrian support for terrorism, Syria's relationship with terrorist groups offers a modicum of control on their actions that could benefit Britain. Syria has been able to help with the release of British hostages on a number of occasions and the Syrians act as a go-between with these groups with regard to the Peace Process – in the short term, then, the British need a Syrian relationship to deal with these groups.

Despite an expressed commitment to multilateralism, in practice there is evidence that New Labour foreign policy undermined its aims. Blair's "effective multilateralism"³⁵ could be seen as an example of this. Unconvinced of the ability of the UN to be reactive to international crises Blair argued for the legitimacy of ad-hoc coalitions to react to events when the UNSC was unable to pass a resolution for action.

³⁵ Williams, *British Foreign Policy under New Labour 1997-2005*, p207

This difference between rhetoric and action brings to the fore other questions on how British foreign policy is made. These discrepancies may be explained by the reactionary nature of foreign policy (therefore the constraint is the international arena), owing to the inconsistencies of leadership perceptions and goals, or as a consequence of outside influences such as interest groups, non-governmental organisations. Looking at the interaction of the policy makers, and the influences over them can provide clarity to the foreign policy decisions taken.

The Decision-making Process

The structure of Government in Britain is such that a strong Prime Minister, (particularly with a large majority in Parliament) has considerable scope to influence foreign policy decision making. John Rentoul quite concisely writes, "Prime Ministers always run their own foreign policy, a fact of British political history which often make the Foreign Secretary's one of the more difficult of the great offices of the state to hold".³⁶ This one sentence sums up not only the who of foreign policy making, as well as capturing the inherent tension in the roles of two great offices of state. Paul Williams also underlines this factor writing that there is "persistent tension between the executive's desire to lead and... centralise policy-making, and the desire of secretaries of state to retain

³⁶ Rentoul, *Tony Blair: Prime Minister*, p420

autonomy for their own department"³⁷. This tension has been exacerbated in recent times as the number of international summits and meetings a Prime Minister has to attend has increased, for example meetings of the European Union, the G8, the Commonwealth heads of government summits all "lock the incumbent inescapably to a considerable amount of foreign affairs activity."³⁸ As a result the Prime Minister, rather than the Foreign Secretary, has become a focal point in the international arena.

Both Thatcher and Blair have been able to exert the influence of their office over foreign policy making, and both have brought strongly held personal perceptions which shape its output. Whilst, their input may not be felt across all aspects of British foreign policy, the Middle East region has held particular interest for British Prime Ministers – for historical reasons it is a region Prime Ministers have conceived Britain should have a role, it is a region in which several crises, with implications for British security, have arisen requiring UK action, and a region in which Britain has important commercial interests in and whilst they may not always relate directly to Syria, Syria can affect them and policy toward Syria is often determined by them.

³⁷ P Williams "Who's Making UK Foreign Policy?" *International Affairs* 80:5 (2004) p912

³⁸ Coles, *Making Foreign Policy*, p93

Steven Kettell writes that “the British political system combines the worst elements of supreme executive power with a relative paucity of effective check and balances on its use”.³⁹ This is to some extent true given Britain’s first past the post electoral system wherein a government with a minority of votes can get a majority of seats, and the impact of party discipline, in which the ruling party normally backs the government and the opposition has little chance to constrain it. It can be shown there is potential for the Prime Minister, certainly, to have considerable impact on the decision making process but there are also restraints, such as the Cabinet, Parliament and public opinion.

One of the primary bodies in determining Britain’s primary national interests and policy choices is the Cabinet. The Cabinet, made up of the Government’s senior ministers, and its subcommittees are seen to be at the centre of policy making in government, and should be pivotally placed to influence foreign policy making. Writing even as early as 1988, however, Michael Clarke wrote the reality of the Cabinet system is a “network of at least 25 secret sub committees, powerful secretariat, the PMs own office, untold numbers of civil servant “shadow committees”, liaison committees and ad-hoc procedures between officials in different departments ... highly centralised but curiously informal”.⁴⁰ How this system works is dependent on what role the incumbent Prime Minister and his or her colleagues want it to play.⁴¹ This means that the system is open

³⁹ Kettell, *Dirty Politics?* p16

⁴⁰ M Clarke “The policy making process” in Smith, Smith, White, *British Foreign policy: Tradition, Change and Transformation* (London, 1988) p73

⁴¹ Coles, *Making Foreign Policy*, p153

to manipulation to reduce the impact the Cabinet can have. Further, the power of the Cabinet has over foreign policy making has reduced over time as the scope of what foreign policy is has widened, making it practically impossible for that one body to oversee all foreign policy decision making.

As a result, the Cabinet, to some observers, has become little more than a rubber stamp to decisions already made. This is not the same thing as saying that Cabinet ministers do not have a say in foreign policy making. It is true that various Prime Ministers have worked with various smaller groupings on specific issues, commonly when it comes to crises, but these have often been official sub-committees of the Cabinet or groupings of the Ministers relevant to the issue at hand.

Whatever the grouping – the Cabinet, a subcommittee or a small group of senior officials and advisors – the expectation is that it should act to curb or balance potentially arbitrary choices in foreign policy decision making. In fact, what can occur is what foreign policy analysts term “group think”, where group members are reluctant to go against the general consensus. This may occur naturally just as a dynamic of a group, however, a leader is also in a position to orchestrate it. The Cabinet, made up of senior ministers all of whom owe their position to the Prime Minister who selects them, could almost be said to formalise this group think concept, especially when the Prime Minister in question is a particularly strong leader. Going further, once a decision is taken

ministers must take collective responsibility for that decision, so given the secrecy in which the Cabinet operates it can seem like there is little dissent.⁴² Still, even a strong Prime Minister can face difficulties if he or she fails to listen to his or her cabinet – Mrs Thatcher, for example, was significantly damaged by the resignation of three members of her Cabinet.⁴³ This can act as a constraint on a Prime Minister as resignations from the Cabinet can prove damaging.

Parliament itself can also influence foreign policy though its role historically has been relatively subordinate. It can provide another restraint on foreign policy behaviour and does have opportunity to debate foreign affairs issues, and also to question the Prime Minister at Question Time, but as Britain's international role has declined so has interest and knowledge of international affairs among members of Parliament with domestic interests taking priority.⁴⁴ While there is information available on foreign policy issues, it is not always comprehensive and time set aside for discussion of foreign policy within the legislature is limited. There are two exceptions to this, firstly, European Union policy which has a potential domestic impact (seen by some as an extension of domestic policy rather than purely foreign policy or at least sitting uncomfortably somewhere between the two) and, secondly, in reacting to international crises.⁴⁵

⁴² Williams "Who's Making UK Foreign Policy?" p917

⁴³ Clarke "The policy making process" p74

⁴⁴ Ibid pp74-75

⁴⁵ Coles, *Making Foreign Policy*, p94

In fact, arguably, the British legislature has traditionally had very little impact on the making of British foreign policy. There is a very limited, very formalised structure which allows scrutiny of decisions which have already been made rather than a structure that allows Parliament to inform the policy making process. This is not to discount the impact of Parliament but that impact is probably more felt at times of acute crises in foreign affairs or when the Government in question is a minority government and is thus more vulnerable to the tide of opinion in Parliament. In general, the simple fact is that foreign policy is rarely something that MPs constituents are interested in, therefore, there is little push to change the current systems to make foreign policy more responsive or accountable in Parliament

Potentially a more powerful check on the Government's behaviour are the Select Committees, and two committees of special note in terms of general foreign policy are the Foreign Affairs Select Committee (FAC) and the Intelligence and Security Select Committee (ISC). The FAC, established by the House of Commons in 1979, has been the major body to scrutinise foreign affairs issues; its members generally have a certain expertise in the area of foreign policy, and to some extent it can hold the government and FCO accountable for policy. While its prominence has grown over time, and its reports are important in the sense of reflecting how Parliament views the

governments conduct of foreign policy, it's impact is limited as it remains under resourced and only able to examine a few issues every year.⁴⁶

On those issues the FAC investigates, its functions are limited with its main powers being inquiry and monitoring of decisions already taken. When scrutiny by Parliament or public pressure results in real inquiry into foreign policy the Government of the day retains the power to limit the scope and fix the framework of the inquiry, limiting both the findings and the impact of such inquiries. This is a criticism which has been levelled against several recent inquiries both the Hutton Inquiry, which investigated the circumstances around the death of Ministry of Defence (MoD) employee David Kelly, who had been the source of BBC reports alleging that the Government had deliberately misled the public on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction in its September dossier leading up to the war; and the Butler Report, which was tasked with examining the intelligence on Iraq's WMD before the war and the discrepancies between it and the intelligence discovered since the war; it also covered more broader issues relating to the intelligence available on WMD programmes in countries of concern and the global trade in WMD⁴⁷.

⁴⁶ C Ross, *Independent Diplomat*, (London, 2007) p209

⁴⁷ Report of a Committee of Privy Councillors, "Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass destruction" HC 898, London: The Stationary Office 14 July 2004 p1

The FAC also suffers from its rivalry with other committees. For instance, the Commons European Scrutiny Committee increasingly takes an interest in issues traditionally seen as a FAC area of interest, this can result in resentment in the institutions being scrutinised as they are being asked for the same information by two different sets of MPs,⁴⁸ a consequence of which can be a lack of cooperation making investigations more difficult and therefore less effective.

Perhaps even more important is the FAC's ongoing war for influence with the ISC. This committee was set up by former Foreign Secretary Lord Hurd under the Intelligence Services Act 1994⁴⁹, with members from both Houses of Parliament who were appointed by and reported directly to the Prime Minister. At the time, Hurd assured the House the establishment of this committee would not limit the role of any existing committees yet since it was set up "successive Secretaries of State have on more than one occasion refused to allow FAC access to the agencies, on the grounds that Parliamentary scrutiny of those agencies is carried out by the ISC"⁵⁰. Meanwhile the FAC has on a number of

⁴⁸ J Dickie, *The New Mandarins: How British Foreign Policy Works*, (London, 2007) p146

⁴⁹ The Committee was strengthened more recently, being reformed under The Justice and Security Act 2013 which made it a Committee of Parliament. Members are now appointed by Parliament (though nominated by the PM, who in turn has to have consulted with the Leader of the Opposition) and it reports directly to Parliament, though on more sensitive matters of national security they may make reports to the PM <http://isc.independent.gov.uk/home> (Accessed 02/02/2016)

⁵⁰ HoC FAC, "The Decision to go to War in Iraq" *Ninth Report of Session 2002-03*, Vol 1, HC 813-I, London: The Stationery Office Limited, 7 July 2003, p48

occasions expressed frustration at being denied permission to speak to officials or access to information on grounds on national security.

Arguably the impact that Parliament and its Select Committees have is growing. Whilst Parliament, and indeed the general public, have been seen to have little direct impact on foreign policy making, the very fact that New Labour published open dossiers (now much maligned) and took the Iraq intervention to a Parliament vote has set a precedent that will now be difficult to overturn, and, as seen in the Syrian case, provide a large obstacle to independent foreign policy making by the government of Prime Minister David Cameron.

Information is also much more widely available, so both MPs and members of the public are much better informed on international affairs making it more likely they would want to influence government policy. This too has an impact on the power of Select Committees, whose findings are made public, which adds to their power to constrain government behaviour.

Central to foreign policy making in Britain has always been, naturally, the Foreign Office. Given Britain's historical global role and interests, this Office has traditionally been powerful, as has the Minister who holds the post of Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. For those studying how foreign policy is made in Britain, then, the FCO, with its Middle East department and Ambassadors in situ, is a key instrument to review.

As controllers of information, providers of advice and implementation of policy they have considerable influence on British foreign policy. Again however, the FCO has seen its influence decline in numerous ways over the past century. A decrease in British power abroad has seen a similar decline in the influence of the FCO. Membership of the European Union, the norms and legislation inherent within that has considerably blurred the line between domestic and foreign policy, meaning a number of "domestic" ministries now have direct contact with their counterparts in the European Union, cutting down FCO influence there.

This has been compounded by the FCO's inability to advocate for itself and the work it does especially in terms of value for money to the Treasury. As a result, its budget has come under attack⁵¹ (though this can also be seen in terms of interdepartmental rivalry as the Chancellor of the Exchequer is the third of the "big" offices of state alongside the PM and Foreign Secretary). The rivalry between the Treasury and the FCO for influence in the government was important in more than simple financial terms with the former department being seen as a "separate elite" having the "pick of the cream of the recruits,"⁵² again casting restrictions on the power of the FCO to press its influence on decision making. New Labour's creation of the Department for International

⁵¹ A Lane, "Modernising the management of British diplomacy: towards a Foreign Office policy on policy-making?" *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 20:1, (Mar 2007) p185

⁵² A Sampson, *Who runs this place?* (London: 2005) p127

Development (DfID) further added to the FCO's problems giving its control of the aid budget to the new department, removing a powerful tool for foreign policy.

Looking into explaining how this can impact foreign policy decision making, bureaucratic politics comes into play. Even where the FCO takes the lead in many aspects of foreign policy making and implementation, other ministries have a role also, such as the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI), the MoD, the security agencies among other, the latter especially in terms of controlling information. Priorities for these ministries may not be the same as those in the FCO and may lead to implementation of policies not in keeping with the general thrust of British foreign policy. In spite of these constraints, it would be wrong to say that the FCO is simply reduced to implementing decisions taken elsewhere. Staff in situ give the FCO privileged access to the relevant political and social elites in the countries in which they are based, alongside relevant and up to date data.

The FCO has clear and established lines of communication and procedures it follows when advising Ministers. Policy advice in the form of written recommendations and policy options, flow through layers of officials before it reaches ministers who decide whether to accept, adapt, or reject it. This advice is commonly given at the request of the minister, or the minister asking if advice is needed on a particular issue, but "the guiding principle is that while

officials advise, ministers decide"⁵³. This is the formal procedure for seeking and giving advice and as such probably is most applicable to the "day to day" running of the FCO. If a FCO official is asked to explain how foreign policy is made, this process is perhaps the easiest answer to give yet it does not give a complete picture. One FCO official stated that it is the informal process that can be more important, and this can be based on the personal relationships between special advisors, senior civil servants and members of the Cabinet. Dependent on the issue at hand, the personalities of the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, and how they relate to each other, can have a substantial impact on policy formulation.⁵⁴ In urgent situations, the importance of these informal relationships is heightened, as the formal policy process is "short circuited" with the Foreign Secretary calling on relevant advisors and officials for quick policy advice.

While the civil servants in the FCO are not the decision makers, their involvement in the process is significant, as is the overall worldview of the institution itself. Civil servants are expected to be politically neutral or independent (indeed there is currently an ongoing debate in Whitehall over the importance of an independent civil servants with some in Government arguing for the power to appoint their own choices to Senior positions in the civil service) the FCO can be seen to have its own general outlook, or to put it

⁵³ Coles, *Making Foreign Policy*, p84

⁵⁴ Anonymous, Interview at the FCO, 2 July 2014

another way, British foreign policy can be seen to have a traditional way of addressing issues.⁵⁵ Individual civil servants will also use their own knowledge, experience and opinions, and these will influence how they present information and opinion on different issues. Both these factors inevitably influence any advice given when policy is being decided on; latterly they will impact how policy decisions are implemented by officials and diplomats tasked to carry it out.

This is demonstrated by what Jonathan Rynhold and Jonathan Spyer describe as the two orientations of British foreign policy in the Middle East. One orientation, generally associated with the FCO, is more pro-Arab and supportive of the EU, the other is more aligned to support for the special relationship with the US, sympathetic toward Israel and is more often linked to the office of the prime minister.⁵⁶ This provides some explanation as to why, on some occasions, British policy has been censured for being too pro-Arab only to be accused of being pro-Israeli on others, depending on whether it is the office of the Prime Minister, or that of the Foreign Secretary which is in the ascendency in making foreign policy at the time. Over the longer term it has perhaps served as a balancing factor to foreign policy behaviour towards the Middle East as one side serves as a check to the other.

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ J Rynhold and J Spyer 'British policy in the Arab – Israeli Arena 1973 – 2004', *British Journal of Middle Eastern studies*, Vol 34 No 2, (Aug 2007) p 138

While much has been made of various Prime Ministers and their use of special advisors in recent times, often these advisors have a background with the FCO providing another avenue by which it can influence decision making. In having access to and control of pertinent and timely information through a considerable diplomatic network, and given Britain's need to use avenues of soft power, the FCO is still positioned to have significant impact on decision making.

A final factor to consider in the foreign policy decision making process is public opinion and, with this in mind, the role of the media. It is of course a central tenet of a liberal democracy that the government is responsible to the electorate it represents. On the domestic scene this is not a straightforward concept as decision-makers represent more than simply those who voted them in. On the foreign front, this must be broadened to include allies, internal organisations, even colleagues in similar parties in other countries.⁵⁷ Even taking account of the need to balance these sometimes conflicting groups to whom decision makers are responsible, there is the notion that the decision must be taken in the best interest of these constituents, something which does not necessarily mean a decision will be popular. In foreign policy this means acting in the national interest which as previously discussed is problematic in terms of definition. The assumption here, that the decision makers make

⁵⁷ Hill, *The Changing politics of Foreign Policy*, p251

decisions based on information not open to the general public, is taken by some to mean there is less need to take account of public opinion when making foreign policy.

For many analysts, the difficulty of assessing the role of public opinion in decision making lies around information and interest. It is perhaps easier to provide evidence of a role for interest groups - lobby groups or single interest groups - that campaign and are knowledgeable about specific issues (in fact members of these groups may be invited into the government's decision making process to share their expertise). What is more contested is the role of public opinion in terms of the general public. While a direct way of holding a government to account is through elections, it is difficult to: 1. Find many examples of elections in Britain being fought on foreign policy issues⁵⁸ and 2. Demonstrate where a party has lost an election due to a foreign policy issue. Labour may have lost the election in 2010 but it would be hard to say whether this loss was a direct result of foreign misadventure, or the fact the economy was in crisis, or, perhaps, the idea that Gordon Brown was not the man to turn things around for Britain.

Added to this is the central issue of just how interested and/or informed the general public is on foreign policy issues. Some experts put this figure as little as five to twenty percent of the general public having any interest in or keeping

⁵⁸ Ibid p260

up to date with matters of foreign policy. Even then this is dependent on the issue at hand, with economy or issues of war and peace being more likely to illicit their interest than everyday diplomatic issues.⁵⁹ A normal source of information and agenda setting for the general public, given this lack of interest or effort when it comes to foreign affairs, is the media.

Whilst the jury might be out over the actual impact that public opinion has on the decision makers, there is evidence to suggest that decision makers are aware of the need to control public opinion (implicitly this suggests they feel that public opinion is important). The decision early on in the Blair government to strengthen the press office under the strong lead of Alistair Campbell to establish a Strategic Communications Unit⁶⁰ can be seen to underline the importance the government put on getting out the right message to the public.

This impulse to control the media continued when NATO's failure to counter the negative media coverage of the Kosovo campaign led to a series of public relations disasters for the organisation. Blair, convinced NATO's actions were right and justified, and frustrated at NATO's blundering with the press sent Alistair Campbell to deal with the problem, a strategy which, whilst somewhat successful was set back by the reality of NATO bombing non-military targets by mistake during the campaign.⁶¹ They also went to great lengths to ensure that

⁵⁹ Alden & Aran, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, p56

⁶⁰ Rentoul, *Tony Blair: Prime Minister* p537

⁶¹ Kettle, *Dirty Politics?* p42

their argument for bombing Iraq, that Saddam had WMD and was a real threat to Britain, was prevalent in the media⁶². With such emphasis on media strategy, the Blair government quickly became synonymous with the concept of “spin”. Clearly this can be seen as evidence of decision makers’ interest in getting their own message out to the general public, implicitly giving weight to the argument that public opinion matters, but also to that of the elite model perspective when looking at the role of public opinion in foreign policy.

Yet the Blair government went to war in Iraq knowing that according to polls taken at the time the British public was against it, 63% of the public against Britain joining US action against Iraq without a UNSC resolution⁶³ according to one poll taken on the eve of the war casting doubt on the level of impact public opinion has on decision makers. Furthermore, despite its aggressive media strategy, Downing Street still accused the BBC, a state funded but independent news media, of bias in its reporting of the Iraq war.

The Parliamentary votes in 2013 and 2015 on the decision over whether to bomb Syria or not, might be used to link public opinion to decision making. A poll in 2013 indicated 60% of the British public coming out against military action against the Asad regime in Syria.⁶⁴ Similar polls prior to the Parliament

⁶² Robinson, “The role of public opinion and the media” p171

⁶³ Iraq, The Last Pre-War Polls <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/newsevents/ca/287/Iraq-The-Last-PreWar-Polls.aspx> (Accessed 01/12/2014)

⁶⁴ T Helm, “Poll finds 60% of British public opposed UK military action against Syria” *The Guardian* (31 August 2013)

vote in 2015, showed support for strikes against ISIS in Syria at 48% for and 31% against.⁶⁵ It could be seen that the vote against action in 2013 and in 2015 followed the trend of public opinion but what is difficult to judge or evidence is how much this factor weighed into decision makers minds over other factors such as the different context in which the votes were taken (the Paris attacks and migration crisis for example), the different targets (ISIS as opposed to Asad) and the difference perceived in the direct threat posed to Britain by ISIS rather than Asad, the different political context in Parliament (Conservative rather than coalition government), to name but a few.

In cases where the media could be seen to be setting the agenda playing a role in holding the government to account such as, for example, its coverage of British arms fairs, of British arms exports or its relationship with states which have questionable human rights records such as China and Saudi Arabia, other interests, mainly economy and security, seem to be given priority. Long term, the media plays a role in helping to shape the social discourse in nations so altering the public perception in terms of national identity⁶⁶, changing the societal idea of what is acceptable and what is not acceptable of our decision makers. This, then, may ultimately adjust the broad constraints that public opinion provides to decision making limiting foreign policy behaviour.

⁶⁵ P Kellner, "Analysis: sharp fall in support for air strikes within Syria" *YouGov.uk*, 02 December 2015 <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2015/12/02/analysis-sharp-fall-support-air-strikes-syria/> (Accessed 01/01/2015)

⁶⁶ Hudson, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, p103

It should be noted that while all the above factors play a role in the British foreign policy making process, with the exception of the role of the executive their impact is likely to be less in terms of direct Anglo-Syrian relations given this has never consistently been an area of priority for Britain in terms of either political or economic interests.

FOREIGN POLICY OUTPUTS:

Phases in policy outputs toward Syria

Several phases and watersheds in UK policy can be identified and change and continuity in these can be explained by changes in the above foreign policy determinants. While this will constitute the substance of the chapters that follow, here, a brief overview is provided.

British foreign policy toward Syria has been influenced by the broader context of British Middle East policy and its wider interests and interdependencies. At various times Britain has tried to engage with Syrian elites in order to pursue these policies and interests with the result, more often than not, being detrimental to both the Anglo-Syrian relations and unhelpful in achieving the outcomes sought by Britain government. During the early part of the century the need to preserve British influence in the Middle East took priority leading to contradictory policies and promises, and left a legacy that in fact, alongside Britain's economic and military decline, made it difficult then impossible for Britain to achieve that outcome.

This era is explored in Chapter one which considers the impact of two world wars on British policy toward the Middle East region and Syria. It looks at how these wars were causal factors in foreign policy decisions that produced contradictory and counterproductive agreements and policies. The impact these had on Britain's ability to effectively pursue its interests in both political and economic terms is also considered.

On the international level, Britain was a major power attempting to maintain power balance in own favour. While the First World War can be seen as a war of empire, of maintaining its primacy as a great power the Second World War can be seen arguably as an existential war. In the Middle East this meant maintaining British assets during world wars and ensuring balance of power in British favour. The necessity, during both wars, to mobilise all possible resources in the war effort and protect British interests in the Middle East from being overrun was a major influence of British policy making. It also, on both occasions, resulted in a British military presence on the ground in Syria adding another dimension to Anglo-French great power rivalry.

Layering over these considerations were the different parties involved in policy making, those in situ in the region, closer to the main players, those involved in negotiating deals with other European powers through traditional diplomatic

negotiations and those elites in London who again differed in opinion on how best to protect British interests. All these factors necessarily playing a part in policy making toward the region, and Syria itself, while never placing Syria at the heart of that policy.

In the period following the Second World War, the international system had irreversibly changed for Britain. Once a great power with a vast empire, Britain had exhausted its resources, lacked the capacity to hold onto its empire and facing the growth of the two new superpowers, and particularly how to counter the threat the Soviets posed to its interests on the Middle East. Britain's policies in this period became about managing that decline, holding on to what influence it could, and ultimately maintaining security both of Britain itself and its worldwide assets and interests.

Acknowledgement of Britain's reduced power position in the international system necessarily meant re-evaluating Britain's relationship with the Middle East in order to meet the perceived threat was apparent in Britain's post war Foreign Secretary's approach, "Bevin emphasized from the start his desire to eradicate old-style imperialist exploitation and develop a partnership with the Arabs which would modernize the economies of the region and increase the

prosperity of the ordinary people"⁶⁷. In other words, Bevin backed Arab nationalism as a way to further British interests without considering whether the interests of Britain and those of the new Arab leaders would necessarily be the same.

The embodiment of this was British support for first the Arab League then latterly backing for the creation of the Bighead Pact. Syria's geopolitical position again meant that British foreign policy makers would have to take Syria into account when pursuing these policies, with their success or failure becoming contingent on Syrian participation. Failure to realise the consequences of prior policy in the region, combined with evidence decline in capacity as a security or political partners for the states in the region marked clearly Britain's decline in power, a decline which was hastened by the Suez fiasco but also by Syria's refusal to join a pro-Western pact, which led Britain to sponsor, with the US, several failed coup attempts against nationalist Syrian governments, naturally leading to a worsening of relations.

Still the decline of British power during the first half of the twentieth century and gradual withdrawal of British presence there meant it was not until the 1980s that Anglo-Syrian relations would again come to the forefront of British

⁶⁷ Greenwood, Sean "Ernest Bevin: Reluctant Cold Warrior" in Otte, T.G. (ed) *The Makers of British Foreign Policy: From Pitt to Thatcher*, (Basingstoke, 2002) p195

policy makers' minds. Chapter two concentrates on this period, with the government of Margaret Thatcher, and her foreign policy during this period. After years of declining influence in the region, as Cold War rivalry played out and British power waned, Thatcher's government saw the re-emergence of confidence in British foreign policy. Of significance during this period was, not only the re-emergence of confidence in British foreign policy, but changes in the international system which favoured the British establishment much more than they did the Syrian regime. With the Soviet economy failing, the Cold War between the two superpowers came to an end with Britain being on the "winning" side, the Syrians conversely lost their main sponsor, problematic both in terms of economy and arms supply. This would affect foreign policy making in both states, setting them on confrontational paths.

Thatcher's foreign policy toward Syria at this time, and the differences between it and policy toward other countries in the region, cannot be viewed purely in its bilateral relationship with that country. Consideration must also be given to Thatcher's alliance with the US and antagonistic relationship with the European Union. The impact of Thatcher's own very personal leadership style, her own prejudices and opinions not only on the socialist government in Syria and terrorism, but her relationships with both Europe and America and how this impacted her Middle East policy and specifically Anglo-Syrian relations.

Restraint on policy extremes which may have come from Whitehall in the past, was side-lined as Thatcher conducted foreign policy from No 10 rather than the FCO. This strong aggressive leadership meant dissent was, at least publically, discouraged and was significant in the handling of a number of terrorist attacks perpetrated by groups with links to the Middle East. As terrorist incidents on European streets increased, evidence indicated a number of Middle East regimes were involved in state sponsored terrorism including that of the Asad regime in Syria. For Britain, one consequence of this was the complete breakdown in relations with Syria.

This chapter reviews how Thatcher's tough stance on international terrorism came to define Anglo- Syrian relations with special focus on the Hindawi affair that resulted in London cutting all ties with Damascus and the consequences of doing so on other British interests. The links between the handling of this affair and the hostage crisis that also arose in this period are further investigated with specific attention to the impact of Thatcher's role in British foreign policy making along with the role of other actors. The chapter, then, reviews the factors that shaped Anglo-Syrian relations in this period, and how events shaped a response from the British Government that lasted four years, a situation which only came to an end when a state leader left office.

During the Thatcher period there were a number of views on the relative merits of dealing with Syria, several voices advocating a different approach was necessary than the one used, for example, to deal with Syria.⁶⁸ These voices were echoed in the Blair government in the aftermath of 9/11 and war in Afghanistan (it could also be seen in the reaction of many British observers, academic, political and others, as the events of the Arab Spring 2010 led to the current civil war in Syria). Whilst adamant that the need to “deal with” Iraq could only be met by military action, forcibly removing Saddam Hussein, and despite the labelling of Syria as a rogue state, the British position still seemed to reflect the above opinion, that Syria was a state that we could “do business with”. As long as Blair continued to hold to the idea that Syria could be pressured diplomatically then, intervention was not an option.

The focus of chapters three and four is the foreign policy of the Blair government. Almost a decade on from the end of the Cold War, the international system as the Blair government came to power in a unipolar international system, firm in the belief of the primacy of liberal democracy as a means to peace and security. Rather than adhering in the belief that a strong Europe could be a counter balance to the power of the US, the Blair government strongly backed a continued close relationship with America, seeing

⁶⁸ P Cradock, *In pursuit of British interests*, (London: 1997) p77

the US as having a continued relevance in maintaining security both in Europe and the wider international system.

The Blair government also saw the more favourable international environment, and strong domestic positions as providing the opportunity to forge a new, stronger role for Britain in the world. With membership of various international organisation, including being a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, Britain was seen to have both the means and a responsibility to be involved in resolving some of the more intractable global issues and conflicts including the MEPP, encouraging democratic reform and good governance, and promotion of human rights. More, with the end of the Cold War, there was opportunity for a more constructive role for organisations such as the UN, which had in the past been stalemated on various issues down Cold War lines.

Chapter 3 specifically looks at the process of how foreign policy decisions were made and who makes them, whether there is anything distinctive about Blair's foreign policy and what makes it distinctive, or whether it was simply a continuation from previous British governments. This is explored particularly with reference to the Blair government assertion of pursuing a new kind of foreign policy, and establishing Britain's role in the world. It examines how Blair's foreign policy decisions impacted on policy decisions in regard to the

Middle East region and what, if any, effect that had on Anglo-Syrian relations in the latter years of Hafez al-Asad's government.

The belief that Britain did have a role on the international stage, and could and should perform it was central to Blair's foreign policy. In terms of Syria, this would be of particular relevance in terms of the promotion of democratic values and good governance through the EU, and also in Blair's push to reengage the Americans in the Middle East process. At the same time, the Syrian regime was also having to deal with this unipolar international system which was not in its favour, looking to Europe to provide some balance for the Arab side of the peace process and as a source of potential stability for its economy. Syria's interest in securing EU support for its ailing economy and seeming interest in embarking on new talks on the peace process once again saw some convergence in Anglo-Syrian interests with the potential for positive forward movement.

Chapter four explores the period after Bashar al-Asad became President. This chapter reviews the expectations Blair had for Asad, and the policies that followed which arose from Blair's early commitment to a new foreign policy path for Britain, to the export of British values and commitment to promoting good governance and human rights. Anglo-Syrian relations were exposed to two changes in this period. The first being Bashar coming into the Presidency

in Syria, which appeared to open the door to normalisation of relations with Syria. More significant however was the impact of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on America on the perceptions of threat and security in the international arena.

This chapter demonstrates the link between how foreign policy decision-making had come to be constructed in the years prior to the terrorist attacks, as explored in chapter 3, came to shape the policy decisions that followed. It examines the impact of the foreign policy decisions that led to the Iraq war alongside the physical presence of British military personnel on the ground in Iraq affected or changed British interests in the region, and what the consequences of this was for Anglo-Syrian relations. In doing so it considers what, if any, constraint this had on British foreign policy decision making in the region, particularly toward Syria, and how far British policy diverged from American policy once it was involved in the occupation of Iraq.

Chapter 5 reviews British policy after the Arab Spring and the outbreak of the Syrian civil war. While the international setting is still that of a world dominated by one superpower, it is one in which perceptions of threat, security and vulnerability have all been changed firstly by the terror attacks of the previous decade both on America and Europe, then by the disastrous Iraqi campaign which highlighted for many the weakness of military power as a response to

this kind of attack. In turn it considers the effect of this to the approach taken to international crises and problems.

British foreign policy in this period is viewed in the context of how decisions in the previous decade continues to influence policy makers. Again it looks at how British foreign policy to the region as a whole has impacted on the relationship it has with Syria and any potential Syrian policies it follows. It also considers Britain's role in international institutions such as the UN and its "Responsibility to Protect" policy and what impact this has had, if any. The chapter asks whether the foreign policy decisions leading to interventions in Libya and Mali had any impact on British policy toward the Syrian crisis. In this it considers if there is a distinctive British interest to the latter two interventions that is not evident in its Syrian policy or that the crisis in Syria is inherently different which constrains British activity over the crisis.

Summary of Approach

The thesis will examine British policy toward Syria, broadly through the lens of neo-classical realism, and although the aim is to take this theoretical paradigm as a tool to guide the analysis, arguably its utility in understanding British-Syrian case, supports claims that it is a significant advance on other approaches.

The argument of this thesis is that to understand UK relations towards Syria over the past century, they have to be viewed in the broader context of British policy on Middle East regional issues, and wider foreign policy priorities. With no direct UK interests invested in Syria, the stance of leading UK politicians on the issues of post-World War regional order, international terrorism, military interventionism, arms sales, dictatorship and democratisation have circumscribed UK policy options in relation to Syria.

As neo-classical realism would predict, a state's position in the international system is the most important broad determinant on its foreign policy. In this respect Britain Middle East policy is shaped by the significant interests established in the region when Britain was a global empire, combined with its considerable subsequent decline in the power to defend those interests.

Britain has little in terms of direct national interest with Syria nor do any of its domestic interests have a significant stake in Syria. Moreover, a history of perceiving the other as unfriendly has also biased relations between Britain and Syria. Syria's strategic geographic position in the Middle East has meant, however, that Syria periodically attracts UK attention in pursuing its other interests in the region, in fact Anglo-Syrian relations are to some extent defined by wider British interests in the regions and the perceived impact that comes from Syrian intransigence or usefulness with regard to securing these interests.

Britain's policy toward Syria will therefore be shaped by the ability of Syria to impact on Britain's Middle East interests, yet also highly constrained by its declining power and interdependences such as its relationships with the US and with Europe. Combined with Britain's lack of direct interests, moreover, Britain's importance to Syria and ability to influence is tied to its ability to work through these interdependencies. Thus the strength of Britain's relationships within the EU has an impact in its ability to forward its foreign policy through that organisation. Similarly, the utility of having strong relations with the US, other than in terms of security, is related directly to how far these strong relations allow Britain some influence of US foreign policy decision making. Syria's interest in stronger relations with Britain, too, are directly related to how useful a partner Britain can be in influencing with the US or the EU toward more pro-Syrian policy making.

Since so few groups have a stake in UK policy to Syria, the impact of the foreign policy process in potentially channelling societal interests into the policy process will be truncated. The result is that Syria policy will be highly concentrated and centralized, in the hands of the Prime Minister and FCO. The FCO Middle East section (and ambassadors), the main source of policy proposals, which however, will be filtered through *the prime minister's broader agenda*. As neo-classical realism predicts, thus, how a state reacts to its international geopolitical position, is shaped by elite perceptions and their capacity to mobilise resources for their agendas. The foreign policy process

will, therefore impact on policy toward Syria insofar as the elites' broader policy agenda and decision making sets the context for Anglo-Syrian relations.

Therefore, it is necessary to understand decision making on foreign policy more generally, and the wider impact of this, to be able to understand British foreign policy behaviour toward Syria.

Chapter 1

Historical Context of Anglo- Syrian relations

The beginning of the 20th Century saw Great Britain at the height of her imperial power. A Great Power at the start of the century with the largest empire in the world, the next fifty years saw Britain initially struggle to maintain her place in the international power structure whilst her resources to do so steadily declined, then latterly pursue policies and alliances to both manage and limit the decline, and meet the expectancy of elites that Britain remain a world power. British imperialism in the Middle East was a big part of this story. Whilst struggling to maintain its grip on its large empire worldwide, British empire in the Middle East continued to grow even after the conclusion of World War I, being important to British interests in terms of economy, access to resources, security, and access to other parts of the empire via the Suez Canal⁶⁹.

The historical foundations of the Anglo-Syrian relationships still reverberate decades later. The British government at this time, viewed their actions in terms of protecting their interests both in terms of wealth and security, and many legitimised their imperial control of territories in moral terms as a guardianship of peoples who were less civilised than themselves, a kind of

⁶⁹ Hollis, *Britain and the Middle East in the 9/11 era*, p11

imperial paternalism. The combination of both protecting British interests and the assumption that the British policy was best influenced the policies they pursued, for many the perception of a strong relationship with countries in the Middle East continues today. In Syria, too, the imperial legacy remains, but unlike British policy makers who have tended to hold up this joint history as an example of how Britain “knows best” when it comes to Middle East policy making, the legacy remembered is one of betrayal and oppression, and one that has been used both to legitimise the regime in Syria as a defender against imperialism, and a weapon to delegitimise attempts by Britain, and the West more generally, to pursue their own interests at the expense of the Arab population in the region, imperial oppression by different means.

Britain, the Levant and the First World War

For the British government, on the approach to World War One, the hope was that the Ottoman Empire would align on the side of the allies or, at least, stay neutral. Thus the status quo in the Middle East would remain.⁷⁰ This reflected British policy throughout the 19th century, that the best policy was to leave the region under Ottoman rule (in contrast to French policy in the Levant which dated back to the 1535 Capitulations Treaty with the Ottoman Empire⁷¹). So central was this thinking that it wasn't until 1915 that the British government

⁷⁰ D K Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East 1914 – 1958*, (Oxford, 2006) p44

⁷¹ Zisser, “Britain and the Levant 1918-46: A Missed Opportunity?” p137

formed an interdepartmental committee to consider British aims in the region in the event the Ottoman Empire collapsed. The decision by the Ottomans to enter the war on the opposing side was concluded on August 2nd, 1914 in the secret Ottoman-German alliance against Russia, and activated by the bombardment of Russian ports by the Ottoman Fleet in the Black Sea on October 29th⁷² leaving no alternative for the British government to prepare for the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and to work assiduously toward that goal.

Accusations of a British betrayal of the Arab people date back to this period. Aware of unrest among some of the Arab population against Ottoman rule, British policy to oust the Turks focused on encouraging the Arab Revolt against them by supporting Arab nationalism and pledging to back demands for Arab independence. Fighting a war that crossed continents, which Britain was by no means guaranteed to win and with the Ottoman Empire now on the opposing side, the British had a number of competing priorities to pursue to have any hope of winning the war.

These priorities included the need to defeat the Ottomans quickly, essential to maintaining British trade and communications access to the east. The most effective way to do this was to mobilise the Arabs, and the French would need

⁷² W Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (3rd Ed), (Oxford, 2004) p146

to be convinced of this. Simultaneously, elements of the British government had also become convinced that the Zionist movement, their cause skilfully championed by the Russian chemist and adroit diplomat Chaim Weizmann, was important to the war effort both in sustaining efforts on the Russian front and in galvanising the American's to join the war on the allied side⁷³. A further concern was that the collapse of the Ottoman Empire would create power vacuum in the region, with the potential a rival might use this to increase their power, to the detriment of British interests something the British government needed to prevent.

The consequence of these competing priorities was the establishment of three conflicting promises and agreements known as the 1915 – 1916 McMahon-Hussein Correspondence, the May 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement and the November 1917 Balfour Declaration. From these agreements the modern Middle East would emerge, one created artificially by great powers, more concerned with their own interests in the region than traditional boundaries or tribal areas. The modern Syria that emerged paid no heed to historical or tribal ties, nor was it the territory that the Arab population had expected as part of the McMahon-Hussein agreement. The pursuit of Greater Syria would be significant in terms of legitimising Syrian regimes to come, but also stand in the way of settlement with Israel. Further, while the new borders cut off territory

⁷³ K Schultz, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, (Harlow, 1999) p6

Syrian leaders traditionally viewed as Syrian, traditional relationships remained, significantly these facilitated and justified cross border “meddling” such has been seen, for example, in Syria’s involvement in the Lebanon, further undermining regional stability.

The decision to support Arab nationalism and their fight for independence was taken in light of intelligence and existing contacts the British had with regional actors at this time. These officials advised that there was significant support for this course of action. Specifically, that Sharif Hussein, Emir of Mecca, who had used his time in office to build a network of tribal alliances, was open to British overtures⁷⁴. Indeed, several months before the war broke out the British government had been approached by Sharif Hussein’s son, Abdullah, for help in the Arab cause but had declined to assist since as at that time the Ottoman Empire was considered a friendly power⁷⁵.

As the war began, in light of the Ottomans joining the Central Powers, the British government authorised its High Commissioner in Cairo Sir Henry McMahon to begin negotiations with Sharif Hussein. In doing so the elites in London gave McMahon a great deal of autonomy in those discussions. During 1915 – 1916 a series of letters were sent between the two, the biggest issue in

⁷⁴ Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, p155

⁷⁵ Z N Zeine, *The Struggle for Arab Independence*, (Beirut, 1960) p2

the negotiations being the question of borders, with the most significant letter was sent on 24 October 1915 which detailed the agreed boundaries.⁷⁶ The letters led to the expectation that the British would support the establishment of Syria as an independent Arab state (including the area of Palestine though not specifically mentioned), subject to some border modifications, in return for the Arabs revolt against their Ottoman rulers.

Whilst the British believed this would be the quickest way to instigating a revolt against the Ottoman Empire, they in no way believed Sharif Hussein to be representative of all Arabs or that he would inspire a complete Arab rebellion. Arguably this was a traditional divide and conquer policy, aimed at weakening the Ottoman Empire in the region enough for it to be overcome. The British assessment of support for Hussein was correct, whilst Hussein managed to gain some clandestine support in parts of Syria it was not unanimous, with some leading Arab figures labelling him a traitor⁷⁷. Yet the main British objective was accessing Hussein's tribal allegiances and resources, thus they were happy to negotiate with Hussein as if he was the representative of the Arabs in order to achieve this. Practically, the needs for the British war effort would be served, while the ambiguous wording of the correspondence left room for renegotiation depending on the outcome of the war, a common practice in

⁷⁶ Full text available: Letter from Sir Henry McMahon to Sharif Hussein, October 24, 1915, <http://www.icsresources.org> (Accessed 19/04/2012)

⁷⁷ Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, p157

diplomatic circles. Similarly, Hussein likely anticipated some revisions of the boundaries discussed but there is no doubt he had reason to believe that he would emerge from the war with an independent Arab state.

The British understood the need to provide the Sharif with enticements to facilitate a rebellion but also had to secure French support for the British plan. The French, occupied at home and unable to defend their interests in the Middle East, were already uneasy with the British presence there. Formal negotiations were required to appease them, culminating in the Sykes-Picot Agreement of May 1916 in which the two powers carved out spheres of influence. France got rights over Syria and Lebanon, providing for a "buffer zone" between British interests in the region and Russia's.

The dissection of the Middle East after the war may bear some resemblance to the boundaries the powers agreed but, in fact, the Sykes-Picot Agreement was never enacted in its original form. Once the Anglo-French negotiations concluded Sykes and Picot travelled to Moscow to continue negotiations with the Allied Powers third Partner. Russia approved the agreement, now the Tripartite Agreement, with some slight alterations. The Bolshevik revolution of 1917 however saw not only the Russian departure from the war but the revelation to the world of the Sykes-Picot agreement by the Bolsheviks.

The very fact that these instances of secret negotiations took place is used as evidence of British duplicity. This charge is strengthened by evidence that the French were ignorant of British negotiations with Hussein until only a few weeks prior to the Paris Peace conference of 1919. Thus the French argued they did not have to abide by British agreements with Hussein since they had not been involved in any negotiations, stating Britain had made this undertaking alone⁷⁸. For his part, Sharif Hussein had no knowledge of the Anglo-French negotiations with even his British contact, McMahon, initially unaware of them despite being given leave to make substantial promises to Hussein.

A third agreement to which the British committed themselves was the November 2nd, 1917 Balfour Declaration which endorsed the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. This declaration has wrought the most damage to British relations with the region, a legacy which has proved difficult to overcome. For Syria, the creation of Israel was viewed as a great betrayal and put a significant enemy on its doorstep, occupying Arab lands. Opposition to the existence of Israel, and the defence of Palestinian rights, became part of the Syrian narrative of Arab nationalism and anti-Imperialism. Britain's part this was not forgotten.

⁷⁸ The Council of Four: Minutes of Meetings March 20 to May 24, 1919, p7

At the time the declaration was simply another move to ensure mobilisation of resources to the British war effort. It was not the promise of a Jewish state as many Zionists took it to be, again vague diplomatic language allowed each side a different interpretation. Those arguing for the commitment to be upheld, maintained the British had a moral obligation to the Jews. More practically, the land promised to the Jews could provide an alternative base for British troops and access to the coast, therefore upholding the agreement could serve British interests. After the war, Britain set a high priority to securing the mandate of Palestine at the cost, arguably, of the Levant. In effect, though, by claiming the mandate Britain stood accused of reneging on its prior agreements to both France and Hussein, who had reasonably expected this land to go to them.

If the primary outcome of these agreements and negotiations was in the interests of British success in the war, then they can be judged as successful. Britain appeared to have gained a particularly powerful position in the Middle East. British troops in the region were a physical representation of that, present not only in territories designated to be British mandates, but also in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon. Furthermore, Britain showed no sign of withdrawing from these areas until a peace treaty was agreed. This gave France significant cause for grievance, whilst also giving the Arabs hope that the promises in the McMahon-Hussein correspondence would be upheld. The

impression that the British were not necessarily committed to withdrawal from Syria was not based just on the military occupation. It was reinforced in that they had endeavoured throughout their time there to strengthen Emir Faisal's position as an Arab leader, for example, General Allenby had allowed Faisal to take over administration of the Syrian territory from Autumn 1918⁷⁹.

This perception of British intent was neither wholly paranoia on the part of the French nor wishful thinking on the part of the Arabs. Some in the British establishment did have reservations regarding the potential impact French influence in Syria would have on British interest in the region. Those advocating that Britain should not hand over control in the Levant, particularly those with knowledge of the region, argued that acquisition of Syria would "put the seal on British predominance throughout the Arab countries; would render Great Britain paramount in Islam; and would safeguard the Eastern Mediterranean and the routes to Mesopotamia and India by securing control of the Aleppo – Mosul line".⁸⁰

British government attempts to renegotiate the terms of the Sykes-Picot agreement continued for two years after the war ended, to the point where the

⁷⁹ D Fromkin, *A Peace to end all Peace*, (New York, 2001) p435

⁸⁰ J Fisher, "Syria and Mesopotamia in British Middle Eastern Policy in 1919" *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol 34, No.2 (1998) p142

French accused the British stationed in Syria of inciting anti-French sentiment. This was a reversion to pre-war great power rivalry in the area rather than a show of full support for Faisal's claims. Those backing Faisal did so for various reasons; some arguing moral principle, others saw him as a figure who could protect British interests in the region. Prime Minister Lloyd George himself argued the case for keeping Faisal as head of state on a number of occasions, including at the 1919 conference, contending that there would be no Syria without British troops and King Hussein's mobilisation of forces. Further, he argued, the French had implicitly agreed when they signed the 1916 agreement stating they were "prepared to recognise and uphold an independent Arab State of Confederation of Arab States in the areas A. and B. Marked on the annexed map under the suzerainty of an Arab Chief".⁸¹ He was unsuccessful in changing French opinion, which was that they had committed to Faisal being the Arab Chief.

Meanwhile Faisal's perceived loyalty to the British combined with his inability to secure Syria's independence weakened his position in the region. Trying to stem unrest among his Arab allies he agreed to take unilateral action and so, without British support, the Arabs declared their own independence in Syria, naming Faisal as King. Consequently, Faisal lost international support for his position. Until peace negotiations concluded these lands were considered

⁸¹ The Council of Four: Minutes of Meetings March 20 to May 24, 1919, p8

occupied territories, hence accepting Faisal's declaration would undermine British interests elsewhere, especially in Iraq where there were serious challenges to the British presence; on the French side it proved the perfect opportunity to remove him from his position.

British power in the region was illusory. The war had dramatically weakened Britain and her economy meaning quick settlement in the Middle East, was a priority. One tactic the British had used to mobilise the Arabs was to support the growth of Arab nationalism to galvanise the uprising. This was a pragmatic response when it became clear the Ottomans were siding against them, but now Britain that faced nationalist uprisings across its own empire. This featured in British reluctance to press its claim in the Levant particularly when it was already facing issues in its own mandated area, especially Iraq. The British need to secure stability in the region meant a compromise with the French, the only other power with the capacity and will to exert influence in the area.

The French were determined to hold the Levant and Britain did not want the Syrian mandate (or were not prepared to fight for). Lloyd George made it clear again at the 1919 conference saying "just as we disinterested ourselves in 1912, so we now disinterested ourselves in 1919. If the Conference asked us

to take Syria, we should reply in the negative".⁸² Some held faint hope that the US might take on the Mandate, or extend their presence in some way, but they had no desire to do so. Britain eventually withdrew their troops when France threatened military action. Eyal Zisser considers whether this was a "missed opportunity" for the British, certainly, there were some within the British establishment who advocated that keeping the Levant under British influence was in its strategic interests. With British withdrawal, French occupation of the Levant was inevitable. Any support Britain had provided toward achieving Arab nationalist aims was eclipsed by this betrayal exacerbated, perhaps, by those closest to the Arabs having made every effort to further their cause, hoping for a *fait accompli*, only to be let down by politicians in London being unprepared to back their cause either politically or militarily.

One interpretation of why British policy was so uncoordinated, and contradictory, is that Britain never intended to keep any of its promises. There are several other interpretations, including the role of those involved in decision making and the impact of the war on Britain's capacity to protect its international interests. The number of different agencies involved in the foreign policy process also factors in. The Foreign Office, War Office, India Office and the Admiralty all had a stake in policy making in the region, along with various diplomats and individuals who influenced government decision making. All had

⁸² The Council of Four: Minutes of Meetings March 20 to May 24, 1919, p5

differing, not necessarily compatible, objectives they perceived as necessary to ensure success in the war. They also had differing levels of autonomy in pursuing these, with agreements being made independent, and often in ignorance of each other.

The differing agreements supported Britain's overarching priority in two ways, firstly, each aimed at mobilising support or resources to that end; secondly, they ignored (if they knew of them) any potential contradictions and might have suspected they would lead to difficulties for British interests in the future, but this was a secondary issue to that of ensuring that the war was won. Not having made these agreements would potentially have cost Britain at least her assets in the region, at worst, the war.

Some argue that the promises made were not even seen to be contradictory at the time. The Balfour declaration whilst promising a Jewish "homeland", it did not promise a Jewish "state", a deliberate wording. The British use of the word "independent" in reference to an "independent Arab state" in the McMahon-Hussein correspondence was not necessarily seen as contradicting anything agreed in the Sykes-Picot agreement. The British did not see the imposition of a mandatory power in the role of "adviser" as incongruous to this end. This view of a mandatory power as a necessary guiding hand reflected the same

elitist attitude as the British idea of the “common good” that had permeated its empire building policy since the mid-19th Century.⁸³

Likewise, by independence the British meant freedom from the Ottoman Empire not the creation of an independent Arab state. This is more difficult to defend, the McMahon correspondence explicitly refers to an independent state, but echoes the imperial elite assumption that the peoples in Middle East were too backward to be self-governing at this time, thus needed the oversight of a more developed society.⁸⁴ The deliberate double speak considerably harmed the credibility of the British, creating the paranoia and distrust that has to some extent marked the British relationship with Syrian regimes over the decades.

The consequences of British foreign policy in the Middle East during this period were not all immediately apparent. Its policies contributed to the successful conclusion of the war for the British but the impact on the British relationship with the emerging states of the region was much less positive. The British government of the time argued that it met its obligations but it left a legacy of betrayal which has had lasting implications for British Middle East relations, particularly with Syria. The growth of Arab nationalism challenged British policy as the Arabs in British mandated areas were emboldened in their demands for

⁸³ R Hollis, *Britain and the Middle East in the 9/11 era*, p8

⁸⁴ B Milton –Edwards, *Contemporary Politics in the Middle East*, (Cambridge, 2006) p25

independence. Longer term, Britain sought to continue its influence through more formal alliance arrangements but was hampered by accusations of imperialism and past betrayals, which became part of the foundations of this Arab nationalism.

The British establishment by now were concentrated on securing primacy over Palestine and Mesopotamia, those arguing maintaining influence on the Levant would aid in this goal unable to convince the government that the military risk would be worth it. British policy still favoured support for Arab nationalism as a way of maintaining influence but a *British* interpretation of Arab nationalism.

This elite perception that the Arab nations needed great power supervision to survive, would greatly limit the effectiveness of British policy making in the decades to follow. Arguably it still influences those who think that Britain has something unique in its relationship with states in the Middle East. Conversely, helps explain why British political speeches describing the export of common values and norms are viewed with distrust, seeming to reflect the idea that somehow Western values are better. In this period the formal embodiment of this attitude was the creation of the mandated territories in the Middle East.

The San Remo Resolution of 1920, confirmed by the League of Nations in 1922, conferred the mandates of Palestine and Iraq to Britain. The League moreover accepted a British request that Transjordan be exempted from the provisions of

the Palestine Mandate, becoming a second Hashemite kingdom, under Abdullah I, another British mandate. The interwar years thus saw the British preoccupied with their own mandated areas and priorities in the Middle East, which no longer included Syria. Using its influence in these areas the British set about agreeing treaties favourable to its own interests in the region.

Most problematic for the British was the Mandate of Palestine, in which it had the duty to enact on the promises of the Balfour Declaration. Britain was faced with the task of reconciling promises to the Jews whilst trying to uphold the rights of the native Arabs in Palestine. The land, historically southern Syria, had been promised to the Arabs as part of McMahon correspondence though the argument here hinged on whether the land lay "to the west" of Damascus, Hama, Homs and Aleppo, causing a further rift in Anglo-Syrian relations. The loss of the lands, particularly to the Zionists, was a further betrayal. Today, it would be easy to consider reconciliation of all the British promises an impossible task yet had it not been for World War Two, British policy could have been successful, as they worked to limit Jewish immigration to Israel and favoured supporting the Arab population there. The outbreak of war in Europe derailed British policy making in the region making it reconsider its Syrian policy once again while it placed further strain of British resources.

Impact of World War Two

The outbreak of World War Two in Europe was an existential threat to Britain, put British interests in the Middle East at risk and also brought the fate of Syria back into British sights. The 1940 armistice signed by Vichy France with Germany was a direct blow to the British war effort in Europe but also problematic for the campaign in the Middle East. It was feared Vichy Syria may fall to Italian or German influence weakening the British position. Britain hesitated in taking immediate action, tactically, unprepared to launch a campaign since elements of the French navy were still out of range and posed significant threat. Politically, the issue of staging the liberation of Syria was problematic. It would be difficult to liberate Syria without encouraging demands from the territories under British control for the same outcome.⁸⁵ Despite this concern both Churchill and Foreign Secretary Eden recognised that eventually they would have to overthrow the Vichy Dentz regime in Syria.

With Rommel's advance into Egypt and having just suppressed Rashid Ali's revolt in Iraq, by 1941 the British were ready to act to prevent German influence in Syria. This episode of British interactions with Syria and the Levant has been characterised by many in the light of great power competition between Great Britain and the French, a sideshow to the wider war.⁸⁶ In

⁸⁵ H M Sachar, *Europe Leaves the Middle East*, (London, 1972) p195

⁸⁶ M Zamir, "De Gaulle and the Question of Syria and Lebanon during the Second World War: Part I" *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol 43:No 5, (2007) p675

advance of their incursion into Syria the British had been in talks with de Gaulle and his Free French army to launch a joint action hoping that this would spur an insurrection of French troops leading to a quick victory, a view that had been encouraged by the Free French. Just before the invasion the opposite was found to be true - that in fact Vichy forces were loyal to Petain, worse, they were larger than the British and Free French armies, occupied the better terrain and would fight to the last.

Differences between the British and Free French over future political arrangements emerged even before the invasion began. The French stance was that the matter was a French one only while the British argued they needed a political justification for their military action. When it became clear that the Vichy troops would not join the Free French army in the fight, the British insisted a declaration must be made to the Arabs. The British statement promised independence to the Syrian and Lebanese peoples, with the British aiming to secure the support of the Arab people in those countries for their action against the Vichy Dentz regime but also hoping to offset the impact of their unpopular Palestine policy.⁸⁷ The Free French made a similar proclamation but qualified it, stating a future treaty relationship between France and the Levant countries would be negotiated.

⁸⁷ A Hourani, *A history of the Arab Peoples* (London, 1991) p356

At odds before they began military action, with continued accusations on the part of de Gaulle that the British were trying to usurp their position in the Levant despite Churchill's continued assurances Britain had no such designs, the situation between the two erstwhile allies continued to deteriorate following the victory over Vichy forces in Syria. The Armistice agreement negotiated by Vichy commander General Dentz and British commander, General Maitland Wilson (assisted by General Cartoux of the Free French army) escalated tensions further. Wilson primarily wanted military victory secured, to get the Vichy French forces out and secure the area under his command. The resultant agreement sent the Vichy troops back to France and transferred authority over Syria and Lebanon to the British, with no mention of the Free French, and was met with condemnation from de Gaulle who denounced the armistice from Cairo on radio, his condemnations eventually wringing concessions on the armistice agreement⁸⁸.

With the allied forces occupying Syria the arrangement was for the French to have administrative authority. Yet British troop presence meant it had strategic control leading to a strong clash of interests. Britain continued to insist on independence for the Arab population, Churchill particularly insisting "Our policy is to give the Syrian Arabs independence... the Arabs bulk far more largely in

⁸⁸ PMH Bell, *France and Britain 1940-1994: The Long Separation* (Abingdon, 1997) p39

our minds then the Free French”⁸⁹. Keeping the Arab population onside was the priority, both in the immediate sense of its importance to the war effort and longer term, there remained the ongoing problem of Palestine meaning buying some goodwill from the Arabs was important, much more so than the French at that time. The British once again seemed to be following contradictory policies whereby the British demanded the French to give Syria independence, and the Syrians give the French a preferred status, whilst at the same time maintaining a hold over British territories in the Middle East⁹⁰.

De Gaulle’s decision to reinstate the French mandate administration despite the earlier promise brought him into conflict not only with the people of Syria and Lebanon but the British⁹¹, on whom the French administration depended to maintain control. British policy was that the French should conclude a treaty similar to its 1930 Anglo-Iraq treaty, giving Syria independence but the French special terms with Syria.⁹² With rising tension between the two sides, the British government sent General Sir Edward Spears, a personal friend of Winston Churchill known also for his friendship toward the French and his experience working with them, to bring about accord and oversee British policy in the area.

⁸⁹ Ibid p39

⁹⁰ AB Gaunson, *The Anglo-French Clash in Lebanon and Syria, 1940 – 45*, (New York, 1987) p78

⁹¹ Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, p229

⁹² Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East 1914 – 1958* p275

The task proved impossible. The two objectives were incompatible and, if anything, Spears managed to increase tensions, certainly becoming seen by many of the French as the villain of the piece who cost them their mandated territories⁹³. He played a central role in demanding France allow free elections in Syria and Lebanon leading to overwhelming nationalist victories in both countries. In November 1943 he encouraged the Lebanese government to announce the cancellation of provisions in its constitution requiring subordination to the French mandate. When the French authorities reacted by suspending constitutional life there, Spears led the British intervention forcing the French to acquiesce. Furthermore, he encouraged both countries not to sign friendship and defence agreements with France. More a problem than the solution Churchill insisting on Spears' removal in 1944. The central issue, independence, remained, reaching crisis point in 1945 when France moved more troops to Syria and launched a bombardment on Damascus to quell Syrian unrest. This led to a major British military intervention to stop the fighting, and impose a solution. The ensuing negotiations led to a simultaneous withdrawal of both British and French forces, and independence for Syria and the Levant.

⁹³ Zamir, "De Gaulle and the Question of Syria and Lebanon during the Second World War" p676

While British policy was a contributing factor in Syria achieving its independence, again its aims were much broader. Britain had entered the Levant in a continuing war against the Axis powers. On the eve of the invasion, British opinion was that the Free French added little to the campaign to take the Levant. On the other hand, once again, they did need the Arabs. Thus maintaining the promise to the Syrian and Lebanese people was more important to the war effort than keeping on side with the French; thus the need for a promise of independence. Yet the vigorous role Spears played as “guarantor for Allied promises to the local populations”⁹⁴ was destructive to the British position elsewhere, as British promotion of democratic elections in Syria and Lebanon and independence from France but not in the areas under British mandate control was questioned by local forces.⁹⁵

The French distrust of British motives can be seen to have some basis in truth. There were those in the British establishment who, again, recognised the importance of the Levant for British interests; with the Syrian frontier only twenty miles from the principle source of oil for British forces in the Mediterranean, Haifa⁹⁶, this was something that had to be secured. The contradictory British policy in the areas under British control and those under

⁹⁴ Sachar, *Europe Leaves the Middle East*, p289

⁹⁵ Zisser, “Britain and the Levant 1918 -46 A Missed Opportunity?”, p143

⁹⁶ W R Louis, *British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-51*, (Oxford, 1984) p147

French also struck the French (not to mention the inhabitants of those areas) as completely hypocritical.

On the other side, the British, while holding de Gaulle in high regard over his unwillingness to accept the surrender of Vichy France, found him difficult, with Churchill and de Gaulle having a particularly contentious relationship, leading to a number of attempts to collaborate in some way with elements of Vichy France until this route was closed to them. The Americans joining the war further complicated the relationship, the Americans were the lynchpin of Churchill's strategy for the wider war but Roosevelt disliked de Gaulle specifically, and distrusted the French generally. Churchill did not share this view, seeing a strong France as essential to take part in the occupation of Germany and as part of the counterweight to the Soviet Union (SU)⁹⁷. Still the sometimes vacillating behaviour of the British to de Gaulle in the Levant can be seen in this wider context.

While the British did wish to fulfil the promises on the eve of the Syrian campaign, the overriding concern was to show support to Arab nationalism, hoping that this would boost British influence in the region. The failure of the decision makers was that they did not recognise the argument that it would

⁹⁷ Ibid, p59

actually do the opposite. That the policy they pursued reduced the influence of France, a great power rival, in the Middle East was seen to be in British interests, assisting in their efforts at forming closer political ties between the Arab states (the Arab League) through which they planned to secure British interests. Thus the French influence would be removed, a potential barrier to British interests, and be replaced with a friendlier power with which the British could work.

Adding to British difficulties was the impact of the war on its mandate responsibilities in Palestine. Attempts to resolve tensions between Jewish and Arab populations in Palestine had been taxing British capabilities before the war, these now became insurmountable. Before the war the British were reassessing their Palestine policy, recognising the impact it was having on their relationship with other Arab states and consequently on its oil and security interests in the region. This is evident in White Paper of 1939 which stated "unequivocally" that the British Government opposed a Jewish state in Palestine, would limit Jewish immigration to 15,000 a year for five years after which no immigration was to be allowed unless the Arab community agreed it, imposed restrictions to land transfers and promised independence to Palestine in ten years.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, p253

The fate of the Jews at the hands of Hitler's regime dashed any hopes the British had to impose the terms of the White Paper, internationalising the issue as never before. Britain's decline in power made maintaining its colonies, mandates and protectorates increasingly beyond its capability; the growth of the US as a world power combined with a powerful American Jewish lobby and general international sympathy for the survivors of the holocaust and a large scale refugee problem in Europe made limiting Jewish immigration and restrictions on land transfers impossible.⁹⁹

By the end of the war any hope of pursuing an independent foreign policy in Palestine concluding in a negotiated settlement acceptable to both sides was beyond British capabilities. Meanwhile simply maintaining peace between the two sides was too costly, both to British lives and resources, to continue. Moreover, the continuing crisis was undermining British influence in the region, causing significant damage to Anglo-Arab relations and critically affecting British ability to protect its interests there. Consequently, the British government referred the matter to the UN for arbitration, then took the unilateral decision to withdraw from Palestine. The Jews immediately declared the independence of

⁹⁹ Schultz, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p10

the State of Israel leading to the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. The catastrophic loss of this war suffered by the Arab states was laid at the feet of the British.

Despite Britain on two occasions championing the cause of Arab nationalism during the two wars and playing a significant role in Syrian and Lebanese independence, the taint of betrayal over conflicting agreements, particularly the Balfour Declaration, has had lasting consequences in the region for British foreign policy. Further, even today British decision makers consider they have a moral obligation to play some role in the peace process, problematic given this history of animosity and the lack of capacity to actually make any real difference.

During the war British policies aimed to protect and preserve its influence in the region and to deny the territory to its enemies; following it Ernst Bevin expressed a clear determination that these interests would be maintained. In a statement on Middle East policy, he asserted that a loss of economic and financial standing in the region would result in a fall in the British standard of living.¹⁰⁰ The same month a Labour leaflet also clearly acknowledged that the British had emerged from the war seriously weakened, that it needed to reduce

¹⁰⁰ "Mr Bevin's Firm Statement of Middle East Policy: Brit Interests will be Maintained", *The Manchester Guardian* (17 May 1947)

its foreign commitments and adjust its policy to match its resources.¹⁰¹ Britain no longer had the capacity (if it ever had) to exert its influence through power and force alone, policy makers continued to look to exerting influence through friendly relations with Arab leaders in the regions, in order to mobilise support against its enemies in the region and prevent a power vacuum there that could be filled by great powers other than Britain – such as the SU. That this approach would be welcomed by Arab nationalist leaders, and that they would recognise their interests to be best served by this relationship with Great Britain, was taken for granted by those policy makers backing this approach.

The Arab League & Baghdad Pact

In 1941 British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden stated, “many Arab thinkers desire for the Arab peoples a greater degree of unity than they now enjoy. In reaching out towards this unity, they hope for support...His Majesty’s Government for their part will give their full support to any scheme that commands greatest approval”.¹⁰² The strength of this sentiment increased throughout the war as Britain recognised the importance of the Arab collective will. The first practical expression of this collective will was the Arab League which found British support, not totally altruistic, as Britain wanted to ensure

¹⁰¹ "Labour defence of Foreign Policy" *The Manchester Guardian*, (22 May 1947)

¹⁰² A Eden, Mansion House Speech May 29, 1941 cited in Sachar, *Europe Leaves the Middle East*

the outcomes of this movement for Arab unity were compatible with British interests.¹⁰³

The thinking behind the support for Arab unity had multiple layers. The immediate aim at the time was to garner support of the Arabs in Syria and Lebanon for the imminent invasion, and to offset accusations that Britain was anti-Arab due to its Palestinian policy. Long term, it was thought that encouraging Arab cooperation would result in regional stability and economic development by cutting through inter-Arab rivalries. Such a federation of Arab states would be stronger, so less inclined to view British policy in the region with suspicion. Unfortunately, such thinking, writes Albert Hourani, was based on one major assumption: that the Arab governments would regard their major interests as identical to British interests.

The first impetus for an Arab unity scheme came from Iraqi statesman Nuri al-Said who envisaged a scheme which, initially, would centre on the Fertile Crescent, and was endorsed by Emir Abdullah of Transjordan. This fit into Abdullah's ambitions of a Greater Syria, the lands promised to the Arabs by McMahon, under his leadership. He was less convinced of the second part of the plan which involved this Greater Syria joining Nuri's Iraq in an Arab

¹⁰³ P Seale, *The Struggle for Syria*, (London, 1965) p22

League.¹⁰⁴ The British maintained their position that they did not support the Greater Syria project.¹⁰⁵ Syrian nationalists were unmoved by the scheme, committed to remain a republic not to come under Hashemite rule.¹⁰⁶ A major factor in Syrian reluctance in joining this union was that these two countries still retained treaties seen to bind them to Britain, Syria had no desire to “become entangled with countries still firmly to “imperialist” Britain”¹⁰⁷. Nuri’s scheme faltered quickly coming up against two main obstacles; the first being the exclusion of Egypt from Nuri’s vision; the second being the distrust of any scheme being led by a member of the Hashemite dynasty, held in disregard for its close relations with Britain, worse in fact, now seen as little more than a British proxy. In the end, Egypt took forward the idea of Arab unity, though it was a different vision to that of the British government.

Egypt taking the lead was not viewed negatively by the British who assumed they could easily direct the policy of the Wafd government in Egypt. British influence had been bolstered there by the presence of its military, built up during the war, and by its embassy’s concerted involvement in Egyptian domestic affairs, resulting in British confidence that they could influence inter-

¹⁰⁴ Ibid p12

¹⁰⁵ Ibid p53

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p15

¹⁰⁷ Huizinga, JH “The Middle East V – the Arabs and the West”, *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959) March 30 1951

Arab negotiations.¹⁰⁸ With British encouragement, Egyptian Prime Minister Nahas Pasha and Nuri el-Said entered negotiations to create a regional Arab organisation that would sit somewhere between the general Arab union advocated by Egypt, and the Fertile Crescent-led organisation advocated by Iraq, with their discussion mediated by diplomat Abdul Rahman Azzam. Azzam, however, proved to have real Pan-Arab vision, convincing King Farouk of Egypt both of his views and the need to include Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia in negotiations to strengthen the potential union.

Once again British policy makers underestimated the affect existing policy would have on the negotiations. Whilst the British presence in Syria kept the French threat at bay, League negotiations concluded with a moderate organisation that the British could be pleased with. Yet British attempts to exert influence on discussions served to weaken the Wafd government in Egypt and their preferred leader Nahas, providing King Farouk opportunity to dismiss his British imposed government¹⁰⁹ shortly after the League's creation while sponsoring Azzam as first Secretary-General of the League. Under Azzam's lead, and with the French threat to Syria over, the organisation began to take a new direction.¹¹⁰ Far from being a vehicle through which Britain could maintain

¹⁰⁸ M Thornhill, "Britain and the politics of the Arab League, 1943 – 50" in M Cohen, M Kolinshy (eds), *Demise of the British Empire in the Middle East*, (London, 1998) p46

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p48

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p50

its influence in the area, the Arab League was quickly turned into an anti-imperial, pro-Egypt tool.¹¹¹

Furthermore, whilst the Palestinian question was initially set low on the League's agenda due to British pressure, this proved only to be a short term gain as the situation worsened there heightened its priority.¹¹² Syria was particularly concerned and, alongside the delegations from Lebanon and Transjordan, used the Arab League to focus on the issue of Palestine,¹¹³ its interests supported by the League's opposition to the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. Further, the pact underwrote the sovereignty of all the Arab member states, a principle to which Syria was committed, Syrian Prime Minister Sa'dullah al-Jabiri making the statement "We reject the Great Syria scheme in principle and adhere to the Pact"¹¹⁴, in response to Abdullah's efforts to push his plan forward.

Ultimately the inability of the Arab League to cooperate effectively in coming to the aid of the Palestinians following Israel's announcement of independence in 1948, coupled with the disastrous performance of the Arab armies in the

¹¹¹ Louis, *British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-51*, p134

¹¹² Thornhill, "Britain and the politics of the Arab League, 1943 – 50", p50

¹¹³ M Rey, "'Fighting colonialism' vs 'non-alignment'" in Miskovic & Fisher-Tine, *The Nonaligned movement and the Cold War* (Abingdon, 2014) p167

¹¹⁴ C E Dawn, "King Abdullah's project of greater Syria: An historical appreciation" in Beshara, Adel (ed) *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood* (Abingdon, 2011) p304

subsequent war, marked its complete failure from Britain's perspective. The outcomes of the League were the complete opposite of those the British had set out to achieve. Azzam used his leadership of the League to undermine the British position in the region and, perhaps worse, it had failed as a vehicle for maintaining regional security and stability. The British had hoped that the creation of some kind of Arab federation would lessen inter-Arab rivalries and conflict but the emphasis on the sovereignty of each individual member state and their rights to freedom of action with regard to foreign policy hinted, at least, that this vision would not be achieved. Certainly they played a hand in the Arabs failing so abysmally in the Arab-Israeli war.

The complete failure of the League in overcoming inter-Arab rivalries when faced with a common enemy and need for cooperation was demonstrated vividly in the failure of the Arab states to coordinate an Arab League policy against Israel. Most significant, clauses enshrining the rights of the Arab people in Palestine, and the need to establish an Arab state in Palestine made it an impossible vehicle for furthering British interest. For Britain, the policy of supporting Egyptian leadership had failed, leaving the British with less influence in the region at a time they were beginning to fear the encroachment of another great power, the SU, leaving them looking to the US to help protect British interests in the Middle East.

For Syria the resounding defeat of the Arab states in the 1948 Arab – Israeli war and associated failure of the Arab League also had far reaching consequences. The League was now seen as an unsuitable vehicle to lead the Arab cause; its failure had also engendered some disillusionment in Egypt. The failure in the 1948 war had highlighted the weakness of the Syrian military leading to Syria's first military coup, the short premiership of Za'im, and briefly opened up, once again, the possibility of union with Iraq though ultimately Syria was convinced to come back into the Arab League fold. ¹¹⁵

Failure to secure a medium for political influence through the Arab League, whilst increasingly concerned over Soviet penetration into the region, left Britain in search of a different defence pact with partners in the Middle East. As had been the case with the Arab League, Britain needed an Arab state to take the lead in the creation of an entity which would stand against the Soviet threat. The overthrow of Farouk in Egypt together with ongoing negotiations for British withdrawal from the Suez zone left British policy retreating from the position that its defence strategy could remain focussed there.

Additionally, there was recognition by many in the British establishment that the Suez base was not as strategically important for the protection of current

¹¹⁵ P Seale, *The Struggle for Syria*, p46

interests. These might be better secured by an “understanding between Turkey, Syria and Iraq”¹¹⁶ both in terms of protecting British oil interests and “halting Russian aggression across Persia.”¹¹⁷ By early 1954 many had come to the conclusion that British occupation of the Suez base was fast proving to be “more a military and political liability”¹¹⁸ than a useful protector of British interests, though the Government was still not ready for the complete abandonment of Egypt in their plans for the region.

The conclusion of the 1954 Anglo-Egyptian treaty left the British free to regain the initiative in the region finding a willing partner in Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri el-Said, who believed that the western powers were crucial to Middle East security.¹¹⁹ This partnership towards the creation of a regional defence pact brought Syria back to the attention of British policy makers. Just how important Syria would be to these plans was considered in the *Manchester Guardian* in 1953 which stated that Syria could wreck any extension of the planned Eastern Mediterranean defence plan beyond Turkey just by refusing to join as it held an important line of coast and airfields that could be developed, plus control of oil pipelines from Iraq and the Persian Gulf through Banias. At

¹¹⁶ “The Suez Base”, *The Manchester Guardian*, (28 April 1953)

¹¹⁷ M P Price, MP, “Middle East Defence: Suez Canal or Turkey” *The Manchester Guardian*, (04 February 1952)

¹¹⁸ N Ashton, “The Hijacking of a Pact: The Formation of the Baghdad Pact and Anglo-American Tensions in the Middle East, 1955-1958” *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2, (Apr 1993) p127

¹¹⁹ Seale, *The Struggle for Syria*, p191

the same time, it notes that no Syrian government could survive cooperation with Britain due to its unpopularity as the power held responsible for the creation of Israel,¹²⁰ a fact that policy makers would struggle with for years to come.

The strategic importance of Syria was acknowledged by Nuri, as evidenced by the time he spent trying to convince Syria to join the pact. Nuri knew Syrian participation would bring in Lebanon and Jordan while, importantly, side-lining Egypt. The union of Syria and Iraq under the Hashemite fertile Crescent scheme, had been something Iraq, and Nuri, had been pursuing for some time countering Egyptian influence, but up to this point, the British had remained at best neutral if not dismissive of this scheme since their interest had been in engaging with Egypt. The rise of Nasser and his pro-Arab policies meant British interests now depended on a strong Iraq and bringing Syria into Iraq's sphere of influence (more to the point away from Egypt's sphere of influence). This put Syria at the centre of the struggle for influence in the Middle East.

On 24th February 1955 Nuri signed a pact of mutual cooperation with Turkey, the Baghdad Pact. Britain viewed the pact as a godsend; it filled what Britain saw as a military void in the Middle East, required no British effort to persuade

¹²⁰ M P Price, MP, "Syrian Opposition to Zionism Unchanging", *The Manchester Guardian* (31 October 1953)

Arab states to join a Western orientated regional pact, and maintained British use of Iraqi bases¹²¹. Eden soon viewed the Pact as “key to the security of the entire Middle East”, committing to it fully¹²². The Pact fulfilled two purposes, one, it guarded against the Soviet threat and two, it bolstered the political power of Iraq, thus, Britain in the Arab world.¹²³ The decision to accede to the Pact on April 4th, 1955, was welcomed by the British Parliament.¹²⁴

Yet in signing the Pact, British decision makers failed to take account of several warning signs, giving far more weight to the military argument emphasising the necessity of continued access to Iraqi facilities.¹²⁵ For Nuri the regional defence pact was an instrument to isolate Egypt while promoting Iraq as the real leader of Arab nationalism. Nuri’s machinations were a direct challenge to Egyptian supremacy, as such Egypt’s hostility to the pact was assured. British involvement allowed Egyptian premier, Nasser, to label the pact as colonial interference, strengthening his calls for Jordan to confine her affairs and interests to the Arab bloc and ultimately undermined, again, British plans.¹²⁶ The struggle for Syria, a key state for those vying for regional hegemony, and so to external powers attempting to exert influence through their allies in the

¹²¹ FS Northedge, *Descent from Power: British foreign policy* (London, 1974) p124

¹²² D Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis*, (Oxford, 1998) p24

¹²³ Seale, *The Struggle for Syria*, p186

¹²⁴ Northedge, *Descent from Power: British foreign policy*, p125

¹²⁵ Seale, *The Struggle for Syria*, p229

¹²⁶ “Wooing Jordan away from the West” *The Manchester Guardian* (12 January 1956)

region, was central to the success, or failure, of the British backed Baghdad Pact.

The Baghdad Pact was an embodiment of Nuri's anti-Russian, pro-Western stance, in direct opposition to Nasser who was committed to Arab non-alignment, a policy which required all Arab states to be on board. The perception was that the balance would be tipped for one side and against the other by Syria's decision to join or stay out of the pact. This was not the first time Syria had fallen prey to its neighbours' manoeuvrings for influence. Syria had suffered previously the scheming of the Hashemite's on one side trying to assert their influence over Syria, and Egypt and Saudi Arabia and the other trying to thwart Hashemite ambition. The fall of the Shishakli regime in Syria, which had fought strongly to maintain Syrian independence, came at a moment when regional struggles were being fought in the overarching context of the Cold War struggle.

A series of weak governments replaced the Shishakli dictatorship. These were divided internally, not least by struggles between pro-Nasserite, leftist forces and pro-Western forces, making Syria particularly susceptible to external meddling.¹²⁷ There was danger for these weak governments in being too

¹²⁷ A Rathmell, *Secret War in the Middle East*, (London, 2014) p91

closely associated with even the suggestion of an external alliance. This was almost immediately demonstrated as the government under Premier Faris al-Khuri collapsed the day after a Cairo conference to which he and other Arab leaders had been summoned. The failure of al-Khuri to condemn Iraq for its intention to form a pact with Turkey, nor to rule out making any external alliances was enough to see the fall of his administration in Damascus. A politician known to lean to a pro-Western stance, his refusal to condemn Nuri, whose proposal to ally with Turkey was now being touted as being akin to an alliance with Israel and a betrayal of the Arab people, was unacceptable. Worse it went against the stated policy of the Chamber, that of "hostility to foreign pacts".¹²⁸ To be pro-Western was tantamount to being against Arab interests.

Patrick Seale describes this moment as a turning point where the "neutralist 'left' seized the initiative and the pro-Iraqi 'right' faced defeat; when two links were made, one, externally between the Ba'ath and Egypt, and two, internally between the Ba'ath and the Syrian Communists – a first concrete step bringing Syria into the orbit of Egyptian and Soviet influence and rejecting western overtures of alliance."¹²⁹ These elements would seek to uphold Arab interests by countering pro-western influence in Syria, looking for support in countries considered fair on the issue of Israel and support the Arab cause. This, in

¹²⁸ Seale, *The Struggle for Syria*, p217-218

¹²⁹ Ibid, p218

practice, meant a pro-Russian stance. Egypt was quick to support the new leftist Syrian government and, consequently, the new Syrian premier made a statement on 22nd February 1955 "condemning the conclusion of all foreign military pacts and wholeheartedly embracing Egypt's foreign policy themes".¹³⁰ A direct challenge to the British backed Baghdad pact.

When Britain actually entered the Pact it was clear Syria would never join, having been persuaded by Nasser's vision of Arab solidarity, swinging the pendulum of power in Arab politics back to Cairo and away from Baghdad.¹³¹ Britain, however, seemed almost blind to the dangers to stability in the region that the Baghdad Pact presented. The spectre of a Hashemite takeover of Syria such a pact raised, represented not only a grave challenge to Egypt, but also gave King Sa'ud reason to intervene eventually creating an Egyptian-Syria-Saud axis against it and British influence in the region. The Americans, who had their own northern tier defence plans for the region and still hoped to work with Egypt, were initially hostile to the Pact, further weakening any hopes for its effectiveness against the Communist threat. Israel, too, opposed British sponsorship of the Pact, unsurprising given Nuri's hopes to use it to strengthen the Iraqi bid for Arab leadership, with Iraq a country still opposed to Israel's very existence. Lastly, the French opposed any agreement that strengthened

¹³⁰ Ibid, p222

¹³¹ Ibid, p226

Iraq at the expense of Syria, arguing this outweighed any usefulness it might have as a defence against Communism.¹³²

The Soviets capitalised on Western mistakes over the Pact. Western powers had already damaged their credibility by issuing the 1950 Tripartite Declaration. This aimed to coordinate the policies of the three big powers, the United States, Britain and France, maintaining regional stability, access to resources and prevent more Arab-Israeli conflict by forestalling an arms race in the region. The initial Arab reaction was cautious, especially over the terms that seemed to imply acceptance of Israeli borders, but broadly accepted it. The Syrian Prime Minister, Nazim al-Qudsi, statement on it, however, was to prove insightful saying Syria "considers itself free to purchase arms wherever it may wish, perhaps even from Russia"¹³³.

Under the Treaty arms purchases were only to be considered if they contributed to the defence of the state in question, in practice, it meant that arms were sold only to those Arab states willing to join a Western sponsored defence scheme. The tripartite agreement was not solely to prevent an arms race in the Middle East but also an attempt to foil Soviet incursion into the area and as

¹³² "French divergence on Baghdad Pact" *The Times*, 28 January 1956

¹³³ A Meyer, *Quiet diplomacy: From Cairo to Tokyo in the Twilight of imperialism* (Lincoln, 2003) p21

such they viewed it with resentment. Yet as Arab nationalist sentiment grew, tied very much to anti-imperialist, and increasing anti-British, anti-French activity, Soviet advantage could be gained by simply shifting to a pro-Arab policy¹³⁴. Soviets exploited the situation simply by making arms available without any of the ties being demanded by the Western powers.

The killing blow to the Baghdad Pact, however, was Britain's ill-judged reaction to Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal. The decision to collude with the French and Israelis against Nasser, then capitulation to American pressure to stop operations, combined to fatally weaken British power in the Middle East. British alliances and pacts in the region were made worthless by the affair. An Arab regime associating with Britain would seriously damage its credibility and legitimacy. The British failure demonstrated how weak it had become, undermining its value as an ally while clearly highlighting the emergence of new world superpowers. Anglo-Syrian relations fell to new lows, the animosity of Syria to British action demonstrated both in the destruction of oil pipelines running through it, and the refusal for some months following to allow their repair, at great cost to the British-owned Iraq Petroleum Company.

¹³⁴ S Carol, *Understanding the Volatile and Dangerous Middle East: A Comprehensive Analysis*, (Bloomington: 2015) <https://books.google.co.uk> (Accessed 01/03/016)

While the Pact continued to exist, America even joining its military committee after the circulation of the Eisenhower Doctrine,¹³⁵ it marked another failure in British policy, projected policy aims being beyond Britain's means to achieve, in material terms and also in its inability to overcome the anti-imperialist sentiment now prevalent in the region. The Pact's failure and the defeat over Suez saw Britain's time as a major power in the Middle East end but it wasn't the final chapter in the Anglo-Syrian relationship.

The "Syrian Crisis"

When the French left Syria in 1946, they did so having made no apparent effort to meet Mandate requirements to prepare Syria for independence. Indeed, to maintain direct control of Syria they had exploited divisions, countering any serious challenge with divide and rule tactics, thus weakening the unity of a new Syrian state. The failure to build an indigenous administrative and civil service in the country left it open to the political manipulation of neighbouring states, with the regimes of 1940s and 1950s being "chronically unstable" due largely to foreign interference.¹³⁶ The decision by the British Government to back the Baghdad Pact meant that Syria became the main battleground between rival states for influence in the Middle East, and both Egypt and the SU were quick to press forward there.¹³⁷ Egypt, after securing a pro-Egyptian

¹³⁵ Ashton, "The Hijacking of a Pact", p136

¹³⁶ Pearson, "The Syrian Crisis of 1957" p45

¹³⁷ Seale, *The Struggle for Syria*, p230

Syrian government, and having signed a Czech-arms deal late 1955, cemented the relationship with a Syrian-Egyptian defence agreement putting the armed forces of the two states under single command.¹³⁸ Egyptian efforts to undermine Iraqi attempts at union with Syria were further underpinned by Saudi gold, the Saudi's determined to undermine Hashemite power in the region.

The Soviets were also quick to seize the opportunity to gain a foothold in Syrian politics, significantly making their first major intervention into Middle Eastern affairs with a public guarantee to stand by Syria a month after the Syrian – Egyptian defence agreement was concluded.¹³⁹ This was quickly followed by Soviet economic and technical aid, political visits by Syrian leaders to Moscow, high level diplomatic exchanges and, importantly, trade and arms deals with members of the Soviet bloc.

Britain viewed the expansion of Soviet influence in Syria with increasing concern. Not just over the threat posed by Soviet political influence which they had been working to curtail, but also practical concern over the potential threat to the Iraqi Petroleum Company's pipelines running through Syria on which

¹³⁸ "Warning to Israel", *Manchester Guardian*, 16 December 1955

¹³⁹ Seale, *The Struggle for Syria*, p250

Britain depended for 17% of its oil imports (France 39%, Italy 25%).¹⁴⁰ While Britain's antagonistic attitude to Nasser in Egypt was not shared by the Americans, over fears a potential Communist takeover of Syria, Britain and the US found common ground. American intervention in Syria had begun even before the British Suez debacle when, reacting to increasing Soviet aid flowing into Syria, the CIA became involved in planning a coup to oust the current regime. The plot failed, easily penetrated by Syrian intelligence after many of the Syrian officers approached by American officials immediately reported back to Syrian authorities. The CIA plot uncovered, Damascus announced its discovery publically on November 23rd. Parallel machinations by Iraq at the time, sponsored by Britain in an attempt to secure Syrian participation in the Baghdad Pact possibly contributed to the plot's failure, the Syrians involved playing one side off against the other.¹⁴¹ Following the Suez Crisis, Syria's forceful rejection of the Eisenhower doctrine heightened American fears, leading to another CIA attempt to reinstall President Adib al-Shishakli, known to support the US, in the unsuccessful "Wakeful" plot of 1957, leading to the expulsion of key US embassy officials.¹⁴²

American fears of a Communist takeover in Syria was well known by British policy makers, and corresponded with the British view of the Soviet threat.

¹⁴⁰ "Driving a hard oil bargain: Western fears for future of pipeline", *The Manchester Guardian*, 19 November 1955

¹⁴¹ C Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Basingstoke, 2004)

¹⁴² Seale, *The Struggle for Syria*, p291

British newspapers throughout the 1950s repeatedly focused on the Syrian-Soviet relationship, reporting in December 1956, that the Syrian Communist party was the best organised in the Middle East and holding key positions in the Syrian Army.¹⁴³ These concerns were reflected in the opinions of the British establishment about Soviet gains in the Middle East so, in 1957, the British quickly capitalised on American fears. Prime Minister Harold MacMillan, aware of American preoccupation with Soviet influence in Syria from his time as Foreign Secretary, was also eager to heal the breach in relations over Suez. MacMillan moved quickly to emphasize the seriousness of the situation in Syria resulting in the formation of the Anglo-American Working Group and raising the prospect of a joint operation to combat it. Operation "Straggle" was launched, its aim: to encourage Syria's pro-Western neighbours to "take armed action to intervene and overthrow the Damascus regime".¹⁴⁴

The Working Group formed in Washington allowed staff from the British Embassy to meet senior US officials from the State Department and CIA, to exchange information and make recommendations on the situation in Syria. Issuing a final report in September 1957, it emphasised the need to plan quickly for action in Syria or risk losing the enthusiasm of Syria's neighbouring states, and consolidation of control by the Communists.¹⁴⁵ The "preferred plan"

¹⁴³ "Syria & Iraq", *The Manchester Guardian*, 05 December 1956

¹⁴⁴ M Jones, "The 'Preferred Plan': The Anglo American Working Group Report on Covert Action in Syria 1957" *Intelligence and National Security*, 19:3 (2004) p406

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p405

was to stage a phony border incident as a pretext for invasion by pro-Western neighbouring states and assassinate prominent pro-Communist figures in the Syrian regime.¹⁴⁶

The plan was never enacted, none of the pro-Western Arab regimes could be brought to support it, the public backlash against the Eisenhower Doctrine made it too dangerous for them to be seen to be closely identified with American policy. The alternative plan, to use Turkish troops to invade (a plan considered by the Americans but discouraged by the British) was foiled by an Egyptian manoeuvre putting 2000 Egyptian troops on the Northern border of Syria, and Syria taking a complaint against Turkish manoeuvres on its border to the UN.¹⁴⁷ These efforts were further bolstered by the SU which issued a warning to the Turkish troops and indicated their willingness to send a matching number of Soviet forces to Turkey's border with Bulgaria.¹⁴⁸

Arguably the Syrian Crisis was a success for British foreign policy makers. There is no doubt that MacMillan used American fear of the "international Communist threat" to re-establish good relations with the US after the Suez debacle. This once again demonstrated British use of Syria as a pawn in its

¹⁴⁶ Pearson "The Syrian Crisis of 1957," p53

¹⁴⁷ Seale, *The Struggle for Syria*, p306

¹⁴⁸ Jones, "The 'Preferred Plan' p409

great power game, or at least in its attempt to maintain its great power status. Britain seized on the opportunity presented by the limitation of US intelligence gathering which had resulted from the expulsion of US embassy staff from Syria. Reports from Britain's own Middle Eastern embassies downplayed communist influence at the time, stating that Syrian Ba'ath leaders in the Army and government were firmly in control. Indeed, officials in the Syrian regime reached out to British counterparts repeatedly throughout this period to reassure them on this front. MacMillan was also well aware that the threat of *Arab nationalism* to British interests in the Middle East was far greater than that of *Communism*.¹⁴⁹ Yet the gains from pursuing this policy were noteworthy. The Working Group provided a model for the type of Anglo-American cooperation Macmillan wanted to develop and, even if longer term it proved disappointing, it helped heal the rift left by Suez.¹⁵⁰

British policy to maintain influence and protect western interests in the Middle East in the decades following the end of World War Two were, in many ways, unsuccessful. The legacy of British imperialism and its perceived betrayal of the Arabs undermined London's post-war policy which aimed to maintain British influence, particularly policy focused on working through the Hashemites.

¹⁴⁹ Pearson, "The Syrian Crisis of 1957", p51

¹⁵⁰ N Ashton, "A rear guard action: Harold MacMillan and the Making of British Foreign Policy, 1957 – 63" in Otte *The Makers of British Foreign Policy: From Pitt to Thatcher* p247

British policy aimed at maintaining great power influence and prioritising British interests in the region instead contributed to its decline.

There were some gains. Its policy objective, encouraging the US replace the British in the Middle East in order to protect Western interests from Soviet infiltration, was an overriding preoccupation. Economically, its accelerated withdrawal from the Middle East and strategic replacement by the US was a good thing for Britain. Furthermore, after Suez soured relations between Britain and the US, the "Syrian crisis" and resulting Anglo-American working group, brought the two nations significantly closer together. It even reaffirmed to the Americans, to some extent, the importance of their British ally. With the mantle for maintaining security and stability in the Middle East removed there was potential for a more normalised relationship with the region over time, one not distorted by the physical presence of British military forces on Arab territory.

However, this policy had a negative impact for Anglo-Syrian relations. Years of encouraging Syria's pro-Western neighbours, specifically Iraq to interfere in Syrian affairs, generally as a challenge to Egyptian hegemony, only pushed Syria further into the Egyptian sphere of influence (finally culminating in the 1958 political union of the two states in the United Arab Republic). So, Syria

had been pushed into closer relations with Egypt and the Soviets, precisely the opposite of what British policy had set out to achieve.

Dealings between Britain and Syria were from this point onwards a continuation of this antagonistic relationship. Britain's imperial past and the close relationship with the new "imperialist", the US, dictated the tenor of the Anglo-Syrian relationship. British policy tried to force a pro-Western stance on Syria, assuming the only other option was being pro-Soviet. Such an outlook forced Syria and other "neutral" Arab states to look elsewhere for their defensive requirements, and in the case of Syria forge a strong relationship with Moscow – strategic rather than the political – meaning even today the Syrian regime can look to Russia for support.

For Britain what was firmly established in this period was the importance of American involvement in the Middle East, again this thinking continues to dominate political elites today. The general trend of the next few decades for Britain would be withdrawal from the Middle East. Yet Britain's position as a permanent member of the UNSC, and lingering feeling of moral obligation, meant a continuing diplomatic presence in the MEPP, notably in the drafting of UNSCR 242 following the 1967 June War. In this, however, once again British policy makers failed to address Syrian interests. The wording of the UNSCR was suitably ambiguous but it was clear that it did not call outright for Israel's

withdrawal from *all* occupied territories. That this was the position of the British government clarified further in 1969, when the British Foreign Secretary affirmed that the omission of the word "all" in the resolution was deliberate.¹⁵¹ For Syria, the implication was that they may have to negotiate with Israel over borders which was unacceptable. As was the fact that the resolution failed to protect Palestinian rights,¹⁵² actually failing to mention the Palestinians other than obliquely referring to a settlement of the refugee problem. Consequently, they rejected it, only adopting the resolution after the 1973 Yom Kippur War alongside UNSCR 338.

Conclusion

Two world wars in the early 20th century had considerable impact on British foreign policy in the Middle East and consequently on British Syrian policy. Primarily policy was created in an effort to mobilise Arab resources in order to win wars that threatened British interests and security across the world. Necessarily this meant protecting interests in the Middle East that Britain alone did not have the capacity to defend. Syria, given its position in the Middle East, was central to this battle. With French forces unable to defend its interests there, the British effort became central to protecting this county in order to secure the region. Promises made to support Arab nationalism and

¹⁵¹ M Stewart Foreign Affairs, HC Deb 09 December 1969
<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1969/dec/09/foreign-affairs>

¹⁵² Seale, *The Struggle for Syria* p144

independence therefore were made primarily in an effort to mobilise the Arabs as a resource, though that is not to say there were not some in the establishment who also championed their cause.

During both wars, policy making was again led by the need to mobilise as many resources as possible, and the real prospect of defeat and loss of territory should this not happen. Decision making was further complicated by the different parties involved in negotiating policies and their differing agendas. These elements in the First World War led to differing promises being made to the Arab population of the region, the European Jews and those great powers allied to Britain. Those closest to the Arab leaders on the ground frequently held different views on the best policy path than those in London, so action often reflected their desire to support the Arab leaders, thus to allow Faisal to enter Damascus with his force first during the first world war, and later Spears' encouragement of free elections for Lebanon and Syria. A central issue in all this was decision makers were more concerned in protecting primary interests in the Middle East, and so Syria was approached only in so far as it was important to protect these issues, and when resources were stretched, such as at the end of the First World War, these primary interests were prioritised.

British concerns for the region were broader than simply protecting the territory, they were also concerned to avoid the creation of a power vacuum in

the region which could be exploited by, firstly, great power rivals and, latterly, the SU. In both periods immediately after each war there were differences in opinion on how this could be achieved. After World War One some supported maintaining British influence over Syria, and felt handing control back to the French could potentially threaten primary British interests, some felt that there was a moral obligation to fulfil the promise made of a fully independent Arab state. Ultimately, decision makers were unwilling or unable to extend the resource this would require. Similarly, after World War Two, British representatives on the ground favoured support for Arab nationalism and while on this occasion they were supported by London, Britain was unable to capitalise on this as policy toward Syria was eclipsed by the failures in Palestine. The result was a series of conflicting promises and short term policies weakening the foundations for future British policy in the region.

Emerging from two world wars British power had been seriously stretched, and its decline as a great power was to be sharp. Yet for the British elite a mind-set persisted that saw the Arab states welcoming British guidance and influence, having a set of interests in common with Britain, despite a legacy of betrayal. Furthermore, the British assumed their shared interest with the US in holding back Communism intrusion would result in a similar outlook on how to achieve this. As a result of British regional policies based on these faulty foundations,

Anglo-Syrian relations foundered pushing Syria in completely the opposite direction.

A number of factors were established during this period which set the characteristics of Anglo-Syrian relations today. Syria is in a strategically important geo-political position. In this period this meant that it was drawn into British great power manoeuvring, used as little more than a pawn to facilitate Britain's pursuit of its interests. Confusion in British policy, the result of simultaneous policies being pursued by different departments with different priorities further exacerbated tensions. This legacy has been used as a propaganda tool to legitimise the Syrian regime as protector of Arab nationalism, and to keep alive the idea of "Greater Syria", to some extent explaining its enduring appeal. This saw Bashar al-Asad, in 2002, giving speech in Paris stating he said Syria was prepared to "forget the past," while no such sentiment was expressed for Britain, on a similar visit to London that year.¹⁵³. The British memory, remains more focussed on its support for Syrian independence, a memory which continues to dominate for those who still hold that Britain has something unique to offer in its relationship with the Middle East. The failure to accept the conflict in these two points of view to some extent continues to impact British policy making today.

¹⁵³ Zisser, "Britain and the Levant 1918 -46 A Missed Opportunity?" p146

Chapter 2

British Foreign Policy Toward Syria in the Thatcher Era

Hafez al-Asad faced a number of crises in the 1980s. Internally he had faced two significant challenges to his regime, the Muslim Brotherhood insurgency, then a challenge to his leadership by his uncle Rifaat as he was recovering from ill health. Externally, there was humiliation in Lebanon as he was outmanoeuvred by the Israelis, being left to watch as Israel besieged West Beirut, bringing the plight of Arafat and the PLO into the international spotlight.¹⁵⁴ Disappointed with the early Soviet reaction, despite the Treaty of Friendship that they had signed with Syria, they remained initially passive distracted by threats closer to home and wanting to avoid a superpower conflict.¹⁵⁵ Worse the Soviet weapons used to counter the Israeli offensive in Lebanon had proved ineffectual. Though a deal was struck for resupply for more modern equipment, the cost was increasing Soviet influence on Syrian policy endangering Asad's capacity to pursue an independent foreign policy in his struggle against Israel.¹⁵⁶ Meanwhile Syria's other major ally, Iran and their Lebanese client, Hizbullah, had begun to pursue their own interests in Lebanon at the expense of Syrian influence there.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ P Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East*, (London, 1992) p386

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p395

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p399

¹⁵⁷ C Dickey, "Assad and His Allies: Irreconcilable Differences?" *Foreign Affairs*. (Fall 1987) <http://www.foreignaffairs.com> (Accessed 06/05/2012)

Having mostly dealt with these challenges by the mid-80s there were several signs in 1986 indicating Asad's grip was again weakening. Washington's campaign against state sponsored terrorism, which escalated in April with decision to bomb Libya in reaction to its alleged involvement in terrorist activity, was of particular concern, not least as the group thought to be responsible was Abu Nidal which had headquarters in Damascus. Evidence thought to link the Syrian regime to similar acts of terror¹⁵⁸ led to the country being listed as a "rogue state" by the US. The ailing Syrian economy was already in crisis having been hit by falling oil prices, and was hit further by an EEC decision to suspend aid to the country after suspected Syrian involvement in the attempted bombing of an El Al aircraft.

Internationally, Hafez was increasingly isolated from the West while, towards the end of the decade, his primary ally the SU was weakening, less able to supply arms and resources. As a result, his ultimate aim of achieving strategic parity with the State of Israel, believed necessary to bargain effectively for recovery of the Golan from Israeli occupation, looked to have failed. As the Soviet economy collapsed, the Russians started to call in debts placing further

¹⁵⁸ Ibid

strain on the Syrian economy. Assad had to re-evaluate his external policies, with the final collapse of the SU leaving Syria internationally isolated.

That decade the Thatcher government in Britain also experienced problems, at least in regard to the Middle East. Despite significant interests in the region and a stated commitment to furthering the MEPP, Britain concluded the 1980s having cut diplomatic ties with no less than three Middle Eastern states, Iran, Libya and Syria; Thatcher faced accusations of pursuing a much too pro-American policy in the region and also of being seen as being part of the pro-Israeli camp; finally, and partly as a result of these failings, there were a number of British hostages being held in the Lebanon with little resolution in sight.

Thatcher was one of the first Prime Ministers to enter office with very little foreign policy experience. Most Prime Ministers of the past century had previously held the post of foreign secretary, one of the most senior offices of state, it could almost be seen as a prerequisite to becoming British Premier. Thatcher, elected at the height of domestic economic troubles, with British international prestige at perhaps its lowest point after decades of decline in its world role having withdrawn from its colonial assets, campaigned on a domestic agenda. She seemingly had little interest in foreign affairs, content on just

letting her Foreign Secretary “get on with it”. This state of affairs would not last long.

The Falklands War demonstrated the power of successful foreign policy in increasing the popularity of the government in power. The lesson was that prestige, the appearance of power, was a kind of power on its own. Victory gave Britain a boost externally and internally, contributing to Thatcher’s 1983 election triumph.¹⁵⁹ Though a clear military victory (probably not possible without the logistical support provided by the US¹⁶⁰) the episode demonstrates the difficulty in assessing the success of foreign policy itself. It went against the overarching objective of British foreign policy towards its old colonies – one of decolonisation. Furthermore, it was a failure of longstanding policy that favoured by successive governments since the 1960s and by the FCO, that of a negotiated settlement.¹⁶¹ The Falklands then became a non-negotiable issue for British policy makers, despite the continued harm to British relations with other countries in South America.

The favourable impression Thatcher’s handling of this situation left on the Americans saw the beginning of a close relationship that for some defined

¹⁵⁹ Hollis, *Britain and the Middle East in the 9/11 era*, p22

¹⁶⁰ D Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the 20th Century (2nd Ed)*, (Harlow, 2000) p245

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, p244

British foreign policy during the era, especially with regard to Middle East policy. Whilst British emphasis on Anglo-America relations was long established, in the Thatcher era some perceived it as being too close and the costs too high, particularly to relations with Arab states in the Middle East. It also damaged British relations with Europe, already strained by Thatcher's antagonistic style of statesmanship when negotiating in Europe.

Another harmful consequence of the Falklands war was that it solidified Thatcher's pre-existing instinctive mistrust of the Whitehall officials at the FCO, providing her an opportunity to "move against" it and constitute her own foreign policy unit at No 10.¹⁶² Lord Carrington's resignation (the first of two Foreign Secretaries to resign under Thatcher) came as the Foreign Secretary was blamed by Thatcher for the failures which resulted in the conflict¹⁶³, and strengthened her control on foreign policy. Thatcher would now rely instead on her friends Cecil Parkinson and Lord Hugh Thomas for foreign policy advice.¹⁶⁴ This, combined with Thatcher's tendency to see things as black and white with finite solutions, and her distrust of diplomacy - Sir Nicholas Henderson states

¹⁶² N Lochery "Present and Post-Blair British Middle East Policy", The Annual Madame Madeleine Feher European Scholar Lecture No9, 01 March 2007, p8

¹⁶³ Despite the FCO warning for years that Argentina might take the Falklands and warning the MoD of the likely consequence of withdrawing HMS Endurance from the area. Some suggest that the MoD felt a "nice little war" could just be the thing to prevent the proposed cuts to the armed forces -Coles, *Making Foreign Policy* p52

¹⁶⁴ M Clarke, "The Policy Making Process" p74

she was someone who did not believe in “useful negotiation,”¹⁶⁵ - was to have a profound impact on her foreign policy.

There were several points during this period in which both British and Syrian interests were engaged. Britain was key in drafting the European Community’s Venice Declaration in 1980, and continued during the rest of the decade to express its commitment to the peace process. As settlement of the Palestinian issue was a central concern for the Asad regime, any intervention by Britain was likely to impact on the Anglo-Syrian relationship. Commitment to the special relationship saw Britain embroiled with American policy both in Lebanon after the Israeli invasion in 1982, and in Libya over state sponsored terrorism in 1986. Syria regarded Lebanon as part of its sphere of influence thus British policy clashed with direct Syrian interest. Furthermore, increasing concern in the British government over international terrorism brought disagreement with the Asad regime over its alleged role in sponsoring terror, but also over the Syrian decision to “house” terrorist groups, groups which Syria viewed as resistance fighters and integral to Syrian leverage in negotiating a Middle East peace settlement.

The Middle East Peace Process

¹⁶⁵ Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p242

In her book *Britain and the Middle East in the 9/11 era* Rosemary Hollis sums up how the FCO in the 1980s defined British Middle East interests. Roughly these can be summed up as maintenance of its access to resources and markets, preserving stability in the region, countering any Soviet threat, and maintaining its alliances, particularly the US and Europe.¹⁶⁶

It might be thought from this that there was little implication for Anglo-Syrian relations. Central to achieving these goals, particularly preserving its economic interests and promoting stability, however, was advancement of the MEPP. Britain would be a key player in the scripting of the Venice Declaration, 1980 a significant step in which the EC clearly set out its vision of the process towards settlement in the Middle East, and made various attempts to advance the process throughout the 1980s including showing support for the Fahd Plan (1981), and even inviting delegations to London in the mid-80s to attempt to move the process forward. British policy, however, was a challenge to Syrian interests.

Syria, a front line state in the fight against Israel, viewed the peace process as a vital concern, having fought against Israel in the 1948, 1967 and 1973 conflicts, as well as numerous clashes between 1945-67, with considerable

¹⁶⁶ Hollis, *Britain and the Middle East in the 9/11 era*, p24

losses both material and of human life. The prevailing perception, that this sacrifice could not be wasted, gave Syria a “political and moral” imperative in Middle East settlement, above even that of the narrower interests of the Palestinian people¹⁶⁷. Any peace process not taking this into account, that attempted to cut the Syrians out of a lead role, and especially that was seen to be led by external agents and not the Arab people themselves, was unacceptable to the Syrians.

The Thatcher government’s initial foray in this area was led by the FCO, with Carrington playing a central role. The EC’s 1980 Venice Declaration aimed to “promote Middle East settlement through recognition of Palestinian rights”.¹⁶⁸ In Carrington’s view it was important to have a more cohesive and equal working relationship with France and Germany, in turn “crucial because of the vulnerability of Western Europe to instabilities of the Middle East and the redefinition of the Atlantic relationship that now seems to be taking place”.¹⁶⁹

The declaration recognised the right of all states in the region to exist and their security, and expressed recognition of the need for justice for all peoples, implying the rights of the Palestinians. It called for a just solution to the

¹⁶⁷ HJ Agha & AS Khalidi *Syria and Iran: Rivalry and Cooperation* (London, 1995) p43

¹⁶⁸ Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p251

¹⁶⁹ P Jenkins, “Lord Carrington’s new Priorities” *The Guardian* (05 March 1980)

Palestinian problem, not just the refugees, but a settlement allowing them a right to self-determination. Significantly it called for the involvement of *all* parties concerned in the peace settlement which included the PLO and any unilateral initiative designed to change the status of Jerusalem. It expressed the need for Israel to end territorial occupation, and considered Israeli settlements both illegal under international law and a serious obstacle to the peace process. Lastly it called for the renunciation of force or the threat of force by all parties.¹⁷⁰

Thatcher maintained this was simply a reiteration of what had been the basic European position for some time. There was criticism that this was a major departure from traditional British policy, arguing that the European Councils' recognition of the Palestinians right to self-determination, was substantially different to its previous commitment to "the rights of the Palestinian people to express their national identity and to a homeland".¹⁷¹ The recognition of the PLO was also a noteworthy step, one not in step with American policy at this time. Britain viewed the Declaration partly as a tactic to keep pressure on the America, thus the Israel, to keep momentum on the peace process following the Camp David process. Carrington declared "What we have done is to occupy ground which had to be occupied, ground in which Europe is seen and should

¹⁷⁰ The Venice Declaration, 1980,
http://eeas.europa.eu/mepp/docs/venice_declaration_1980_en.pdf

¹⁷¹ P Keel, "Nine fell for PLO propaganda, says Callaghan" *The Guardian* (17 June 1980)

be seen to be proposing something which is demonstrably fair to both sides and anybody who says it isn't really hasn't read the Venice Declaration".¹⁷²

Michael Smith writes that London's active participation in drafting the declaration put Britain between the European and American positions in the Middle East.¹⁷³ Mark Sedgwick expands this, saying that Britain tried to achieve a balance, assuming the EC rhetorical stance to leverage EC diplomatic assets in support of ensuring consistent engagement from Washington¹⁷⁴. Certainly the necessity of American involvement was acknowledged by Carrington, who addressing the House of Lords in July 1980, stating, "None of us is labouring under the illusion that Europe is capable of producing a settlement on its own. Full US involvement is vital to the chances of peace ... The initiative by the Nine is complementary to that process."¹⁷⁵ Britain maintained the view that the EC process should be complementary to the US process, rather than presenting it as an alternative.

By the late 1970s, early 1980s, having completed its own physical withdrawal from its responsibilities there, Britain found itself between two forces in the

¹⁷² G Edwards "Britain" in Allen & Pijpers (Eds) *European Foreign Policy-Making and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (The Hague, 1984) pp 55

¹⁷³ M Smith, "Britain and the United States: Beyond the Special Relationship" in P Byrd (ed) *British Foreign Policy under Thatcher*, (Oxford, 1988) p22

¹⁷⁴ Sedgwick. "Britain and the Middle East: In pursuit of eternal interests" p18

¹⁷⁵ Carrington, AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST, HL Deb 09 July 1980 vol 411 cc1176-279 <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1980/jul/09/africa-and-the-middle-east> (Accessed 01/04/2016)

Middle East, the strategic security involvement of the US in maintaining order and progressing the MEPP, and the growing involvement of the EC in economic terms. Thus at the same time as Britain and the EC set out the principles of the Venice Declaration, the British were contributing troops to the multinational force (MFO) observing Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai as part of the Camp David Accords.¹⁷⁶

The British government did not relish the idea of returning even as part of the MFO. Thatcher, in a conversation with Raegan noted her reservations. British history, the legacy of the Balfour Declaration and involvement in the mandate of Palestine had left a black mark on Anglo-Arab relations, taking part in the MFO would exacerbate this. Thatcher had even sought advice from Crown Prince Fahd, meeting him at No 10, and he had supported her view saying the effect of British involvement would be "very adverse indeed, and would do us harm in the Arab world." Consequently, Thatcher told Raegan she "simply could not afford to lose the business."¹⁷⁷.

Carrington, at that time President of the European Community, a revolving post each of the member states held on rota, also expressed concern. At a Council of Ministers in Luxemburg he indicated the need to "balance the interests of Washington and of the Arab world, and try to find a strategy for the EEC as a

¹⁷⁶ Smith, "Britain and the US: Beyond the 'Special Relationship'", p22

¹⁷⁷ No 10 record of conversation (MT-Reagan) 12 Oct 1981

<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/125898> (Accessed 10/12/2015)

whole." Carrington was anxious that participation would indicate support for the bilateral Camp David agreement about which the Europeans were sceptical at best. As a consequence, he felt, any involvement held potential to undermine the European initiative.¹⁷⁸

Ultimately pressure on Britain to send troops came not only from the Americans but also her European partners. The Americans understood there would be no European involvement without the British¹⁷⁹, with the French, Italians and Dutch all having expressed a desire to take part in the force, but only in concert with Britain, as part of a "European" contribution¹⁸⁰. Thus a decision not to take part became potentially damaging to relations both with the American administration and partners in Europe.

The final decision to contribute (with troops from Britain, France, Holland and Italy) to the Sinai peacekeeping force came with a statement of support from the 10 EEC governments. This statement, at Greek insistence, made no reference to the Camp David agreement saying the decision met "the wish frequently expressed by members of the Community to facilitate any progress in the direction of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East on the basis of mutual acceptance of the right to existence and security of all the

¹⁷⁸ P Keatley, "Britain cautious on Sinai peace force." *The Guardian*, (22 Oct 1981)

¹⁷⁹ Haig message to Carrington ("Sinai") <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/125912> (Accessed 12/12/2015)

¹⁸⁰ No.10 record of conversation (MT-Carrington) <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/125902> (Accessed 10/12/2015)

States in the area and the need for the Palestinian people to exercise fully its right to self-determination.”¹⁸¹

A statement from the four countries contributing troops was more detailed, referring to Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai as a step towards realising the terms of UNSCR 242, and confirming the commitments in the Venice Declaration. Not participating would contravene the ethos of the Venice Declaration,¹⁸² but it made “support for the arrangements associated with the implementation of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty as quite distinct from and independent of the rest of the Camp David process.”¹⁸³ The four, very aware of the antagonism the move would cause in the Arab world, hoped differentiating their participation in the peacekeeping force from support for Camp David would lessen the effect.

Though holding reservations, and while actively engaging with the European process, Britain also took pains to maintain and support American dialogue, later taking a positive position on the Reagan Peace Plan despite feeling it fell far short of what was needed. In a communication to embassies Carrington emphasised the line that while Britain had issues with American policy at the time, believing it would fail, and that British participation in the MFO could

¹⁸¹ Sinai Multinational Peacekeeping Force, HC Deb 23 November 1981 vol 13 cc620-9, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1981/nov/23/sinai-multinational-peacekeeping-force> (Accessed 10/01/2016)

¹⁸² Parsons, “The Middle East”p88

¹⁸³ Sinai Multinational Peacekeeping Force, HC Deb 23 November 1981

damage its ability to propose an alternative to American policy, he continued to maintain that only America could bring about comprehensive peace negotiations.¹⁸⁴

The Venice Declaration, however, became the basis of a common European position on the MEPP, but did little to stimulate peace negotiations on the ground. Israel and America both attempted to stop the EC from issuing it with Israel loudly and emphatically decrying it."¹⁸⁵ Some also saw the as evidence of British pro-Arab bias, an accusation repeatedly heard in this early period of the Thatcher government with Carrington being assigned blame. Carrington was accused of putting British and American interests directly in conflict with each other, and of seeing "the road to influence with Saudi Arabia and Persian Gulf states to be appeasement of the Arab desire for a Palestinian state carved out of Israel."¹⁸⁶

The Arab reaction was a "grudging welcome,"¹⁸⁷ disappointed that it made no proposal to change the wording in UNSCR 242 from "refugees" to "Palestinians" and that the PLO was not recognised as sole legitimate representative of the

¹⁸⁴ FCO to UK Embassies and Missions, 15 October 1981,

<http://www.margarethatcher.org/document/125900> (Accessed 10/01/2016)

¹⁸⁵ Israeli Cabinet statement cited in R Hollis, "The Union and the Arab – Israeli Conflict: From Venice to Madrid" <http://www.passia.org/seminars/95/s1-27.htm> (Accessed 11/11/2014)

¹⁸⁶ W Safire "British – American affinity could become ruffled, Lord Carrington cast a long shadow", *Lawrence Journal-World*, (23 Feb 1981)

¹⁸⁷ A Parsons, "The Middle East" in P Byrd (ed) *British Foreign Policy under Thatcher*, p87

Palestinians.¹⁸⁸ More to the point they were most angered at the continued refusal of EEC governments to move toward explicitly recognising the PLO in the declaration at all.¹⁸⁹ The greatest disappointment overall, however, was Europe's failure to build on it, creating no momentum at all.

Britain's decision to support to the 1981 Fahd plan further underscored, for some, both Britain's desire to appease the Saudis and Gulf states, and her pro-Arab bias. The Fahd plan, proposed Saudi Arabia, went further than UNSCR 242 in a number of ways; in the call for a return of *all* Arab lands, in the dismantling of settlements, in referring to the rights of the Palestinian people and creation of a Palestinian state rather than simply a just settlement for the refugees,¹⁹⁰ and recognised the PLO as legitimate representatives of the Palestinians.¹⁹¹ In return, it implicitly accepted Israel's right to exist. America held this implied recognition with scepticism; the British, reflecting on it in continuing discussion with the Saudis, saw it as both credible and necessary, referring to the Saudi Foreign Minister's statement that negotiation between Palestine and Israel would not happen without mutual recognition.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ A Persson, *The EU and the Israeli – Palestinian Conflict 1971 – 2013: In pursuit of a just peace*, (London, 2015) p83

¹⁸⁹ Palmer, "Arab disillusion threatens dialogue with EEC" *The Guardian* (29 September 1981)

¹⁹⁰ M Kramer, "The US and Israel: it will get worse" *New Your Magazine*, (11 January 1982) p36

¹⁹¹ Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East*, p403

¹⁹² Mr Hurd, HC Deb 18 November 1981 vol 13 cc269-70,

<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1981/nov/18/middle-east> (Accessed 11/11/2015)

Throughout the early 1980s British policy, attempted to bring some balance to peace negotiations. However, this did not bring it closer to Syria over the issue actually setting Britain at odds with Syrian policy over settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Syria had borne tremendous costs in the Arab-Israeli conflict, leading to the belief Syria had an integral role (and right) in any negotiated settlement. Hafez further held the view that the issue of Palestine was an integral pan-Arab concern, and as such could not be left to the Palestinians, or any other Arab state, alone to resolve as they saw fit.¹⁹³ The Venice Declaration may have brought some balance to negotiations but did not mention Syrian (or Jordan) by name, and calls for the PLO to have a role in negotiations raised fears of a settlement with the Palestinians that did not include Syria.

The decision by the British to participate in the MFO in the Sinai further underscored Syrian fears that the Europeans, alongside the US, sought to divide the Arabs and pursue individual peace treaties rather than a comprehensive peace settlement. The 1973 war with Israel, for Asad, was a tool in achieving an "honourable settlement,"¹⁹⁴ Sadat's decision to conclude an individual peace treaty with Israel in 1979 was the ultimate betrayal of Asad's belief in the need of a comprehensive peace treaty. Asad's view was that Sadat had capitulated to Israel, not made peace. Asad would work assiduously

¹⁹³ Agha & Khalidi *Syria and Iran* p43

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid* p47

against any Israeli agreement that opened the door to further bilateral peace treaties thus sideline Syria from negotiations¹⁹⁵.

Carrington's support for the Fahd plan similarly found itself at odds with Syrian interests. British hopes that an Arab led plan could provide movement on peace negotiations were dashed when the Fez summit rejected it – largely owing to the machinations of the Syrian president who thought it was not the right time to be negotiating a peace settlement. Throughout his premiership Asad maintained peace negotiations should only be done from a position of strength vis-à-vis Israel and only on the grounds that negotiations must cover more than just the return of territory. British policy failed to take into account the Syrian outlook on the peace process, particularly the concept that the Palestinian issue was a Pan-Arab one, not just one for the Palestinian people. Furthermore, they failed to consider the Syria's strategic positioning, a rivalry between two regional powers in which Syria sought to stop Israel encroaching not only on Syrian territory, but into her sphere of influence, through separate peace deals.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ Hinnebusch "The foreign policy of Syria" in Hinnebusch & Ehteshami (eds) *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States* (London, 2002) p154

¹⁹⁶ Agha & Khalidi, *Syria and Iran* p44

British attempts to move the peace process forward continued through the 1980s, with a shift of focus to including the PLO in talks. The Venice Declaration, formally recognised the PLO as a key player though informally Britain had done so for some time, with some high level official contact. Ministerial contact was politically a more difficult proposition.¹⁹⁷ British policy was constrained by an internal struggle, one faction seeing the necessity of including the PLO, while Thatcher struggled to accept the necessity of including individuals she regarded as terrorists in peace talks. An Arab League peace mission visit to London in January 1983 was cancelled after it refused to accept British insistence on a declaration that “would have committed them to a far more explicit rejection of terrorism and readiness to recognise Israel than their governments have so far been willing to endorse”. Many felt that this was Thatcher showing solidarity with the US.¹⁹⁸ A compromise was reached in March replacing the contingent from the PLO with an academic, a move that contrasted sharply with the position of several of Britain’s European partners who had already met the original delegation before it was due to go to London.

Despite calls in 1984 from Foreign Secretary, George Howe, for the Americans to concede that the PLO had a part to play in the peace process, the problem of was repeated in 1985. Thatcher, following a visit to Egypt and Jordan, issued

¹⁹⁷ G Edwards “Britain”p54

¹⁹⁸ J Langdon, P Keatley “Arabs place blame for rift on Thatcher” *The Guardian* (08 January 1983)

an invitation to a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation to come to London for discussions on a peace settlement.¹⁹⁹ Again the meeting with Howe was cancelled last minute, as the two PLO members of the delegation refused to make public statements denouncing the use of violence. Many suspected that was a last minute demand from Thatcher under pressure from Israel, Jewish actors in Britain and Washington, along with her own reluctance for talks with the group.²⁰⁰ Her dislike of terrorists certainly was clear and across the board, apparently also negatively affecting her relationship with Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir of Israel due to their early involvement in terrorism against the British in the Mandate of Palestine.²⁰¹

Even these moves served only to underline the tension between British policy and Syrian interests. Again it opened up the possibility of a separate peace process being concluded between Israel and the PLO. The involvement of Jordan in the process was also a point of conflict - when the PLO-Jordan agreement, to form a joint delegation to any future middle east peace conference, was announced in 1985 Syria reacted by accusing Jordan of trying to control the PLO and of capitulating to the Camp David Accords. Jordanian involvement was a direct challenge to Syria's own role in championing the

¹⁹⁹ Hollis, *Britain and the Middle East in the 9/11 era*, p23

²⁰⁰ "Foreign Office wilts as the heat goes on" *The Guardian*, (15 October 1985)

²⁰¹ Moore, Charles *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography, Volume Two: Everything She Wants*, (London: 2015) p213

rights of the Palestinian people. Thus British policy put her directly at odds with Syrian interests.

Lebanon

The 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon provoked a crisis overtook any hope of the EC countries building on the commitment of the Venice Declaration as Lebanon became a proxy fighting ground for the world's two superpowers over the next few years. British policy toward the conflict was mixed, setting it on the path to increasing hostile relations with Syria as the British and American policy positions became closer.

Thatcher severely criticised Israeli aggression, telling the Commons that this kind of aggression and hostility must be condemned.²⁰² Foreign Secretary Francis Pym stated that Britain and its European partners were looking at possible measures to take, calling Israel's actions disproportionate and unjustified.²⁰³ Britain suspended arms sales to Israel, while attempting to persuade her European partners to do likewise²⁰⁴. Both referred to supporting

²⁰² Engagements, HC Deb 08 June 1982 vol 25 cc14-8, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1982/jun/08/engagements> (Accessed 10/12/2015)

²⁰³ The Middle East, HC Deb 22 June 1982 vol 26 cc210-71, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1982/jun/22/the-middle-east#S6CV0026P0_19820622_HOC_465 (Accessed 10/12/2015)

²⁰⁴ FCO letter to No.10 ("Israeli Invasion of Lebanon: Arms Sales, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/124649> (Accessed 10/12/2015)

American efforts to negotiate a cessation of violence, clearly deferring to American predominance in the area.

Israel's aggression also caught Asad by surprise, his air force sustaining huge losses though his ground forces managed to hold up the Israeli advance, stopping them from reaching vital Syrian security interests in Biqa, and from the Syrian border.²⁰⁵ Asad twice agreed to ceasefires, with the Israeli's breaking the first, attacking Syrian and Palestinian positions to gain control of West Beirut, then negotiating a second ceasefire after the Syrians were driven back fifteen kilometres from the capital. Asad was left "embarrassed and humiliated," forced to sit by and watch Israel assaulting an Arab capital, and accused of abandonment by the Palestinians²⁰⁶. The PLO and Arafat, meantime, garnered international sympathy and recognition having gained a new platform in Lebanon.

Pym visiting Syria in October 1982 observed Hafez was moving cautiously. Pym noted in a communication to US Secretary of State, George Schulz, that "on issues of central importance to them there were few signs of real flexibility, but they may be ready to give peace efforts a chance"²⁰⁷. At the time two peace

²⁰⁵ Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East* p382

²⁰⁶ Ibid p384-386

²⁰⁷ Pym message to Shultz, <http://www.margarethatcher.org/document/140020> (Accessed 01/01/2016)

plans were in circulation. The Reagan Plan proposed by the Americans, called for an immediate freeze on Israeli settlements, proposed Palestinian self-government in association with Jordan in the West Bank and Gaza and reconfirmed the commitment to UNSCR 242. Regarded by Syria as a continuation of the Camp David process it was unacceptable. Further, it made no reference to the Golan Heights, a vital interest to the Syrians, and fatally the Reagan plan ruled out full statehood for the Palestinians.²⁰⁸

The second, Fez-2 was the reiteration of the Fahd Plan. This time the plan was endorsed by Syria for two key reasons; 1. it caused a closing of Arab ranks, denying Israel a political reward for its aggression; 2. it denied Jordan the opportunity to pursue bilateral peace negotiations with Israel under the Regan Plan²⁰⁹. Pym explicitly expressed that between the Fez summit and Reagan plan there was an air of expectation in the region, and the advantage would be lost if action was not taken quickly,²¹⁰ something borne out in the turnaround in fortunes in Lebanon. His attempts to persuade Syria of the merits of the Reagan Plan, noted in his communication to Shultz, one that didn't even mention Syria or the Golan Heights, were doomed to fail. Pym's statement following his visit, referred to Syria's importance because of its position in the region, affirmed that dialogue was essential and there were a number of points

²⁰⁸ J MacManus, "Pym attacks 'aggressive' Israelis", *The Guardian* (13 Oct 1982),

²⁰⁹ Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East* p403

²¹⁰ J MacManus "A tilt toward peace" *The Guardian* (08 October 1982)

of agreement including the condemnation of Israel's invasion of Lebanon. He outlined Britain's position but also underlined that British direct influence was limited so Britain would work through its European partners "to continue putting pressure on even the US to help in bringing about a just peace to the region".²¹¹

With this lack of direct influence and with discussion limited to old ground, little new emerged from the visit. British support for the Reagan Plan, with no provision for the creation of a Palestinian state, and the potential for independent Palestinian or Jordanian led negotiations, put Britain at odds with the Syrian position. The discord widened over American policy in the Lebanon.

During the Lebanon conflict, the British position moved demonstrably closer to the American position, exemplified by British participation in the multinational force (MNF) there. The decision to participate did not go unchallenged. Enoch Powell summed up the criticisms; Britain had no interests in Lebanon thus no moral or legal imperative for activity there, the duties of the force were so circumscribed as to be meaningless, he could see no other reason for the British being in Lebanon other than "to dance, and to be seen to be dancing to

²¹¹ BBC Summary of World Broadcasts "Palestinian Affairs; Francis Pym's Statement after Visit to Syria" Part 4 The Middle East & Africa; A. THE MIDDLE EAST; ME/7155/A/1

the American tune."²¹² With Thatcher seen to be reluctant to send troops, the fact she sent even a small force was used as evidence Britain supported the American stance.

As a cycle of terrorist and reprisals American forces increasingly engaged in military operations in Lebanon, disquiet over the decision to send a British contingent to Beirut grew. This heightened following an American decision to bomb Syrian positions outside Beirut, arguably escalating American involvement from peace keeper to combatant. The British government received a late warning, through military not diplomatic channels, further enflaming opposition in Britain.²¹³ Still Thatcher defended her position in the Commons, declaring that British forces would not be withdrawn and backing the American operation, saying they took the action on grounds of self-defence, the need to act quickly had resulted in the late notice to American allies.²¹⁴

Asad expressed his concerns to Thatcher in a letter pointing out four worrying developments; firstly, the heightened US military intervention into internal Lebanon affairs, secondly, escalation from participation in internal fighting to attacking Syrian forces rather than establishing peace. Thirdly, he noted the

²¹² E Powell, "Bad days for foreign policy" *The Guardian*, (17 September 1983)

²¹³ I Aitken, "Commons rebellion over Lebanon force" *The Guardian* (06 December 1983)

²¹⁴ J Langdon, "Thatcher insists UK force stays in Lebanon" *The Guardian* (08 December 1983)

recently signed strategic agreement linking the interests of Israel with those of America, had immediately increased their joint aggression against Syria and her forces in Lebanon. Lastly he pointed out that the actions of America and Israel were hampering not aiding national reconciliation.²¹⁵ Asad perhaps hoped that British involvement in the MNF and Thatcher's close relationship with Reagan, would provide Britain with influence on American policy. Thatcher's reply to Asad was limited to reiterating the purpose of the British presence as part of the MNF, her commitment to aiding in the restoration of peaceful conditions in Lebanon allowing for the Lebanese people being able to resolve their own internal divisions and the withdrawal of all outside forces.²¹⁶

As American policy in Lebanon progressed the risk of reprisals against the MNF heightened. Increased terrorist attacks against American and Western targets enflamed anti-terrorist hysteria in the Reagan administration particularly against states seen to sponsor terror such as Libya, Syria and Iran, an attitude reflected by Thatcher. The public support Thatcher gave the US administration was not reflective of Whitehall as a whole, with a number of diplomats wary of the impact that badly thought out policy was having, though this division was largely a matter of method not of objective.

²¹⁵ President Asaad of Syria letter to MT (situation in Lebanon), Sec 1983
<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/132095> (Accessed 10/12/2015)

²¹⁶ MT letter to President Asaad of Syria (situation in Lebanon),
<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/132125> (Accessed 10/12/2015)

Britain and US both supported national reconciliation, stability and withdrawal of all outside forces. This led the Americans to back the 1983 May 17th Agreement between Israel and Lebanon which called for an end of the state of war between the two countries. It set out conditions for the withdrawal of Israeli troops in return for security guarantees, and opened the way for talks on normalisation of relations. Britain, however, saw a need for more flexibility in order to overcome Syria's objections to the agreement, seeing difficulties if Syria chose not to cooperate. Britain put less emphasis on normalisation of relations between Beirut and Jerusalem, on post-withdrawal Israeli patrolling rights and believed a less threatening, more coaxing approach to the Syrian regime would be more effective.²¹⁷ In this Britain could be seen to implicitly be accepting that Syria would perceive the agreement as further Israeli encroachment into its sphere of influence, which would not be acceptable.

Increasing violence in Lebanon coupled with domestic pressure for withdrawal in the run up to the American elections left America searching for a way to extract its troops from Lebanon. British Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe met Asad in Damascus, in his first trip to the region, hoping to find a way forward. Asad, though, was in a much better position to continue the struggle, having encouraged his local allies in Lebanon to come together as the National

²¹⁷ I Black "Whitehalls' uneasy role" *The Guardian* (20 December 1983)

Salvation Front to fight an Israeli – Lebanese accord, and having used the time America had been facilitating negotiations to rearm²¹⁸, his Soviet backing had also strengthened with the change in Soviet leadership in November 1982. Asad was clear, he was “in no rush to help extricate the US from Lebanon quagmire.”²¹⁹ Asad was prepared to wait until his main objective, the abrogation of May 17th Israel-Lebanon agreement was met.

Thatcher was known to be frustrated at the lack of progress but certain there would be no forward movement without Syrian cooperation in reducing the level of violence. Not under the same pressure as Reagan to withdraw, she continued to argue there could be no withdrawal from Lebanon before an “alternative arrangement” could be made.²²⁰ Howe echoed this sentiment in the Commons on January 25th, 1984 stating “precipitate withdrawal would be irresponsible”.²²¹ Yet again the British stance would be undermined by the US announcement in early February of its unilateral decision to redeploy its contingent of Marines to ships off the Lebanese coast. Thus the US was free to launch air and naval strikes at Syrian and Lebanese Muslim forces without

²¹⁸ Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East* p410

²¹⁹ J MacManus, “Syria to set high price on Lebanon peace” *The Guardian* (13 January 1984)

²²⁰ R W Apple Jr, “US & Britain discuss alternatives for Lebanon” *The New York Times*, (21 January 1984)

²²¹ G Howe “Syria” HC Deb 25 January 1984 vol 52 cc909-10,
<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1984/jan/25/syria> (Accessed 19/11/2014)

endangering US troops on the ground however its partners in the MNF, including Britain, were left scrambling to extricate their own forces.²²²

Some in the British establishment certainly viewed policy over Lebanon as misguided, or as Ivor Lucas, former UK Ambassador to Syria 1982 – 1984, describes it “frankly disgraceful.”²²³ Yet influenced the British position in the broadest context for the British position can be seen in terms of a continuation of Cold War politics. Priority was given to maintaining a close relationship with the US, including supporting its continued involvement in the region to ward off Soviet influence, with Syria cast as a Soviet ally. The Reagan administration clearly held Syria as the “primary obstacle” to peace in Lebanon and pointing out that the Soviets stood firmly behind them.²²⁴ This played into Thatcher’s own personal inclinations, naturally pro-American and suspicious of anyone associated with the SU. Still, even here Thatcher took pains to caution Reagan, advising him to limit use of force against Syrian controlled areas to self-defence only for fear of enflaming the situation further²²⁵. Thatcher maintained a cautioning voice, well aware American policy created more risk for British

²²² M Dobbes “Europeans look for ways to get out of Lebanon” *The Washington Post* (08 February 1984)

²²³ I Lucas, Correspondence 08 July 2014

²²⁴ Reagan telegram to MT (Lebanon) [plan for phased redeployment of US element in MNF to ships offshore 06 Feb 1984, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/136653> (Accessed 15/11/2015)

²²⁵ MT letter to President Reagan (Lebanon) 09 Feb 1984, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/136668> (Accessed 15/11/2015)

personnel on the ground and weakened prospects of political reconciliation in Lebanon.

The gradual alignment of British policy with the American position, and so, anti-Syrian position, can also be explained by reviewing the changes in the British foreign policy decision making structure. Early moves toward closer coordination with the EC had largely been led by one man, Carrington. The Falklands episode removed him from office and while there remained a significant pro-Arab, pro-Europe element in the FCO, it had also lost influence allowing Thatcher seize control of British foreign policy²²⁶ which increasingly reflected her own pro-American stance.

The solidarity with the Reagan administration was maintained even while many in government and the FCO thought American policy was ill judged, (even some in the American administration that the Israelis had "misled them at every stage of their Lebanese operation"²²⁷). More broadly, they feared that American policy over Lebanon undermined America's position with moderate Arab states, thus affecting their faith in America using its leverage with Israel to negotiate a fair peace settlement. Thatcher prioritised Anglo-American relationship, still

²²⁶ A M Eames, "Margaret Thatcher's Diplomacy and the 1982 Lebanon War" in *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 25:4 (Fall 2014), p 44

²²⁷ I Black, "Arabs are 'losing faith' in America: lessons from Lebanon 1982" *The Guardian* (04 Jan 2013)

believing only the Americans could put Israel under the necessary pressure to keep them engaged in the peace process, and continued to hope public support could lead to influence in private with Washington.

The costs of supporting American policy were high. In political terms, it caused more rifts between Britain and her European partners, already an antagonistic relationship. Thatcher's perception was however that maintaining a strong relationship was essential to counter the Soviet threat. Her inclination to show public support to America, even while privately expressing the need for caution, dragged British troops back into the Middle East as part of the MNF in Lebanon, putting them into a country in which Syria had a strategic interest, set Britain and Syria on opposing sides in a middle east conflict, and locked them into an increasingly hostile relationship. What little influence Thatcher gained from her policy of supporting American action seemingly not putting any restraint on US reactions to what it saw as Syrian aggression.

Thatcher, the US and the Libya Crisis

Involvement in Lebanon was not the only time Thatcher's foreign policy came under serious criticism for being too closely linked to that of the US. In fact, writes Eric Evans, Reagan was a natural ally for Thatcher and "'Atlanticism' was

a key element in British foreign policy during the 1980s".²²⁸ Thatcher's close personal relationship with Reagan did nothing do alleviate these accusations from her rivals and opposition. Support for the American bombing raid on Libya, April 14th, 1986, in retaliation for the terrorist bombing of a West Berlin nightclub in which two US servicemen were killed earlier that month, is cited as a further example of this.

Thatcher agreed to the deployment of US aircraft from UK bases, the only Western European leader to support the unilateral action by the US. The decision increased tensions with her EC partners.²²⁹ In the Commons, Thatcher stated that Britain, too, had suffered from Libyan terrorism, that Libya was known to supply direct and continued support to the Provisional IRA and that there was evidence that the Libyan government were "directly involved in promoting terrorist attacks against the US and Western countries and have made plans for further attacks"²³⁰ linking British interests to the American action. Reagan credited this evidence to the work being done by GCHQ.²³¹ Thatcher declared Article 51 of the UN Charter which recognises a state's right to self-defence provided the legal basis for the operation, meaning America did

²²⁸ E Evans, *Thatcher and Thatcherism (2nd Ed)*, Taylor & Francis Kindle Edition, p91

²²⁹ *Ibid*, p95

²³⁰ M Thatcher, Statement to the House of Commons 15 April 1986, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1986/apr/15/libya#S6CV0095P0_19860415_HO_C_157 (Accessed 15/11/2013)

²³¹ President Reagan letter to MT, 08 April 1986, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/143431> (Accessed 10/12/2015)

not need to take its case to the UNSC. Further the UNSC had previously condemned state sponsored terrorism but “has not been able to take effective action to deter state sponsored terrorism” and that the US response was proportionate.²³² This despite the fact in early 1986 Thatcher stated “I do not believe in retaliatory strikes which are against international law”²³³ at a news conference.

While defending Washington’s decision in the Commons Thatcher and her advisers were concerned. Privately Thatcher expressed reservations that the response would set off a “cycle of revenge and counter-revenge”, and potentially strengthen Qadhafi rather than weaken him²³⁴. It was thought that the US had seriously underestimated the Arab reaction to the bombardment and likely repercussions for Americans in the region; at the same time, they were aware of potential consequences for Britain in becoming so closely associated with American policy.²³⁵ In a letter to Dr David Owen MP, Thatcher took pains to point out that the decision to allow the use of UK bases was not a blank cheque. Future action would require the US government to seek UK

²³² M Thatcher, Statement to the House of Commons 15 April 1986, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1986/apr/15/libya#S6CV0095P0_19860415_HO_C_157 (Accessed 15/11/2013)

²³³ D Mason “Thatcher against sanctions or military action against Libya” *Associated Press*, 10 January 1986

²³⁴ President Reagan letter to MT (Libyan terrorism) [reply to MT's points] 09 April 1986, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/143432> (Accessed 01/12/2015)

²³⁵ P Cradock, *In pursuit of British Interests*, p76

government permission for the bases to be used.²³⁶ Thus Thatcher attempted to establish that though Britain had supported this US action, it was not blindly aligning itself to American policy. Similar requests would be considered on a case by case basis with British interests in mind.

The feared political and human cost was quickly apparent as reports came in of the killing of hostages being held in Lebanon. Two British hostages, John Douglas and Philip Padfield, who had worked at the American University of Beirut, were killed alongside their American colleague Peter Kilburn in direct retaliation for the attack. Additionally, the Islamic Jihad Organization claimed responsibility for the kidnap of British journalist, John McCarthy, three days after the bombing raid. The former residence of the British Ambassador in west Beirut was also attacked though no one was hurt.²³⁷

These were costs Thatcher was prepared to incur. Thatcher's decision was calculated; the raids would go ahead regardless so it was better for the British interest to stand with the US on this issue. Following the raids Minister of State Timothy Renton made it clear that in taking the decision "Britain had taken

²³⁶ M Thatcher, Letter to David Owen 21 April 1986, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106367> (Accessed 15/03/2012)

²³⁷ R Dowden, "British hostages shot – 400 saved in jet/ Arab terrorists retaliate against US bombing raid" *The Times* (18 Apr 1986)

account of the position of the hostages"²³⁸ The decision was made on the basis of "the importance for this country's security of our Alliance with the US and the American role in the defence of Europe."²³⁹ No doubt frustration over the inability of the UNSC to tackle the terrorist situation also played some part. Moreover, there was also a feeling that after the support from the US over the Falklands, Britain was not in a position to refuse the use of British military bases to attack Libya.²⁴⁰ Britain also gained "kudos", helping influence the passing of US legislation which aimed to make it harder for IRA fugitives to claim asylum in the US²⁴¹.

For some this was not enough in repayment. UK support provided US action with an air of legitimacy which was not equalled by British influence over American Middle East policy. Yet two of Thatcher's main policy aims were met; a strong relationship with America and her determination that states that sponsor terror needed to be dealt with aggressively.

It should be noted Libya also a good example of an occasion where Thatcher was prepared to stand against it, that is, in her refusal to apply sanctions to

²³⁸ A Travis, "Hostage position was considered before strike" *The Guardian*, (18 April 1986)

²³⁹ M Thatcher, "US Bombing of Libya" House of Commons Speech, Hansard HC [95/875-81], 16 April 1986

²⁴⁰ M Smith, "Britain and the US: Beyond the Special Relationship" p23

²⁴¹ P Sharp, "British Foreign Policy under Margaret Thatcher" in Otte (Ed) *The Makers of British Foreign Policy: From Pitt to Thatcher*, p280

Libya. Increasingly exasperated with Libya's behaviour particularly its involvement in sponsoring terrorist attacks against western targets, the US announced a series of economic sanctions against Libya in January 1986. They sought the support of other western countries in applying sanctions designed to isolate Qadhafi. Britain had broken relations with Libya two years previously in following the shooting of WPC Yvonne Fletcher outside the Libyan People's Bureau in central London in April 1984. Thus it could have been expected that Thatcher would have agreed to the sanctions regime suggested by the Americans.

Britain, however, stood with Europe in refusing to impose sanctions,²⁴² Thatcher proclaiming loudly that "sanctions don't work".²⁴³ For once, happy to side with her European allies, Thatcher stood firm in the belief that sanctions only work "if every country applies them" and "Alas, that was not going to happen with Libya."²⁴⁴ The demands of American policy here conflicted with another major priority for Britain, that of protecting British economic interests. These interests won out, a consistent pattern for the Thatcher government; the same reasoning was behind Thatcher's refusal to impose sanctions against South Africa where Britain also had considerable economic interests. Thatcher's

²⁴² Smith, "Britain and the US: Beyond the Special Relationship", p21

²⁴³ D Mason, "Thatcher against sanctions or military action against Libya"(10 Jan 1986)

²⁴⁴ Thatcher, "US Bombing of Libya"

personal prejudice that nothing should get in the way of free trade central to the decision.

Once again, however, British support for America over the raids set it against the interests of the Syrian regime. Once more Asad watched as an external power aggression against an Arab state, an allied state. Reacting predictably, the regime warned prior to the attack that "the US would be "the biggest loser" if it attacked"²⁴⁵ and pledged to support Libya against US aggression. Syrian concerns went further than simply condemning the bombing of an Arab state. The Reagan administration was preoccupied with the issue of terrorism from the start, with some in the administration seeing a "Soviet hand behind every manifestation of anti-Western statement."²⁴⁶ Syria, seen as a Soviet client, was particularly concerned that they could be next, US statements in the wake of the raid heightening this concern as Reagan warned that if other states such as Syria were found to be involved in international terrorism they would "receive the same treatment."²⁴⁷

Syrian support of "terrorist" groups was a tool in Asad's fight against Israel encroachment into Arab territory but Asad also viewed these groups as national

²⁴⁵ Anonymous, "Syria leads Arab world in opposition" *The Guardian* (14 April 1986)

²⁴⁶ Seale *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East* p367

²⁴⁷ Lalevee T, "Herr Genscher's message for Assad" *EIR* Volume 13, Number 20, (May 16, 1986) p49

resistance fighters, legitimately fighting against oppression of Palestinian rights. He contested their being labelled terrorist saying:

“Since the beginning of the Palestinian question, Syrian territory has been open to all Palestinian organizations, but they have been allowed to engage only in the struggle against Israel for the restoration of their usurped rights; they have never been allowed to engage in any other activities. As far as I know and remember, no terrorist act in any other part of the world emanated from Syria”.

While there is no doubt that Syria used its connections with various groups to further its interests, through Hizbullah in Lebanon for example, this was generally a direct reaction to Israel’s manoeuvres. It can be argued this was done out of self-interest, a proxy was against Israel that protected Syria’s borders and security, yet it was also a strong part of Syria’s identity as a frontline state in the fight against Israel, and part of their Pan-Arab role in fighting for the rights of the Palestinian people, and against the wrongs that had been done to the Arab people as a whole²⁴⁸. The tendency to treat all activity perceived as terrorism the same way limited policy options for the West and severely impacted on constructive Middle East policy, resulting in a more hostile relationship with Syria.

²⁴⁸ Agha & Khalidi *Syria and Iran* p44

Asad was further aggravated by the apparent hypocrisy in the Western approach, pointing out in an interview he gave on May 17th to a delegation of journalists, that there was no similar condemnation of terrorist acts committed by Israel in Lebanon, such as the bombing of villages, towns and refugee camps.²⁴⁹ American policy demonstrated an inability to take a more nuanced approach to Syria, and tendency to disregard Syrian concerns. British support for that policy left it with little room for manoeuvre even had policy makers wanted to. As terrorism struck closer to home, however, Anglo-Syrian relations would only continue to deteriorate.

Thatcher, terrorism and Anglo-Syrian relations

By the time of the 1986 Libya raid the world had seen a “growing trend of state-sponsored terrorism with Libya, Syria and Iran as prime culprits”.²⁵⁰ As western policy in the Middle East resulted in increased terrorist activity, Thatcher’s stance on state sponsored terrorism hardened. British foreign policy, led from No 10, increasingly backed American anti-terror activity. Thatcher was strident in her denunciation of terrorist activity, influenced,

²⁴⁹ Interview 1. Hafiz al-Asad: Terrorism and the Anti-Syria Campaign, Hafiz al-Asad, Ben Bradlee, Jim Hogland, Jonathan Randall and Samuel Kerbitte, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Summer, 1986), pp. 3-16

²⁵⁰ P Cradock, *In pursuit of British Interests*, p75

perhaps, by her own experience of IRA terrorism. This set the groundwork for the break with Syria when terrorism interrupted Anglo-Syrian relations in 1986.

The Hindawi Affair

On April 17th 1986 an Irishwoman, Ann Murphy was stopped by an Israeli security guard at Heathrow airport as she boarded at El-AL airliner. Unknown to her she carried 1.5kg of Semtex in her suitcase, given to her by her boyfriend, a Jordanian named Nizar Hindawi. A day later he turned himself over to the authorities, and on 18th April he was arrested and taken into custody for questioning. Details of the plot would emerge at his trial in early October but from early days of the enquiry many believed the plot was linked to senior levels of the Syrian government.

Prior to Hindawi's trial the British government showed a relatively measured response with no rush to precipitate action. Internationally, the Tokyo G7 economic summit in May provided an opportunity to reach agreement and issue a statement on a number of measures to be used against states that sponsor terror, with Thatcher very much masterminding the statement. Still, the British

seemed to take a different view from the US on whether or not the new agreement allowed for the use of military power.²⁵¹

On May 7th Howe, answering questions in the Commons was asked if he shared the view of the American administration who "thought Syria would be a suitable candidate for possible unilateral American action." He stated that Britain was committed to the measures set out in the Tokyo communique, and any action would depend on whether "there is plain proof of state involvement in terrorism, suitable to deserve the response suggested."²⁵² This message was repeated by Timothy Renton, asked for a clear statement the government would not support retaliatory action by Israel against Syria in a Parliamentary discussion on 12th May. He replied similarly stating that each case would be judged on its own merit with a proportionate response.²⁵³ Hafez condemned the Tokyo measures as 'acts of intimidation', feeling this was a "worldwide campaign against Syria which he saw as a prelude to physical attack wither by Israel alone or in conjunction with the US... He believed Europe, and Britain in particular, had joined the hostile US-Israeli front".²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ A Brummer, "Reagan jubilant at terrorism accord" *The Guardian* (08 May 1986)

²⁵² G Howe, House of Commons Questions, Terrorism, HC Deb 07 May 1986 vol 97 cc139-42 http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1986/may/07/terrorism-1#S6CV0097P0_19860507_HOC_98 (Accessed 10/03/2012)

²⁵³ T Renton, Syria, HC Deb 12 May 1986 vol 97 cc447-53, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1986/may/12/syria#S6CV0097P0_19860512_HOC_193 (Accessed 10/12/2015)

²⁵⁴ Seale, Asad: *The struggle for the Middle East*, p477

Meantime, there was the normal tit-for-tat summons to Syrian diplomatic staff, expulsions alongside assertions from the Syrian regime was that it was not involved and accusations that Israel was behind it all. The Syrian Ambassador was informed that the British Government required the withdrawal of the three attaches from Britain within seven days, after they failed to cooperate with the police. The Syrians in turn expelled three British diplomats – a decision denounced by the British as retaliation that “was regrettable and totally unjustified”²⁵⁵ but not unexpected.

Elements in the British establishment were actively advocating restraint. One reason for caution was concern for British hostages in the region. The attempted bombing of the EL Al Aircraft occurred only two days after the American bombing of Libya. Taking too militant a stance at this point would further heighten the risk to British ex-patriots in the area. Furthermore, Syria was not Libya, being “tougher, more influential, more discreet... Syria was, however vulnerable to diplomatic pressures because it aspired to function as a conventional and respectable Middle East state”²⁵⁶ Thus caution at this stage left the door open to persuading Syria to adopt a friendlier position more in line with Western interests. Ultimately however, until the trial itself, British judicial

²⁵⁵ “Parliament: British threat to take further measures against Syria/Terrorism” *The Times*, (13 May 1986)

²⁵⁶ Cradock, *In pursuit of British Interests*, p77

procedure dictated details be kept confidential, the added involvement of the FCO and intelligence services makes this level of secrecy unsurprising.

On the Syrian front, Asad denounced the accusations levelled at his regime. He suggested that the focus on combating terrorism obscured the real issue, treating the symptom but not the underlying problem. Not denying the acts of terrorism perpetrated in Western Europe, he accused these countries of failing to talk about terrorism in Lebanon and Palestine “they are levelling accusations against the real strugglers who have faith in their nation and their homeland, and who are offering their blood for the cause in which they believe”, making the differentiation between “terrorism” and the fight for national liberation.²⁵⁷ Prior to the Hindawi trial, Asad also gave an interview in which he challenged Western intelligence services “to prove that Syria was behind a single terrorist operation anywhere” and giving his version of events in which blame for the plot was laid firmly at Israeli feet as a means to weaken his government.²⁵⁸

The evidence revealed at the trial appeared to comprehensively lay the blame for the plot on the Syrian regime. Anti-terrorist detectives revealed Hindawi’s group had all the “hallmarks of a group of misfits, freelance terrorists looking

²⁵⁷ Excerpts from speech by Hafiz al Asad, “Syrian President discusses Terrorism at 27th May Athens dinner” *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts* (30 May 1986)

²⁵⁸ Tandler “Damascus and the European Bombings (25 Oct 1986)

for a sponsor". After a number of abortive meetings in Libya, they left for Syria and were taken to a military camp in the Bekka Valley and trained by Syrian Air force intelligence officers. There Hindawi met with Brigadier-General Mohammed Kholi, head of Syrian Air Force Intelligence, and three officials, Lieutenant-Colonels Haitham Said, Mufid A'Kour and Samer Kokash. In February 1985 Said provided him with false credentials and paperwork allowing him entry to Britain, along with money and told him of a plot to bomb an El Al aircraft. He made a dry run to London following which he returned to Damascus to be taught to arm the bomb's detonator and provided with a cover story should he be caught.

On his return to London, he was supplied with Semtex. He then resumed contact with his girlfriend, and on 16th April, took her to the airport leaving her with the bomb. He returned to his hotel only to find the plot already foiled, Israeli security staff having found the bomb just after 9am, and publically announcing the discovery. He then went to the Syrian embassy where he reportedly asked for and received help from the Syrian Ambassador. The next day he gave himself up to the British authorities.²⁵⁹ On 24 October the trial concluded with Hindawi convicted of "attempting to place on an El Al aircraft at London (Heathrow) Airport a device likely to destroy or damage the aircraft

²⁵⁹ P Murtagh, "The front man for Damascus/ The role of Nezar Hindawi in the Syrian-inspired El Al bomb plot" *The Guardian* (25 October 1986)

contrary to Section 1(1) of the Criminal Attempts Act 1981.” Hindawi was sentenced to forty-five years’ imprisonment.

This terrorist attack was just one of several that western authorities suspected of having Syrian connections. There was a suspected “own goal” in which two Syrians were killed after a bomb destroyed their car parked in London’s West End on New Year’s Eve 1978. The 1982 assassination attempt on the Israeli Ambassador in London was thought to have Syrian connections, clear links were found to the Abu Nidal organisation, a Palestinian terrorist group at the time based in Syria. In 1985, Britain expelled four Syrians after British detectives apparently thwarted a planned attack on two leading PLO figures in London.²⁶⁰ October 1986 saw two men holding Iraq passports deported to Syria after they were intercepted by police at the start of what was thought to be another Abu Nidal plot. Asad rejected the accusations, the regime insisting that the Abu Nidal offices in Damascus dealt only with information and publicity and the attacks did not serve Syrian interests. In fact, even Western intelligence agencies came to the conclusion that Abu Nidal himself was now actually in Libya.²⁶¹ The Hindawi trial was on another level however. The compelling nature of the evidence and the strong link, not just to terrorist organisations based in Syria, but to senior members of the Syrian regime and to

²⁶⁰ S Tendler, “Damascus and the European Bombings” *The Times* (25 October 1986)

²⁶¹ Seale *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East* p467

high level Syrian embassy staff, considered a major development. The consequences of this for the Anglo-Syrian relations were serious.

Providing a statement to the Commons on Anglo-Syrian relations on October 24th Howe confirmed “conclusive evidence of Syrian official involvement with Hindawi.” The Syrian claim, that their contact with Hindawi throughout had been as a “bona fide journalist” was “frankly ridiculous” given his paperwork could not have been obtained without collusion with Syrian officials, and the contacts he’d made with Syrian officials since arriving in London. “Independent evidence” established that the Syrian ambassador was personally involved in securing Hindawi sponsorship by the Syrian intelligence authorities. “Equally compelling evidence”, according to Howe, showed that Hindawi sought to secretly contact Syrian intelligence officials in Damascus to request assistance in securing his release. Toward the end of his statement Howe announced the decision to break diplomatic ties with Syrian.²⁶²

The statement revealed the now inherent conflict in British policy, choosing to cut ties with Syria as part of a hard-line stance against terrorism directly contradicted the policy of “playing our full part” to find peaceful settlement in

²⁶² G Howe, Secretary of State for Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs statement on Anglo Syrian relations 24 October 1986, <http://www.apnewsarchive.com/1986/Text-Of-Howe-s-Statement/id-78732fd5e4f3cfd24b1443ce3412db20> (07/03/2012)

the Middle East. A statement from the British Ambassador to Syria at the time, though, is illuminating; while admitting the break in relations to be a "disadvantage" the ambassador added "It has got to be said that in recent years we have not been able to exercise very much influence over Syrian policy".²⁶³

The decision to break diplomatic relations came within hours of the verdict. The breakdown in relations with such a strategically important state in the Middle East can only be seen as a failure for British policy. In some senses the government had no option, Thatcher's aggressive stance against state sponsored terrorism meant her credibility was involved; anything reaction seen as weak risked criticism in Parliament and the press, potentially from her international partners. In fact, she made the decision three days prior to the verdict and saw Asad, now, as an obstacle to an accord being reached between Israel and Jordan²⁶⁴. Thatcher was, reportedly, the driving force in the decision to end diplomatic relations, a decision not discussed at full Cabinet, but taken by Thatcher and a small group of senior Cabinet ministers.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ N Beeston "Syria and Britain complete their rift" *The Times*, (01 November 1986)

²⁶⁴ Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East*, p481

²⁶⁵ "Thatcher forced through tough stance" *The Guardian*, (26 October 1986)

Percy Cradock, writes that there was a choice for Britain; one, to expel the Syrian ambassador or two, cut off ties entirely. He argues he would have opted for the first since full confrontation equalled a greater risk to British citizens, sacrificed intelligence information, and also risked losing Britain's overflight rights which would have a financial implication.²⁶⁶ Prior to the trial the FCO and Foreign Secretary had urged caution for similar reasons. These reasons remained but in addition if Britain failed to convince her allies to follow her lead in cutting ties with Syria, then the British action would have little effect on Syria. The cost potentially - British lives in Lebanon and British interests in the Middle East generally.

Clearly the decision was not straight forward, one diplomatic source explaining that there was much at stake, including the risk to British diplomats abroad and that "Syria could make sure that Britain play no further role in the Middle East peace process. That would be a blow to the Foreign Office... [Syria] is the cornerstone of the Middle East."²⁶⁷ Thus Syria was acknowledged as a key state in the Middle East, under the direct protection of the SU and its influence in the region recognised as extensive. The breach in relations would necessarily have a number of consequences.

²⁶⁶ Cradock, *In pursuit of British interests*, p163

²⁶⁷ M Evans "The Hindawi case: How MI5 bugged the embassy for years" *The Times* (25 October 1986)

British property and citizens across the Middle East were at heightened risk of becoming priority targets for Abu Nidal and other terrorists, and there was further risk for western hostages already being held. Though Britain had little economic interest in Syria the British move put its wider economic interests at risk since Syria was considered a frontline state in the war against Israel. Consequently, British relations and trade with other Arab states could have cooled, even with those states Britain viewed as more moderate such as Saudi Arabia. Lastly, there were implications for British airlines since many flights to the Middle and Far East were routed over Syria and the closure of Syrian airspace would have a financial cost. The FCO was not unaware of these risks. On the announcement of the break in diplomatic relations one FCO source called it an "accident of history" that the Hindawi case had led to Britain accusing Syria of involvement in terrorism, saying "We are reacting to a situation. Any country around the world could find themselves in the same situation".²⁶⁸ Attempts to mitigate the situation were evident in the statement by FCO officials saying Britain was not attempting to provide a "blueprint" for its partners in the EC or other members of the G7.

²⁶⁸ E Lederer, "Britain becomes first Western power to break with Syria" *Associated Press*, (24 October 1986)

Officials noted a number of ways Britain's allies could show support of its stance. One, suspension or reduction of high-level contacts; two, tighter security checks on Syrian Arab Airlines; three, the recall of ambassadors for consultations. They also noted the pledges made by the G7 at the Tokyo summit in May for concerted action where cases of state sponsored terrorism were proven.²⁶⁹ By this, the FCO was attempting two things. Firstly, to moderate the impact should Britain's allies fail to act as stringently as the Government would like, perhaps in part hoping to balance the anticipated strong voice of the Prime Minister. Secondly, by reminding Britain's allies of their commitment to concerted action they tried to elicit a joint approach to Syria that might mitigate effects of the break on British interests.

Syrian reaction to the break in relations was immediate and fierce. British diplomats were given just one week to leave the country. Overflight rights for British aircraft were revoked. The British Council in Damascus was closed, a considerable blow to cultural relations between the two countries. Syrian ports and territorial waters were barred to British shipping. Syrian Arab Airlines were stopped from flying to London. The reaction, though not unanticipated, dashed any hopes that Syria would maintain the principle of reciprocity, which was the norm in such cases.²⁷⁰ Asad furiously denied any Syrian involvement, pointing the finger at Israel and enemies of the regime who wanted to weaken his hold

²⁶⁹ Ibid

²⁷⁰ I Black, "Aircraft banned in retaliation" *The Guardian* (25 October 1986)

on power. There was evidence linking the Hindawi family to Mossad, uncovered by coordinated Syrian and Jordanian investigation, which established the family had a history of involvement with the agency. Another theory is that Israel had prior knowledge of the plot, allowing it to go so far for maximum political benefit. Others suggest that the plot was too clumsy for Asad to have been involved, the evidence so obvious that it was more likely to have been a frame up, not by the CIA or Mossad, but an Arab enemy such as PLO chairman Arafat or Qadhafi.

Patrick Seale argues that probably at least one Syrian agency was involved, but equally it is likely neither Asad nor his Prime Minister Dr Kasm and possibly the rest of his government knew anything of it until the story broke on the news. Asad deliberately set up his various security services and military agencies in order to prevent any one agency gathering too much power and thus the ability to challenge him, so it is possible one of these may have acted independently. Equally these agencies could be encouraged to partake in this kind of plot independently, offering Asad plausible deniability. Yet, that it was Khouli, with close personal ties to Asad, who was apparently central to the whole affair creates even more uncertainty as to the level of Asad's own knowledge and involvement.

For the British government, the evidence left little doubt of some Syrian involvement, likely, the Syrian Air Force Intelligence agency. Asad, though, viewed the plot in terms of regional intrigue, seeing it as an attempt to undermine his regime. Certainly he had reason to be worried about the allegations of involvement in terrorism being brought against his regime. His regime was being subjected to the same barrage of accusations that had resulted in the US air force launching bombing raids against Libya, making his sense of vulnerability all the more pertinent. As would be repeated both in 2003, after Iraq, and the 2011 after Libya, there was mounting speculation throughout 1986 that Syria was next on the list for US military intervention. Both Vice-President George Bush and President Reagan accusing Syria of “godfathering terrorism” and “running the risks that entailed”.²⁷¹ Thatcher made no statement backing a military strike against Syria, but neither did she categorically rule it out. Her decision to “break new ground” becoming the first British Prime Minister to visit Israel in late May had further cemented the perception of British drift into an US-Israeli axis.²⁷² For Asad this demonstrated British support for plans by Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres to pursue settlement of the Palestinian problem through a separate deal with King Husayn of Jordan,²⁷³ a move bound to raise Syrian ire.

²⁷¹ Comment “Mr Assad in the firing line” *The Guardian*, (08 May 1986)

²⁷² Comment, “Mrs Thatcher breaks new territory”, *The Guardian* (24 May 1986)

²⁷³ Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East*, p477

Thatcher's response was also predictably strong. Her natural inclination to distrust this Soviet backed socialist state; direct experience of terrorism through the IRA, and her personal friendships with King Husayn of Jordan and Prime Minister Peres of Israel may also strengthened her thinking.²⁷⁴ In the official British view, the nature of the Syrian regime was to blame for creating the conditions for the plot to occur. If it was the case that Asad was not the person who authorised the attack then the worth of a diplomatic relationship with a leader of a regime not able to control, or answerable for, its activities was questionable. If he did know about the attack the decision to cut ties was even more justifiable.

The Hindawi affair stands as an exemplar of the murky world of Middle East intrigue and demonstrates the difficulties British foreign policy faced. There were clear differences in opinion between the PM and the FCO in how to handle the affair. While Thatcher's voice reigned supreme it was key in preventing the resumption of ties with Syria. Thatcher insisted in tying the resumption of relations with Syria, to Asad's willingness to renounce terrorism, unwilling or unable to accept the Syrian argument that these were resistance fighters, or that the groups are integral to Syrian interests in its regional struggle with Israel. According to the British government the evidence tying Syria to the EL AL plot was conclusive but several other investigations into terrorism in Europe

²⁷⁴ Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East*, p481

failed to build similar strong cases, making choosing an appropriate response problematic. Thus a coordinated and effective policy against international terrorism remained elusive.

The case highlighted the difficulties Britain applying pressure on Syria with few economic ties and military retaliation not an option. Political and economic pressure had to come from acting in concert with allies and partners. With the Tokyo agreement in place, and the joint experiences of terrorist attacks suffered by other Western allies, the conditions appeared favourable for a collective stance against Syria. Yet conversely, there was a considerably less than robust response given the circumstances highlighting the difficulty for Britain's partners and allies to stand united on Middle East policy, and for Britain, it highlighted some intrinsic difficulties in its foreign policy.

Taking a stand, Thatcher and her allies

The task of negotiating a coordinated response from the EC was arduous, with each member state having a different view on what measures the EC might take toward Syria reflecting their different interests in, bi-lateral ties with, and proximity to, the Syrian regime as well as the Middle East region as a whole. Whilst most of the twelve governments condemned the plot, a number, led by

France, expressed doubt as to the extent of Asad's involvement with a marked reluctance to break economic and diplomatic ties.

A meeting of European Foreign Ministers on October 27th, 1986 in Luxemburg failed to reach a collective decision despite Howe's detailed summary of the Hindawi trial including the evidence collected of official Syrian involvement in the plot. Howe appealed for the Community to adopt a nine-point package of measures against Syria, including a tough statement condemning Syria, a halt to EEC aid, ceasing official visits, an arms embargo, limits on the size of Syrian embassies, mutual non-acceptance of expelled Syrian diplomats, tighter visa controls, temporary recall of EEC ambassadors from Damascus and more security checks on Syrian airline flights. Delegates were unwilling to go much further at this stage than a "vaguely worded condemnation of terrorism."²⁷⁵ Even this wasn't unanimous as Greece refused to endorse it, not accepting either that Syria was sponsoring terrorism or that the Damascus government be singled out. A French representative said of the evidence that Britain "presented to us, what can be described as irrefutable proof of the involvement of Syrian intelligence services... However, is it the same of the Syrian government? We were not convinced".²⁷⁶ It was a stance echoed by several other partners.

²⁷⁵ D Brown, "Europe refuses to back Howe on Syria" *The Guardian* (28 October 1986)

²⁷⁶ T Lavee, "Thatcher takes lead against Syrian terrorism" *EIR*, Vol 13, No 44, Nov 1986, p46

This reaction was instantly condemned by the British government, Howe complaining that terrorist attacks in one European country appear not to make much impact on others. Thatcher was the loudest and most critical of her partners, stating that their lack of action did not “live up to their bold statements against terrorism”²⁷⁷. This played well in the press, but the reaction of the other EC states was likely expected. It was unreasonable to expect any more from a multinational organisation only three days after the end of the Hindawi trial. Britain’s own decision to cut ties with Syria had been taken with no prior notice to any of these partners whom it now asked for support. Each member had their own interests to consider, France had her own hostage concerns, as did Germany, and also had troops on the ground in Lebanon. Any decision with regard to Syria would have implications for both.

Additionally, this meeting of EC foreign ministers was arranged prior to the verdict and key ministers were missing, the French, German and Italian foreign ministers all with prior engagements.²⁷⁸ It was hardly an auspicious setting to discuss united action against Syria. Thatcher had not endeared Britain to her European partners consequently they were resentful of British attempts to pressure them over Syria for measures “designed to boost Mrs Thatcher’s

²⁷⁷ H Pick, “Thatcher takes EEC to task on Syria” *The Guardian* (29 October 1986)

²⁷⁸ R Owen, “Whitehall accused of arrogance/EEC refuses to back Britain over Syria” *The Times*, (29 October 1986)

political popularity at home rather than as a genuine international contribution to defeating terrorism".²⁷⁹ Dennis Healy, shadow foreign secretary, noted that "the British case might have been stronger if it itself had taken stronger action over South Africa."²⁸⁰ Here both Britain and Germany had opposed sanctions with similar interests at stake, but while Chancellor Kohl quietly lobbied behind the scenes Thatcher had approached negotiations in her usual manner leaving a stain of resentment among her EC partners, while Kohl came away clean.²⁸¹

Howe sought to mitigate British reaction, reporting to the Commons on his return from the EEC Foreign Affairs Council, that partners had been "impressed and disturbed"²⁸² with the evidence he'd brought to the meeting and stressing to the House that all ministers were prepared to take further measures given time to digest the evidence, with the exception of Greece. This was backed by the French President in his statement that "no compromise was possible with terrorism or states which indulged in terrorism."²⁸³ Both viewed the meeting the upcoming 10th November as a chance to review the potential measures that could be taken. At that meeting Britain finally got an agreement on joint EEC action. The attending foreign ministers decided on four sanctions against Syria, including an arms embargo, suspension of high-level visits, a review of the

²⁷⁹ Brown, "Europe refuses to back Howe on Syria" (28 October 1986)

²⁸⁰ A Travis, "Howe Pledges veto against EEC £100m aid to Syria" *The Guardian*, (29 October 1986)

²⁸¹ Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p250

²⁸² Travis, "Howe Pledges veto against EEC £100m aid to Syria" (29 October 1986)

²⁸³ C Page, "France hints at new line on terror" *The Guardian* (29 October 1986)

activities of Syrian diplomats and consular missions in EC countries, and that each would review and tighten security precautions surrounding the operations of Syrian Arab Airlines.²⁸⁴

These were moderate anti-terrorist measures falling far short of Howe's suggested nine-point package, but the varying national interests meant that this could be expected. The ban on high level exchanges with Syria was maintained for nine months, and the EEC Commission did not recommence its funding of two major aid projects in Syria until September 8th, 1987. The Commission stated that these had stopped over technical and not political problems while British government continued to insist it would not support any proposal for new aid to Syria at that time.²⁸⁵ The suggestion that European partners should follow Britain into a full diplomatic rift with Damascus was flatly refused. Howe presented the meeting as an example of EEC resolve.²⁸⁶

Perhaps in contrast the support from the US seemed more immediate; Reagan endorsed the British stand, withdrew the American ambassador from Syria and intimated that there could be further action after discussion with Britain.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁴ "The Hindawi Case: Syrian Connexions" *The Institute for Counter Terrorism*, (01 November) 1986, <http://www.ict.org.il/> (Accessed 22/06/2009)

²⁸⁵ J Palmer, "EEC aid to Syria resumes", *The Guardian* (08 September 1987)

²⁸⁶ D Brown, "Europe backs sanctions against Syria", *The Guardian* (11 November 1986)

²⁸⁷ M White, "Reagan withdraws ambassador in support of Brit move" *The Guardian*, (26 October 1986)

While indicating that the US might consider further diplomatic and economic steps with regard to Syria, the Reagan administration also clearly stated there would not be a diplomatic break. This was consistent with its recent position vis-à-vis Syria which was to keep "President Asad's Syria on its list of proscribed terrorist nations while at the same time maintaining diplomatic links at the highest levels".²⁸⁸ Perhaps after her high profile support of US action in Libya Thatcher might have expected more from the US. Following the Tokyo Summit agreement, it had been the US that had been most vocal in supporting the possibility of military intervention in Syria. Taken together with the hawkish rhetoric coming from President Reagan and Vice President Bush earlier in the year and the weight of evidence against Syria, the US reaction could be viewed as somewhat weak.

The Americans, though, had their own interests to look out for in the region. The fate of the six American hostages held in Lebanon, and the public reaction should they be killed as a result of American aggression toward Syria, restricted its options. The Syrian role that had emerged in helping to organise safe passage for American hostages in that period was also important.²⁸⁹ Any action against Syria also risked further destabilising the general situation in Lebanon, which potentially could destabilise the whole region. The issues that worried

²⁸⁸ A Brummer "US ready to take limited steps against Damascus" *The Guardian*, (28 October 1986)

²⁸⁹ Ibid

the British FCO over taking a tough stance with Syria, overridden by Thatcher, were of as much a concern, if not more so, to the US which had more interests invested in the region that would be put at risk. Lastly there was infighting within the administration as to where the blame for the incident really lay, some believing that Qadhafi not Assad was behind the plot.

Despite earlier sabre rattling following the Libyan strikes, any action against the Syrian regime was an entirely different and more dangerous prospect for America. It risked a confrontation with the SU, Syria being their principle client in the Middle East, "As a pariah Colonel Qadhafi was the soft option; as the Soviet Union's closest ally in the Middle East, President Assad is untouchable".²⁹⁰ It should also be noted that the Syrian military was not seen as a "pushover" making the risks of staging a military intervention higher.²⁹¹ Even in Britain there was no particular support for military intervention so it would have been hard to justify by the US, particularly as the Article 51 argument on self-defence provided to legitimise the Libya action was already considered weak in that scenario. Lastly, there was the added complication that tensions between Israel and Syria were already high so any action by the US had to be considered in terms of igniting this situation further.

²⁹⁰ Comment, "The act that won't come together" *The Guardian* (29 October 1986)

²⁹¹ Pick, "Determined Thatcher calls Assad to account" *The Guardian* (25 October 1986)

Both the Thatcher government and Reagan administration agreed that Syria “tolerated, encourages or actively sponsors operations which... would pass as terrorism”, yet Asad was not considered in the same light as Qadhafi and never gave the same kind of “rhetorical support for most flagrant terrorist exploits”²⁹² as Qadhafi did. In other words, Qadhafi, much like Saddam Hussein in 2001, was a state leader who overtly stood in the way of peace and stability in the region, posed a threat to American interests and most importantly, was someone with whom the diplomatic option was no longer thought viable. Asad was still considered as someone who had authority and influence, and most importantly a rational actor with whom to engage in diplomatic negotiations.

Less than a month following the Hindawi verdict Thatcher suffered another blow as details of the Iran-Contra affair emerged. Senior officials in the American administration had been secretly facilitating the sales of arms to Iran, then under an arms embargo, hoping to secure the release of US hostages and to fund the Contras in Nicaragua. The emergence of details of the arms for hostages deal was damaging to the US administration. As if to underline the importance of his regime in the region, it was Asad who revealed the affair, deliberately leaking details to the pro-Syrian Beirut paper *Al-Shiraa*. For Asad this served a number of purposes, reminding the Americans and others in the region of the important part Syria played there. It was also a shot at Iran

²⁹² D Hirst, “Behind the Syrian lines” *The Guardian* (12 May 1986)

which, in Lebanon, was vying for influence with Syria. Neither was it coincidental that Asad chose to reveal these details just as the Americans were praising Iran for aiding in the release of hostages while dismissing any suggestion of positive Syrian involvement in these releases.

Thatcher, in her drive to “punish Syria for its role in the Hindawi affair,” was left high and dry.²⁹³ In Washington as the story broke, however, Thatcher maintained her policy of publically supporting Reagan. Within weeks of breaking relations with Syria, Thatcher “defended the President’s secret dealings with Iran on the grounds that it was always necessary to maintain contact with people... she offered not a word of admonition for the most blatant appeasement of terrorists a western government has undertaken”.²⁹⁴

Thatcher’s staunch defence of Reagan was more than what he received from some members of his own government.

Thatcher held a genuine desire to make a stand against terrorism, and Syria was a soft target, military action was ruled out as there could be no risk of direct military confrontation with the SU, and there was no real loss to be had in economic terms. Additionally, the amount of evidence in this case was

²⁹³ “The secret web that Syria blew”, *The Guardian* (07 November 1986)

²⁹⁴ H Young, “Commentary: A terrible price to pay for the love of Ronnie/ The political relationship between British Premier Thatcher & US President Reagan”, *The Guardian*, (18 November 1986)

unusually persuasive. Speaking to the Commons, Thatcher stated that “There is a very clear declaration on terrorism, to which all summit countries are committed. We shall obviously be monitoring its application”.²⁹⁵ This was Thatcher’s opportunity to put the agreement to the test. Unfortunately, as with many such statements, in order to get agreement on the statement the language was suitably ambiguous and as such not all Thatcher’s allies were compelled to act.

In her insistence on cutting ties with Syria and refusing to consider reengagement until President Asad denounced all “support for terrorism” without any preconditions, Thatcher cut ties with a key state in the region. A dialogue with Syria could potentially have aided in bringing British hostages kidnapped in Lebanon home safely. In some senses it isolated Thatcher, not Asad, locked in a path significantly different from both her European and American allies, who despite denials, all negotiated with both the Syrians and Iranians to free their own nationals. Domestically it caused friction within her own government. Furthermore, cutting ties with a state thought to be central to the achievement of peace, security and stability in the region ran contrary to British interests in pursuing an active role in peace efforts.

²⁹⁵ Tokyo Economic Summit, HC Deb 08 May 1986 vol 97 cc259-69, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1986/may/08/tokyo-economic-summit> (Accessed 10/12/2014)

Resumption of Diplomatic Relations

The major condition Thatcher put on re-establishing relations with Syria was that Syria must show itself to no longer sponsor terrorists. On this there would be no movement, but ultimatums such as this are not useful tools in diplomacy. Thatcher's efforts to isolate Syria and thus potentially forcing the regime to give way on this issue, rested on Britain's ability to persuade her partners to follow suit. Britain essentially encountered the same problem that America had run into over Libya when it had sought partners to join the Americans in sanctions against the Qadhafi regime. Moreover, the Syrian regime was being told it must renounce state sponsored terrorism and cut all links with so-called terrorist groups, simultaneously, the British government was insisting that Syria should show her readiness to be a responsible member of the international community by using her influence with such groups to press for the release of the western hostages in Lebanon. This must be regarded as a somewhat ambiguous at least, if not contradictory stance on the issue.

Finally, Thatcher's stance against state sponsored terrorism, and in particular against Syria, became closely attached to her own personal prestige as Prime Minister. It became almost impossible for the British government to back down on the issue without any significant move by Syria to give ground while Thatcher held the premiership. While other countries made deals to secure the

release of their citizens in Lebanon, no movement was achieved by Britain in this respect until after relations with Syria were restored and this did not, perhaps could not, happen until the resignation of Thatcher in 1990.

The FCO and the British Embassy in Damascus had felt British reaction to events should never have gone as far as severing ties completely.²⁹⁶ Almost immediately after they were cut there were calls for the government to restore ties and questions over what would precipitate this restoration. By February 1987 the FCO had upgraded its diplomatic presence in Damascus with speculation that the timing was linked to the disappearance of Terry Waite in Lebanon, and the hope that Syria would use its influence to negotiate his release and the release of other hostages.²⁹⁷ This was denied by the Foreign Secretary and relations remained the same.²⁹⁸ Simultaneously, the UK government also came under pressure to reinstate diplomatic relations with Syria from her European partners who hoped for an international Middle East peace conference in which Syria was seen to play a crucial role.²⁹⁹ In both cases Britain maintained that no restoration of relations could be considered until the Syrian regime cut its support for terrorist groups, and refused to support restoration of EEC ministerial visits to Damascus.

²⁹⁶ Black "Aircraft banned in retaliation" *The Guardian* (25 October 1986)

²⁹⁷ N Beeston, "Whitehall admits it has upgraded diplomatic presence in Damascus" *The Times*, (16 February 1987)

²⁹⁸ J Palmer "UK denies Syria deal over Waite" *The Guardian* (17 February 1987)

²⁹⁹ J Palmer "Thatcher pressed to renew Syria tie" *The Guardian* (08 April 1987)

By July 1987 Britain had removed its opposition to dropping the sanctions the EEC had adopted in the wake of the Hindawi affair "in order to facilitate renewed diplomatic attempts for a conference on peace in the Middle East".³⁰⁰ The Thatcher government by then had already expressed support for American moves to reengage with Syria, a decision they had made in hopes of Syrian cooperation in the hostage situation, and also in an attempt to encourage Syria to distance itself from Iran at a time where the two countries are seen to be increasingly in dispute over Hizbullah in Lebanon.³⁰¹ Despite both these issues having clear links to the stated British priorities, plus some positive signs from Syria in terms of the regime distancing itself from terrorism with the closure of the Abu Nidal group office in Damascus, the British government maintained Syria had not done enough to begin moves to restore relations.

America and Britain's European partners moved to reengage with Syria prioritising their individual interests or goals in the region while pressure on Thatcher's government to do the same increased as hostages from other states were returned safely. As a number of signatories to the Tokyo anti-terror statement of 1986 were seen to breach anti-terrorist declarations, Thatcher

³⁰⁰ Y Sharma, "Syria: Britain ready to lift ban on EEC-Syria contacts" *Inter Press Service* (29 Jun 1987)

³⁰¹ B Hewitt, C Dickey, T Clifton, "Syria: Forgive and Forget?" *Newsweek*, Vol. 110 Issue 9 (31 August 1987)

held the line in Britain. In May 1988 Thatcher told the Commons that Britain would not pay ransom to terrorists, reiterating that there would be no resumption of relations with Syria until it disassociated itself from terrorism, and denying concern over loss of influence in Middle East diplomacy.³⁰² Syria's position, not Britain's, appeared stronger as a result. Asad's regime, now experiencing warmer relations with the US and other EEC partners, could withhold cooperation on the hostage issue as an incentive to full diplomatic relations.

It is easy to consider British policy here simply as clumsy but, as one article of the time put it, "It was Syria's London embassy that was the base for one of the most flagrant abuses of diplomatic privilege of modern times."³⁰³ While there may have been other motivators in Thatcher's decision to cut ties, the severity of the crime plus the weight of evidence were important factors. It was the conditions placed on resuming them that was problematic. For one thing, it was unclear what the Syrian regime would have to do to demonstrate compliance. The immediate measures Asad took to tighten his control of the intelligence services and later the expulsion of Abu Nidal from Syria³⁰⁴ did little to sway the British government. Thus relations were broken without any clear route to their resumption.

³⁰² H Pick, "Thatcher sticks to hard line on deals with terrorists" *The Guardian* (06 May 1988)

³⁰³ "Dealing with Syria", *The Times*, (21 August 1987)

³⁰⁴ Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East*, p482

By early 1990 the Thatcher government's stance toward Syria was becoming untenable. Voices in both Parliament and the media were arguing loudly for the resumption of relations. Circumstances had also changed. A similar break in relations with Iraq over the hanging of a London based journalist, or even over the smuggling of nuclear trigger devices, had not followed those events. The estimated cost to BA was now being estimated to be up to £50 million a year, and Britain only had two junior diplomats and a Secretary in Damascus with no access to senior figures in the Syrian regime, so no influence over hostage negotiations.³⁰⁵ The call for a different approach was echoed in the FCO and led by Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, appointed in October 1989, who also defended the decision to maintain Anglo-Iraqi ties saying Britain must not lose its last embassy "between the Khyber Pass and the Mediterranean".³⁰⁶ By this time, it was clear there was no advantage to this policy against Syria. Furthermore, Thatcher's own position in Government was weakened, particularly over the unpopularity of her government's poll tax policy, plus suffering from Howe's damning resignation speech which severely condemned her attitude to Europe.

³⁰⁵ C Walker, "Syrian role in the hostage story puts onus on Britain" *The Times*, 24 April 1990

³⁰⁶ "Purity or Progress" *The Guardian*, 12 April 1990

Signs of disagreement between No. 10 and the FCO were again apparent in disagreement over speaking with Iran over the hostage issue. Thatcher spoke in the Commons restating her position, equating negotiating as akin to blackmail.³⁰⁷ Yet Britain's established policy had neither gained the release of the hostages already in captivity nor made any Western citizens in Lebanon safer. On resuming relations with Syria, Tory MP Peter Temple-Morris, who sat on the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, said "Pressure is now moving strongly in this direction... From my contacts with the Foreign Office over the years I know that an element can see the advantage of a restoration of diplomatic relations with Syria".³⁰⁸ Hurd in the Commons too, reiterated his opinion that holding discussions, not striking bargains or making concessions, with the hostage takers was perfectly right.³⁰⁹

For Syria the outlook had also changed. Along with internal issues including a poor economy with a bloated public sector, and blatant corruption and loss of financial aid from other Arab countries Assad had by now lost his major ally the SU. From the mid-1980s onwards Gorbachev, facing his own economic problems, stopped supplying Syria with large amounts of military equipment

³⁰⁷ Thatcher, Engagements HC Deb 03 May 1990 vol 171 cc1203-8, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1990/may/03/engagements#S6CV0171P0_19900503_HOC_122 (Accessed 12/12/2015)

³⁰⁸ "Foreign Office may restore relations with Syria" *The Independent*, (08 May 1990)

³⁰⁹ Douglas Hurd Hostages HC Deb 09 May 1990 vol 172 cc175-7 http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1990/may/09/hostages#S6CV0172P0_19900509_HOC_14 (Accessed 19/11/2014)

ruling out any hopes of achieving strategic parity with Israel.³¹⁰ Asad's pragmatic policy making saw him move to improve relations with the West, and regionally with Egypt, Morocco and Jordan and demonstrating his regime was instrumental in securing negotiations for release of Western hostages, along with Iran.³¹¹

The 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait offered Asad an opportunity to cement this change in direction as the US sought to recruit Syria in order to isolate Saddam; Asad's strong nationalist credentials, strong army, and intelligence assets made him potentially the strongest Arab rival to Saddam in Iraq.³¹² There were indications, too, that Britain recognised the changing situation. FCO Minister William Waldergrave stated that new circumstances in the Middle East might raise the prospects of hostages being released and noted engagement with Syria and Iran might figure in that.³¹³ The issues over Syria's links to international terrorist groups with the continued opposition to renewal of ties with Syria meant Britain restored relations with Iran, not Syria, on 27th September 1990. Still a softening on the British stance could be seen in the government lifting its block on EC aid to Syria for the first time since 1986,

³¹⁰ M Ma'oz, "Syria's role in the region Mediator, Peacemaker, or Aggressor?" *A Century Foundation Report*, (New York, 2007) http://tcf.org/assets/downloads/tcf-maaz_syria.pdf, (Accessed 19/11/2014)

³¹¹ R Norton-Taylor, M Simmons, "Severed links hinders release efforts" *The Guardian*, (04 May 1990)

³¹² M Tran "US seeks help of Syria & Iran" *The Guardian*, (10 August 1990)

³¹³ M White, "Britain may seek renewed links with Iran & Syria" *The Guardian* (27 August 1990)

freeing the path for European Commission discussion on grants and loans to the value of £105 million at least.³¹⁴

By October 1990 Syrian troops were on the ground in Saudi Arabia, alongside American and British forces, adding another layer of complexity to Anglo-Syrian relations. Hurd stated "On our side there is complete readiness to re-establish diplomatic relations."³¹⁵ The resignation of Thatcher finally opened the doors to a reconciliation. On 28th November 1990, the same day John Major became British Prime Minister, the government restored relations with Syria. A change in both the international arena, with the downfall of the SU and in the regional situation with the invasion of Kuwait, combined with the ongoing hostage situation with the key role of Syria in both Lebanon and the MEPP, plus American reengagement with Syria added weight to those arguing for a restoration of ties. Yet timing suggests that Thatcher played a large part in delaying that rapprochement, even to the point of seemingly obstructing national interests. While others in her government may have backed her opinion, Thatcher's fall from grace handed power to those opposing it.

³¹⁴ A McEwen, "Hurd consents to EC opening aid talks with Syria", *The Times*, (20 September 1990)

³¹⁵ M Sheridan, "Crisis in the Gulf: Syria 'ready to renew ties with Britain', Douglas Hurd will this weekend learn of Syrian interests in the release of British Hostages" *The Independent* (12 October 1990)

Conclusion

The Thatcher government did not enter office intending to be dragged back into the quagmire of the Middle East, to be side-lined in diplomatic terms to some of the biggest issues in the Middle East and would have lost diplomatic relations with three Middle East states including Syria. British foreign policy toward Syria during the 1980s was directly influenced by its reaction to broader Middle East issues during this period, and despite Anglo-Syrian relations not being high priority for the incoming Thatcher government, they were certainly high profile by the time Thatcher resigned as Prime Minister of Great Britain on 22 November 1990.

A key point for British foreign policy in the region was, in fact, an event totally unrelated to Middle East politics. The Falklands War can be seen to be key for a number of reasons considerably impacted on British foreign policy making and this had consequences for the policies it pursued in the Middle East from that point on. It heightened Britain's sense of identity and confidence in the world, and strengthened Thatcher's hold over government policy. Simultaneously, some strong voices in government lost influence in the fall out, not least Carrington. Thus it decreased the strength of those voices calling for a closer relationship with the Europe and strengthened Britain's relationship with the US, not least in underlining the importance of the relationship to Britain in the strategic support it received from them. Further, the victory impressed the

Reagan administration, highlighting Britain as a useful partner on the world stage and cementing a strong personal relationship between the two leaders, Thatcher and Reagan.

There was nothing to indicate these developments would necessarily lead to the deterioration of Anglo-Syrian relations. However, combined with events which saw British troops on the ground in Lebanon, British support for American bombing in Libya, a growing perception that British foreign policy was far too closely linked to American and a hard-line stance by the British government against international terrorism the path toward increasing Anglo-Syrian tensions was clear. Keeping British on this path, were Thatcher and her supporters.

Thatcher's legacy was a poor one for British policy in the Middle East.

Thatcher's antagonistic relationship with Europe meant she was not naturally inclined to support European initiatives, her overwhelming belief in the necessity of a close relationship with the US, fundamental to the security of Europe, disinclined her to support a distinctly European approach in the Middle East. The subservience to American policy in the region side-lined any hopes of a significantly different approach, and left the Arab states without a stronger voice to balance American backing of Israel. This position was detrimental to Britain's hopes for peace and security in the region.

Thatcher led Britain's policy toward international terrorism, her black and white stance leaving little room for manoeuvre after the conclusion of the Hindawi trial. Thatcher's Syrian policy eventually set her staunchly apart from her allies who maintained some kind of diplomatic relationship, but not in a way that significantly aided British priorities in the region. While the British reaction was understandable, the removal of a British presence in Syria resulted in the loss of a valuable source of intelligence and means for discussion and negotiation. The position essentially weakened British capacity to pursue its goals in terms of protecting its own citizens in the region.

The resignation of Thatcher cleared the obstacle standing in the way of resuming with Syria. By 1990 Syria too was looking to the west for some support, having lost its primary sponsor, the SU. As events played in Kuwait, in many ways it could be argued that Asad had made the more astute foreign policy decisions having, despite various setbacks, kept his regime relevant to the resolution of major regional issues; the resolution of civil war in Lebanon, key to ending the hostage crisis, still a major player in bringing about a comprehensive peace in the Middle East and, in showing support to the allied action against Saddam's aggression in Kuwait, helping to legitimise the coalition's counter offensive while gaining various boons from the Gulf states and Egypt. Thatcher's policies on the other hand, had seen British policy in the Middle East severely undermined and had done little to live up to the early

promise of the Venice Declaration. Only in the resignation of Thatcher was there some hope for the normalisation of British relations with Syria but it was some time before Anglo-Syrian relations once again rose in prominence.

Chapter Three

New Labour's Foreign Policy and Syria before Bashar

Tony Blair's New Labour government came into power almost a decade after the end of the Cold War, and was the first to be completely free of the shadow of that conflict. The collapse of the SU had left the West optimistic. The Western style liberal democracy had "won", and was the model which could secure peace and stability internationally, therefore priority was given in the promotion of good government, democracy and human rights. The violence seen in Eastern Europe, especially in Bosnia, however, had highlighted that threats to peace and security remained and needed an international response that could be shaped in a very different way now the threat posed by sparking Cold War dispute was removed.

The international system was dominated by the remaining superpower and Britain's ally, the US. There was opportunity to reframe British foreign policy, and the Blair government expressed its aim of establishing a new role for Britain, one that would establish Britain as a force for good in the world. British priorities laid in strengthening ties with Europe, and maintaining a "special relationship" with the world's remaining superpower, ensuring some of the key security arrangements of the Cold War years, such as NATO, remained relevant and remained a priority for the US. Security was no longer seen in terms of protecting against an existential threat, but in terms of a number of diverse

issues including security of resources, environment, against international crime and arms trafficking. This meant the establishment of a new kind of foreign policy, a move away from foreign policy based on narrow national interest and realpolitik.

The 1997 election, as is generally the case in Britain, was fought and won primarily over domestic policy issues; Blair had only given one speech on foreign policy on the run up to the election. This was neither surprising nor unprecedented but even so Blair was particularly ill-versed in foreign policy, according to Clare Short he had shown little or no interest in foreign policy before becoming Labour leader in 1994.³¹⁶ He was also one of the most inexperienced Prime Ministers in foreign policy matters since World War Two.³¹⁷ It was, then, in complete contrast to this, that his premiership would in many ways be defined by matters of foreign policy.

Blair was quick to set out his plans for a new confident Britain. The notion of "Cool Britannia" was born giving an indication of how important the idea of image and prestige, thus the role of the media, would be for this government. Blair had the strong support of the Labour party behind him, having remodelled

³¹⁶ O Daddow, "Tony's War? Blair, Kosovo and the interventionist impulse in British Foreign Policy" *International Affairs* 85:3, (2009) p550

³¹⁷ J Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, p8

it significantly since becoming labour leader, removing many barriers previous leaders had faced when attempting to negotiate key policies particularly with the unions. He was also strengthened in that many in the Labour party credited Blair, personally, as a major factor in the Labour victory.

The perception of a strong and dynamic new government was heightened by its contrast with the preceding government of John Major. The outgoing Conservatives had been riven with internal wrangling, had poor relations with the US Clinton administration, and such a bad relationship with Europe that its European partners delayed final negotiations on the Treaty of Amsterdam until after the British election.³¹⁸ Blair quickly established good relations with the US and his positive outlook on Europe was viewed with favour by other European leaders³¹⁹. His very engaged and personal style of politics meant he "rose rapidly to the status of key world leader",³²⁰ his increasing presence on the global arena having implications not just for foreign policy direction in Britain, but also for the decision making process itself, over which actors in government could influence policy decisions.

³¹⁸ Speech by Lord Wallace of Saltaire "The Collapse of British Foreign Policy" Chatham House, (September 2004)

³¹⁹ D Kavanagh, "The Blair Premiership" in A Seldon (ed) *Blair's Britain 1997 – 2001*, (Cambridge, 2007) p3

³²⁰ M Clarke "Foreign Policy" in A Seldon (ed) *Blair's Britain 1997 – 2001*, p593

While not immediately apparent, this held implications for British policy towards Syria, as British policy in the Middle East region took centre stage for Blair's premiership, firstly in attempts to rejuvenate the MEPP, and latterly as the War on Terror focussed international attention on the region once again. Echoing the experiences of the past, Anglo-Syrian relations would be impacted more by wider British priorities and interests, than they would be direct bilateral interaction and concerns. This chapter looks at the early years of the New Labour government, considering its style, decision making processes and priorities and how this affected its foreign policy, demonstrating any impact this had on the Anglo-Syria relationship. Further it looks at how the government became increasingly pro-interventionist in its foreign policy, demonstrating the lessons it learned from these experiences, the impact that had of its policy making which would eventually bring British interests into conflict with those of Syria.

New Labour & the making of British Foreign Policy

New Labour's foreign policy making process, under Blair, came under intense scrutiny from the media, academics and MPs both in the Labour party and in the opposing parties, all of whom to varying degrees, queried policy decisions not just in their own right but also on the basis of who was leading foreign policy making and how decisions were made. Further they queried the

assertion that foreign policy making under New Labour would be something new, and involve a new role in the world.

Blair was determined to overhaul "old fashioned institutions"³²¹ of Whitehall. The intent to reform the FCO was clear from the outset, driven by a concern within elements of both new and old labour that it was a last bastion of privilege which needed to be overhauled to reflect "modern" Britain³²². All Whitehall departments were subject to the drive to import management styles from the private sector, aiming to increase accountability and improve working practice, in practice this introducing a management style based around targets increasing workloads and leaving less time for policy discussions. John Dickie, in *The New Mandarins*, describes how this new approach to foreign policy was felt in a practical sense, including changing the recruitment and selection process in the FCO to ensure quality and diversity in intake, improving training for new recruits, and launching a review into how the FCO operated, all to challenge the prevailing institutional perceptions, to modernise and think differently on world issues and its approaches to them. The intention clearly to change the way in which the FCO operated and challenge underlying perception and assumptions of that department.

³²¹ I Hall, "Building the Global Network? the Reform of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office under New Labour" *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* (2012) p228

³²² Hall, "Building the Global Network?" p230

The primacy of the FCO over foreign policy had been under challenge for some time but this was compounded under Blair with the creation of a new department, the DfID, led by Claire Short. Short interpreted the remit for this new department widely, leading to a number of turf wars with the MoD, DTI, FCO and No 10.³²³ Whilst the creation of the DfID had been announced prior to the election, it now seemed to be in direct contradiction to Blair's commitment to "joint up" and "open government."³²⁴ The rivalry between this new department and the FCO did nothing to add to the ideal of transparency and clarity in policy decision making. Once established, the DfID's influence grew rapidly, with Chancellor, later PM, Gordon Brown directing significant budget resources into this department. The DfID quickly outstripped the FCO, by 2009 – 10, having a resource budget two times the size of that of the FCO.³²⁵

Even in providing advice on foreign policy to ministers the FCO has increasingly seen competition. New Labour also brought in expertise and knowledge from other governments and non-governmental organisations including academics, businessmen and increasing the number of think tanks, most notably The Foreign Policy Centre set up by New Labour in 1998. The intent was to reform

³²³ Williams, "Who's making UK foreign policy?" p916

³²⁴ J Lunn, V Miller, B Smith, "British Foreign Policy since 1997" Research Paper 08/56, House of Commons Library, (23 June 2008) p74

³²⁵ Hall, "Building the Global Network?" p230

the way policy was made by expanding the knowledge base and expertise, and diversifying the sources of policy advice. As well as tapping into a broader spectrum of data and experience, the intention was also to further erode the traditional narrow elitist base for foreign policy decision making, to diversify its input and tap into relevant and up to date information held by agencies outside of government. It should be noted, though, in doing so the Blair government exposed the decision making process to the invested interests and concerns that these outside agencies hold, as they would advocate in the interests of their own particular area of interest.

Conversely, while the process was opened up in this way, funding for research within the FCO itself has seen cuts throughout the 1990s³²⁶. Foreign policy decision making cannot, then, be fully explained simply by studying the advice from and implementation through the FCO and its officials. This in itself adds a layer of difficulty as Paul Williams writes, that even with the rising number of agencies that may be consulted on policy, the "process itself remains one of the most secretive in government". It is difficult to attribute decisions making in the face of this highly complex policy making process.

³²⁶ Hollis, *Britain and the Middle East in the 9/11 era*, p63

Despite the commitment to “doing things differently”, traditional characteristics in British foreign policy were present in Blair’s government. New Labour had committed to steps which could have tackled some of the underlying criticisms of British foreign policy, such as the secrecy that often surrounded policy making, and criticisms of its pragmatic, *realpolitik* approach to foreign affairs. These included measures to be taken to “open up” government and to increase transparency in government decision making. One set was fulfilling a 1997 manifesto promise in the passing of the Freedom of Information Act. The FCO also took further action, using mediums such as its website to make various documents and reports easily available to the public, helping to generate a sense that the government was opening up in the arena of foreign policy making. Robin Cook committed to publishing a new annual Human Rights report,³²⁷ highlighting the work of the FCO in promoting Human Rights abroad. Still, while consultation may have been broadened, and while official publications may be easier to access, the decision making process was more complex and arguably still opaque in its nature.

The British political system, at least with regard to foreign policy, is structured in such a way that a significant amount of power lies with the executive. Calling Blair’s stewardship a presidential style premiership is not an accurate reflection of the position of the British Prime Minister. Indeed, it has been

³²⁷ N Wheeler, T Dunne “Good international citizenship: a third way for British Foreign Policy” *International Affairs*, 74:4, (1998) p851

argued that, in fact, Blair was not subject to the same checks and balances that a US president must face in the realm of foreign policy.³²⁸ Once voted in, the British first past the post system hands the Prime Minister a tremendous amount of power, especially in the realm of foreign policy, where the domestic audience is generally less informed thus providing less constraint on government behaviour.

The means that the role of the Prime Minister is likely to be a significant factor in foreign policy making, often creating a tension between that office and that of the Foreign Secretary. A growing trend over the past half century had seen the transfer of power over foreign policy to the Prime Minister simply owing to the way that foreign affairs are conducted at the international level.

Commitment to a multilateral approach to international affairs and membership of numerous international organisations, the UN, the EU, NATO, the G8, the Commonwealth, not only allowed Blair to argue Britain's "unique" position in the world, but required him to take the lead at the numerous summit meetings that accompany membership of such groups. Thus even in the mind of the general public the face of the Prime Minister was more connected with foreign affairs, as numerous pictures of Blair at various international summits and meetings were beamed into living rooms and spread across newspaper front pages.

³²⁸ Sampson, *Who runs this place?* p87

By his second term Blair had replaced Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, a potential rival to Blair's vision, with Jack Straw. From this point, the role of the FCO was more about the implementation of policy rather than making it, and the Foreign Secretary "became more of a trouble shooter and messenger than policy architect or innovator".³²⁹ This added weight to accusations that Blair was deliberately by-passing the traditional process altogether, favouring his "cabal"³³⁰ of advisors, his inner circle which included Alistair Campbell, Jonathan Powell, Sally Morgan and David Manning, in what was dubbed his "denocracy". He was criticised for rarely consulting the FCO to the point senior officials would by-pass it and talk either directly to Blair or his foreign policy aide, Sir David Manning instead.³³¹

Blair's use of special advisors has been harshly criticised by many on a number of grounds. These advisors are unaccountable to the electorate as they are political appointees rather than elected officials. Additionally, unlike civil servants who are also unelected, there is no sense of loyalty or being a representative of an institution of state, only to the person employing their services. Yet Blair was not the first Prime Minister to use special advisors, for

³²⁹ Ibid, p136

³³⁰ Kettell, *Dirty Politics?* P63

³³¹ S Dyson, "Personality and Foreign Policy: Tony Blair's Iraq Decisions" *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 2, (2006) p301

example, John Major had eight special advisors, but by Blair's time this had risen to twenty-seven³³² adding to concerns that these advisors were replacing the role of the "impartial" civil services in providing policy advice.³³³ It could equally be argued that the number of special advisors reflected the increasing complexity of international affairs, and introduced flexibility into the process not possible working through the formal processes of the FCO. Still the impression that Blair personally involved himself in foreign policy at a high level and preferred working with his coterie of "favourite" advisers and officials, as reflected by the Butler report, making it difficult for his foreign secretaries, Jack Straw for example, to exert their own authority over policy making³³⁴ was damaging.

Describing this small group simply as a group of close Blair allies bypassing appropriate channels is however, an over-simplification. In fact, Blair's key advisers on foreign policy, particularly policy in the Middle East, were actually seconded from the FCO,³³⁵ notably David Manning. These ad-hoc groups were not static, Blair would gather together the relevant ministers and relevant defence and intelligence officials depending on the issue at hand. Thus while many decisions were taken by small groups of ministers or by the Prime

³³² Hollis, *Britain in the Middle East in the 9/11 era* p58

³³³ Coles *Making Foreign Policy* p25

³³⁴ Dyson "Personality and Foreign Policy" p301

³³⁵ Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, p11

Minister with one or two ministers, these were officials who had a major interest in, and knowledge of, the issue at hand.³³⁶

In fact, the most damaging aspect of Blair's preference for working in this way was the accusation that in doing so he by-passed his Cabinet in the decision making process. This refrain came not only from observers outside Whitehall, but also from within the Government itself. Cook and Short were both particularly critical on this issue. In this "sofa style" government it was not just the FCO that had been supplanted from its traditional role, but the Cabinet's role was likewise diminished. This is a particular allegation of those who accuse Blair of running a "presidential style" of leadership. Instead of consulting and discussing international affairs with his Cabinet, Blair favoured ad-hoc meetings with a select group of advisors not accountable to the electorate. Clearly Blair did prefer these informal arrangements but again he was not unique, nor was he acting without precedent.

Whereas the scope of foreign policy has grown over time, the capacity of the Cabinet remained the same. It is, and in fact it has long been, a body that "registered decisions taken elsewhere, most often at No 10 or one of its subordinate committees."³³⁷ For example, the first military intervention the New Labour government embarked on, Operation Desert Fox, was agreed at a

³³⁶ Coles, *Making Foreign Policy*, p23

³³⁷ Williams, "Who's making UK foreign policy?" p918

meeting of the cabinet Defence and Overseas Committee rather than by full Cabinet.³³⁸ Most ministers sitting at the Cabinet, are too overburdened with the priorities of their own departments and in keeping their own position³³⁹ to adequately discuss matters of foreign policy in weekly Cabinet meetings. The Foreign Secretary gives weekly reports on EU matters and Foreign Affairs generally and, if any decisions are to be made, the Cabinet is “usually left just to rubber stamp the conclusions of the three grandees of Downing Street – the Prime Minister, Chancellor and Foreign Secretary.”³⁴⁰

For Geoffrey Howe the 2004 Butler Report clearly underlines that the Blair government, in operating this way, failed to make use of the knowledge and intelligence available by neglecting to consult with the “resources of wisdom, experience and expertise available in the independent civil service, not least in the FCO, and not to mention the Cabinet Ministers themselves”.³⁴¹ The criticism certainly was upheld in the Butler Report. It stated:

“we are concerned that the informality and circumscribed character of the Government’s procedures which we saw in the context of policy-making towards Iraq risks reducing the scope for informed collective political judgement. Such risks are particularly significant

³³⁸ Ibid, p916

³³⁹ Hefferman, “The Blair Style of Central Government” p27

³⁴⁰ Dickie, *The New Mandarins*, p124

³⁴¹ G Howe “British Foreign Policy: The Folly of Iraq” in R Harvey (Ed), *The World Crisis after Iraq*, (London, 2008) p70

in a field ... where hard facts are inherently difficult to come by and the quality of judgement is accordingly all the more important"³⁴²

The criticism was not simply about lack of note taking, or transparency in decision making, where Blair had overstepped the mark was in that these small groups were seen to act outwith the Cabinet structure and processes. Blair's reaction to the criticism was not to end the ad-hoc meetings but to organise them to "operate formally as an ad-hoc Cabinet committee"³⁴³ from that point onwards. This may not have made the decision making process any more transparent to outsiders, but it did produce a review of procedures and more "systematic record keeping" at No 10.³⁴⁴ Blair, not bound by any constitutional requirements setting out the role of the Cabinet, ensured that he was one of the few who had oversight of the whole process; he was responsible for deciding how the system would work, setting the agenda, the timescales, and the memberships for cabinet committees. After the 2005 election, he further enhanced this position as he "dramatically reworked the Cabinet committee structure, establishing new committees charged with pursuing his policy priorities... usually chaired by himself".³⁴⁵

³⁴²Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass destruction, p148

³⁴³ Williams, "Who's making UK foreign policy?" p918

³⁴⁴ Hollis, *Britain and the Middle East in the 9/11 era*, p57

³⁴⁵ Hefferman, "The Blair Style of Central Government", p26

While restraints on policy making – the electorate, Parliament, the Cabinet for example – exist for both domestic and foreign policy, in the case of the latter they are weaker. The maxim that British governments are not voted out over foreign policy would seem to hold given that Labour managed to win the 2005 election despite the Blair government despite the situation over Iraq, Labour losing in 2010 largely due to the economic crisis and Gordon Brown's unpopularity. The "presidential" argument may be credible when it comes to foreign policy, it would be a much harder argument to win over domestic policy where No 10 was often at battle with the formidable Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the Treasury, even managing to stymie Blair's desire to join the Euro, one of many policy issues that bridge domestic and foreign affairs issues.

Foreign policy making in Blair's government was influenced by two separate but related factors that led to an increasing centralisation of foreign policy making. Firstly, the overall trend of foreign policy making over the last few decades had been to centralise the decision making in the executive and specifically in the post of prime minister. A pre-existing deficiency in the system, that is, the lack of an adequate system of checks and balances on foreign policy making once a party is installed in government has exacerbated this factor. The result has been that the Prime Minister is able to take a strong lead in foreign affairs, and is much less constrained in that arena than in domestic policy making.

A second factor was Blair's own personal style which saw him predisposed toward controlling the foreign policy agenda. This was owing to his belief in his own leadership in foreign policy making and his determination to take an active role in international affairs. To these a third element would be added, with the international context changing after the events of 9/11 and the perceived need for dynamic leadership straight from the top only strengthening the trend towards centralisation. All of these elements affected the shaping of policy and its implementation, impacting on Britain's relationship with the Middle East generally and thus relations with Syria, as the increasing centralisation of decision making limited dissenting voices to Blair's preferred policies.

New Labour: New priorities?

Blair is described by several authors as having neither a particularly strong political background nor convictions, and in particular little experience in foreign policy. His overriding concern was making New Labour distinctive from old, and with respect to foreign policy, distinctive from what had gone before. Above all Blair championed the idea of making Britain a "strong force for good" in the world— this would later be apparent in his willingness, among other things, to commit to British forces to military intervention. The rebranding of Britain would herald new confident participation on the international level. Britain would be strong in Europe and strong in America, Blair seeing no contradiction

in the position, saying that to be strong in one relationship would strengthen Britain's position in the other. However, while Blair would come to dominate British foreign policy making, initially Robin Cook as Blair's first Foreign Secretary, was given the freedom to formulate and express New Labour's international priorities for the FCO. For some, Cook's appointment, given his strong personality, is evidence that at least at first, Blair did not intend to take a leading role in foreign policy.

Peter Ford (former Ambassador to Syria 2003 – 2006) describes Cook's tenure as a "brief flourish of independence" before British foreign policy was totally subordinated to the American policy agenda.³⁴⁶ On his appointment, Cook set out to forge a new vision for Britain. His mission statement for the FCO on 12th May 1997, had four foreign policy goals: security, prosperity, quality of life, and mutual respect. Despite New Labour's eagerness to show it was taking a new direction in foreign policy these goals were not particularly novel. However, it was one phrase in this speech, speaking of an "ethical dimension" for British foreign policy, that caught the media's attention, causing unwanted scrutiny of British international dealings, not to mention of Cook's personal life, and also creating tension between Cook and Blair, as Cook's ethical statement went much further than those at No 10 had anticipated³⁴⁷

³⁴⁶ Interview with Peter Ford, 12 December 2014

³⁴⁷ Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, p12

Cook's mission statement bore little resemblance to the kind of realpolitik traditionally associated with British foreign policy. Alluding to the growing interdependence of nation states, for Cook it was essential that the values and interests that underwrote Britain's domestic policy must be supported in foreign policy. The belief in human rights that was present in domestic policy, should not be ignored in foreign policy simply for pragmatic reasons of national interest, in an interdependent world this kind of hypocritical behaviour could undermine Britain's influence, and ultimately this would be damaging to the country. From this he derived that there must be an ethical dimension to policy. This notion that Britain should be a "force for good" to enhance its influence in international affairs was also reflected in Secretary of State for Defence, George Robertson's, 1998 Strategic Defence Review which first coined the phrase and suggested reforming Britain's defence strategy with a view to be ready to intervene in world crises. A joint exercise by the FCO and the MoD, the review aimed to incorporate New Labour manifesto priorities to be "strong in defence; resolute in standing up for our own interests and an advocate of human rights and democracy the world over; a reliable and powerful ally; and a leader in Europe and the international community"³⁴⁸.

³⁴⁸ Hollis, *Britain and the Middle East in the 9/11 era*, p39

The review appeared to reflect a change in attitude that had begun to seep through into government, that the public wanted to see Britain taking an “active role in foreign troubles – “the desire for the government to do something”³⁴⁹. However, it failed to adequately address the rationale for the new focus, or reveal which partners would be involved, or where such interventions might be carried out.³⁵⁰ For states suspicious of the very same legacy or imperial history that Blair argued meant Britain had a natural role in the world, a special stake in the Middle East for example, the new emphasis on promoting values, ethics and democracy not simply pursuing national interests was just another mask for the traditional western style imperialism with which they associated British governments.

In his mission statement Cook said that

“Our foreign policy must have an ethical dimension and must support the demands of other peoples for the democratic rights on which we insist for ourselves. The Labour Government will put human rights at the heart of our foreign policy and will publish an annual report on our work promoting human rights abroad”

³⁴⁹ Comment, “Why take such a defensive view of foreign policy?” *The Independent* (09 July 1998)

³⁵⁰ W Wallace, “Spent Force; Following the Americans up and down the Gulf scarcely justifies us spending billions on new aircraft carriers”, *The Guardian* (09 July 1998)

Cook's concept of an "ethical dimension" to foreign policy came under immediate attack by critics. Arguably, by trying to make New Labour foreign policy distinct in this way he unnecessarily drew criticism to it. His public commitment to an ethical dimension presented opponents and critics of New Labour with an easy target, any hint of unethical dealings immediately made the press.

Ethical Foreign Policy and the British Arms Industry

A major priority for the new Foreign Secretary was to tighten up on arms export controls and he moved quickly to do so, introducing guidelines which stressed the importance of human rights, the need to consider whether exports "would be likely to lead to increased tension" and that exports would not be granted where "the arguments for doing so are outweighed... by concern that the goods might be used for internal oppression or international aggression, or by the risks to regional stability, or other considerations".³⁵¹ Cook was then actively involved in the passing of a EU level agreement, the 1998 EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports, again aimed at preventing the sale of arms "which might be used for internal repression of international aggression or contribute to regional

³⁵¹ R Norton-Taylor, "Ethical arms policy in disarray" *The Guardian*, (24 June 1998)

instability”³⁵², preventing the sale of arms to regimes where they might be used to violate “human or democratic rights”³⁵³.

Cook further committed the FCO to producing an annual report on arms exports, and under the EU code all members were under obligation to share information on their arms exports (conventional arms, ammunition and military equipment), share details of export licenses and produce public reports.³⁵⁴

Arms manufacturers, at least publically, welcomed these moves as it put them on an equal footing with their competitors across Europe.³⁵⁵ Still, it was inevitable the government’s role in the arms trade would come under attack, the very concept of a British arms trade being at odds with what the media chose to report as Cook’s ideal of an ethical foreign policy.

Britain is the world’s second largest arms exporter³⁵⁶ and is thought to have the most lucrative defence industry on the continent³⁵⁷. According to the MoD, over 400 000 jobs depend on the arms industry, with around 30,000 dependent

³⁵² European Union Code of Conduct on Arms Exports, Brussels, (5 June 1998)
<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/08675r2en8.pdf> (Accessed 01/01/2016)

³⁵³ M Binyon, “Britain to press EU for code on arms exports”, *The Times*, (02 January 1998)

³⁵⁴ M Bromley, N Cooper, P Holtman, “The UN Arms Trade Treaty: arms export control, the human security agenda and the lessons of history”, *International Affairs*, Vol 88 No5, Sept (2012) pp1036 -7

³⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p1040

³⁵⁶ M Curtis, H Close, V Dury, R Ibister, “The Good, The Bad and the Ugly: A decade of Labour’s arms exports” (London, May 2007) p3

³⁵⁷ S Castle, “UK arms export figures give lie to ‘ethical’ policy” *The Independent* (01 October 1999)

on exports.³⁵⁸ In its first full calendar year the New Labour government approved more than 10,300 arms export licences, a figure larger than the previous year despite the new policy.³⁵⁹ 2181 of the licences granted were to “countries of concern”, among these, Syria, which was granted licences for small arms, machine guns and accessories. Indeed, only 24 licenses were refused, with licences granted for arms exports to a further 15 states that would seem to contravene both UK and EU guidelines.³⁶⁰

The commitment to these new guidelines was again brought into question when Britain’s largest arms fair was held in Surrey in September 1999. Whilst the expo was organised by the company Defence Systems & Equipment International, it was sponsored by the MoD. The list of invited countries, compiled by DSEI and the Government, of which, according to Amnesty International, at least “thirty classed as having repressive regimes and/or states involved in torture” including representatives from Syria where the regime, as described in the Independent newspaper, “had been involved in brutally repressing opponents” whilst it also hosted the headquarters of a number of Palestinian terrorist groups”.³⁶¹

³⁵⁸ R Norton-Taylor “In the swamp: Robin Cook should pull Britain out of the arms trade altogether” *The Guardian* (02 September 1999)

³⁵⁹ Castle, “UK arms export figures give lie to ‘ethical’ policy” (01 October 1999)

³⁶⁰ R Cornwell, “No let-up in UK arms sales abroad” *The Independent* (24 June 1998)

³⁶¹ Y Ridley, “Focus: The Arms Trade – Selling death in the suburbs” *The Independent* (05 September 1999)

Writing in the Times, Michael Binyon reported Amnesty International's claim that Cook's attempts to "put human rights at the heart of foreign policy" was undermined by the failure of other Government departments to follow his lead. Moves by the FCO to set up the international war crimes tribunal, limit arms exports and speak out with regard to human rights abuses were not supported by the MoD, the DTI or the Home Office"³⁶² In fact, he writes, the DTI approved 10 licenses for exports to Algeria, 10 to Colombia, 59 to Saudi, 64 to Indonesia, and 146 to Turkey. A further report in the Observer, April 2003, drew attention to official reports from the DTI, which showed that between 1999 and 2001, export licenses exceeding £1.5 million were approved for equipment that had dual use. The 2001 report listed exports including "toxic chemical precursors, equipment for the use of military infrared/thermal imaging equipment and military flying helmets." In the case of the chemical precursors, the DTI had nothing more than the assurances of the Syrian government as to its end use.³⁶³ Even in the case of Syria, with no special ties to Britain, having a long history of hostile relations, and in which the economic interest was negligible in terms of the actual sales, the priority given to arms sales by the DTI seemingly overrode the commitment of the FCO to bringing an ethical dimension to arms sales.

³⁶² M Binyon "Ethical Foreign Policy eroded by Whitehall" *The Times* (23 September 1998)

³⁶³ "Ministers face probe on UK arms for Syria", *The Observer*, (06 April 2003)

Cook's efforts were further undermined by Blair who was said to have watered them down. Blair is said to have insisted on a statement underlining the Labour government's commitment to a strong defence industry after coming under pressure from Britain's main arms manufacturers (one of his main advisers, was a former director of British Aerospace).³⁶⁴ In fact, Short writes that arms sales were a "blind spot" for Blair and he would later be joined in this by Straw who saw it as a "duty to promote British arms sales".³⁶⁵

While arguably Cook might have been more genuine in his commitment to an ethical foreign policy than Blair, it certainly was Cook who faced the most criticism when the reality of Labour foreign policy decisions failed to live up to the rhetoric. Cook's commitment was demonstrated, for example, in his establishment under the Foreign Secretary's office of a large department dealing with Human Rights, which had a staff of twenty diplomats. It is also evident in his appointment of an Amnesty International activist as a political adviser. He seemingly failed to get his colleagues on board with the direction of his policy, however, and his work was undermined in a country where such priority was given to the arms trade.³⁶⁶ Cook's handling of two cases of note,

³⁶⁴ F Abrams, "Cook's ethical policy 'was watered down'" *The Independent*, (19 September 1998)

³⁶⁵ C Short, *An Honourable Deception? New Labour, Iraq and the misuse of power* (London, 2005) p119

³⁶⁶ Dickie, *The New Mandarins*, p117

the sale of Hawk jets to Indonesia and the Arms to Africa Affair, were heavily criticised on this basis.

The sale of £300 million Hawk jets to Indonesia was approved despite reports of these aircraft being used against the population in East Timor. When faced with actual evidence in 1999, the government still refused to revoke the licenses citing legal reasons and insisting Indonesia had promised not to use them this way again.³⁶⁷ Derek Fatchett, Minister of State at the Foreign Office, made a statement at the time saying, "I would say we are ethical in terms of the fact that we have very clear criteria for the sale of defence equipment. Those criteria are very different from the previous governments,"³⁶⁸ feeding criticism that it was business as usual for the British arms industry.

More damaging was the Arms to Africa scandal, in which FCO officials and the British High Commissioner in Sierra Leone were accused of sending arms and ammunition in support of the beleaguered President Kabbah, through a private military company, Sandline International. This was in contravention of a UN arms embargo, one which had been drafted in large part by Britain. A report by the Foreign Affairs Select committee was highly critical of the FCO's role in

³⁶⁷ Norton-Taylor "In the swamp: Robin Cook should pull Britain out of the arms trade altogether" (02 September 1999)

³⁶⁸ J Joseph, "Is callousness preferable to hypocrisy?" *The Times* (27 January 1999)

this affair, criticising officials in failing their duty to Ministers, and both the FCO and the Foreign Secretary for prioritising a government inquiry³⁶⁹ over that of the Select Committee. The affair was damaging itself but the criticism of Cook and the FCO was substantial, not only opening the FCO to criticism over its commitment to ethical foreign policy it also brought into question the commitment, more generally, to open and transparent foreign policy decision making³⁷⁰.

Perhaps more importantly, Blair was impatient with Cook's seeming inability to deal with the negative publicity. For Blair, Britain did the right thing in supporting Kabbah in Sierra Leone, regardless of any mistakes made, and he was furious at Cook's mishandling of the situation, and inability to refute the criticism he was receiving from opposition and in the press.³⁷¹ The whole affair cast a shadow over Cook and the FCO, as "by a combination of incompetence and cover-up, the Foreign Office managed to turn a minor if flawed effort to do the right thing...into a crisis which further 'took its toll' on the Foreign Secretary's standing"³⁷²

³⁶⁹ The government had instigated an internal inquiry into the handling of the Sandline affair refusing to cooperate with the Select Committee until this was complete. FAC refused to accept this, unwilling to accept a precedent where a select committee inquiry might be superseded, or delayed, by a departmental inquiry

³⁷⁰ FAC, Second Report, Session 1998 -99, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199899/cmselect/cmcaff/116/11603.htm> (Accessed 01/12/2015)

³⁷¹ Kampfner *Blair's Wars*, p66

³⁷² Rentoul, *Tony Blair: Prime Minister*, p425

Ilisu Dam Project

Blair's instinct to override ethical principles in favour of economic interests was apparent in his support of Turkey's Ilisu dam project. This also brought British policy into direct conflict with Syrian interests. The purpose of the Ilisu dam project is hydroelectric power production, flood control and water storage. It is situated on the Tigris river 40 miles upstream of the Syrian-Iraqi border and in a mainly Kurdish region of Turkey. To create the reservoir for the dam, fifty-two villages, and fifteen towns had to be flooded. This included the town of Hasankeyf, a Kurdish town of 5500 people, and of historical significance as the only town in the region of Anatolia that had survived since the Middle Ages.³⁷³ The full human impact of the project would be the displacement of about 16000 Kurds with no compensation, with another 20000 having their lives "disrupted".³⁷⁴

British interest came from the involvement of British firm Balfour Beattie in the development of the dam. They were being supported by the DTI in their bid to build the dam, with the project to be underwritten by the British government to the tune of £200 million from the export credit guarantee department. Turkey

³⁷³ P Brown, "Britain Backs controversial dam; £1bn Turkish scheme threatens Kurd lands" *The Guardian* (01 March 1999)

³⁷⁴ D Brown, K Maguire, "Ethics policy in shreds as dam approved" *The Guardian* (22 December 1999)

had looked for funding from other governments after the World bank had already decided against funding the project on the grounds that it violated the UN convention preventing border disputes, and wars between states that share water resources, consequently private banks were unwilling to back the project.³⁷⁵

Both Syria and the Arab League lodged complaints against the dam (Turkey having failed to consult her neighbours) on the grounds that the downstream flow of water, a resource already stretched, could potentially be limited by the Turks. The impact of the project was debated in February 2000 in the House of Commons where it was heavily criticised, it would affect three countries – Turkey, Iraq and Syria— with a consequent impact on the water politics of the entire area, something with the potential to create further instability in an already unstable area.³⁷⁶

This criticism was echoed in a report from the Select Committee on Trade and Industry which stated, that there were suggestions that Turkish officials had threatened to cut supplies to states thought to support Kurdish insurgency, and

³⁷⁵ Brown, "Britain Backs controversial dam; £1bn Turkish scheme threatens Kurd lands" (01 March 1999)

³⁷⁶ Kevin McNamara MP "Ilisu Dam" HC Deb 15 February 2000 vol 344 cc155-75WH http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/westminster_hall/2000/feb/15/ilisu-dam (Accessed 14/11/2014)

that the dam was in breach of a number of treaties and agreements. Further, the Syrian Embassy had forwarded a paper arguing the “failure of Turkey to consult the downstream states on the Ilisu dam is in breach of international law.”³⁷⁷

The government faced censure over its capability to exert any control over Turkey’s future use of the dam. The Select Committee recommended that a number of conditions would have to be put in place before the Government agreed to grant export credit for the project, which included conditions on Turkey consulting affected parties, that the issue of resettlement was resolved including adequate consultation, compensation and monitoring of the programme, and the maintenance of downstream flows was assured. It also recorded a concern “if DTI took their own responsibilities for promotion of the Government's commitment to human rights and sustainable development the less seriously because of a perception that other departments would take up those issues, leading in practice to DTI invariably granting priority to commercial considerations”.

³⁷⁷ Trade and Industry – Sixth Report, Session 1999-2000, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199900/cmselect/cmtrdind/200/20002.htm> (Accessed 14/11/2014)

This latter observation highlighted a major issue with the project - it was in direct contradiction with both the FCO's ethical foreign policy, and also its environmental policy. Perhaps even more significantly, it was another indication that not all Whitehall departments were on board with the FCO's objectives. It also signalled a failure of the government's "joint up working" agenda since reportedly the FCO was not consulted over the project and apparently only found out about the issue when it was reported in the Guardian.³⁷⁸ In this case, the priorities of the individual departments involved were in conflict with each other, and the DTI pursued its own interests above the priorities set out by the FCO for British foreign policy.

In the prioritisation of British economic interests abroad, the DTI had an important backer. As controversy over the dam raged on, one of its main proponents was Blair despite the objections of Cook, the deputy Prime Minister and the Trade Secretary. Blair prioritised just the direct commercial interests involved in the dam but his support was also linked to Turkey's bid for accession to the EU, and to British arms exports, Turkey, being a NATO ally, was a key market for the British arms market.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁸ P Brown, "Britain is warned not to fund Turkish Dam" *The Guardian*, (08 May 1999)

³⁷⁹ Brown & Maguire, "Ethics policy in shreds as dam approved" *The Guardian* (22 December 1999)

Critics pointed out that, in fact, Turkey's membership of NATO meant the construction of the dam conflicted with British long term interests. The project had the potential to exacerbate tensions over access to water, risking regional stability, bad for British long term interests. More specifically, Turkey is a NATO ally, if fighting did break out then Britain could be dragged into the conflict under NATO's Article 5, meaning there could be a direct impact on Britain's security. On the EU side of the argument, a further report from the Trade and Industry Select Committee pointed out that they were "not confident of the capacity of the Turkish authorities to meet conditions that would satisfy European Union standards".³⁸⁰ Again this did not fit in with Blair's policy to be a strong and full member of the EU.

While Blair remained in favour of the project he was persuaded to add conditions to the financing of the project. Firstly, a resettlement programme for the Kurdish people, secondly, provisions to ensure water quality in the Tigris reservoir, thirdly, adequate downstream water flows to Iraq and Syria and lastly, the production of a detailed plan to preserve the archaeological heritage of Hasankeyf.³⁸¹ It was not until 2001 that the government dropped its support for the dam project but only after it had been severely criticised on four separate occasions by House of Commons Select Committees, and following the

³⁸⁰ Trade and Industry – Twelfth Report, Session 2000 – 2001, <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200001/cmselect/cmtrdind/512/51202.htm> (Accessed 14/11/2014)

³⁸¹ P Brown, "Dam could lose £200m aid", *The Guardian* (04 July 2001)

withdrawal of Balfour Beatty from the project. The four conditions imposed by the government had still, at that point, not been met.

By 2001 Cook had suffered criticism both on the personal and political front for which Blair had little patience. Under attack over how British arms sale fit into his new ethical framework, and hitting barriers over economic policies, Cook's ethical foreign policy, particularly its emphasis on human rights, also ran into difficulties over the concurrent policy of constructive engagement.³⁸² This policy required a relationship with repressive regimes and represented "a new faith that trade with questionable regimes will make them reform and behave".³⁸³ The trick was finding a balance between pursuing an ethical foreign policy with a commitment to human rights which might preclude the very kind of interaction need by constructive engagement. Evidence of this problem could be seen in the criticism of Cook's visit to China when he was censured for putting economic interests ahead of human rights. For many however, this is just another example of business as usual, with British economic interests put ahead of human rights considerations.

Meantime Blair had come into his own as a leader in international relations, while losing patience with Cook's model for an ethical foreign policy. Blair had

³⁸² Ibid, p420

³⁸³ "Ethics, Arms, Cook & Blair" *The Scotsman*, (25 June 1998)

found a role on the international scene and framed his own version of ethical foreign policy in the form of humanitarian intervention. In a speech in January 1999 he said "when the international community agrees certain objectives and then fails to implement them, those that can act, must."³⁸⁴ The problem with this policy, one of "doing the right thing", was that it had little legal basis. FCO lawyers had previously advised that "humanitarian motives were insufficient to justify the use of force under international law"³⁸⁵ yet Blair was not dissuaded.

The Blair Doctrine

In his time as British Prime Minister, Blair led Britain into an unprecedented number of military engagements including interventions in Iraq (1998), East Timor (1999), Kosovo (1999), Sierra Leone (2000), Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2003). The earlier interventions served to strengthened Blair's position in terms of leading the foreign policy agenda, in increasing his profile, and strengthening his standing with other governments and leaders.

It was his preference in deciding on these interventions, as several British leaders before him, to work through small ad-hoc groups. During Operation

³⁸⁴ Rentoul, *Tony Blair: Prime Minister*, p516

³⁸⁵ Kettell, *Dirty Politics*, p40

Desert Fox in 1998, Blair worked through the DOP committee. By the second, more extensive, Iraq campaign this group had become even smaller comprising of a very select inner advisors.³⁸⁶ Not running the war through the main Cabinet was not a major change, past engagements had been run through a war cabinet, a formal subcommittee and responsible to the full cabinet. Where Blair strayed, was his "war meeting" which included three Secretaries' of State (Foreign Affairs, Defence, International Development), his Chief of Staff, his Directors of Communications and of Political Relations and his Foreign Policy adviser was that it was not formally responsible to the Cabinet, so was a prime ministerial committee.³⁸⁷ Arguably, then, Blair did consult with the relevant people, rather than just meet with his "cronies" as was the perception of many observers. However, the lack of formality, the small grouping and the crisis situation made decision making susceptible to "group think", making it difficult for any member to go against a general consensus, particularly with a leader with such a dynamic personality leading it.

Blair emerged from the Kosovo intervention much more confident in his international role. Blair soon observed that, even if the allies only used air strikes, 85% of the assets used would be American.³⁸⁸ His experience also led him to conclude that his European partners could not be trusted, either in terms

³⁸⁶ Williams, "Who's making UK foreign policy?" p917

³⁸⁷ Hefferman, "The Blair Style of Central Government" p25

³⁸⁸ T Blair, *Tony Blair: A Journey*, (London, 2011) p231

of willingness to act and capacity to deliver, to provide the necessary resources for military intervention. Blair noted in his autobiography, the European's "brilliant statements of intent...evaporated when consequences of seeing them through became apparent".³⁸⁹ The episode underlined his key belief in the need to maintain American engagement in international affairs, since without US military support the Europeans would have been unable to act; thus in order to pursue a policy of humanitarian intervention it was necessary to keep the Americans on board.

Justifying the action in Kosovo and giving thought to the problems in getting Britain's partners and allies to act in times of humanitarian intervention, Blair gave his Chicago Speech in April 1999 in what became known as the Blair doctrine. The speech laid out five considerations when deciding to intervene:

1. Is the case for actions clear?
2. Have the diplomatic options been exhausted?
3. Are there military options that can be sensibly or prudently undertaken?
4. Are we prepared for the long haul?
5. Are national interests at stake?³⁹⁰

Notably despite New Labour's commitment to multilateralism there was no mention of partners in the considerations. Critics even argue that not even the

³⁸⁹ Ibid, p227

³⁹⁰ Lunn, Miller, Smith, "British Foreign Policy since 1997" p10

Kosovo intervention fit these criteria. While Blair increasingly favoured greater intervention, viewing it as the responsibility of being a member of the international community to promote "universal" rights and freedoms, the perception in many states was that he was promoting intervention to impose "Western" notions of justice and freedom.

Blair's proactive foreign policy approach had a tendency to fail to consult with the FCO.³⁹¹ His "Doctrine of International Community" was further example of this behaviour, devised without any prior consultation with the FCO.³⁹² Yet this was the department which had to try to turn this speech into a viable strategy document, a task that prove impossible and which they gave up after "a few weeks of effort".³⁹³ Lawrence Freedman, a major contributor to the Chicago speech, suggested in this case there could be two reasons for this reluctance regarding FCO "interference". In the first instance, he suggests, if the FCO had seen the speech first they would have insisted on including a UN test, which Blair saw as a potential roadblock to intervention. Secondly, the speech came at a time where the Prime Minister wanted "something dramatic" which would appeal on both the domestic and international level, something that the often too pragmatic FCO could not produce.³⁹⁴

³⁹¹ Sharp, "Tony Blair, Iraq and the Special Relationship: Poodle or Partner?" p63

³⁹² J Sharp, "Tony Blair, Iraq and the Special Relationship: Poodle or Partner?" *International Journal*, 59:1, (Winter 2003/04) p63

³⁹³ Kampfner, *Blairs Wars*, p53

³⁹⁴ Daddow, "Tony's war?" p556-7

The former point would seem to be fair. In July 2000 Cook attempted to clarify the Doctrine setting a further 6 principles to consider when it is clear there are ongoing human rights violations and crimes against humanity on a large scale, saying the international community should, these included the criteria, "Ensure force is collective and where possible has the authority of UNSC."³⁹⁵ The need for UNSC authorisation was something Blair had purposely left out as he had been frustrated by the inability of the UN to act on Kosovo since the Russians would have vetoed any attempt at a resolution authorising the use of force.

Blair's language on the right to intervene on humanitarian grounds was criticised in 2001 by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty. The commission was set up by the Canadian government in response to Kofi Anan's question of when the international community should intervene for humanitarian purposes and produced the report "Responsibility To Protect". It criticised Blair's doctrine, firstly, in that his language prioritised the rights of the intervening parties rather than the rights of the people who would be affected by any intervention and, secondly, in that the doctrine deals mainly with the intervention itself rather than dealing with the steps prior to, or the commitment of resources following, an intervention. A final criticism was that Blair framed the discussion in terms such that anyone disagreeing with the

³⁹⁵ Lunn, Miller, Smith, "British Foreign Policy since 1997" p11

need to intervene can be dismissed as “anti-humanitarian,”³⁹⁶ prejudicing the discussion from the start.

Nelson Mandela was another opponent of Blair’s doctrine, criticising the action in Kosovo, and NATO for ignoring the vetoes in the UNSC, saying that diplomacy should have been better used, “I am resentful about the type of thing that America and Britain are doing. They want to be the policemen of the world and I’m sorry that Britain has joined the US in this regard”.³⁹⁷ A final failure of the doctrine was that it neglected to clarify who should apply the criteria when considering undertaking an intervention, if not an organisation such as the UN. Still, in both the Kosovo and Iraq cases Britain has been criticised for failing to fulfil its even its own weak criteria and of not letting the diplomatic option run its course.

Despite framing the Kosovo intervention in moral terms, pressing the international community to engage in a military operation based on “values,” there were important interests at stake. These included the credibility of NATO, the special relationship, and the need to lead in European defence.³⁹⁸ To these reasons author Mark Curtis adds two more, that the bombing campaign was

³⁹⁶ Daddow, “Tony’s war?” p559

³⁹⁷ Rentoul, *Tony Blair: Prime Minister*, p526

³⁹⁸ Louise Richardson cited in Lunn, Miller, Smith, “British Foreign Policy since 1997” p21

necessary to enable NATO to continue its expansion eastward, and also, that it aided in reorganising eastern economies to the benefit of Western businesses. If so these are very much traditional interests for British foreign policy.

Britain a "pivotal power"?

A professed objective of Blair's foreign policy was for Britain to be a pivotal power, a bridge between the US and the EU. British governments had persistently struggled with balancing the "special relationship" with the US and the ever closer political relationship with the EU. Blair insisted that the two relationships complimented each other, certainly if Britain were to be a "bridge" then it needed to be seen as a committed and strong member of the EU.

Most observers consider Blair's first term to have been quite successful in terms of the British relationship with Europe. Though the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, prevented Britain joining the single currency, in other areas Blair was successful. Blair's government was recognised as having a more positive outlook on the European project, an "enthusiasm for enlargement, a whole hearted support for a common foreign and security policy, in favour of new

initiatives in European defence, and behind a renewed push for greater trade liberalisation".³⁹⁹

Yet, again, in a number of ways Blair's European policy reflected a simple continuation of traditional British interests. The Saint Malo declaration signed in 1998 established the European Security and Defence Policy⁴⁰⁰, the creation of the European Rapid Reaction force in December 1999 allowed Britain to take a lead on European defence, but under British insistence "NATO remained the basis of the EU's collective defence."⁴⁰¹ Blair insisted that European measures were integrated with the NATO framework, thus not threatening the role of NATO.⁴⁰² Ensuring the primacy of NATO was designed to demonstrate the Europeans were pulling their weight in defence terms (especially after events in the Balkans) rather than providing an alternative security and defence strategy, and was an attempt to keep the Americans engaged in European defence and security. In doing so, it limited the capacity of any European defence arm acting independently of NATO or the US.

³⁹⁹ Clarke, "Foreign Policy" p601

⁴⁰⁰ F Hood "Atlantic Dreams and European Realities: British Foreign Policy After Iraq, *Journal of European Integration*, 30:1 p188

⁴⁰¹ Lunn, Miller, Smith, "British Foreign Policy since 1997" p32

⁴⁰² Ibid p39

To some extent Blair's concept of Britain as a "bridge" was simply a reframing of Churchill's three circles policy. The idea that Britain was needed to be a "bridge" between the US and EU left other Europeans somewhat bemused by the idea that they needed Britain's intervention to be able to work the US. Still, for a time, Blair was able to maintain some balance between the two central relationships in British foreign affairs. However, when the international context changed after the events of 9/11 the difficulties in balancing these two relationships were laid bare despite Blair's assumptions that the common interests and values shared by Europe and the Americans would bring them closer together.

During the first term of New Labour government there were a number of developments which came to define the Blair government. While Cook made some attempts to reprioritise British foreign policy to incorporate an ethical dimension, he failed to get backing from other Whitehall departments who had their own priorities, eventually this lack of cooperation greatly undermined his efforts. Blair's increasing tendency to centralise information, knowledge and decision making in No 10 marginalised the Foreign Secretary to an extent with many decisions on foreign policy instigated in No 10, not the FCO. Eventually, Cook was removed from the FCO as Blair lost patience with his ethical project.

The appointment of Jack Straw as Foreign Secretary strengthened Blair's position. Straw's role became more of a "trouble shooter and messenger than policy architect or innovator".⁴⁰³ Here, even Straw eventually stepped out of line when he stood with Germany and France in their efforts to come to a diplomatic solution with Tehran over their quest for nuclear power. To many this demonstrated "that the British no longer had an independent foreign policy and to prove that they could on occasion disagree with the Americans when their judgement differed".⁴⁰⁴ Some reports at the time had it that this stance cost Straw his post, though Lord Levy writes that it was actually Straw "cosying up to Gordon Brown around the cabinet table"⁴⁰⁵. Peter Ford, however, says that the Americans were behind Straw's removal and from that point there was no one in the FCO willing to go against the American line.⁴⁰⁶

The centralisation of decision making at No 10, and an executive that revolved round a select inner circle has led authors to criticising the Blair government on the grounds that these ad-hoc groupings were "susceptible to group think" limiting policy discussion and dissent. This was combined with Blair's personal willingness to embark on military intervention on humanitarian grounds, although after 9/11 this became more associated with intervention on behalf of

⁴⁰³ Hollis, *Britain and the Middle East in the 9/11 Era*, p136

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p121

⁴⁰⁵ Levy, *A Question of Honour* (London, 2008) Kindle Location 2323

⁴⁰⁶ Interview with Peter Ford, 12 December 2014

security and counter-terrorism.⁴⁰⁷ This would have impact across all British foreign policy decisions, limiting the input into decision making and creating a context where the scope for manoeuvre was also limited.

Impact on Anglo-Syrian relations

The 1990s had seen the international system change with the ending of the Cold War and the outlook for Syria had also changed. Without Syria's primary ally of the SU and given the moribund state of the Syrian economy, Hafez's decades long goal of strategic parity with Israel was out of reach. This brought with it a need to review Syria's foreign policy options, regionally and internationally. No longer able to pursue his previous strategy with regard to Israel, Hafez opted to pursue engagement in the peace process.

Hafez's struggle to prevent Saddam's ambition to promote Iraq as the natural Arab hegemon in the region was coupled with a need to reduce Syria's isolation, a result both of losing the SU as an ally and of his alliance with Iran in the Iran-Iraq war leaving him at odds with other Arab leaders in the region. This had led to his joining the Allied Coalition in 1990 after the invasion of Kuwait, a rational decision that had resulted in several positive consequences. It removed of Saddam as a possible rival leader of Arab nationalism and

⁴⁰⁷ Lunn, Miller, Smith, "British Foreign Policy since 1997", p11

secured more positive relations with the West and the Gulf states (in turn was financially beneficial as he received aid from both the Gulf states and EU). Most importantly, Asad entered the anti-Iraq coalition in the anticipation that the US would in return (and as promised) broker an acceptable peace settlement with Israel once the Gulf war was over.

The decade, then, had seen an overlap develop in the interests of the Syrian regime and those of Britain and the West generally. The British policy for containment of Saddam's Iraq, the need for movement on the hostage issue, the belief that Syria was key to achieving peace in the Middle East, a general view that Asad was someone they could do business with and the long term British priority of promoting stability in the region concluded in the policy of engagement with Syria. Relations further warmed as Hafez saw the EU as a power that could potentially act as balance to the influence of America in the MEPP, seeing Britain, along with France, as necessary to establishing this. Even in the 1980s, Syria's principle interest in Britain was owing to its role in the European Union.⁴⁰⁸ Generally, however, while the British came to the conclusion that it was necessary to deal with Syria, there was no sense that there would be any modernisation of the regime itself whilst Hafez Asad was in power.

⁴⁰⁸ I Lucas, Correspondence 08 July 2014

Blair's determination to enhance Britain's position in the world was evident in his efforts to get the MEPP moving again. This coincided with Hafez's own interests who had, by then been calling for a greater European role for some time. Hafez recognised that, while there was need to strengthen his relations with the US to bring Israel to the table, it was also necessary to have a balance to the US, and he looked to the EU to provide this. Whilst France was a more natural ally, Hafez perceived a need for warmer relations with Britain as London was a potential veto to EU involvement because of its closeness to Washington. Perhaps this was behind the fact that Hafez was reported to be the first Arab ruler to have congratulated Blair on his election victory in May 1997.⁴⁰⁹ Blair's eagerness to be involved in the process was also almost immediately apparent, dispatching Derek Fatchett, FCO Minister for Foreign Affairs to the Middle East, including a visit to Syria, within weeks of the elections to hold talks with Syrian officials on the stalled negotiations.⁴¹⁰

While Blair evidently saw a role for Britain in pushing for movement within the EU, this was within the traditional British position that the EU role should be in compliment to any US-led negotiations. There were early hopes that Blair could use his time in the EU Presidency (January – June 1998) to push the peace

⁴⁰⁹ F Matar, "Syria vests hopes in Labor Britain, *Mideast Mirror*, (14 July 1997)

⁴¹⁰ "British Minister visits Syria" *United Press*, (28 May 1997)

process forward. Traditional thinking had it while the EU had significant economic ties in the region, it had little military clout and was perceived as too pro-Arab for the Israelis to take seriously, leaving only the US as the serious broker for peace. There hope Blair could cash in on the important EU economic ties and his own close relationship with US President Clinton to reinvigorate the process.⁴¹¹ However, Britain failed in this. The failure was understandable, since the EU has struggled to create a Common Foreign and Security Policy, and in areas where there are numerous individual national interests at stake such as the Middle East, finding a common position on issues and events has been rare. Thus, the British view that the US takes the lead on the MEPP can be understood yet simultaneously this position undermines the EU efforts by limiting its options to those that compliment American efforts, and consequently limiting pressure on Israel.

Blair gained office at a time when Netanyahu's premiership of Israel meant even the US had given up on making any progress on the Syrian track of the peace process, it meant, all the more, that no progress could be made on the EU track. The Ehud Barak premiership in 1999 reopened the door on the Syrian track, with it becoming the preferred option and seen as the most likely path for success (dealing with Arafat considered a more impossible option). With the full weight of a Clinton administration behind it and both Barak and Asad

⁴¹¹ L Freedman "Will the buck stop with Blair" *The Times*, (21 April 1998)

seemingly open to some kind of deal, this negotiation was given support by the British who were glad to see America pushing talks forward again. Whilst ultimately the talks collapsed and stalled in 2000, negotiations had got much further than previously thought possible.

Clearly the British did not have a lead role in these negotiations, yet some American officials pointed to a level of British intervention. A conscious decision to take a more pro-Israeli stance was apparent which had led to a strengthening of relations between Britain and Israel. Blair had strengthened links with the Israeli Labour party while appearing hard on Netanyahu's Likud government⁴¹² when it was in power, having sent one of his own aides to consult for the Barak campaign. One gesture of payback for this was Barak's resumption of talks with Syria with a role for Britain, filled by Blair's special confidant, Michael Levy who was sent to handle British diplomacy.⁴¹³

In truth, the extent of British influence here is questionable. Without America taking the lead, and if the two negotiating parties had not their own individual reasons for the resumption of talks, there would not have been much British intervention could have done to kick start negotiations. The pro-Israeli stance and the use of a personal envoy, particularly Lord Levy known as "The Cash

⁴¹² Lochery, "Present and Post-Blair British Middle East Policy", p11

⁴¹³ S Sadeh "A Quiet Victory" *The Times* (16 December 1999)

point" in Israeli political circles,⁴¹⁴ have been criticised as typically Blair, short sighted if he indeed wanted a role in the wider Middle East, and with regard to Lord Levy, making traditionally pro-Arab the FCO deeply unhappy, and uncertain as to Levy's role and remit.

However, according to some accounts this may be an overly negative criticism of events. Levy's reception at the FCO may be open to debate but he does seem to have enjoyed a close relationship with Robin Cook, Blair even asking for his help in persuading Cook to accept the position of Leader of the House.⁴¹⁵ Levy himself states that while his relationship with Jack Straw was not as close, they got along⁴¹⁶ though Straw is less kind, saying "If you wanted to be Tony's Foreign Secretary, Michael was part of the package....I was consistently bemused as to what Tony seriously thought Michael added to the peace of the Middle East". He further noted that "When Michael Levy was appointed as envoy... Israel must have thought they had won the lottery... his unpredictable manner led to many difficult moments – one senior official describe him as 'self-launching, semi-guided missile'."⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁴ D Davis, "Blair admits major Barak contributor is personal envoy to Mideast" *Jerusalem Post*, (24 February 2000)

⁴¹⁵ Levy, *A Question of Honour*, Location 2288-2289

⁴¹⁶ Ibid, Location 2317

⁴¹⁷ J Straw, *Last Man Standing*, (London, 2012) p437

It is clear that Levy did have some impact on restarting the Syrian- Israeli peace talks, making an initial series of visits to the Middle East in spring/summer 1999. On his first trip to Syria he met with Farouq al-Sharaa to be given the frank Syrian view that they were sceptical of Israeli willingness to meet their minimum requirement for peace - withdrawal from the occupied lands to the 1967 lines. A second visit to meet Hafez followed in June, which Levy describes as "warm but formal".⁴¹⁸ Basil Eastwood, Ambassador to Syria at the time, thought that Hafez used the meeting to conclude "that Levy was a valid interlocutor about the relationship between Israeli internal politics and the peace process".⁴¹⁹ Asad appeared to have appreciated Levy's insights into how the Israelis were thinking, capitalising on his contacts there. Far from being outside the official process, Eastwood explains, Levy was accompanied on his first visit by Robin Cook's political advisor, and subsequently by the FCO desk officer for the Arab/Israeli negotiations.

As described above, at the time of Levy's first visit to Damascus, the political context in the region was more positive. Barak was Israeli Prime Minister and there were indications that the Americans were looking at the revival of the Syrian track, although not really expecting much progress. Levy's first meeting in Damascus was with Basil Eastwood and the American Ambassador Ryan Crocker, no one really expected much progress. For the meeting that followed

⁴¹⁸ Levy, *A Question of Honour*, Kindle Location 1978

⁴¹⁹ B Eastwood, Correspondence, 19 June 2014

with Hafez, Levy was accompanied by Eastwood and an FO specialist, and the discussion was “business-like and friendly” but with little “substance”, confirming the earlier conversation. Over the next 24 hours, Levy would be taken to meet with Bashar al-Asad, then be called back to see Hafez who, contrary to all expectation, expressed a readiness for “open early, face-to-face talks with Israel with the aim of a peace deal and an eventual summit”.⁴²⁰ Hafez saw Levy as a conduit to the Americans to pass on the message that he was ready for direct negotiations. On receipt of that message a few days later, Madeleine Albright quickly arranged peace talks in Shepherds town. In fact, according to Eastwood:

“There was no British presence at Shepherdstown. In my view the Israelis tried to be too clever; they pocketed (and then leaked) all the Syrian concessions (on security arrangements, water and peaceful relations) but avoided any serious discussion about withdrawal (and the key Syrian demand – the line of 4 June 1967). It might have been better if there had been a British presence to encourage the Israelis to be more serious.”⁴²¹

This reflects a view that the British could potentially have impact in facilitating talks on the Syrian-Israeli track of the MEPP, but also the view that, by insisting on the primacy of the Americans in the process, Blair set limitations on the impact. There was no balancing power to bring pressure to bear on the

⁴²⁰ Levy, *A Question of Honour*, Location 2017-2051

⁴²¹ B Eastwood, Correspondence, 19 June 2014

Israelis, which might have been a deciding factor in these talks. Levy, however, suggests that the real problem of the peace talks which ended at a summit in Geneva, March 2000 may have been the desire on Asad's side for an early deal due to his poor state of health. On arrival at the summit he must have realised that any deal was some time away and he no longer had the time to make it.⁴²²

Within months of the failure of the Geneva summit Hafez died. Many now saw these talks as having been a missed opportunity. On the British side while there must have been disappointment that these talks failed, they now looked at the new Syrian President, someone who'd spent time in Britain, had a British wife and appeared to be a modern Arab leader. Blair viewed Bashar as a reform minded leader, as did many in the West, and saw an opportunity to create a new Anglo-Syrian relationship. As things stood, there was potential for a new relationship to be forged by the two states.

Conclusion

The early years of Blair's government were marked by the commitment to a new kind of foreign policy, a break from realpolitik that traditionally marked British foreign affairs. Britain was going to forge a new role in the world, be a

⁴²² Levy, *A Question of Honour*, Location 2141

force for good, be strong in Europe and strengthen the special relationship with the US. The international system, redefined since the end of the Cold War, and now unipolar with the US the remaining superpower, meant that there was the opportunity to redefine the role Britain played in international affairs.

In practice, however, the changes New Labour made in UK foreign policy were not so substantial. While these years were definitive, it was more in the sense of a new government settling into office, and therefore determining who and how foreign policy was made. These formative years saw power in foreign policy making move from the FCO to No 10, and influenced by the very personal leadership style of the Prime Minister. The period also saw the normal interdepartmental conflicts of priorities which resulted in foreign policy activity that did not always fit the narrative. None of this was particularly precedent setting.

In terms of what this meant for Anglo-Syrian relations, British emphasis on good governance and democracy could have set these on a rocky path. Yet, the interest Blair had in proactively working towards settlement of the MEPP, and being a more integrated member of the EU held opportunity to strengthen these relations as they also fit the interests of Hafez Asad who was looking to the EU to balance the influence the US gave to Israel in peace negotiations. There were opportunities here for Britain to play a more constructive role.

Whilst there were moments in which the interests of Britain and Syria overlapped, such as some minor arms sales, the Ilisu dam project, and the interjection of Lord Levy into the peace process perhaps helping to give confidence to the US that these talks would be worthwhile, there was little indication of any new initiative that would significantly change relations. Where these interests overlapped they were dealt with on a case by case basis rather than being considered, seemingly, in terms of the wider foreign policy priorities, in part, perhaps, because of the involvement of department other than the FCO.

In many ways, then, the censure of some observers of the time that it was “business as usual” at the FCO, was accurate at least in terms of the Anglo-Syrian relationship. Even Blair’s increasing role in foreign policy decision making and strengthening of support for humanitarian intervention would seem to have had little direct implication for British relations with Syria. While British policy was to promote economic liberalism and good governance, and while it viewed the EU as a vehicle to aid it in doing so, the door was open to a warmer relationship between the new Asad regime in Syria and the Blair government.

Chapter Four

Blair and Basher – A new relationship?

As Bashar al-Asad ascended to the Syrian Presidency, Blair's government had been in power for three years. During this time, British foreign policy priorities and strategies had been made, and structures around who made it and how it was made had been settled. The reality for Anglo-Syrian relations was that there was little direct impact. Where interests had overlapped on a few occasions in this period, policy seemed to be made on a more or less traditional basis, case by case.

Yet, barely a year into his presidency events outwith Bashar's control created a whole new international context. The terrorist attacks of September 2001 rocked the international system. Whilst still living in the same unipolar world, the sense of American invincibility had been delivered a severe blow, and threats to international security were viewed under a different lens. With particular significance for Syria and the Middle East, regions that were viewed as creating instability in the international system, and states who were seen to encourage terrorism, were now viewed as a more serious threat to international peace. For Britain, this highlighted the need to tackle the MEPP, and to work with the autocratic regimes of the region, such as Syria, to normalise their relations, promoting reform and modernisation and exporting British values and ideals.

In Hafez's final years, there had been signs of that the Anglo-Syrian relationship warming up in contrast to the relationship typical of the previous few decades. As Bashar entered the presidency, Blair's belief in his personal leadership style was established, demonstrated in his confidence in his own ability to work with this new generation of autocratic leaders. Kampfner observed that, "whenever he saw a leader that was new and different, he tried – on a very personal level – to befriend him. It could be Putin, it could be Jordan's new King Abdullah, Syria's new President Basher al-Asad or even China's premier Zhu Rongji"⁴²³. This view was fed, in part, by the idea that the end of the Cold War had discredited this kind of regime while it validated the Western economic liberal democratic model. It combined with the view Syria's "westernised" Bashar was already inclined, indeed needed to, make reforms in his country. The feeling in No 10 was that the time was ripe for change in Syria.

Just as Hafez had been the first Arab leader reported to have sent his congratulations to Blair after his 1997 election win, Blair was quick to welcome Bashar to his Presidency. This despite the fact that not only was he unelected but the presidency in Syria is traditionally a non-hereditary position, meaning the Syrian constitution had had to be amended to allow his assumption of power. The idea that Bashar was set to introduce reform, and that this should

⁴²³ Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, p103

be encouraged, fit conveniently with one of New Labour's primary foreign policy priorities, that of achieving regional and international stability through democracy promotion and promoting good governance.

A number of signs in the initial weeks following Bashar's inauguration seemed hopeful for the future. As Hafez spent the last decade of his life preparing the way for Bashar to succeed him, part of this strategy had been a conscious effort to limit his exposure to the public eye.⁴²⁴ Despite this, Bashar was commonly understood by many in London to be a young modern leader with a Westernised outlook due to his time in Britain, and a willingness to reform his regime. These reformist credentials seemed to be borne out in the period known as the Damascus Spring following his accession during which a number of civil societies were allowed to form in Damascus. Political discussion was more open, with calls for the State of Emergency in Syria to be ended (the Statement of 99, September 2000), and a more democratic multiparty political system established. It was argued that the need for economic reform had to be accompanied by political reform (the Statement of 1000, January 2001). These statements were not welcomed by the regime but elicited only minimal reaction and discussion was not immediately closed down.

⁴²⁴ E Zisser, "Does Bashar al-Assad Rule Syria?" *The Middle East Quarterly*, (Winter 2003) p15

This new era of Syrian life saw the emergence of a new set of apparently reform minded individuals recruited into the regime. Alongside the creation of the new civil societies, it saw the release of hundreds of political prisoners (unique in the admittance that these prisoners had been detained for purely on political grounds according to Amnesty International)⁴²⁵ and new freedoms for the press in the form of licensing of private newspapers, and allowing parties affiliated to the Baath party to publish and distribute their own journals. A further sign of change was the creation of the Human Rights Association of Syria in July 2001⁴²⁶.

The general hope was that these were signs that Bashar heralded a fresh new start yet it was quickly demonstrated that there were limits to how far the regime would tolerate criticism, the Damascus Spring soon followed by the Damascus Winter. Most authors writing of this period blame the “old guard” for the sudden crack down on the growth of civil societies, regime stalwarts fearing the pace at which the demand for change was growing. Many of those prisoners released soon after Basher’s inauguration were quickly be incarcerated again. The fact remains, however, that the expectation that Bashar would immediately act on political reform, or even that he ever really intended to (at least to the extent some activists and the West clearly wanted),

⁴²⁵ A George *Syria: Neither Bread nor Freedom* (London, 2003) p40

⁴²⁶ C Wieland, *Syria at Bay*, (London, 2006) p65

was too high, and even the “evidence” that Bashar was set on complete reform exaggerated.

Bashar, in reality had spent only two years in London, more significantly he had received a traditional Syrian education. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that his western experience would drastically shape his overall outlook. In fact, Raymond Hinnebusch writes:

“Bashar’s exposure to the West does not compare with that of most other Middle Eastern leaders. Moreover, the father-son relation, a presumably powerful socialization mechanism, would have committed him to the preservation of his father’s Arab nationalist legacy while the apprenticeship he served under his father, including time within the military, would have socialized him into the code of operation of the establishment. And the legitimacy of the Bashar’s presidency was contingent on faithfulness to the standard of national honor defended by his father, namely the full recovery of the Golan from Israel without being seen to abandon the demand for Palestinian national rights.”⁴²⁷

Flynt Leverett, in his 2005 work *Inheriting Syria* explores this theme further. He examines not only the political legacy Bashar inherited on his father’s death,

⁴²⁷ R Hinnebusch, “Syrian Foreign Policy under Bashar al-Asad”, *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, Vol 1:No 1, (July 2009) p14

but the weakness of his own position, in terms of the limitations and constraints he was left with, challenges from other members of the Asad family, from within the regimes inner circle, and owing to the unresolved issues in the Syrian economy and political and civil society.

On foreign policy, Bashar inherited Hafez's grand strategy, aimed at containing Israel,⁴²⁸ at a time when Syria's regional and international standing was considerably weakened. Lebanon in 2000 had seen a resurgence of anti- Syrian sentiment and Rafik al-Hariri was about to return as Prime Minister, posing a serious threat to Syria's dominance in the neighbouring state. Israel had unilaterally withdrawn from the South, weakening Syria's justification for its role in Lebanon⁴²⁹. Hopes that Bashar's presidency would revive peace talks with Israel were soon dashed as it became clear that talks could not be revisited until Bashar strengthened his internal position in the regime. The weakness of Bashar's position meant that there would be no immediate progress on the hoped for reforms or peace negotiations.

The extent to which Bashar was committed to reform may have been overestimated. While his inauguration speech spoke of reform the main concern was with economic reform. When speaking of democracy Bashar said,

⁴²⁸ F Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, (Washington DC, 2005) p36

⁴²⁹ Ibid, p44

“We cannot apply the democracy of others onto ourselves. Western democracy, for example, is the outcome of a long history that resulted in customs and tradition that distinguishes the current culture of Western societies”.⁴³⁰ Many thought this opened the way for debate on democratic reform in Syria, equally it could have signalled Bashar’s belief that the Western state model was not necessary the right for Syria. Many of the new “reformers” were better described as technocrats not democratic thinkers, making it more likely that Bashar was concerned with reform of the administrative system rather than the political one, something that would sit comfortably alongside attempts at economic reform.

In the economic sphere the need for reform was acute which was reflected in Bashar’s attempts to court western governments. The Syrian economy had suffered substantial blows during the 1980s from the abrupt decline of the oil price, the loss of soft loans from the Gulf states as a result of supporting of Iran in the Iran-Iraq war, and the collapse of the SU. Hafez in the 1990s made some attempt to open up the Syrian economy aiming to encourage private investment. Economic growth appeared to signal some success but the failure of the reform was masked by the effects of Syrian participation in the 1991 Gulf War – the monies Syria received from the Gulf states in return for its support,

⁴³⁰ B Rubin, *The Truth about Syria* (New York, 2007) p135

the rise in oil prices as a result of the war and latterly the illegal sale of Iraqi oil against UN sanctions.

The economic predicament Bashar faced was acute thus attempts to liberalise the economy were an obvious priority. The end of the Cold War was a "win" for the western model of neoliberal capitalism and the associated Western dominated institutions, the IMF, World Bank, OECD and WTO that support it.⁴³¹ Syria's economic reforms had to be aimed at "integrations into and conformity with the standards of the global market and accompanying West centric foreign policy". This meant shifting the emphasis from the moribund public sector, and encourage investment in the private sector.⁴³² Several measures aimed at enabling this were passed. The problem was that for a number of these measures this was as far as it went, with the pace of implementation very slow. For example, while Bashar persuaded the Baath Party Regional Command to ratify a decision to promote opening of commercial private banks in Syria in December 2000, by 2003 not a single one had opened.⁴³³ Bashar fought on, making overtures for help, for example, inviting representatives from the Bank of England to Damascus to discuss setting up a regulatory system.⁴³⁴ Private banking was eventually established in the late 2000s.

⁴³¹ J M Dorstal, "The European Union and Economic Reform in Syria" Syrian and the Mediterranean Partnership, *St Andrews Papers on Contemporary Syrian Studies* (2009) p9

⁴³² Hinnebusch, "Syrian Foreign Policy under Bashar al-Asad", p11

⁴³³ Zisser, "Does Bashar al-Assad Rule Syria?" p17

⁴³⁴ Interview with Henry Hogger, 28 August 2014

Bashar encountered many of problems that had plagued his father's attempts to liberalise the economy. To take the measures required to encourage economic growth and reform the inefficient public sector, tackling corruption within the elites of the regime would be necessary, and Asad initially lacked the power or support to do this. Some argue this is another reason Asad looked to the West for support. He acted quickly to revive EU Association Agreement talks, seeing this as a tool which could be used to increase the pace of change in Syria. Following the Iraq war, he argued the agreement would strengthen ties with Europe, telling this old guard this was a necessity in the face of the hostile US relations.⁴³⁵

Blair has been criticised for seeing a potential partner in Bashar. Certainly he was not alone in seeing Bashar's presidency as a positive development, many Western leaders and academics thought likewise, and initially there were the signs in Syria reflecting this point of view. Similarly, there were also signs that perhaps should have served warning, certainly they advocated a cautious approach in pursuing a dialogue with the regime. Barry Rubin points out that this optimistic outlook was in total contrast to the disgust of many Arab intellectuals. They saw Bashar's inauguration as a final humiliation turning the

⁴³⁵ Leveret, *Inheriting Syria*, p85

Syrian republic into a family fiefdom⁴³⁶. Taken in light of the events in Syria since the beginning of the Arab Spring 2010 it would be easy to accept Rubin's arguments pointing to the Asad regime manipulating the West's desire to see reform without any real commitment to change. Yet, at the time there was certainly a struggle going on inside Syria between reformers and the Old Guard, and many Syrians were hopeful for the future, reflected somewhat in Bashar's personal popularity with many Syrians. This being so there did seem some hopes for Britain, and the West, to forge a better relationship with Syria. Certainly the assumption that the Baath regime was there to stay and thus had to be dealt was one that was widely shared.

Regardless of the true nature of the Syrian regime and its intent at this juncture, consideration needs to be given as to how far British foreign policy generally, regionally and specifically toward Syria, could be seen to have facilitated the desired changes in the regime. The British stance as taken by Blair, was that Asad was someone with whom Britain could work. Given that this was the position taken, the question must be how far British policies augmented this dialogue.

⁴³⁶ Rubin, *The truth about Syria*, p134

Blair seemed to take the lead role in engaging Bashar but the decision to engage Syria was not at odds with FCO policy. This was “generally supportive of the idea of engaging with Syria”⁴³⁷, viewing Bashar as a “new player worth giving the benefit of the doubt.”⁴³⁸ The Syrian regime was authoritarian but Bashar showed signs of wanting to open up, and unlike Saddam in Iraq and Qadhafi in Libya, the Syrian regime seemed to have more of a collective leadership, rather than just one man at the helm, which could be dealt with.⁴³⁹ For the Syrians, better relations with Britain were advantageous for reasons of legitimacy for the regime, held potential for improvement of trade and in terms of having British support within the EU. For the British, there was interest in opening dialogue with regard to human rights and offering support with regard to stability in Lebanon.⁴⁴⁰ Both sides had potential gains to make. Still many in Whitehall and the media queried whether Blair was justified in believing his own personal brand of leadership could affect change, as he took charge of building relations with Bashar, arranging a visit in October 2001 which took place post 9/11, and the beginnings of US intervention in the Middle East and Afghanistan.

⁴³⁷ Interview with Henry Hogger, 28 August 2014

⁴³⁸ Ibid

⁴³⁹ Interview with Henry Hogger, 28 August 2014

⁴⁴⁰ Anonymous, Interview at the FCO, 2 July 2014

The War on Terror

The events of September 11th, 2001 were a defining moment for British foreign policy as Blair immediately recognised that immense implications for international relations as he writes in his memoir, "It was war... this was not a battle for territory, not a battle between states; it was a battle for and about the ideas and values that would shape the twenty-first century."⁴⁴¹ Blair saw the event itself as world changing, an "intrinsic challenge to the democratic free market and global order".⁴⁴² This the reasoning behind his immediate decision that the US could not be left to fight alone, this was a fight for principles and values, not narrow national interests. Jack Straw, purports to have had no such immediate epiphany. However, he acknowledges in his autobiography that day did change everything, defining British foreign policy for several years following the attacks and probably longer. Certainly, for all that came before, Blair's response to these events came to define not only his foreign policy, but his entire premiership.

In the statement given by Blair responding to the terror attacks on the US, he said Britain stood shoulder to shoulder with American, saying "This is not a battle between the United States of America and terrorism but between the free and democratic world and terrorism... [we] will not rest until this evil is driven

⁴⁴¹ Blair, *Tony Blair: A Journey*, p345

⁴⁴² Clarke, "Foreign Policy" p 605

from our world."⁴⁴³ Straw also argued for standing with the Americans and advised the best way of doing so was to publically support Washington and try to use what influence Britain had privately.⁴⁴⁴ Most importantly, for Blair, was that Britain's close alignment to the US be "pursued more vigorously than ever"⁴⁴⁵. It was essential that the US should not be driven to act unilaterally, harming international relationships and potentially undermining international institutions. To avoid this, the British needed to be part of the conversation, to encourage the US to work through the UN, and to address the moribund Arab-Israeli peace process.

Additionally, Blair argued, the commitment to stand with the US was clearly in the national interest, since he viewed the terrorist attacks as attacks on the "free world" not just America. They thus attacked the values and beliefs that Britain, America and the West held in common. Promoting this message, in the eight weeks following 9/11, Blair would travel 40000 miles, take 31 flights and speak with 56 foreign leaders,⁴⁴⁶ adding to the perception that he was acting like an American diplomat not a British Prime minister. In his autobiography Blair writes "I was writing regular notes to him [Bush], raising issues, prompting his system and mine: humanitarian aid; political alliances,

⁴⁴³ Blair, *Tony Blair: A Journey*, p352

⁴⁴⁴ A Campbell, *The Blair Years*, (London, 2008) p563

⁴⁴⁵ R Harvey(ed), *The World Crisis after Iraq*, p11

⁴⁴⁶ W Wallace "The Collapse of British Foreign Policy" *International Affairs* Vol 81, No 1, (2005) p53

including in particular how we co-opted the Northern Alliance (the anti-Taliban coalition) without giving leadership of the country over to them... Above all, I was globetrotting – to the Middle East, Pakistan, Russia – trying to ensure that we kept the support we had.”⁴⁴⁷

Rather than showing true leadership, this unprecedented level of support earned Blair the reputation of being an America lackey among leaders in Europe and the Middle East. Further, John Dickie writes, “His whirlwind tours of far flung capitals to garner support for the campaign ... led to an impetuous promise of 6000 troops to ‘stabilise Afghanistan’ when calmer heads at the FCO were advocating caution. Heeding this advice would have spared him embarrassment of standing down the British force weeks later as US command clear they running campaign and did not want them.”⁴⁴⁸ His early years in government had strengthened Blair’s belief that only he could handle this kind of foreign crisis effectively. It had also left no one strong enough in government to counter his belief that this was an attack on Western values and restrict his reaction accordingly. This lack of formal consultation was also evident in that at this time, between 11th September and the end of the month, Blair convened his cabinet just once, and even Cobra, the Governments crisis response committee, had only three meetings.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁷ Blair, *A Journey*, p358

⁴⁴⁸ Dickie, *The New Mandarins*, p131

⁴⁴⁹ Kampfner, *Blairs Wars*, p121

Blair's statement also underlined the instinctive leaning he had in defining international events as "good" and "evil", foreign policy in the light of "doing the right thing" in a moral sense, rather than the more considered ethical foreign policy aspirations of Cook's time in the FCO or traditional pragmatism in defence of the country's interests. Anyone who could not see events in this light was met with impatience: other states that could not see the value of Blair's argument were on the wrong side. Blair's foreign policy agenda would not be one of narrow national interests but Britain would be acting to protect "ideals of greater good in places where our interests were not visibly involved at all", a contentious policy at best.⁴⁵⁰

Targeting the Taliban

Blair was the first foreign leader President George Bush called following the September 11th terrorist attacks. Bush ended his call saying "we will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbour terrorists".⁴⁵¹ This was the prism through which US foreign policy was made in the decade which followed, one with which Blair would quickly align. In the days following the attack Blair spent much of his time calling on other leaders to rally behind the US, and visited both New York and Washington in

⁴⁵⁰ Harvey, *The World Crisis*, p12

⁴⁵¹ Kampfner, *Blairs Wars*, p116

the week that followed. The first to feel the impact was the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

Sympathy was clearly with the Bush administration. UNSCR 1368 which condemned the attacks was passed on 12th September with little fuss quickly, two weeks later a further resolution passed authorising military action.⁴⁵² After the Taliban failed to acquiesce to demands to give up the leadership of al-Qaeda and move to dismantle its network, US and UK forces moved in beginning Operation Enduring Freedom on Sunday 7th October 2001 with the aim of removing the Taliban from power and confronting al-Qaeda.

The international community was largely supportive over the operation in Afghanistan. The links to the training of Al-Qaeda operatives there were known, as was the fact that the Taliban housed and supported its leadership. Still, the operation was criticised by some, particularly over the fact that no explicit UN authorisation for the war was sought, instead it was justified under the UN Charter's Article 51, as an act of collective self-defence. There were further accusations that, while the events of 9/11 led NATO to invoke Article 5

⁴⁵² Straw, *Last Man Standing*, p341

of the charter, NATO was not represented in Afghanistan (neither was the EU).⁴⁵³

The invasion of Afghanistan might have served to introduce a cautionary approach to solidarity with the US. Several states, alongside Britain, declared their support for the Bush administration in the operation against the Taliban. A total of 80 countries offered support but "only Britain participated in the first wave of strikes".⁴⁵⁴ The US campaign to remove the Taliban from Kabul was fast and unilateral, NATO's offer to aid in the invasion brushed aside.⁴⁵⁵ Having learned the lessons of Kosovo, the Afghan campaign was fought through a coalition of the willing but whilst the US used the military, logistical and diplomatic support of their allies, they refused to share leadership of the operation.⁴⁵⁶ The reasoning behind Blair's support for the US was that influence a war you have to be in it,⁴⁵⁷ but an effective way to have done this would have been in advocating a role for NATO, both to protect the credibility of such multinational organisations, and in legitimising the operation which lacked explicit UN authorisation; however, instead Blair prioritised the need to stand with the Americans above such considerations.

⁴⁵³ M Cox, T Oliver, "Security Policy in an Insecure World" in Dunleavy, Hefferman, Cowley, Hay (Eds), *Developments in British Politics*, (Basingstoke, 2006) p175

⁴⁵⁴ Hollis, *Britain and the Middle East in the 9/11 era*, p94

⁴⁵⁵ M Cox, T Oliver, "Security Policy in an Insecure World" p175

⁴⁵⁶ Hollis, *Britain and the Middle East in the 9/11 era*, p43

⁴⁵⁷ Blair, *Tony Blair: A Journey*, p352

In the US led invasion, Britain lacked influence over operational matters, even though UK troops were involved. This was clearly evident when the Bush administration decided to move their focus from Afghanistan to Iraq without consultation, leaving UK troops to take up the slack in Afghanistan. Blair could not persuade Bush that reconstruction in Afghanistan was vital and a responsibility of the allies; every attempt he made being met with resistance in Washington.⁴⁵⁸ These lessons should have served warning as Britain considered supporting a similar intervention in Iraq, foreshadowing similar problems.

One state leader who did condemn the Afghanistan invasion was Bashar al-Asad. It was as part of his 9000 mile, month long trip following 9/11 Blair embarked on his ill-advised October 2001 visit to Damascus. Both leaders professed to having an open and candid discussion but in the public press conference Asad roundly condemned the Afghanistan campaign. Asad said that whilst he condemned the terrorist attacks on America, "We didn't say we support the international coalition for launching war. We are always against war... We cannot accept what we see on television, the killing of innocent civilians, hundreds now dying every day. I don't think anyone in the West agrees to that". Drawing a distinction between terrorists and resistance

⁴⁵⁸ Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, p146

fighters, with regard to the Palestinian groups whose headquarters were in Damascus, he said "Resistance to occupation is an international right....Acts of resistance are very different from acts of terrorism. In the West you have examples. In France one of the most prestigious is President de Gaulle, who fought for the liberation of France."⁴⁵⁹

Asad was in a difficult situation after 9/11 and trying to occupy a middle ground. Whilst he condemned the terrorist attacks and cooperated in sharing intelligence on al-Qaeda, he roundly condemned the military action in Afghanistan. Given Bush's proclamation that states were "either with us or against us" this position was dangerous. Asad's outburst was explained by referencing his need to play to his home audience yet it highlighted the difficulties the British faced in attempts to engage with Syria. Asad also had reason to be concerned, with the US considering Syria a "rogue state." America's new crusade against terrorism and the states that played host to what it considered terrorist groups, notably militant Palestinian factions hosted by Damascus made for a challenging environment. Rather than write this off simply as playing to a home audience Blair could have used the opportunity to address some of these concerns, but he seemed completely unaware of Syria's views or interests.

⁴⁵⁹ B Brogan, "Assad hits at Blair over war deaths" *The Telegraph*, (01 November 2001)

This was the backdrop to Blair's visit to Syria. He had two objectives, "to look for a way of weaning Syria away from its support of Hizbullah and other groups, and the other was to try to get Syria to re-enter talks with Israel on the return of the Golan Heights"⁴⁶⁰. What he achieved was a PR disaster. In Alistair Campbell's words, Blair received "a total banjaxing from Pres Asad, which was a bit of a problem" and it was played out in the British media to the extent that, "there was no point trying to make out Asad had been anything but unhelpful, though TB was still of the view it was as much a clash of political and media cultures as a deliberate act of hostility".⁴⁶¹..

The reasons behind Blair's decision to court Syria, in some ways, were only strengthened after the terrorist September 2001. For Blair, 9/11 had inalterably changed international relations, and the need to tackle areas of instability was heightened. That that meant reengaging in Middle East peace negotiations, and tackling leaders who were seen as likely to ferment instability, which meant getting the key players on board. Syria's was one of those key players. Asad's regime was no friend of Bin Laden, was militantly secular and "had no love of action based on fundamentalism".⁴⁶² It had also already shown willingness to

⁴⁶⁰ Hollis, *Britain and the Middle East in the 9/11 era*, p136

⁴⁶¹ A Campbell, *The Blair Years*, p585

⁴⁶² B Whitaker, "Listed as an enemy, wooed as a friend in a crisis" *The Guardian* (31 October 2001)

share intelligence. Still, most observers were uncertain what Blair hoped to achieve with his visit (the Canadian foreign minister had visited less than 48 hours before and discussed the same issues much more privately⁴⁶³) and unclear what “unique leverage”⁴⁶⁴ Blair brought to the table.

The visit went against the advice of the FCO, not in that they were against the attempt to engage Bashar, but in the high profile of the visit and press conference. Blair was either poorly briefed or not briefed at all, since “he spoke constantly of the Palestinians, of the Mitchell Plan and the Tenet Proposals” giving the impression his concern was only with the Israeli – Palestinian peace process⁴⁶⁵, and that Syria’s own peace negotiations and demands were unimportant. This impression was compounded by his demands that Asad stop supporting “terrorist” groups demonstrating little understanding of Syria’s legitimate claims with regard to the Golan Heights. This served as a further demonstration of a British government failing to understand and give weight to Syrian interests, whilst insisting Syria met British demands over its priorities.

The perception was that in this display of international showmanship Blair was, once again, ignoring the knowledge and expertise of his own FCO, and relying

⁴⁶³ B Whitaker, “Misplaced politics in Damascus” *The Guardian* (03 November 2001)

⁴⁶⁴ P Wintour, “Blair undertakes mission to Middle East”, *The Guardian* (31 October 2001)

⁴⁶⁵ B Whitaker, “Misplaced politics in Damascus” (03 November 2001)

too closely on a very small group of policy advisors. His rhetoric appeared to echo American demands that Syria gave up support for Palestinian militants, its major leverage for Syria in the peace process, before Syria's concerns could even come to the negotiating table. Blair's European partners were reportedly perplexed at his visit.⁴⁶⁶ Without clear British investment or interests in Syria, which could be used to exert leverage, British influence in Syria was dependent on what it could deliver through Europe, and what kind of influence Blair held with the Bush administration. The image of Blair as an Ambassador for the US, then, did little to assure the Syrians he could deliver what they needed on either front. By appearing to simply reiterate the American message it brought into question whether he had either the will or the power to influence them, and being too closely linked to American policy put him at odds with his European partners, meaning it was unlikely Britain could use Europe to pressure Syria on this issue.

Blair could have chosen to send a representative, either from the FCO or a special envoy. Blair himself pushed for the press conference, adding fodder to critics who argued that, for New Labour, presentation, not substance, was very much part of policy. Unfortunately, again it showed naivety on Blair's part: Asad had to play for a home audience and given Blair's mishandling of the issues Asad's firm rebuttal could easily have been predicted. Even Charles

⁴⁶⁶ P Wintour, "Blair ponders diplomatic failure" *The Guardian*, (02 November 2001)

Powell, himself sent by Blair to establish a dialogue with Asad in September 2001 expressed surprise that a press conference was held when there were no detailed agreements or joint actions to announce⁴⁶⁷. Lastly, the visit was not one that would ingratiate Blair with Jerusalem, thereby conflicting with another of his priorities in the region.

Iraq

Clearly showing support for the US factored into the decision to go to war in Iraq yet for Blair Saddam was a problem long before September 11th, 2001. Blair's point of view had been formulated from his own experiences of the events that led to Operation Desert Fox. The failure of the sanctions regime, the continuing flouting of UN resolutions by the Iraqi regime, simply the *behaviour* of Hussein to date was evidence enough that he would not change, and consequently would remain a danger to peace and stability as long as he was in power. In 1997, Paddy Ashdown, noted Blair's comments that, "the state of the intelligence was 'pretty scary', and that Saddam Hussein was 'very close to some appalling weapons of mass destruction'. 'we cannot', he warned, 'Let him get away with it. The world thinks this is just gamesmanship but it is deadly serious'"⁴⁶⁸. In February 1998 Blair made a statement to the Commons, saying: "The Saddam Hussein we face today is the same Saddam Hussein we

⁴⁶⁷ Charles Powell, BBC4 radio interview, 08 September 2002, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/news/withus/powell.pdf> (Accessed 10/10/2011)

⁴⁶⁸ Kettell, *Dirty Politics?* p36

faced yesterday. He has not changed. He remains an evil, brutal dictator.... it is now clearer than ever that his games have to stop once and for all. If they do not, the consequences should be clear to all".⁴⁶⁹ Reportedly Blair was much more keen to see military action over Saddam's continued defiance of the US and UK.

Britain's relationship with Iraq was similar to that of the US since the 1991 Gulf war. Maintaining the no fly zone and upholding UN resolutions since the 1991 war was a constant and costly commitment. Sanctions imposed by the UN, supported by Britain, were failing, bringing not only the effectiveness of Britain's policy, but the credibility of the UN, into question. Britain's preferred solution - "smart" sanctions - was not supported by France or Russia. Some suggested this was because both had negotiated lucrative trade deals to commence after the lifting of sanctions, but another argument is that the French priority was that the Russians were not left as Iraq's "only friend." The French further insisted that inspections could not become "perfectionist" and thus unrealistic. They argued, that once 95% of Iraq's WMD were destroyed it would be difficult to find the last 5%, meaning it was essential that a diplomatic relationship was maintained to allow continued access for inspectors.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁹ Dyson, "Personality and Foreign Policy: Tony Blair's Iraq Decisions", p290

⁴⁷⁰ C Cogan, *French Negotiating Behaviour*, (Washington, 2003) p196

Blair's frustration over Hussein's intransigence, and willingness to choose the military solution, was demonstrated in the run up to Operation Desert Fox, a major bombing campaign carried out by Britain and US from December 16th – December 19th 1998, justified by the allies on grounds that Iraq was in violation of UNSC resolutions and was refusing to cooperate fully with inspectors. As military action was due to start, in fact some aircraft were already in the air, on 15th November he received a call notifying him that the American's were turning back after Hussein had contacted them agreeing to greater compliance. Blair argued this should be ignored as Saddam would not follow through on promises but it was too late, the air strike being called off. Ultimately Operation Desert Fox commenced on December 16th, 1998, with Blair being proven correct, and with Britain the only ally to join the US in military action.⁴⁷¹ Clearly Blair was already convinced that something had to be done about Saddam well before the 2003 operation.

The opinion of both the British and US governments after 9/11 was that the world could no longer tolerate the kind of behaviour exhibited by Saddam. The persistent undermining of the UN resolutions, in particular, Saddam's cat and mouse game with UN weapons inspectors could no longer be borne.

Furthermore, there was the possibility that WMDs still remained in the hands of

⁴⁷¹ Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, p23

this “evil dictator” and the potential that these WMD could end up in the hands of terrorist groups was unacceptable.

For Blair, the experience of Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan had proved the viability of military force, and clarified the justifications for it as he had conceptualised in his April 1999 Chicago speech. In Kosovo, particularly, Blair had considered the “dysfunction between international law and plain morality” and reconciled for himself the legitimacy of action taken by NATO without a UN resolution.⁴⁷² Finally, the events of 9/11 had clarified in his mind what could and could not be tolerated. British intelligence reports had for many years detailed the data on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, the likelihood of what still remained, of whether he would use them, and of what might happen once sanctions were lifted. The perception of the potential threat these posed was now much higher, as terrorism and WMDs could potentially come together, and obligated a response. While Blair made the decision early on that it was essential that the US not be left to act unilaterally in response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11, he was also clear that, in his opinion, this was in also Britain’s national interest.

⁴⁷² Rentoul, *Tony Blair: Prime Minister*, p513

America had moved to a policy supporting regime change by either covert means or through assistance to opposition groups in 1998, Britain also generally supported this position, while France and Russia remained opposed, instead advocating a gradual lifting of non-military sanctions, and normalisation of relations with the current regime.⁴⁷³ Endless rounds of negotiation had become almost farcical. Carne Ross, offers a number of explanations for this. One, the traditional analysis that the interests of those concerned were diametrically opposed; the US interest being to maintain sanctions which had been highly effective in preventing the Iraqi's from any significant rearmament: Britain interest was to find a way to soften the impact of the sanctions on the Iraqi people thereby countering international criticism whilst maintaining a sanction regime; the French and Russian interest being to make sure any new sanctions regime would not make the situation worse for the population, though both also had substantial economic interests at stake. Another analysis is simply one of "bad group dynamics" that is, the negotiators were a group of "young to middle aged males (mostly), who spend the time arguing but not listening, with "petty rivalries and animosities" dictating the debate. Finally, he offers another, complementary analysis; that each side believed that their argument dealt with "real facts and real people", in other words their information was good and unbiased, whilst the other side's was not. This he says is common to all foreign policy and is aggravated, not helped, by the ever

⁴⁷³ T Young, P Bowers, "Iraq and UN Security Council Resolution 1441" Research Paper 02/64, House of commons Library, (2002) p9

growing information now accessible through the explosion in communications and the internet.⁴⁷⁴

Arguing that Blair's support for the invasion of Iraq was solely due to his dedication to the US does not present the full picture. What can be said is that he was unable to adequately set out the British case for intervention as separate from that of the US. The Bush administration had clearly stated regime change as an objective, alongside the WMD issue, whereas the British government was restricted from citing the same. Though clearly viewing Hussein as a central risk to stability in the region, Blair was advised that regime change had "no basis in international law" as a justification for invasion.⁴⁷⁵ The Attorney General advised further that the current situation with regard to Iraq meant intervention on humanitarian grounds was not applicable.⁴⁷⁶ This left Blair a narrow case to put to the public based on compliance on UNSCRs.

Britain's support over Iraq, with Britain being another permanent member of the UNSC, lent the US-led coalition a more significant degree of legitimacy. Blair's proactive support for the war in the US, where he was considerably more popular than Bush,⁴⁷⁷ made the case more credible to the American public. A

⁴⁷⁴ C Ross, *Independent Diplomat*, pp63-66

⁴⁷⁵ Kettle *Dirty Politics?* p58

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid p98-99

⁴⁷⁷ Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, p120

criticism made since, by members of the US government, is that Blair failed to exert the same level of influence over Bush as he did over the US public. Still the nature of government in Washington is such that different groups are always vying for power, making politics there difficult to navigate at the best of times, and even President Bush has since admitted that his administration was “heroically dysfunctional”.⁴⁷⁸ This makes it difficult to judge just what level of influence Blair could have brought to bear on this matter.

The support Blair offered was neither unconditional nor blind. While it may be true that, for Blair, the idea of not supporting the US position on Iraq was unimaginable there was more reason behind the decision. Britain was inclined to support the invasion of Iraq as a solution to what was a long standing and intractable issue. It further supported the war due to the British perception of security changing after 9/11. In real, practical, terms however British support came with two requests (though never absolute conditions). One was that the Bush administration attempt to go the UN route to get support for the action; the second was a US reengagement in the MEPP which Blair saw to be at the heart of problems in the region.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid, p397

The argument is that Blair failed to achieve either of these objectives, that despite showing public support to the US, the British government had very little influence over US foreign policy aims and that this was a failure for British foreign policy. Here again, it must be stated that these were desirable outcomes for Blair not absolutes. From the British government's point of view Blair did succeed in getting the Bush administration to try the UN route and did come away with UNSCR 1441, which Straw and his team were instrumental in drafting. Furthermore, he never stopped pressing for the Americans to reengage with the MEPP resulting in the November 2002 commitment to the Road Map; though in reality this did not become a priority. In the end Blair could have backed out of the Iraq conflict, being given the option to do so by Bush just before the vote was put to the British parliament, but he opted not to do so.

Blair has also been criticised for not meeting his own stated criteria for intervention as defined in his Doctrine of International Community speech (set out in the previous chapter) before setting out on his Iraq adventure. The *case for action* was not clear. The precipitator to action in Iraq was the terrorist attacks in America. Without these, it is unlikely that any action against Iraq would have taken place. There was no evidence linking Saddam to the terrorists involved in the 9/11 attacks (though plenty linking them to Saudi Arabia, a major UK and US ally in the region), and no real links with the al

Qaeda organisation. The case for war on Iraq was built around its possession of WMD in defiance of UNSC regulations. Certainly, in a document produced later that year UK "International Priorities: a strategy for the FCO," making the world safer from global terrorism and WMD was one of the top priorities for Britain. Since the end of the war and subsequent failure to find WMD, criticism has focused on the British intelligence case behind this and how far the British government misled parliament and the public over the WMD issue.

Whilst it seems clear now that there were no WMD to be found in Iraq, the intelligence presented was consistent both with the intelligence from other states and the intelligence reports and FCO briefings on Iraq since 1991 according to the Butler report. Yet both the September dossier and the "dodgy" February dossier detailing this intelligence data to Parliament have come under much criticism as deliberate attempts to mislead. There have now been four inquiries into aspects of the Iraq war, one by the FAC, one by the ISC, the Hutton Inquiry and the Butler Report, all cleared the government of any attempt at deliberate subterfuge. All, aside from the Hutton Inquiry (which had a much narrower remit) have been critical of the way intelligence information was presented, while finding no evidence that the information was manipulated to mislead.⁴⁷⁹ It should also be noted that the scope of these inquiries was dictated by the government and depended on its cooperation.

⁴⁷⁹ Kettell, *Dirty Politics?* p155

Straw reflects in his memoirs that bowing to pressure to make a case for war was the mistake made here, all the rationale for the war was clearly available in open source documents in the form of UNSCRs.⁴⁸⁰ In releasing the dossiers the government had not anticipated that parliamentarians and the general public would treat the intelligence as fact, rather than intelligence. What criticism there has been of the dossiers has revolved around failing to include the normal kind of caveats that would be more usually found in intelligences briefings and dossiers created for the government.

Criticism, particularly that considering the legality of the war, has focussed also on Blair's failure to get a second UNSC resolution and/or his failure to get the US to push harder for a second resolution. Again, it should be noted that these arguments were not over the accuracy of the intelligence available. Straw asserts that intelligence agencies in a most states including Russia France and Germany, believed Saddam Hussein possessed WMD.⁴⁸¹ The argument was over how far Saddam Hussein was cooperating with UNMOVIC and whether diplomacy still could work. The British government was of the opinion that Hussein was never going to fully comply. UNMOVIC reports stated that no significant new evidence was being produced by the Iraqis and they were still

⁴⁸⁰ Straw, *Last Man Standing* p377

⁴⁸¹ Ibid, p384

being stopped from interviewing witnesses. Through January and February 2003 some process was made but inspectors could not “produce immediate and conclusive answers” as to whether Iraq was cooperating “actively and unconditionally with inspectors”⁴⁸². Hans Blix, reporting back on 7 March 2003 said whilst some items remained unaccounted for, spot inspections had not unearthed any hidden arsenals and the Iraqis were “more or less cooperating”.⁴⁸³ The French and the Russians wanted more time. The US, UK and Spain argued Iraq was not completely cooperating thus was in breach of UNSC1441

Which goes to the next question, *whether the diplomatic options been exhausted*. It was on this point that the other members of the UNSC disagreed as did the lead inspector. From Blair’s perspective all options had been explored. The actual failure of British diplomacy here was, arguably, the failure to convince its European partners of the case for war. Given the diametrically opposed position vis-à-vis the Iraqi sanctions regime it is hard to see where a consensus could have been formed.

⁴⁸² FAC, “Foreign Policy Aspects of the War against Terrorism” Tenth Report of Session 2002-03, HC 405, London: TSO, (31 July 2003) 14

⁴⁸³ Hollis, *Britain and the Middle East in the 9/11 era*, p103

This failure decreased Blair's ability to influence the Bush administration further. The neo conservatives in that administration had been reluctant to go to the UN to get the first UNSC resolution, but Blair had managed to convince Bush of the necessity. The British argument was that this was desirable in order to show unity over action in Iraq, but was not legally required. Saddam was clearly in contradiction of UNSCR 678 and thus the military action was legal.

Furthermore, Straw writes that it was clear when writing the UNSCR 1441 everyone knew "serious consequences" meant military action, it was only after the resolutions was passed that those involved started backing away from this position. Ultimately, a statement from the French President Jacques Chirac, saying France would not support a second resolution gave the Blair government a way out. Instead of challenging the statement, Straw took great delight in denouncing the French for blocking the diplomatic process in the UN and the decision was made to go ahead with military action, which was justified as legal under the first UNSC resolution against Iraq.

In the case of Blair's third criteria, the *military resources* were in place and the campaign planned well before the outbreak of hostilities. In the case of the fourth, *planning for the long haul*, Blair again failed. Blair's and the FCOs concerns about planning the rebuilding of Iraq were not heard by the US administration. Some of the blame for this comes from the convoluted nature of American politics rather than a British failing. The decision by Paul Bremner,

who headed up the Coalition Provisional Authority, to disband Iraq's security forces, for example, was taken without consulting the British at all, but even Washington got only the most "cursory consultation"⁴⁸⁴ leaving leading figures including senior figures livid. Given the impact of the decision on British troops, and the consequences for the Iraqi population, the lack of British input was a massive failure on the part of the British politicians.

Blair's government did, however, succeed in establishing the basis for the legal obligation of the occupiers to restore law and order in Iraq through UNSCR 1483.⁴⁸⁵ In envisaging a role for the UN in the long term rebuilding of Iraq and persuading the Americans of the need for this role, the Blair government held a consistent line. Initial steps to establish a UN presence in Iraq were taken but suffered a serious blow when the UN headquarters in Baghdad were blown up in August 2003 only 10 weeks after UN personnel were sent in killing several, including UN Envoy Sergio Vieira de Mello.

Lastly the question of *national interest*. According to Blair confronting Saddam was in the national interest because ultimately not dealing with rogue regimes made the world a less safe place, undermining international security and stability thus attacking British interest. As a number of intellectuals, politicians

⁴⁸⁴ Straw, *Last Man Standing*, p396

⁴⁸⁵ Hollis, *Britain and the Middle East in the 9/11 era*, p109

and academics forewarned however, both the fact that Britain had been involved in several wars in Muslim countries and aligned itself so closely with American foreign policy has not made the country safer; evidence suggests that Britain is at much greater risk from international terrorism and home-grown terrorism since the Iraq adventure.⁴⁸⁶

Regardless as to whether the criteria for intervention was met before the invasion, with no WMD found Blair increasingly spoke of the intervention in Iraq in terms of human rights and democratic values.⁴⁸⁷ With the growing unrest following the removal of Saddam's Ba'athist regime and increasing casualties both Iraqi civilians and of coalition forces, this argument too was undermined. As the situation in Iraq continued to spiral out of control, it became clear that the occupiers would need to engage more with other states in the region to bring about stability in Iraq

Impact on Syria

Almost immediately upon the US declaring a War on Terror, the Syrian regime made the offer of intelligence cooperation with the US. This cooperation

⁴⁸⁶ Harvey, *The World Crisis After Iraq*, p20

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid, p17

achieved little for them politically however as the US took this more or less as its right. If anything, the regime became a larger target for a number of neo-cons in the Bush Administration. With the US setting its sights on those it saw to be giving succour to terrorists the Asad regime remained in the line of fire. According to Peter Ford, the Syrian regime felt immensely threatened by the US attitudes, ultimately concerned for its survival in the face of such aggression.

The Iraqi conflict was a difficult challenge for the Syrian regime on a number of fronts. Iraq is on Syria's doorstep, the war brought Western forces right to the Syrian border. Whilst this was not the first time Syria was asked to support military action against Iraq, the situation was on this occasion was significantly different from the previous action. In 1991 Saddam had attacked Kuwait, a clear provocation and justification for the action taken against him. The US and UKs rationale for action against him in 2002 was much weaker; the key arguments for the need for action such as the nature of the "rogue" regime, the support for terrorist groups, the possession of WMD together with the idea of democratisation to secure peace and stability in the region could equally be levelled against the Asad regime, indeed in the US this had already begun.

An additional challenge for Bashar was that by chance Syria held the non-permanent member Arab seat at the UNSC at the time. This meant the Asad regime, one that in part legitimised itself in pan-Arab terms, had the unenviable

task of having to vote on a resolution that could potentially lead to the military invasion of another Arab state. Syria was not alone in speaking out against this but the fact it was on the UNSC at that time meant the Asad regime felt particular pressure. When Bush, under pressure from Blair alongside members of his own administration, came to the UNSC for a resolution on Iraq, the Syrian camp was left in a difficult position.

In both the UN and Arab League Syrian diplomats attempted to block legitimisation for the American invasion of Iraq.⁴⁸⁸ Despite Britain's push for the US to take the matter to the UN, and its involvement in scripting the specific resolution, it was the French, with the assurance that the resolution did not authorise automatic military action, that persuaded Syria eventually to vote for UNSCR 1441. The French wanted to know the views of all fifteen members of the UNSC (the Americans focussed on the five permanent members), what Blix required in terms of an enhanced mandate for inspections, and ultimately wanted to preserve the rule of the UNSC as the supreme authority governing international behaviour.⁴⁸⁹

Both the French and the Russians were aware of the potential consequences of Britain and US going it alone. Both Russia and France were concerned about

⁴⁸⁸ Hinnebusch, "Syrian Foreign Policy under Bashar al-Asad" p17

⁴⁸⁹ Cogan, *French negotiating behaviour*, p198

the precedent it might set if the Iraq war was justified on grounds of a developing threat, and further, what the consequence would be if two traditionally strong proponents of international law were seen to be willing and able to stretch it this way potentially undermining the rule of law in a way which would affect international peace and stability. Both would undermine the credibility of the UNSC and thus the value of the French and Russian veto.⁴⁹⁰

The importance of a unanimous vote prompted both President Chirac and Kofi Annan to phone Bashar persuading him to vote for the resolution, emphasising the importance of the Syrian vote as the only Arab country represented on the UNSC, and arguing that a unanimous vote stood the best chance of convincing Saddam of the seriousness of the situation. The French also manoeuvred to ensure the vote at the UNSC was taken on November 8th, two days ahead of the Arab League meeting in Cairo to ensure the Syrian representative did not return to New York requesting further modifications.⁴⁹¹

The resolution gave Iraq a final chance to comply with all previous resolutions or face "serious consequences". While committed to opposing war, Syria wished to avoid the angering the "reigning superpower"⁴⁹², hoping that

⁴⁹⁰ M Byers "Agreeing to Disagree: security Council Resolution 1441 and Intentional ambiguity" *Global Governance*, 10, (2004) p174

⁴⁹¹ Cogan, *French negotiating behaviour*, p200

⁴⁹² Byers "Agreeing to Disagree" p175

mandating renewal UN weapons inspectors would curb Bush's push to war⁴⁹³ whilst supporting the resolution would demonstrate a reasonable level of support to the Americans. The Syrian regime walked a tightrope, on one hand trying to avoid angering America, on the other letting it be known that they did not support the invasion of a neighbouring Arab country. On voting for the resolution Syria's Permanent Representative to the UN stated

"This vote also followed assurances and contacts that were made at the highest levels between permanent members at the UNSC and the leadership in the Syrian Arab Republic... We saw that the drift of the resolution does not allow any side to launch an attack automatically on Iraq."⁴⁹⁴

Despite eight weeks of negotiations the language of the resolution was ambiguous enough that all those voting could be satisfied. The French, Russians and Chinese were assured there was no automaticity for military action in the resolution, with both Straw and Blair clear that serious consequences meant military action. Straw would also argue that the use of military force was not automatic, it was reliant on whether or not Saddam Hussein complied with his responsibilities or not under the resolutions⁴⁹⁵. The Syrians, voting in a resolution with credible reservations and at a political cost,

⁴⁹³ Hinnebusch, "Syrian Foreign Policy under Bashar al-Asad" p1

⁴⁹⁴ Young, Bowers, "Iraq and UN Security Council Resolution 1441" p35

⁴⁹⁵ Straw, Last Man Standing, p385

received little thanks. Straw, reflecting on the episode, shows more exasperation than any understanding of the Syrian position:

“The resolution was finally passed on 8 November 2002, at first, fourteen of the Council’s fifteen members were in favour. Then Syria, a non-permanent member, reluctantly decided to come in with the rest. The Syrian foreign minister, Farouk al-Sharaa, one of the more difficult people I have ever had to deal with, called me.... and engaged me in the most contorted explanation as to why his country had taken so long to make up its mind”⁴⁹⁶

More publically at the time he said that the result of active diplomacy with Syria had reached a much better common understanding.⁴⁹⁷ The British position, then, was less than accepting of differing points of view, or that the Syrian regime had legitimate concerns over the resolution.

It was in this context that a reciprocal visit from Bashar to Britain went ahead in December 2002. In the run up to this visit to London Blair explained what he saw as the “value of dialogue with Syria”. Blair stated that Syria is an important and influential country in the region, that Britain had its disagreements with Syria over the terrorist groups based there, its trade links

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid, p380

⁴⁹⁷ J Straw, “British Contributions to Middle East Peace Plan, www.fco.gov.uk (Accessed 06/05/2010)

with Iraq, and wanted to see greater movement towards political freedom and that he “strongly believes that candid dialogue is much more productive than no dialogue at all”. There were areas of agreement such as voting for UNSCR 1441, that Britain was supporting reform efforts in Syria including a British consultant being the main author of the Syrians IT strategy, and Britain was providing advice on economic reform; also the British Council was supporting the expansion of Syrian Universities and scholarships were being provided for Syrian students to take post grad courses in Britain.⁴⁹⁸ Somewhat more pragmatically Syria was seen as “pivotal in the looming conflict with Iraq”⁴⁹⁹ so dialogue was seen as essential.

The decision to invite Bashar to Downing Street (and Buckingham Palace) provided the opportunity to press him to close down the offices of the “three most feared Islamist groups in the Middle East”, and to convince him to support a tougher stance towards Iraq.⁵⁰⁰ The visit however highlighted the acute difference of opinion over Iraq. Bashar was extremely hesitant on the issue, despite the fact Syria have been intense rivals with Iraq in terms of hegemony in the region. The fact that Syria was a non-permanent member of the UNSC provided a high profile, with Asad encouraged in his anti-war stances by the

⁴⁹⁸ Tony Blair “The value of dialogue with Syria”, FCO publication, www.fco.gov.uk (Accessed 06/05/2010)

⁴⁹⁹ R Beeson, “Blair attempts to woo Assad with London summit” *The Times*, (29 Nov 2002)

⁵⁰⁰ A La Guardia, “Blair stakes reputation on dialogue with ‘rogue’ state” *The Telegraph* (16 December 2002)

support of France and Russia. While there was discussion over the issues as Britain saw them, "Asad was more interested in supporting the Arab view and what he saw as a strong international consensus against war in Iraq"⁵⁰¹. Therefore, he felt supported in standing up to the British and Americans

Given the events taking place at the time it is unsurprising that, as Rime Allaf writes, Syria was unable to make the time as a non-permanent member of the UNSC pay off.⁵⁰² At the best of times it is difficult for non-permanent members to make progress on significant issues, particularly those in which the permanent members have a stake. With the UN facing the challenges which began with the September 11th terrorist attacks, Syria faced impossible odds in advancing its own priorities in the Council, such as the peace process, economic priorities, or even, warmer relations with US or any key power. This was illustrated succinctly after the Israeli an airstrike on Syrian territory at the time, when the regime failed to garner enough support in the UN to even discuss a draft resolution condemning it.⁵⁰³

In period leading up to the invasion of Iraq, Bashar made a number of what were considered incendiary statements as to the futility of taking that course of

⁵⁰¹ Interview with Henry Hogger, 28 August 2014

⁵⁰² R Allaf "Point of no return", *The World Today*, (Nov 2004) p12

⁵⁰³ Ibid

action. Allaf writes that the Asad regime did not “adequately read US political developments from 2000” and should have taken the fact that Syrian aid in terms of intelligence and renditions did not significantly raise support for the regime within American circles.⁵⁰⁴ On the eve of the invasion Bashar further angered Washington saying, “No doubt the U.S. is a super-power capable of conquering a relatively small country, but... the U.S. and Britain are incapable of controlling all of Iraq.”⁵⁰⁵

Despite increasing alignment with American policy over Iraq, Britain held to its original hopes for the new Asad regime a lot longer than Washington⁵⁰⁶. As stated previously the Asad regime could be accused of the same ‘crimes’ as Iraq, in fact, at the time the regime in Syria actually supported groups that both Britain and the US have listed as terrorist groups, *unlike* Iraq.⁵⁰⁷ The British attitude can be put down to the difference in how the leadership in Syria were viewed as opposed to other rogue regimes. Henry Hogger, UK Ambassador to Syria 2000 -2003, attributes UK policy toward Syria to the fact that although there was an authoritarian regime in Syria at the time, Bashar showed signs of opening up and unlike with Hussein and Qaddafi, in Syria there seemed to be more collective leadership. Peter Ford echoes this saying that for all its brutality the regime was nowhere near as brutal as the regime of Saddam

⁵⁰⁴ Allaf “Point of no return”, p12

⁵⁰⁵ Hinnebusch, “Syrian Foreign Policy under Bashar al-Asad” p18

⁵⁰⁶ Interview with Peter Ford, 12 December 2014

⁵⁰⁷ E MacAskill, M White, “Assad told to cut links with terror” *The Guardian* (16 Dec 2002)

Hussein, the atmosphere in Damascus was welcoming and courteous and, lastly, notes the fact that Syria was a militantly secular state also played into the decision.

In the lead up and initial few months of the war, the strength of anti-Syrian feeling emanating from the US administration was an issue for Britain. The British government initially held a different outlook when it came to relations with Syria, consistently making statements to the effect that Syria was not “next on the list.” Both Blair and Straw insisted that there were no plans to invade Syria, and that Britain would not support military intervention there, making statements to the Commons in March and April 2003 to that effect. During a visit to Kuwait in April 2003 Straw stated categorically, “There is not a list. Syria is not on the list. But Syria has a responsibility to recognise the new reality and come into the fold. There are important questions that Syria needs to answer”.⁵⁰⁸ Likewise, Blair criticised the Syrians for “support for terrorism... and for not being a signatory to the chemical weapons convention”.⁵⁰⁹ Still, whilst clear that the Syrian regime needed to make some changes, the British kept to the view that the Syrian regime could be reasoned with, and the tool for that was diplomacy.

⁵⁰⁸ P Webster, “Blair dampens speculation that Syria is next” *The Times* (15 April 2003)

⁵⁰⁹ “No Plans to invade Syria, insists Blair” *The Guardian* (12 April 2003)

Bashar meanwhile continued his verbal attack on the Anglo-American action, being the first Arab state, aside from Iraq, to predict their defeat.⁵¹⁰ After a stray US missile resulted in the deaths of five Syrians, Syria called for an emergency meeting of the UNSC, demanding an immediate ceasefire and withdrawal of US and British forces.⁵¹¹ While Britain maintained a dialogue with Syria for a time, it was not long before there “was quite a falling out”.⁵¹² Peter Ford puts it more strongly saying that there was a point, at the start of his term in Syria in 2003, when the British Ambassador had the best access to the regime in Damascus, of all the Western states, but that this was a wasted opportunity. Britain was seen as the best friend of Syria in Europe by the Syrian government, which also thought that Britain had the ear of Washington. This was useful as they wanted Britain to use its influence to convince the US to take Syria off the list of terrorist states, and to advise Washington to cut Damascus some slack. “Above all they wanted to get the Americans off their back and stop talking about regime change”. Instead, the British government had let itself get into a situation in which it did not have much scope to pursue a separate policy while they were jointly occupying Iraq with America, even had it wanted to. Had Britain not done so much damage to relations with her European partners on the run up to the war, it may have been possible to convince the EU to engage in a support role to the reconstruction of Iraq and provided a distinctly different path from the American led path, instead the

⁵¹⁰ “Assad predicts defeat for invasion force” *The Guardian*, (28 March 2003)

⁵¹¹ J Steele, B Whitaker, “US missile kills five Syrians on bus” *The Guardian*, (25 March 2003)

⁵¹² Interview with Henry Hogger, 28 august 2014

Europeans “washed their hands”⁵¹³ of the situation. Rather than being a bridge between America and Europe, Blair had firmly stood with the US over Iraq and in doing so, significantly damaged Britain’s relationship with the EU.

For Syria, if its foreign policy environment in advance of the Iraq war had been challenging then the initial success of the operation was unnerving. The behaviour of the Syrian regime can be seen as a reaction to US troops on the doorstep and a hostile US administration in office in Washington. A report to Congress noted that “Syria has walked a fine line between constructive and obstructionist policies in Iraq”.⁵¹⁴ Indeed, during the period of the Iraq conflict, Britain (alongside the US and some other European countries) accused the Asad regime of a number of offences. These included allowing jihadist fighters to cross into Iraq, harbouring members of the old Iraqi Ba’thist regime, supporting terrorism both in terms of allowing known terrorist groups to house their headquarters in Damascus, and in training and arming some groups, of unduly interfering in Lebanese affairs and in not seriously entering into a conversation with Israel.

⁵¹³ Ibid

⁵¹⁴ A Prados, J Sharp “Syria: Political Conditions and relations with the US after the Iraq war” CRS Report for Congress, (10 Jan 2005) p18

No doubt these accusations had some merit. The regime had indeed opposed the invasion and there were foreign fighters crossing its border into Iraq. In this its behaviour was very calibrated in response, trying to let just enough fighter cross the border to make a difference but holding enough back to show it could be potentially useful in stopping the fighters.⁵¹⁵ At the same time the British Embassy in Damascus felt the line London had taken on this was unrealistic, the Syrian border with Iraq was 400 miles long and it was a big task for them to completely prevent jihadists crossing it. Henry Hogger suggests that the Syrian's could have been supported in the endeavour by the supply of an electronic border monitoring system if the British government had seriously wanted action, while in the event London even refused to supply night vision goggles when the Syrian's brought it up for discussion.⁵¹⁶

The demands for Syria to reform its behaviour and become a responsible member of the international community coming from London, showed little consideration for what were very real concerns for the Syrian regime. Ford states he "often went to bat for the regime but it was a lost cause as there was no sensitivity in London for their concerns"⁵¹⁷. The allegations that the Syrians had chemical weapons, and demand that they give them up, failed to take into account that the Syrian reason for having them was in maintaining some sort of

⁵¹⁵ Interview with Peter Ford, 12 December 2014

⁵¹⁶ Ibid

⁵¹⁷ Ibid

strategic parity with Israel. It was inconceivable that Assad would strike first with chemical weapons when Israel would “immediately go for nuclear retaliation”.⁵¹⁸ Yet Blair’s government insisted in viewing them as a threat to regional security. The same was true of Syrian support for the various Palestinian liberation groups headquartered in Damascus. The Blair government only considered the militant groups in the context of the threat they supposedly posed to regional stability refusing to accept that without progress on the peace process the Syrian regime could not halt its support, as these were its tools in the negotiation process.

The consequence of this intransigence in the US was the passing of the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act (SALSRA), 2004 by the US Congress. Even in the US this was not greeted with universal support. Officials who supported the measure believed the way to get change in Syria was by “pressuring from within and isolating it internationally”.⁵¹⁹ Others argued that the Syrians needed to be engaged with and that the act created a “new collection of sticks with which to beat Damascus” but “few carrots to encourage continued cooperation by Syrian in the fight against al Qaeda”.⁵²⁰ In fact the Bush administration held out against pressure to pass SALSRA for two

⁵¹⁸ A Green, UK Ambassador to Syria 91-94 “Why Syria is America’s new target” *The Guardian* (17 April 2003)

⁵¹⁹ Ibid, p20

⁵²⁰ C Salhani, “The Syrian Accountability Act: Taking the wrong road to Damascus” *Policy Analysis*, No 512, (March 2004), p3

years, attempting to avoid limiting diplomatic options. Only as the security situation on the ground in Iraq got worse, and with the suspension of intelligence sharing on al-Qaeda, did the administration drop its objections to it.⁵²¹ The effects of the Act were limited, US economic relations with Syria were already small, the main effect was creating more anti-American feeling in the country, though the Syrian Trade Minister admitted to some negative affect from sanctions.⁵²² The Act also demonstrated the difficulties for Blair's government which advocated influencing US policy in private – it was passed despite reluctance from number of members of Bush's own administration, if they could not bring their influence to bear from within government, the chance of British influence coming to bear fruit seems low.

Syria, Britain and the EU Association Agreement

It was in the economic arena that the British government had a chance to forge a more constructive relationship with Syria alongside its European partners using the Euro-Mediterranean partnership and negotiations on the Association Agreement. The economic relationship between Syria and the EU was much more significant than that between the US and Syria, thus the signing of an association agreement was a much greater incentive for the Syrian regime. In 2004, the same year the US imposed sanctions, the total EU assistance aid,

⁵²¹ Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, p1

⁵²² Wieland, *Syria at Bay*, p58

mainly technical assistance, institution-building and democracy promotion, reached €55m. This provided an opportunity to pursue a different policy toward Syria, through the EU, and very much distinct from the one being pursued by the Bush administration which was still persisting in its policy of trying to economically isolate the regime.⁵²³

The Association Agreement process began well before the War on Terror was even thought of. The objectives behind the Agreements were, in fact, very much in keeping with New Labour's own objectives. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was launched in Barcelona in 1995, with the aim to promote regional stability in a region now at its borders. The EU's Mediterranean policy has three main goals:

- The creation of an area of peace and stability based on fundamental principles, including respect for human rights and democracy.
- The creation of an area of shared prosperity through sustainable and balanced economic and social development, and especially the gradual establishment of free trade between the EU and its partners and among the partners themselves.

⁵²³ Hinnebusch, "Syrian Foreign Policy under Bashar al-Asad" p12

- The improvement of mutual understanding among the peoples of the region and the development of an active civil society.⁵²⁴

The cornerstone of the EU's policy was economic, setting up a free trade area with economic and financial cooperation, though signatories were also required to develop democracy and the judiciary within their political system, respect human rights and acknowledge the role civil society can make to the process. The process was not tied to the peace process but provided another forum through which parties could meet, establishing another avenue for dialogue. The implementation of this at a bilateral level had been established through the conclusion of EU Association Agreements with the individual MENA states. These went much further than the cooperation agreements they were replacing in that they included Human Rights clauses. What was especially problematic for Syria is that clauses on eliminating weapons of mass destruction were added in at a late date and would only apply to Syria, but not Israel.

The importance of the Agreements as a tool in dealing with Syria was clear to many involved in British foreign policy making. The Commons Foreign Affairs Committee Eighth Report of Session 2006-2007 stated that Syria played a significant role in key areas in the Middle East and that the EU Association Agreement with Syria "presents a powerful incentive for Asad to remedy his

⁵²⁴ Euro-Med Partnership, "Regional Strategy Paper 2002-2006 & Regional Indicative Programme 2002 - 2004" p5

country's political behaviour".⁵²⁵ Yet Syria remained the only member of the European-Mediterranean Partnership area that had not signed an Association Agreement with the EU.⁵²⁶

Syria came late to the process and only reluctantly, starting negotiations in 1997, pursuing them half-heartedly, a signal, according to the country strategy paper 2002 – 2006, that the regime had remained unconvinced about signing a final document. Another explanation is that this was indicative of the power struggle within the regime between the old guard and the reformers within the regime. If, as Leverett suggests, Bashar pursued the Agreement in order to overcome the objections to reform from the old guard and corrupt elements in his regime and increase the pace of reform, the negotiations have not rewarded him for that effort.

The EU Association Agreement process was a potential tool through which Britain could have encouraged Syria to reform. It could have provided a useful distinction to the American policy at the time. As the EU announced the resumption of negotiations with Damascus in 2004, coinciding with the implementation of SALSRA in American "Chris Patten, the EU's commissioner for

⁵²⁵ Eighth Report of the Foreign Affairs Committee Session 2006-7, "Global Security: The Middle East" HC 363, 13 August 2007 p6

⁵²⁶ European Commission, <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/regions/euro-mediterranean-partnership/> (Accessed 01/02/2015)

external relations, noted that, while the EU shared America's policy goals for Syria, "we do not share the same tactical approach".⁵²⁷

Whilst seemingly supporting the EU Association Agreements made with the Mediterranean states, however, Britain has been particularly active in insisting on adding new requirements to them. Together with Germany, the British were particularly vocal in demanding the human rights element be at the forefront of negotiations. Furthermore, at the insistence of Germany, the Netherlands and Britain, the EU inserted a new standard clause to the Association Agreement, "the EU decided that partners in its association agreements must denounce weapons of mass destruction".⁵²⁸ This was in line with the current British international priorities, but both the fact that there was no move to add this "standard clause" to existing agreements, and timing suggested that it was aimed entirely at the Syrian agreement. Some point to Washington's influence as behind Britain insistence on more stringent language on non-proliferation though Britain has rejected this assertion.⁵²⁹ For its part, in its departmental report 2004 - 2005 the FCO states that it pressed hard during 2004 in order to "ensure the principles on the 2003 European Security Strategy were reflected in the EU-Syria Association Agreement."⁵³⁰ This identified the proliferation of

⁵²⁷ F Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, p85

⁵²⁸ B Whitaker, "Suspicious Sanctions", *The Guardian* (17 May 2004)

⁵²⁹ R Youngs, "Trans-Atlantic cooperation on Middle East Reform: A European misjudgement?" *The Foreign Policy Centre* (2004) <http://fpc.org.uk/publications/MiddleEastReform>

⁵³⁰ Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Departmental Report 01 April 2004 – 31 March 2005, CM6533, London:TSO, (June 2005) p68

WMD as one of five key threats, and placed emphasis on prevention, committing the EU “working through the UN and multilateral agreements” to combat this.⁵³¹

Syrian complaints at double standards can hardly be dismissed. The criteria of Syria’s agreement were much stronger on a number of measures than any other agreement, including those measures dealing with respect for democratic principles and fundamental human rights, WMDs, and cooperation on Counter-Terrorism.⁵³² As negotiations continued additional provisions were added such as cooperation with UNSCR 1559, the resolution calling for all foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon and all militias in Lebanon to disband, and later for Syria’s cooperation in the Hariri tribunal. The moving goalposts led the Syrians “to think that it’s a game and ask what the next condition will be.”⁵³³ The issue is broader than just Anglo-Syrian relations. Britain used an existing EU process to exert pressure on a particular state, on behalf of the US, arguably undermining the EU’s attempts at engagement with its neighbours. Hardly in line with the policy of being a strong contributing member of the EU.

⁵³¹ The Council of Europe, *European Security Strategy: A secure Europe in a better world*, (2009) p11 <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf> (Accessed 12/04/2016)

⁵³² A Zorub, “Trade Liberalization and Adjustment via Regional Integration: The Syrian-European Association Agreement”, *Syrian and the Mediterranean Partnership*, *St Andrews Papers on Contemporary Syrian Studies* (2009) p9

⁵³³ Dorstal, “The European Union and Economic Reform in Syria” p17

Accusations of hypocrisy have also been levelled. Already having shown favour to Turkey over the Ilisu dam project, New Labour, had given considerable support to Turkey's bid to join the EU. On this matter Cook had stated "the question of rejection does not arise", arguing then that it would be "inconceivable that Britain would invoke mere human rights atrocities to block Turkish entry.⁵³⁴ This also aligned with US policy on "supporting a relatively low democratic threshold for Turkish EU accession"⁵³⁵. Similarly, the EU Association Agreement with Israel had been signed and ratified despite their ownership of WMD, and treatment of Palestinians. Reacting pressure it faced over UNSCR 1559, the Syrian regime pointed that the UNSC was "totally ignoring 40 or its resolutions, adopted unanimously, and another 600 General Assembly resolutions, all calling for Israel to withdraw from the occupied Arab territories and establish a just and comprehensive peace in the region,"⁵³⁶ an accusation which could equally apply to the EU. Furthermore, in those states where agreements had been signed, the EU has been reluctant to act on failure to implement the very clauses on which the Syria agreement was foundering, so there had been little punishment for states that have failed to implement the human rights measures to which they have agreed.

⁵³⁴ Curtis, *Web of Deceit*, p44

⁵³⁵ Youngs "Trans-Atlantic Cooperation on Middle East Reform: A European misjudgement

⁵³⁶ "A UN report turns the spotlight on Syria" *The Guardian*, (11 October 2004)

Despite these additional measures tagged onto the agreement, Syria still came very close to signing the agreement. Negotiations reached a conclusion in October 2004, when the European Commission and Syrian officials initialled the text, though by then a combination of Damascus's growing dispute with the French over Lebanon, and EU Enlargement (10 new member states joined in 2004) left whether the EU had the will or capacity to quickly approve the draft was now unclear.⁵³⁷ For Bashar the failure, despite Syrian negotiators making significant concessions, to get the agreement signed was a major blow. It also left the impression on the Syrian side that concessions "only resulted in additional demands"⁵³⁸ discouraging any further movement on their side to accede to demands.

Despite not having reached an Association Agreement with Syria, considerable EU resources were still put into the country. A greater role for Britain in pushing the process forward would have been a logical way to bring some influence to bear on the behaviour of the Syrian regime, and make better use of the resources already being contributed. British behaviour, however, acted more as a block to progress in this area. Former Ambassador Ford, states that "what the Syrian regime wanted from us was for us to treat them as respectable partners". Asad was disappointed, frustrated by Britain's block to the association agreement the failure only strengthening the hardliners in

⁵³⁷ F Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, p85

⁵³⁸ Dorstal, "The European Union and Economic Reform in Syria" p17

Asad's regime. Furthermore, Ford states, the reasons preventing the agreement going forward were purely political, one being the 2003 Iraq war, a war that the Syrian regime vocally opposed but the main reason, critical at the time, was the Hariri assassination, which would have made the signing of the agreement "embarrassing".⁵³⁹

Lebanon and the Hariri Assassination

As relations with Syria faltered over the situation in Iraq, a new crisis erupted for Syria in Lebanon. As a reward for its support of the coalition in the 1991 Gulf War, Syria's hegemony over Lebanon had been tacitly approved by the US, and its allies.⁵⁴⁰ The 2001 unilateral withdrawal of Israeli troops from South Lebanon combined with the perceived intransigent behaviour of the Asad regime had significantly changed how the regional situation was viewed by those same powers in 2004. When Bashar moved to extend the term of President Lahoud for a further 3 years, the regime had failed to recognise the extent to which the international context had changed, or to anticipate the strength with which it would be condemned. In particular, Bashar was said to be blindsided at the French leading the charge on UNSCR 1559 which called for

⁵³⁹ Interview with Peter Ford, 12 December 2014

⁵⁴⁰ Ma'oz, "Syria's role in the region Mediator, Peacemaker, or Aggressor?" p9

"all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon" and "for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias."⁵⁴¹

Asad's move to extend Lahoud's presidency was aimed to contain the influence of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri who had returned to office in 2000. Damascus feared that he would use his influence to undermine Syrian authority in Lebanon, and also that he was using his own channels with the West to bypass pro-Syrian ministers and officials. Extending Lahoud's presidency meant he could continue to block Hariri's initiatives in government. Bashar also continued to support Hizbullah's growth on the political scene as another way to maintain control over Lebanon.⁵⁴² The Syrian decision to impose its will in this way was immediately countered by the French and Americans. They quickly drafted the UN resolution, gained British support for it, and got it passed by the UNSC, though in doing so they gave truth to Syrian suspicions of Hariri's influence with Western leaders. The clauses in UNSCR 1559 reflected the interests of both France and the US; the French interest in Lebanese sovereignty and democratisation as a way of increasing its historical influence on the country, the Americans' interest in weakening Damascus.⁵⁴³ It also served the interests of Hariri in calling for a free and fair electoral process in Lebanon, and that

⁵⁴¹ T Youngs & C Taylor, "The crisis in Lebanon" *Research Paper 07/08, House of Commons Library*, (January 2007)

<http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/RP07-08#fullreport>
(Accessed 01/06/2014)

⁵⁴² Leverett, *Inheriting Syria*, p108

⁵⁴³ Wieland, *Syria at Bay*, p131

presidential elections adhered to constitutional rule with no outside interference, leading the Syrian regime firmly lead the blame for it at his feet.⁵⁴⁴

Tensions in Lebanon continued to mount culminating, on February 15th 2005, in the assassination of Hariri leaving the international community shocked. Syria was almost immediately assigned the blame though there was argument over whether or not, or to what extent, Bashar himself knew about the attack itself. Almost unanimously observers called the assassination a major miscalculation on the part of the regime. Equally, they concluded, that the Asad regime would not survive the fallout from Hariri's assassination. Huge demonstrations were held in Lebanon, people demanding Syria get out of Lebanese affairs. Britain backed France and the US in demanding Syrian adhere to the terms of UNSCR 1559. There was a freeze on Ministerial visits, Britain agreeing "an understanding that no ministerial visits to Syria were to be carried out."⁵⁴⁵ By April Syrian troops were out of Lebanon, a loss many felt the Asad regime could not withstand.

Whilst not leading the charge, Ford says that Britain "got caught up in the hounding exercise led by France and the US". Once again, in Ford's opinion, London closed its eyes to why the Asad regime felt threatened by Hariri,

⁵⁴⁴ N Blanford, *Killing Mr Lebanon*, (London, 2009) p103

⁵⁴⁵ Eighth Report "Global Security: The Middle East" p59

refusing to consider the concerns they had, such as, the concern that a number of those in Lebanon's government were on Hariri's payroll. Also ignored was the disquiet even among some supporters of UNSCR 1559 over the clause dealing with the disbanding of militias. Some saw this as a pro-Israeli move, others viewed as a barrier in building national support against Syria and Lahoud,⁵⁴⁶ viewing the clause as short-sighted. Even within Lebanon, there was uneasiness at what was seen as further foreign meddling in Lebanese affairs. None of this was reflected in London's position, Straw naming Syria as the prime suspect behind the Hariri assassination as early as 25th February 2005 with no evidence at all to back up the claim.⁵⁴⁷

Even as they acquiesced in the demand for the withdrawal of troops from Lebanon, the Syrian influence over events there did not disappear, it "merely opened a new page of meddling in Lebanon."⁵⁴⁸ Syrian troops may have withdrawn but the Syrian intelligence apparatus and Hizbullah remained. Additionally, Bashar refused demands that his regime cooperates with a special tribunal set up to investigate Hariri's death using Syria's influence through Hizbullah to delay proceedings in every way possible.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid

⁵⁴⁷ J Steele, "Now Syria is at the top of the bad guys' league table" *The Guardian*, (25 February 2005)

⁵⁴⁸ R Allaf, "Open for Business: Syria's Quest for a political deal" Chatham House Briefing Paper MEP BP07/03, p5

The Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, while an embarrassment for Bashar, and most certainly a consequence of a failure to adapt to the changes in the international system, was not the fatal blow to the Asad regime that the West, including Britain, may have hoped for. Despite not having a physical presence in Lebanon, Syria's political allies including Hizbullah were still able to significantly delay a tribunal into Hariri's assassination and also block the formation of an effective government in Lebanon. Carsten Wieland argues that the necessity of withdrawing troops after the Hariri incident could have actually helped the Asad regime in that, before this, it would have been hard for him to secure a complete withdrawal in the face of opposition from hardliners, "Only this unexpected turn of events made it possible and set free military and financial resources that were basically needed at home."⁵⁴⁹ Given the state of the Syrian economy this argument might have some merit though it overlooks the political costs of the episode. Still, the withdrawal of troops certainly did not harm the Asad regime to the extent that some had predicted.

Western pressure in this arena failed to take into account of all factors and relationships in the region. This is a failure that has dominated British foreign policy in its relationship with Syria, in which it has either failed to consider the wider ramifications of a particular policy (such as how its Iraq policy would

⁵⁴⁹ Wieland, *Syria at Bay*, p18

affect Syria as a neighbouring country either in terms of a potential refugee problem, or the threat the policy posed politically), or makes demands of the Syrian regime without considering whether the Syrian regime hold legitimate or relevant concerns simply because the regime itself is autocratic (such as demands to expel "terrorist" organisations from Damascus). As a consequence of its Lebanon policy, one of the relationships Britain had been seeking to disrupt, that is, Syrian sponsorship of Hizbullah, in fact grew stronger. Hizbullah became more vital to Syria as a conduit for exerting pressure in Lebanon and a front for its struggle against Israel. Rather than convincing Syria to tone down its support to this group, the link has been strengthened.

This failure was evident as fresh violence erupted in Lebanon in July 2006. As is often the case the situation on the ground changed faster than any action by the UN. The Israel-Lebanon war of July-August 2006 provided Asad with a lifeline, once again making him the "champion of the Arab street and far beyond"⁵⁵⁰ as Hizbullah emerged the victor of that crisis, with Syria reflected in the glow. Blair, on the other hand, was roundly criticised for his failure to call for an immediate ceasefire after the outbreak of hostilities. In his speech calling for "complete renaissance" on foreign policy he justified his position, stating that the loss of civilian life there was terrible, but asking that the losses suffered by Israel also be considered in Gaza and from Hizbullah and that "Just

⁵⁵⁰ C Wieland "Syria's challenges after the election year: Is Bashar al-Asad part of the problem or part of the solution in the Middle East?" *Pap. Polít. Bogotá (Colombia)*, Vol. 12, No. 1, p218

to complete the picture, Israel's main neighbour along its eastern flank is Syria who supports Hizbullah and house the hardline leaders of Hamas."⁵⁵¹ Once again Blair failed to show any understanding of regional issues, speaking in black and white terms of this incident and following Israeli reaction.

Blair's stated rationale for not calling for a ceasefire was that it was unfair to call for "unilateral cessation" of hostilities, saying that a more comprehensive peace plan needed to be in place⁵⁵². This failed to recognise the disproportionate reaction of the Israelis who targeted not just Hizbullah in the South, but Lebanese state infrastructure and consequently civilians. It provided further example of British foreign policy being identified too closely with the that of the Bush administration, as the US and UK moved to block a call for an immediate ceasefire by European and Arab countries in the Rome Summit toward the end of July 2006.⁵⁵³ This policy was also seen as being too pro-Israeli, damaging further British credibility and therefore influence in the region, and being out of step with general public opinion in Britain. ⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵¹ Tony Blair's Speech: A "Renaissance" in Foreign Policy 01 August 2006

⁵⁵² Eighth Report of the Foreign Affairs Committee Session 2006-7, "Global Security: The Middle East" Government response CM 7212, (October 2007) p15

⁵⁵³ J Hooper, E MacAskill, J Steele "Frustration as summit fails to end conflict" *The Guardian* (27 July 2006)

⁵⁵⁴ G Jones, M Moore, P Bishop, "Pressure on Blair to push for ceasefire in Lebanon" *The Telegraph*, (27 July 2007)

Finally, it was also out of step with the opinions held by most in the FCO, one official saying the Foreign Office “had repeatedly urged Israel to act proportionately, to conform with international laws and to avoid the appalling civilian deaths and suffering”⁵⁵⁵ indicating, at the very least, a rift in the relationship between No 10 and the FCO, and that No 10 had taken a firm lead in the policy being pursued in the region.

The Asad regime, conversely, benefitted through its continued support of Hizbullah and from the added influence it gained from a strong Hizbullah in Lebanon. Lebanon was and is crucial to Syria strategically, economically and culturally. Trade with Lebanon, both legal commerce and illegal smuggling, contributed significantly to the closed Syrian economy, so without any feasible alternative the Syrian regime used any means it could to maintain an influence in Lebanon politically.⁵⁵⁶ The regime itself felt it had been justified in the position it had taken, that it had been “proved right about regional issues, regardless of its own involvement (alleged or proven) in them”.⁵⁵⁷ It had been correct with its warnings over the disintegration of Iraq, its concerns over the threat Israel posed to Lebanon (borne out in its July 2006 campaign), and in its opinion that negotiation on the Palestinian solution had to be all inclusive. Ford echoes this thought in pointing out that the July 2006 Hizbullah – Israel war

⁵⁵⁵ P Wintour, E MacAskill “Downing Street and Foreign Office at odds on Lebanon” *The Guardian*, (21 July 2006)

⁵⁵⁶ Wieland “Syria’s challenges after the election year” p234

⁵⁵⁷ Allaf, “Open for Business” p3

was a direct consequence of the Syrians pulling out of South Lebanon, something which a number of people at the time predicted.

As the crisis in Lebanon continued and no end in sight to the violence in Iraq and with the consequent toll that was taking on British servicemen and women, the British government began to revert back to its argument that Syria had a key role to play in the region generally and specifically with regard to a solution in Iraq. October 2006 saw Blair send Sir Nigel Sheinwald to Damascus, his spokesman saying, "We all know that Syria is part of the reality on the ground in the Middle East and therefore it can play either a constructive or destructive role ... We obviously would hope that it will play a constructive role. But in the end, the Syrian government will decide what it believes is in Syria's best interests."⁵⁵⁸ The costs of not speaking to Syria were too high.

Talks again centred on concerns over support for Hizbullah, and hopes to dissuade Syria from helping Hizbullah to rearm, on seeking Syrian support in preventing Jihadis crossing into Iraq, and on a potential breakthrough in the MEPP. The latter hoped to build on Bashar's recent call for new talks on the Golan Heights. The decision to reopen the dialogue found support in the British establishment, a report of the FAC concluded the decision to send Sheinwald

⁵⁵⁸ S Tisdall "Playing second fiddle in Syria" *The Guardian*, (01 November 2006)

was the correct one, and recommended the Government resumed ministerial contacts without delay (suspended after Hariri), and that the Government continue to support the EU's engagement with Syria.⁵⁵⁹

Britain returned to its previous position that it was necessary to have a dialogue with Syria much sooner than the Bush administration. Giving evidence to the Iraq Study Group, a bipartisan group appointed by the US Congress and chaired by James Baker and Lee Hamilton, Blair stated that he supported the view that both Syria and Iran needed to be engaged in the reconstruction of Iraq. However, the US remained sceptical of British efforts to engage with Syria and the Bush administration deciding not to take on board the recommendations of the study group.

Blair's resignation from office came in June 2007. The establishment of Gordon Brown's premiership was an opportunity for a realignment of British foreign policy, distancing itself from the overly US-centric policies of the previous six years. Brown still viewed the "special relationship" as an important part of British foreign policy but he did not have the same baggage as Blair. The main focus for Brown was the necessity of a British withdrawal from Iraq, and the necessity for engaging with Syria in order to do this was clear.

⁵⁵⁹ Eighth Report "Global Security: The Middle East" Government Response p15

On a visit to Syria on 18th November 2008 Foreign Secretary David Miliband stated:

"Syria has a big potential role to play in stability in the Middle East. It can be a force for stability or it can be a force for instability... I've been talking with the Syrian foreign minister about her responsibilities, Syria's responsibilities in the region, in respect of counter-terrorism, in respect of Iraq, in respect of the Middle East peace process, and we've got the chance now to take those discussions further forward.⁵⁶⁰

In the final years of the decade there were signs of a better relationship for Britain with Syria, particularly as Israel and Syria announced they had begun indirect talks to reach a comprehensive peace. There were signs of a Syrian rapprochement with France, with President Nicolas Sarkozy meeting Bashar before the founding summit of the Mediterranean Union as a reward for the constructive role he had played in the May Doha agreement which ensured the establishment of a stable government in Lebanon.⁵⁶¹ With the Bush

⁵⁶⁰ S Jones "Syria: An Introduction" Standard Note SN/IA/05111, House of Commons Library, 19 June 2009, p16

⁵⁶¹ Ibid p15

administration on the way out in the US, the British had more scope to work with France to bring Syria in from the cold.⁵⁶²

Throughout 2007 the Anglo-Syrian relationship had warmed as a consequence of Syrian aid in securing the release of 15 Royal Navy Sailors, captured by Iran in March, and as Syria helped in facilitating UK efforts to secure the release of Alan Johnston, BBC Gaza correspondent.⁵⁶³ France reopening the doors to the EU and Miliband's visit re-establishing intelligence links with Syria and Syrian cooperation in clamping down on Islamic militants crossing its borders⁵⁶⁴ built on this. This reengagement was not, however, a consequence of successful British policy bringing about a big change in Syrian behaviour; Syria remained a dictatorship, remained a supporter of Palestinian militant groups, and remained a close ally of Iran. The British government had returned to the pragmatic viewpoint that to achieve its objectives in the region, Syria was key and one had to secure its cooperation by respecting its interests rather than insisting they be abandoned to fit preconceived Western blueprints for the region.

⁵⁶² R Beeston, C Philip, O Angus "Britain re-establishes high-level intelligence links with Syria" *The Times* (19 November 2008)

⁵⁶³ Eighth Report "Global Security: The Middle East" Government Response p22

⁵⁶⁴ H Macleod, "Syria to share intelligence on terrorism after Miliband visit" *The Guardian* (20 November 2008)

Conclusion

When the Blair government came to power in 1997, there was nothing to indicate there would be any significant change to Anglo-Syrian relations, despite stated priorities of promoting good governance and human rights, and commitment to an ethical dimension in foreign policy. The stated intent of Blair that Britain would play a pivotal world role, and be a bridge between Europe and the US also had little impact, though its strong relationships with both might have placed Britain in a better position to hear Syrian concerns and use its influence on the behalf of the Syrian regime, as seems to have been the hope early in Bashar's premiership. It also could have potentially proved a boon to balance American support for Israel in peace negotiations if Britain, with Europe, could have represented Arab concerns in a similar fashion. Interaction between Syria and Britain would simply depend on the matter at hand and what the interests involved, there did not seem to be any reason that this would significantly change. What did change was the international context following the terrorist attacks in America in 2001.

In a practical sense, many things following September 11th, 2001 remained the same. For the US the Syrian state remained labelled a "rogue state", for Britain, the Syrian regime was still autocratic, one which supported terrorist organisations, and one which was "of concern" due to human rights abuses for example. What did change was the perception of the threat this kind of regime

posed to international stability and security. The immediate impact of this was felt in Afghanistan and Iraq, but it also dictated policy toward Syria.

In this context who and how British foreign policy was made did impact policy toward Syria, Blair's dominance in the process led to almost unconditional support for the Bush administration which inevitably set it in conflict with Syrian interest. Furthermore, his personal style, tendency to see things in black and white seemingly affected the ability of the British government to take a more nuanced approach reflecting Syrian concerns, as advocated by British officials in situ. Furthermore, Blair's support for the Iraq intervention put British troops on the ground in Iraq, with the much larger American presence there and American direction there, this left little room for manoeuvre with regard to relations with Syria, and did not pay off with any ability to influence America over US Syrian policy. In fact, if anything, America used its influence with Britain to help block the EU signing of an Association Agreement with Syria, despite Syrian commitment to making the reforms required of it by the EU.

This situation was echoed over Lebanon, where Britain was once again at odds with Syria and seen as too close to American policy there. While France pursued a similar policy in terms of removing the Syrian influence from Lebanon, they had something to gain from doing so, unlike Britain.

Furthermore, France, in keeping with the rest of Europe, demonstrated a more

balanced reaction to the 2006 war, calling for an immediate ceasefire and Israel's action disproportionate, unlike Blair who followed the US line, while clearly some in the FCO supported the European position.

In the longer term, the consequences of the Blair's foreign policy agenda, particularly over Iraq, has been of much greater significance for Anglo-Syrian relations, and in a much more unforeseen way. The decision by Blair to produce dossiers, highlighting the concerns the government held over Saddam's regime, then the distrust created by those of dossiers proving to contain bad information, and which never contained the provisos necessary to explain to the uninformed the nature of intelligence information, has made the task of convincing Parliament or the public of the case for war challenging. This is something which had severe repercussions for David Cameron when he tried to convince Parliament of the case for intervention in the Syrian civil war. The precedent of going to Parliament to vote on whether or not to go to war was set by the Blair government in the run up to Iraq. Once this vote was called it made it almost impossible to see a time when a British government could go to war without a Parliamentary vote even though there is no legal or constitutional requirement for this in Britain at the moment. This has raised the bar for any government trying to get approval for intervention and has had direct consequences for British policy toward Syria.

In a similar way, the intervention in Iraq which left that country in disarray, and saw numerous British casualties, and the fact that most of Blair's interventions have been in Muslim countries has left a legacy for British foreign policy. It has had an impact internationally, as even the US with its overwhelming military force has not been able to "solve" the problem of the Middle East, leaving the world's last remaining superpower feeling vulnerable and less inclined to commit military resources to Middle East or European security issues. The perception has grown of a world that is much less stable than it had felt at the end of the Cold War, and that British action in Iraq made Britain less safe and less secure, more susceptible to terrorism, and has even encouraged home grown terrorism. This has had considerable implications for Anglo-Syrian relations as the Arab Spring developed into the Syrian crisis then Syrian Civil war.

Chapter 5

The Arab Spring and the Syrian crisis

The terrorist attacks on the US, the war on terror and following terrorist attacks in Europe, had changed the perceptions of the international system for many Western powers. The world was now seen as less secure and less safe by many, with the perception of increased threats from terrorism and instability in regions such as the Middle East. As the perception of the threat had grown, however, the misadventures in Afghanistan and Iraq had demonstrated that military power alone was not enough to solve the problem. At the same time, the experience of those campaigns had shown the vulnerability of the US, with the world's remaining, arguably declining, superpower now more reluctant to get involved in issues which had no direct impact on US interests.

The Arab Spring occurred, then, can be seen in this context, when several Western powers were re-evaluating their interests and responses to international threats. Broadly supportive of the peaceful uprisings, the response was not universal to each uprising and could be seen to be reflective of traditional ties and economic interests in the region. There were also the security implications of supporting uprisings against regimes that were providing aid to American and Europe in countering the terrorist threat and sharing intelligence with them.

The British reaction to the uprising was mixed echoing the reactions of her European and American allies. The Arab Spring brought British Middle East policy under the spotlight once again, highlighting her traditional ties to regimes with poor human rights records, and particularly Britain's history of arms sales to the region. This had an impact on Britain's response to events in the Middle East, resulting in a confused and inconsistent policy that affected her ability to effectively deal with the regions uprisings. In addition, the legacy of Britain's intervention in Iraq, and Britain's decision to take part in the joint action with France in the Libyan uprising, significantly impacted on Britain's decision making over the Syrian crisis, limiting her policy options which had considerable consequences for the efficacy of the moderate rebels in the uprising against the Assad regime.

The events of the Arab Spring took the British Government by surprise, though in this they were not alone. The government was accused of being slow in responding to events on the ground, leading to further criticism of British foreign policy, and particularly the FCO. A report by the FAC accepted that Britain was not alone in this. Whilst publically welcoming the demand for greater freedoms, and democratic rights in the region, British policy reacting to the crisis echoed its existing and traditional ties to various regimes in the Middle East; its arguably passive, supportive reaction to the uprisings in Tunisia and

Egypt welcoming the change of regimes, differed from its failure to support the uprising in Bahrain; its decisive and aggressive support of the Libyan rebels contrasted with its policy of only non-military support for the moderate factions in Syria.

The reaction to the crisis in Syria was, for many, underwhelming, and saw little real action in comparison to the military intervention in Libya. Whilst other leaders in the region had quickly tumbled before the demands for change, the same was not expected in Syria. As the Arab Spring spread across the region, the initial assumption by commentators, and the Syrian regime, was that the popular uprising in Syria would not become a violent rebellion. There were several factors feeding this belief, including, Bashar's personal popularity and that the Syrian leadership, despite being authoritarian, was "close to its people,"⁵⁶⁵ and that the regimes strong command over the military and security apparatus would discourage it. When, in March 2011, largely peaceful protests were brutally put down by regime forces this assumption was challenged and public demands by Western politicians that the violence stop quickly followed. From here events escalated rapidly until the unrest became a civil war, (initially) in all but name.

⁵⁶⁵ B Smith "Syria: no end in sight?" Research Paper 12/48, House of Commons Library (23 June 2008)

Unlike the Libyan case, diplomats and politicians were comparatively divided in opinion over the right response to the crisis, unable to agree on a preferable outcome much less a policy that might achieve it. Even the events of August 21st 2013 with the alleged use of chemical weapons by the regime, though initially appearing to make military action inevitable as the Syrian regime had crossed US President Obama's stated "red line", failed to result in a united front either within the international community or with the British political establishment.

A Short Rapprochement

In the years preceding the outbreak of violence in Syria Bashar's regime had begun to regain some international ground. The regime had suffered in the fallout from the invasion of Iraq when it was accused of hindering attempts to stabilise Iraq; its ill-advised bungling in Lebanon, had led to international condemnation and UNSCR 1559. It sunk deeper into the mire with the assassination of Rafik Hariri with the consequent humiliating withdrawal from Lebanon and the following UN special investigation. At that time many had projected the collapse of the regime, with Asad too weak to withstand the pressure.

Despite predictions on the limited longevity of the regime, Asad did, however, manage to ride out the storm. By 2009, Western officials could be said to have been almost falling over themselves to gain an audience with Bashar and his foreign minister, the British government being no different from its partners in this regard. Once again, the geopolitical importance of Syria, combined with the resilience of the regime, had led Western governments to the conclusion that the only way forward for the region was to persuade the Asad regime to be a positive influence. Hizbullah aided Syria in demonstrating its potential constructive role in May 2008 when it broke the Lebanese deadlock leading to the Doha agreement and formation of a national unity government.⁵⁶⁶ In this way Syria maintained its influence and showed the world it would not be sidelined. Thus, when FCO official, Bill Rammell, visited in April 2009 the familiar topics of improving intelligence cooperation, encouraging a constructive relationship with the Iraqi government, of Syria using its influence with Hamas and Hizbullah, and using its influence with Iran,⁵⁶⁷ were all back on the agenda.

Even the vaunted EU-Mediterranean Association Agreement, put on hold in 2004 due to the concerns of some of the EU member states, including Britain, was again being negotiated in 2009. This time, though, it was the Syrians calling the shots, requiring time to review the revisions to the agreement. This

⁵⁶⁶ Hinnebusch "Syrian Foreign Policy under Bashar al-Assad" p22

⁵⁶⁷ D Macintyre "Is Syria getting ready to come in from the cold?" *The Independent* (04 April 2009)

despite the fact that British and Dutch demands for special provision regarding human rights and weapons of mass destruction had been defeated and the revised version used language now standard in all Agreements⁵⁶⁸ .

Some accuse the Asad regime manipulating the West's interest in Syria without committing to demands for good behaviour, but economically there was good reason to at least review the agreement. The Syrian economy at this point was beginning to see some dividends from reforms brought in by the regime. Further liberalisation of the economy, particularly cuts in state subsidies for basic goods, deemed absolutely necessary by bodies like the IMF, ignored the affect this would have on the average Syrian household income.⁵⁶⁹ Further, Free Trade Agreements were negotiated with Egypt and Tunisia despite the findings of a 2007 EU impact assessment. That report estimated the requirements of the agreements would result in a shrinkage in the manufacturing sectors in both countries of around two thirds and a loss of 1.5 million and 100000 jobs respectively.⁵⁷⁰ These kind of losses would potentially destabilise the Syrian regime. Additionally, a number of members of the regime were substantially benefitting from the widespread corruption of the current,

⁵⁶⁸ I Black, "Assad keeps Europe waiting" *The Guardian* (30 March 2010)

⁵⁶⁹ Dorstal, "The European Union and Economic Reform in Syria"p27

⁵⁷⁰ T Jones, "Is the G8 supporting or undermining the Arab Spring?" *The Guardian* (03 June 2011)

partially reformed, economic model, and would potentially stand to lose from the signing the agreement with the EU.

With the advent of the new coalition government in Britain relations with Syria, and the Middle East in general, looked to carry on in much the same way as they had in the preceding years. David Cameron, campaigned on a domestic agenda with limited foreign policy interest at most, some would say no foreign policy at all. Andrew Rawnsley, writing for the Observer, summed up Cameron's policy as 1. Concentrate on domestic affairs, 2. Get out of Afghanistan, 3. Hope Europe does not provoke backbenchers, 4. Maintain the aid budget 5. Sell more stuff abroad, 6. Concentrate on domestic affairs.⁵⁷¹ This was the agenda, the Arab Spring was something completely unexpected and unplanned for.

Nothing summed this up so much as the fact that, as the Arab Spring spread to Egypt and Cameron gave his speech which was a ringing endorsement to the protesters standing up for democracy, human right and freedoms, he did so from Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia an absolute monarchy, criticised for its human rights record and lack of freedoms, but which Cameron was visiting, accompanied by various businessmen, with the express intent on getting more

⁵⁷¹ A Rawnsley, "Mr Cameron gets a lesson on the need for a proper foreign policy" *The Observer* (27 February 2011)

business for the British defence industry.⁵⁷² This trade mission to the region in February 2011 saw the Prime Minister together with the representatives of several arms manufacturers on the latest arms selling push by the British government.⁵⁷³

Arms Exports

The Arab Spring highlighted once more the conflicting aims of British policy in the region, urging peace whilst pushing arms sales to repressive regimes. Reportedly, “the defence industry supports over 300000 jobs across the whole country, and generates an estimated £35 billion per year to the British economy.”⁵⁷⁴ The rationale, then, for the government to maintain and expand this sector is clearly evident. In April 2011 the Financial Times reported that in the previous two years, Britain exported military equipment to fifteen MENA states that could be used for the repression of civilians, although since January 2011 160 export licences had been withdrawn. Items sold since January 2009 included components to military helicopters in Algeria, submachine guns and tear gas in Bahrain, machine guns to Egypt, grenades to Jordan, small arms

⁵⁷² Ibid

⁵⁷³ R Norton-Taylor, “Britain has allowed its weapons to be used for internal repression”, *The Guardian* (05 April 2011)

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid

ammunition to Syria, hand grenades, sniper rifles and tear gas to Saudi Arabia and shotguns to Morocco.⁵⁷⁵

These sales took place despite British arms export regulations brought in by Cook 1997, and the 1998 EU regulations he had championed. In 2011, however, a cross-party committee of senior backbench MPs found that successive governments have been in breach of these official guidelines.⁵⁷⁶

While a number of arms export licences to Tunisia, Egypt and Bahrain were revoked in the face of the popular unrest, the government approved the sale of £1 million worth of military equipment, including licenses for gun silencers, weapons sights and rifles, to Bahrain even after the violent crackdown on protesters. The continuation of arm sales to known repressive regimes was scrutinised by Commons Committee on Arms Export Control whose Chairman criticised the government's "over-optimistic approach to an authoritarian regime".⁵⁷⁷

In addition to arming these regimes, the British government had to defend its training programme for military officers from several of these countries. From

⁵⁷⁵ J Pickard, J O'Docherty, "Arms sales to Arab States under fire", *FT.com*, (05 April 2011)

⁵⁷⁶ R Norton-Taylor, "Britain has allowed its weapons to be used for internal repression, MPs say", (05 April 2011)

⁵⁷⁷ R Norton-Taylor, "Bahrain receives military equipment from UK despite violent crackdown" *The Guardian*, (14 February 2012)

2005 – 2010, three officers from the Syrian armed forces trained in Britain with a further two enrolled in Sandhurst and the Britannia Royal Navy college in 2003. In the same period 104 Bahraini officers, seven Libyan, three Tunisian and fifty-six Yemeni officers attended British military training colleges. This pales in comparison to the support given to the Saudi national guard. This included frequent courses on “weapons, field craft and general military skills training, as well as incident handling, bomb disposal, search, public order and sniper training” run by the MoD through its British Military Mission in Saudi Arabia.⁵⁷⁸ The government argued the training instils British values and morality into those attending the training,⁵⁷⁹ though in the light of the Saudi intervention in Bahrain, and later Yemen, where it has been accused of committing war crimes, this defence would seem hard to sustain. It has certainly been queried in Parliament. Jonathan Edwards, MP, stating “It is intensely hypocritical of our leadership in the UK...to talk of supporting freedoms in the Middle East and elsewhere while at the same time training crack troops of dictatorships”.⁵⁸⁰ More investment in bodies such as the British Council, the BBC World Service and, importantly, support for civil society as instruments of soft diplomacy have been advocated as a better use of resources.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁸ J Doward, P Stewart, “UK training Saudi forces used to crush Arab spring”, *The Observer* (28 May 2011)

⁵⁷⁹ R Booth, B Quinn, “Syrian Officers received training in Britain”, *The Guardian* (27 April 2011)

⁵⁸⁰ Doward, Stewart, “UK training Saudi forces used to crush Arab spring” (28 May 2011)

⁵⁸¹ D Mathieson, “Blair, human rights and the Barcelona Process (13 January 2005)
<http://www.fride.org/publication/172/blair,-human-rights-and-the-barcelona-process>
(Accessed 06/02/2013)

The sale of arms to countries with repressive governments undermines the argument that export licences will not be granted where they could be used for internal repression or external aggression. As has been demonstrated in the Syrian uprising, if a regime is challenged and is determined to remain in power by any means possible, then whether the arms that have been sold are small arms ammunition, sniper rifles or fighter jets, the likelihood of their being used for internal repression is stronger than that of the regime in question abiding by previous commitments it made when purchasing them.

The contradiction in British policy highlighted here can be explained as being a result of competing priorities and departments. Whilst the British government was supportive of some of the uprisings - in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya - the government was remarkably quiet about the repression of protestors in Bahrain, and particularly the intervention of Saudi Arabia. This lack of condemnation is in line with the behaviour of previous governments such as the Blair government's decision to suspend the investigation into BAE systems relationship with the Saudi government, a decision, according to Blair, made on both security and economic grounds⁵⁸². It may also reflect the fact that, given the involvement of the Saudi National Guard in supporting the Bahraini government, the likelihood of British trained officers, or British equipment being

⁵⁸² Hollis, *Britain and the Middle East in the 9/11*, p39

used in quelling the unrest cannot be refuted. In fact, it is known that Saudi Arabia sent forces to help quell the unrest in British made trucks.⁵⁸³ A statement by the MoD shed further light on the rationale behind these decisions, as it called Saudi Arabia a “key partner in the fight against terrorism”.⁵⁸⁴ In terms of British foreign policy priorities, then, the maintenance of the British bilateral relationship with Saudi Arabia far outweighs the commitment to human rights and democratic values, while this commitment is used to justify British involvement in the affairs of other parts of the region where bilateral relations are not as strong—such as Syria.

David Cameron has described British arms exports regulations as extremely robust, Britain having one of the “strictest regimes anywhere in the world for sales of defence equipment”⁵⁸⁵. Despite this, British regulations have come under scrutiny over the sale of dual use substances to Syria. Suspicions of Syrian chemical weapons production are longstanding yet, even with concerns that the regime would use these against elements of the population, in January 2012 export licences were granted to a British company to sell potassium fluoride and sodium fluoride, known components in the making of the nerve agent sarin, to Syria. The actual export was subsequently blocked by EU

⁵⁸³ Norton-Taylor, “Bahrain receives military equipment from UK despite violent crackdown” (14 February 2012)

⁵⁸⁴ Doward, Steward, “UK training Saudi forces used to crush Arab spring” (28 May 2011)

⁵⁸⁵ N Morris “David Cameron defends Middle East visit insisting he WILL raise concerns about hosts' human rights records” *The Independent* (5 November 2012)

sanctions in July that year. Vince Cable, Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills defended the decision giving evidence to the Select Committee stating that “the licences were granted because at the time there were no grounds for refusal”.⁵⁸⁶ This at a time when the Syrian regime were already using brutal force against its own population in an attempt to put down the uprising.

Scrutiny of the arms exports licensing regime in Britain falls to the Committee on Arms Export Controls (CAEC), comprising of members from the four Commons Select Committees with an interest in Britain’s arms exports: the Foreign Affairs, Defence, Business and Skills and International Development Committees. The CAEC reviews the Governments annual and quarterly reports covering arms exports and, since 2011, has been highly critical of the government’s licensing regime, particularly over arms and military equipment exports to the MENA region and the failure to prevent sales to states known for human rights abuses. The criticism led to a review of export licenses to the region and, in July 2011, the initial results were presented by Foreign Secretary William Hague who stated that there was no evidence of British equipment being used in suppressing Arab pro-democracy protests.⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸⁶ C Milmo, A McSmith, N Kumar, “Revealed: UK Government let British company export nerve gas chemicals to Syria” *The Independent* (2 September 2013)

⁵⁸⁷ B Smith, “The Arab Uprisings” Research paper 11/73, House of Commons Library (15 November 2011) p90

In October that year Hague announced a number of new measures dealing with the monitoring of export licences, including a mechanism to enable immediate suspension of licensing to countries “experiencing a sharp deterioration in security or stability”.⁵⁸⁸ This, though, did not address the criticism of export licences to regimes which should not have been approved in the first place and added little to prevent this reoccurring. The suspension of export licences after equipment had already reached its destination was criticised as too little too late, especially in cases where the misuse could be reasonably predicted.

The reviews into government export license approvals and refusals which are carried out by the CAEC are, similarly, after the fact, and the power of the committee on the decisions taken is at best indirect. Despite the CAEC’s role in examining the Government’s expenditure, administration and policy on strategic exports, the authority it has to question government ministers and officials, and even despite the government’s own commitment to transparency, the CAEC has so far failed to get a clear answer as to whether chemicals to Syria were actually shipped. According to CAEC chairman at the time, Sir John Stanley, the committee also failed to get a clear answer as to why Saudi Arabia is treated differently than other states in the region. Furthermore, the committee’s

⁵⁸⁸ J Lunn, “UK arms export control policy” Standard Note SN/IA/2729 House of Commons Library (21 Nov 2014) p7

criticism of the government is not necessarily censure of its behaviour in itself, rather about how open the government is about the reasoning behind policy. In a statement Sir John recognised the Government had “relevant and legitimate” reasons for the policy – based on intelligence sharing, oil, and British business interests – but “regret that so far the Government have been less than forthcoming—indeed, pretty much non-forthcoming—about the real reasons why they treat Saudi Arabia so differently”⁵⁸⁹

The criticism was on the quality of the information being provided to the committee, a request for full disclosure, rather than of censure of the policy itself. While the committee may provide a curb to some government behaviour, it has no direct power over policy decisions making, or power to hold the Government to account for any failings. A former chair of FAC also reflected on the difficulty of the British relationship with Saudi Arabia, again not querying the importance of relations but rather on balancing priorities, “On one hand Saudi Arabia faces the threat of al-Qaida but on the other its human rights record is dreadful. This is the constant dilemma you have when dealing with autocratic regimes: do you ignore them or try to improve them?”⁵⁹⁰ The idea of constructive dialogue with autocratic regimes has been reflected in previous policies towards Syria, the difference with the Saudi Arabian case is that the

⁵⁸⁹ B Smith, “The Arab Uprisings”, p90

⁵⁹⁰ Mike Gapes MP quoted in Doward, Stewart, “UK training Saudi forces used to crush Arab spring”, *The Guardian* (28 May 2011)

economic and security implications are of a much higher priority for Britain.

The criticism above considered the difficulties in dealing with Saudi Arabia, but at best called for the government be up front on their reasoning or review the relationship in terms of balance, the idea that the relationship continue itself being largely supported.

Successive British governments have made commitments to regulating the arms trade through its own export control legislation and to the EU's Code of Conduct. Most recently this has been expressed in its ardent support for, and signing of, the Arms Trade Treaty on 3 June 2013. Yet it continues to sell arms to repressive regimes, undermining the British stated position. The government is aware of the contradiction which exists but balances the question of human rights against that of security of its interests, with the latter often prioritised.

The Arab Spring resulted in a number of export licences being revoked, short term, but the overall policy did not change. This was demonstrated by Cameron's trip to the United Arab Emirates in November 2012, when a joint statement was issued announcing the establishment of a "defence industrial partnership". Cameron then travelled to Saudi Arabia holding discussions with

King Abdullah and Crown Prince Salman on potential arms sales.⁵⁹¹ 2014 saw the announcement that Britain was to establish a new naval base at Mina Salman Port in Bahrain, with construction beginning in 2015. This further demonstrates British prioritisation of its economic and security interests in the Gulf over its concern for democratic and human rights there.

In the short term, these bilateral agreements strengthen British relations with states with which it has long standing interests, are economically important and allow Britain to project influence into the region. Further, strong defence relationships with these states were being viewed in the context of regional instability caused by the upheaval in Syria and the threat from Iran⁵⁹². Long term, the contradictions of this position undermines policies promoting democratic values, human rights and freedoms that form part of an overarching British interest in promoting international stability and security, and it is damaging if these are seen to come secondary to other interests. They further add to the perception within the region that Britain, and the West generally, continue to act as imperial powers thus bear some responsibility for the longevity of the autocratic regimes that have been suppressing freedoms in their countries. In the current international context this is seen by many as

⁵⁹¹ T Colman, UK Seeks to Strengthen Middle East Ties, *International Policy Digest*, (13 November 2012) <http://www.internationalpolicydigest.org/2012/11/13/uk-seeks-to-strengthen-middle-east-ties/> (Accessed 19/11/2014)

⁵⁹² "Britain secures defence partnership with UAE" *The Peninsula*, (07 November 2012) <http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/news/middle-east/213415/britain-secures-defence-partnership-with-uae> (Accessed 01/01/2015)

adding to international instability and insecurity, encouraging terrorist attacks against European powers and fuelling the jihadist movement to and from the Middle East, a particular concern with regard to the Syrian civil war.

Syria has never signed large arms contracts with British companies like some of the Gulf States. The export licences that have been approved covering categories including small arms and machine guns (1998) and dual use items cleared for sale up to, and even, during a period in which the government has been involved in the violent repression of its citizens (2004 – 2012). This has been counterproductive to Britain's priorities for stability and security. Whilst these sales are relatively minor they demonstrate conflicting priorities, where foreign policy comes up against economic priorities, and where economic priorities do not always consider fully the short and long term security implications, particularly problematic in such a turbulent region.

Intervention and the Responsibility to Protect.

The willingness of the international community, particularly Britain and France, to intervene in Libya and then Mali has been contrasted starkly with the inability of the international community to form a cohesive position allowing a united statement on Syria, let alone agree on military intervention in Syria. In the former cases there was what seemed to be decisive, swift and unanimous will

to act, while the latter saw ineffective political wrangling resulting in little more than a frustrated stalemate and conspicuous inaction from any Western power.

It is tempting to contrast the policy in terms of why Britain reacted differently to very similar events in two MENA countries. This oversimplifies the decisions made by Britain, and indeed, Britain's international partners. For a start, the decision to intervene in Libya was not as straightforward as it may have seemed, and the success of the intervention continues to be disputed as the situation in Libya has deteriorated rapidly since Qadhafi was removed. The problems faced by policy makers over how to support the uprisings in Libya and Syria have surface familiarity but in reality there were significant differences. British ministers have often called for a "whole Middle East policy" or a region wide approach but, in practice, British policy can hardly be said to demonstrate this, either in decisions made by different Whitehall departments, or in consistent application of policy across the different regimes in the region. British policy is very much a lattice work of bilateral relations and diplomacy based on mutual and national interest. The differing responses to the individual uprisings across the region reflect this. Here, Britain can indeed be said to "present an unpredictable face to the world"⁵⁹³, an accusation very close to that

⁵⁹³ R Norton-Taylor "London arms fair faces protest by anti-weapons trade campaigners" *The Guardian* (12 September 2011)

which British diplomats and officials have been known to direct at the Syrian regime.

The intervention in Libya was hailed, by some, as the first successful use of the UN Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle. Certainly the main proponents of the intervention in Libya, Britain and France, took their draft resolution to the UNSC, gained support for it (not unanimously since five members of the council Brazil, Germany, India, China and Russia abstained from the vote) and with the legal backing from UNSCR 1973 staged a military intervention in Libya using NATO forces, resulting in the Qadhafi regime being overthrown. The difficulty here is that this was not what the resolution authorised. UNSCR 1973 legalised intervention in Libya under Chapter VII, called for an immediate ceasefire and end to violence, imposed a no fly zone and authorised "all necessary means" to protect civilians and civilian-populated areas though, significantly, it barred a "foreign occupation force". To enable it to pass, like many UN resolutions, the wording was kept deliberately vague but, as seen with Iraq, such ambiguity can lead to member states "interpreting" resolutions to their own satisfaction. Ultimately this does organisation no favours, particularly when Western states then use these resolutions to launch military action. So it proved in the case of Libya, which in turn, held serious consequences for Syria and even for the future of the concept R2P itself, with some believing the principle now dead.

Whilst the Libyan example has been touted as a successful application R2P it is arguably not a genuine example of the principle. Justin Morris, writing in *International Affairs*, 2012, argued that the R2P principle hardly factored in the UNSC when the Libya resolution was being discussed. He notes that in the official record of deliberations over UNSCR 1973 there is little to support assertions that R2P played a major influence, only France and Colombia actually referred to the concept, and deliberation by Britain and US little referenced it being more concerned with other considerations and interests.⁵⁹⁴

For the Libyan example to be considered an instance of the successful use of the R2P principle then it must fit certain criteria. The principle sets out three specific responsibilities:

1. The responsibility to prevent (this being the most important)
2. The responsibility to react
3. The responsibility to rebuild

When considering military intervention four measures identified:

1. Right intention
2. Last resort

⁵⁹⁴ J Morris "Libya and Syria: R2P and the Spectre of the Swinging Pendulum" *International Affairs* 89:5 (August 2012) pp1265 - 1283

3. Proportional means

4. Reasonable prospects ⁵⁹⁵

Whilst Britain and France may have reached the outcome they sought from advocating military intervention through to carrying it out, they have been accused of failing to live up to these responsibilities. This clouded opinion on the Libya intervention and consequently harmed the formulation of any united international reaction to events in Syria.

It could be argued that the “responsibility to prevent” is a principle which the international community has already largely failed in by the time the UN is considering involvement in a crisis. Many conflicts have moved to the acute phase before there is any momentum in the international community to get involved, especially internal conflicts where long standing notions of internal sovereignty still hold sway. There still remains a responsibility to prevent further escalation but the failure to get involved in the initial stages of a conflict combined with the unwieldy nature of getting international agreement in a timely fashion, especially when there are other interests involved, makes this task more difficult. In the case of a number of the states involved in the Arab Spring, for instance, the responsibility to prevent should have impacted on

⁵⁹⁵ C Abbot, J Slobba “The ‘Blair Doctrine’ and after: five years of humanitarian intervention” Open Democracy (21 April 2004) https://www.opendemocracy.net/globalization-institutions_government/article_1857.jsp (Accessed 20/03/2014)

decisions to sell arms to repressive regimes, or to prop up autocratic leaders in the name of preserving stability, or because security and intelligence cooperation was prioritised. Rather than condemning Qadhafi's behaviour in Libya, the years immediately prior to the uprisings saw British politicians working to improve relations with the dictator, renewing ties and increasing trade links, and the British government had approved arms exports to the regime widely known for its human right violations and repression.

Yet even more contentious is the principle, the responsibility to react. This does not necessarily dictate the use of military intervention, there are certainly other tools the international community should consider before military intervention including using diplomatic channels, mediation, and sanctions. Military intervention is just one of the tools, though for a military intervention to go ahead it must meet the four measures described above. Judged against these measures the Libyan intervention has come under some criticism.

UNSCR 1973 authorised use of force to impose a ceasefire and to protect the civilian population. As the NATO bombardment of Libya continued many began to question the real reasons behind the intervention, as journalist Simon Jenkins put it "Britain is blatantly sponsoring one side in a tribal civil war, and

the mission has passed from civil protection to backing a territorial rebellion⁵⁹⁶. This bombardment contrasted with the British position on Syria, Hague in that instance calling on Bashar to “do the right thing”, and in a statement to the Commons, called for the “violent repression to stop, for individuals to be held accountable for the violence, for President Asad to respond to the legitimate demands of his people”.⁵⁹⁷

Whilst undoubtedly the intervention in Libya saved Benghazi, continued aerial bombardment in populated areas made it difficult to argue that the purpose was only to protect civilians – there is no such thing as a truly surgical strike. Use of aerial bombardment in built up areas adds to the argument that the allies failed to satisfy the third measure, proportionate means. As, increasingly, it became clear that the goal of the operation was regime change, it undermined the “right intention” measure, providing ammunition to those arguing that the British and French true interests lie in Libyan oil and getting rid of Qadhafi, a leader they viewed in much the same light as Saddam Hussein. Additionally, since the goal of regime change was not mandated by the UNSCR but was clearly an aim of the allies, the legality of the whole operation was open to question. What certainly did bring legality into question, being a clear breach of the arms embargo imposed by the resolution, was the admission by

⁵⁹⁶ S Jenkins, “In Libya, Britain has slid into every interventionist fallacy”, *The Guardian* (17 May 2011)

⁵⁹⁷ H Mulholland, J Borger, I Black “Not too late for Syria to do the right thing” *The Guardian* 27 April 2011

NATO Secretary General Rasmussen on 5th September 2011 that he knew France had supplied arms to the rebels.⁵⁹⁸

The Russians also argued that once the allies embarked on their military campaign, they failed to take any of the opportunities to bring to an end the bombing and resume diplomatic options because they were intent on regime change. Another criticism was that not enough consideration of other means was deployed, such as the provision of purely humanitarian aid, and that the military option should never have been agreed.⁵⁹⁹ Thus the second measure, military action as a last resort, was brought under scrutiny.

Lastly it is questionable whether the idea of reasonable prospects was ever really tackled. On the basis of what the UNSCR authorised, NATO forces arguably had the capacity to accomplish the mission, establish no fly zones and protect civilians. Yet clearly the intent was regime change, presumably the end aim was the installation of a moderate, friendly democratic government bringing stability to Libya. Here there was less evidence the operation had "reasonable prospects". Much like Iraq, while the removal of the old regime was achieved, the killing and fighting continued. The country was plunged back into crisis, with oil production almost entirely stopped and the government

⁵⁹⁸ B Smith, "The Arab Uprisings", p81

⁵⁹⁹ D Swanson "Libya: another neocon war", *The Guardian* (21 April 2011)

losing much of the country to militias. Damningly, not only has NATO action failed to stabilise Libya, but it has failed to prevent instability spreading with Mali's descent into chaos plainly linked to the Libyan conflict. The decision to launch a military campaign also had implications on a practical level for any similar intervention in Syria, as even had there been the will, the capacity of the allies to do so was severely reduced by the Libyan campaign.

The responsibility to rebuild is often overlooked by those planning intervention. Blair did at least attempt to discuss this with regard to Afghanistan and Iraq, but the Bush administration did not want to listen – that fact did not prevent Blair joining the war effort. As exemplified in Iraq, Afghanistan, and most recently Libya, rebuilding is no small undertaking but is vital for the long term success of intervention. In fact, the immediate success of military intervention has been undermined by the political failure to effectively support the rebuilding process. In Iraq, failure to plan for rebuilding in advance led to the immediate dismantling of the security forces, a major contributing factor to the ensuing violence after Saddam's removal from power. In Libya the lack of forward planning contributed to the displacement of the transitional government, with the tribal militias all but taking complete control of the country and its oil resources. Even if the intervening powers spend time planning for reconstruction after regime change, their plans may be rejected by the newly installed, legitimate, government adding further complexity to discussions of

intervention. This is particularly an issue in countries in which the stability of the newly installed government may be undermined if it is seen to take support from former imperial powers. Such deliberations form the discussion on Syria, where the additional fear of the “wrong” group gaining the advantage in a new government has also caused concern.

The NATO operation in Libya exposed additional weaknesses for Britain. Despite the Americans deliberately taking a back seat, avoiding being associated with another war with an oil rich Muslim country (something perhaps the British should have considered), without the logistical support from the US the operation would never have got off the ground. Indeed, without the Americans the aerial bombardment would have ceased long before it actually did since the Europeans ran through their missile stockpile and had to buy more from the US. This appears to validate Blair’s realisation after the Kosovo campaign that in order to carry out military operations of this sort the US must remain engaged. It also means Britain will not act in Syria without America as an ally, as the Europeans did not have the capacity to carry out the kind of operation that would have been needed in Syria at that point.

Even had the Libyan intervention lived up to all the expectations of R2P, one of the fundamental questions remained unresolved, i.e. when to apply the principle. In the case of Libya, the Arab League was the regional

representative which referred the case to the UN requesting the establishment of a no-fly zone in March 2011. The legitimacy of this group, mainly autocratic and repressive regimes, calling for intervention in the name of human rights and civilian suffering is itself questionable, though their interest in regional stability was a reasonable concern. Queried as to whether there were plans for similar intervention in Syria in August 2011, FO Minister Alistair Burt said the situation was not like Libya where the Arab League asked for western intervention.⁶⁰⁰ Not setting criteria on when to apply R2P was a barrier to its use in the Syria setting.

In the Syrian case, there was a marked reluctance to intervene from the beginning. The lack of will for military intervention in Syria stands out in comparison to Libya. Far from setting the precedent humanitarian intervention under R2P, the Libyan intervention proved fatal to hope for intervention in Syria. On a purely practical level, as the Syrian unrest escalated the attention of the international community was firmly fixed on the Libyan campaign. More importantly, the recriminations resulting from what many, crucially Russia and China, saw as mission creep in Libya, made it impossible to agree a resolution on Syria through the UNSC. Finally, the consequences of military intervention, both the unsanctioned action in Iraq 2003 and the UN authorised in Libya,

⁶⁰⁰ "Government rules out military intervention in Syria", *The Telegraph*, (01 August 2011)

served as warnings -- the continuing instability in both these states could potentially be even worse in Syria.

The Syrian Crisis

Simply comparing the situations in Libya and Syria as like for like distorts the complexity of the issues involved in the Syrian case. Bashar al-Asad, at this time, was not viewed as the same kind of leader as "madman" Qadhafi, hence a succession of British diplomats had tread a path to his door over the past decade (although with conspicuous gaps in diplomatic relations) in the hopes of engaging the Syrian regime. Since becoming president, Bashar had been courted by the West as someone who could be reasoned with and supported to bring about change, and indeed someone who actually wanted to pursue reform. Thus, despite early signs of the regime using brutal means to crush protests, the British government was willing to give credence to the half-hearted concessions of the regime.

When the unrest began Bashar was still regarded as a popular leader. Huge televised rallies were held by supporters of the regime, and though by no means spontaneous, pointed to mass support in at least some regions of the

country.⁶⁰¹ Estimates in May 2012 put his popular support at around 30%.⁶⁰² Even after years of bloody warfare, during which fighter jets and chemical weapons were used against the population, it is unclear just how much support the regime retains. This being so, it was much harder to immediately disclaim Bashar's position as a legitimate leader of the Syrian people. In addition, Bashar has played off the different sects and factions within his population successfully to, if not preserve his popularity amongst them, at least convince them that his survival is essential to preserve their own communities. This has continued whilst the crisis has become increasingly violent, with some communities fearful of their fate should Bashar fall, with evidence of sectarian killing, and gross violations of human rights against different sects, being confirmed.

The idea of the popular leader, separate from the more unpopular regime, certainly was a frustrating factor in dealing with the regime even prior to the crisis, and a tool Bashar has used to his advantage. Praise for any reform enacted during his presidency has fallen to Bashar, criticism for the slow pace of reform, and behaviours that were less than satisfactory, often placed on "hardliners". This protected him from some of the more severe criticism of his regime, for example, after the Hariri assassination, when suspicion fell on the

⁶⁰¹ B Smith, "Unrest spreads to Syria, Standard Note SN/IA/ 5928 House of Commons Library, (10 June 2011) p4

⁶⁰² B Smith "The Syria Crisis – Update" Standard Note SN/IA/6271, House of Commons Library, (09 May 2012), p1

Asad regime but though not necessarily on Bashar. Ivor Lucas, Ambassador to Syria 1982-84, suggests that Bashar is "a front man for a junta consisting of a hard core of the old military, security and intelligence fraternity which will never surrender...I do not believe that he is the man in charge, or that anything significant would happen if he were to disappear tomorrow. Hence the cry "Asad must go" which seems to be the constant refrain of the Establishment in London as well as that of the Syrian opposition is in my opinion irrelevant."⁶⁰³

The doubt over whether or not Bashar is "in charge" held even while many of his father's old guard have been removed and been replaced by Bashar's allies, achieved reasonably early in his presidency. This tactic of keeping other governments guessing as to who makes decisions, and how decisions are made within the regime, has helped Bashar's statesmanship. Hague, having visited Bashar in January 2011, exemplified this the following April when he condemned the violent crackdown against protestors and told Asad to respond to the demands of his people, yet still stated "you can imagine him as a reformer".⁶⁰⁴ Thus, leaders have been unable to decide, at least initially, on who and how to approach events in Syria as it was not immediately clear there was actually a "mad man" to remove, another Hussein or Qaddafi, or , conversely, if removal of Bashar would even address the problem.

⁶⁰³ I Lucas, Correspondence 08 July 2014

⁶⁰⁴ Mulholland, Borger, Black "Not too late for Syria to do the right thing" (27 April 2011)

Practically, British policy makers saw other differences in the Syrian situation. There was a lack of clarity over the situation on the ground, no singular opposition group, while in Libya a cohesive coalition which could be supported in fighting the regime, quickly emerged. Syria, long-time ally of Russia and Iran, had a real military defence capability adding to concerns that any intervention would be protracted and costly, with potential costs also in terms of soldiers' lives, something that domestic audiences would not support. The military in Syria was not comparable to that of Tunisia and Egypt (liable to defect), Bashar having filled many of the top posts of his armed forces with Alawites whose loyalty was to the regime.⁶⁰⁵ Any likelihood of an internal coup within the government was similarly weak, with the core regime appearing strong, his chief advisers being all Alawite, a number of them being relations.⁶⁰⁶ This being so, the survival of one, is the survival of all.

The regime had strong allies in Russia and Iran, and it was hard to predict their reaction to a military intervention. British military analysis of the Syrian crisis at this stage almost consistently advised against a Syrian intervention, certainly they have stressed in no uncertain terms the probable hazards. They underlined the significant differences in the resistance they would meet from

⁶⁰⁵ B Smith "Syria: no end in sight?" p5

⁶⁰⁶ I Black, "Six Syrians who helped Bashar al Assad keep an iron grip after his father's death" *The Guardian* (28 April 2011)

the Syrian regime as compared to the case of Libya or Mali. There would also be severe consequences in terms of civilian casualties in the event of military action with targets being in heavily built up areas.⁶⁰⁷

The reluctance of the West including Britain to intervene in Syria from the outset was more than clear. Hague made several statements throughout 2011 and 2012 saying that there were no plans to intervene in Syria. Within Syria, too, there was fear, not hope, in the general population over possible military intervention, many mindful of the consequences intervention brought for Iraq and Libya. Only once it was clear the regime was not going to be easily removed, and its repression became more brutal, did demonstrators call for intervention. The Arab League, reflecting on the Libyan experience, initially refrained from going to the UN to request intervention, attempting to find a solution themselves. They began negotiations with the Syrian regime, and sent an observation mission, signalling both their unease with what they had seen as mission creep by the NATO powers in Libya, and also their own national interests in using Syria to increase their own regional influence.

The last difficulty with intervening in Syria was the potential consequences of the fall of the Asad regime. Unlike in Libya where the overthrow of Qadhafi

⁶⁰⁷ Interview with Henry Hogger, 28 August 2014

was not seen to present a great threat to the stability of the region⁶⁰⁸ the overthrow of Bashar could potentially throw the whole region into chaos, unrest spreading across its borders and in particular into Lebanon. A worst case scenario of Islamists gaining power and the impact of that with regard to Israel was also a grave concern.

The Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy queried Oliver Letwin MP, Minister of State, Cabinet Office why there was intervention in Libya but not in Syria. Letwin who attempted to clarify the British position, saying that while many of the accusations made of the Qadhafi regime could be made of the Syrian one. The decision not to intervene was not based on the lack of capacity to do so but that:

“the circumstances that made it possible to do so successfully in Libya are not, in our view, present in the case of Syria: it is not possible to get a United Nations resolution of the same kind; there is not the same regional backing for action; and so forth. So we are judging, case by case, not just what it would be good to do but what it is possible to achieve.”⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁸ Smith, “The Arab Uprisings” p82

⁶⁰⁹ JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY First review of the National Security Strategy 2010 Oral and written evidence (September 2011)

This succinctly summarises the main elements in how the Syrian case was viewed differently by the British Government. Further to this it can be argued that the Libyan campaign was supposed to be easy and short yet it actually highlighted the weaknesses of NATO. With the costs of Libya coupled with the economic crisis and pressure on European budgets including defence spending, the budget has to be considered a restraining factor in British policy toward the crisis. The Libyan operation exposed the deficiencies in European defence spending, and its reliance on the US to enable it to carry out this kind of operation. The cost of carrying out another, open ended, military operation in Syria whilst the European economy was in crisis would have been a hard sell for European governments.

A lack of strategy?

The unrest in Syria began March 6th 2011 with the arrest of fifteen children in Dera'a after they had been caught writing anti-government slogans on a wall. Subsequently demonstrations were organised with demands that the children be released and for reform. Bashar eventually intervened promising an investigation and the children's release, but the demonstrations had already spread to other cities including Aleppo and Damascus, and the government had

<http://www.parliament.uk/documents/joint-committees/national-security-strategy/nsscollatedevidencefinal.pdf> (Accessed 05/05/2014)

lost control sending tanks and helicopters to seal off Dera'a on 22 March, resulting in what protestors called a massacre by security forces on the 23rd in a final attempt to control the riots.⁶¹⁰ The use of brutal repression and the return of the children with obvious signs of torture only fanned the flames of the protestors in their demands for reform.

To counter anti-regime protests, pro-regime rallies were organised for the 29th March with Bashar making an address to the Syrian nation on the 30th. Rather than addressing demands for reform, his speech blamed the unrest on outside influences, a message he has consistently used throughout the uprising – and one that has come to have an element of truth to it as the crisis has gone on. Patrick Seale calls this an opportunity missed: had Bashar announced an end to the state of emergency, freeing of political prisoners and Human Rights activists, a trial of the corrupt elements in the regime, curbing security forces and allowing new political parties to form, he may have been able to stem the tide.⁶¹¹

⁶¹⁰ B Smith "Unrest spreads to Syria, p3

⁶¹¹ P Seale "If Assad falls, we will see all the region's alliances unravel" Comment is Free, *The Guardian*, (11 April 2011)

The British reaction to the brutal use of force by the Syrian regime was to condemn the violence and press Bashar to deliver on the demand for reform.

At the end of April 2011 Hague stated:

"The Syrian government has failed to heed repeated calls by the international community for restraint. As I have stressed it is vital to respond with reform not repression.... We will continue to work with our partners to ensure that those responsible for the violence are held personally to account...In this context, I welcome the EU's decision last night to accelerate work on targeted measures against those responsible. The United Kingdom will again be in the forefront of pushing for such measures."⁶¹²

The commitment of the British government was to work within the existing international framework toward pressuring the Syrian regime to reform, at the same time ministers consistently stated that there would be no military intervention.

As the unrest continued, Bashar did announce some reforms whilst continuing the brutal repression of protestors. Meantime Western policy hardened, both the US and EU imposing sanctions in May against key members of the regime

⁶¹² "Foreign Secretary condemns ongoing violence in Syria", (30 April 2011)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-condemns-ongoing-violence-in-syria>
(Accessed 03/05/2014)

initially, then including the President himself by the end of May, signalling a belated recognition that Bashar could not be treated as separate from the regimes "hardliners". By mid-August 2011, Cameron and other Western leaders had joined President Obama in his demand for Asad to step down, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg stating on the 22nd, that Asad was irrelevant to the country's future.⁶¹³

The demand for Bashar to go was clearly an acknowledgement that in using such violence against his own people, he had lost legitimacy to rule and, even if he could be persuaded to reform his regime, it was unlikely the demonstrators would accept him remaining as president. Even if the orders for the violent suppression of the uprising originated with others in the regime as had been the initial suspicion, then again, the legitimacy and effectiveness of Bashar became questionable. He would not be able to make the reforms needed therefore there was no reason for him to remain. Either way the demand failed to recognise that the removal of Bashar, did not necessarily equate with the removal of the regime, key members of which may be equally responsible for the brutality seen since the beginning of the uprising.

⁶¹³ A Stratton, "Assad should go for the sake of the Syrian people" *The Guardian* (22 August 2011)

A major stumbling block in the Syrian crisis was the lack of a clear opposition to back against the regime. By the end of August 2011 this situation had also changed. The Free Syrian Army announced its formation toward the end of July, followed by the formation of the Syrian National Council, later (November 2012) unifying with other groups to form National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. Britain saw a role in supporting the opposition to organise, then in providing it with non-lethal aid e.g. surgical equipment, body armour for non-combatants. Later discussion moved to arming the rebels.⁶¹⁴

Having a clearly defined opposition group, one Britain recognised as “a legitimate representative of the Syrian people”, UK decision makers were still facing a number of obstacles. United under a common banner, the factions within the SNC were slow to reach a common position for the future of Syria, being racked with internal divisions from the beginning. How representative, thus how acceptable, its membership was in representing those fighting inside Syria was also questionable, as a number were Syrians who had been living in exile for some time. Indeed, a number of Islamist groups fighting in Syria quickly declared that they did not regard the coalition as representative.

Clearly the outcome the government wanted to promote was for the more

⁶¹⁴ L Loveluck, “What’s non-lethal about aid to the Syrian opposition?” *Foreign Policy* (20 September 2012) <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/09/20/whats-non-lethal-about-aid-to-the-syrian-opposition/> (Accessed 22/11/2014)

moderate elements of the opposition to overthrow Asad and form a representative democratic government in Syria. According to Peter Ford, a number of people told the government that the idea that Bashar would fall was simply wishful thinking.⁶¹⁵ Now, adding to this difficulty, was the policy of supporting a coalition that was not considered representative of all groups, with the potential difficulties that could create firstly, in any attempts at negotiating a comprehensive ceasefire; secondly, in supporting the group to form a representative government should Asad go; thirdly, in how to deal with the third grouping of mainly, Islamist groups, that was not part of the SNC, refused to be represented by it and was not the faction Britain wanted to see take over the governance of Syria.

With no intention of staging a military intervention to enforce regime change both the US and UK working with the EU, turned to sanctions to try to force a resolution of the crisis. With the lessons of the 1990s Iraq sanctions regime learned, perhaps, sanctions have targeted specific members of the regime only, though there have also been arms and oil embargos. With little economic interests in Syria the US sanctions were more about making a statement. EU sanctions, however, had considerable impact given that Europe is the main importer of Syrian oil. Still, while Syria has allies in Iran and Russia prepared to

⁶¹⁵ Interview with Peter Ford, 12 December 2014

provide both arms and finance to prop up the regime, the sanctions were not enough to reach the desired conclusion.

An EU arms embargo was placed on Syria in May 2011, with further restrictions imposed in January and June 2012 including on equipment used for monitoring and intercepting telecommunications and goods that might be used for the manufacture and maintenance of equipment that could be used for internal repression.⁶¹⁶ As early as November 2012, however, there were indications that the British government was reconsidering the issue of arming the moderate rebels. Thus within two years, the EU lifted the arms embargo in May 2013, whilst fighting was ongoing. The decision to do so was not a unified decision, 25 out of 27 member states were against it, with the Guardian reporting, "A meeting of EU foreign ministers descended into recrimination with a vast majority against lifting the arms embargo, but Hague blocked a compromise deal. Austria, the biggest opponent of the British aim, reacted bitterly stating that the EU negotiations had collapsed and the Europe-wide sanctions regime would collapse at midnight on Friday."⁶¹⁷ Britain then was central to the collapse of the arms embargo on Syria.

⁶¹⁶ B Smith, A Lang, "Syria: The legality of arming the rebels after the lifting of the EU arms embargo," Standard Note SNIA/6667, House of Commons Library (18 June 2013) p3

⁶¹⁷ I Traynor, "UK forces EU to lift embargo on Syria rebel arms" *The Guardian* 28 Amy 2013

Hague argued his case in the Commons, stating that would increase pressure on the regime and provide Britain with flexibility “to respond to continued radicalisation and conflict”. He also stated that Britain had yet to provide arms to any side in the Arab Spring, and no decision had been made to do so now, reassuring the Commons that any action would be within the limits of national and international law. According to Hague Britain and France were united in the belief that lifting the embargo was essential to the diplomatic effort, making it clear all options were open.⁶¹⁸ On a number of levels this decision undermined the broader goal that the British and French had in mind, that is, strengthening the moderate rebels. One difficulty for the politicians was, once the arms embargo was lifted and the weapons shipped, the “right” rebels to give them to were not easily identifiable, nor was there any way to prevent more radical groups simply taking them from the less organised moderates. Lucas described the mainstream military faction at the time, the Free Syrian Army, as shambolic. According to Lucas, the most successful faction was Jubhat al-Nusra, an Islamist militia increasingly infiltrated by foreign militants. On this basis, he states, the idea of arming them is unwise as “there is no telling where the arms would end up”.⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁸ William Hague, Commons Hansard 20 May 2013, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm130520/debtext/130520-0001.htm#13052013000004>

⁶¹⁹ I Lucas, Correspondence 08 July 2014

Even with the arms embargo lifted providing the rebels with arms could potentially have breached Britain's own exports controls, particularly the criteria specifying the requirement of the consideration as to whether the equipment would:

- provoke or prolong armed conflicts or aggravate existing tensions in the destination country
- be diverted or re-exported under undesirable conditions⁶²⁰

Another legal concern was that, by arming and/or training the rebels, the British government would have risked breaching of Article 2 (4) of the UN Charter on the threat of use of force since the opposition was not the recognised government of the Syrian state, there was no UNSC authorisation, and at that point, it would be very hard to argue the case that the British government was acting in self-defence.⁶²¹ A further legislative constraint was the potential that Britain could be held accountable for human rights abuses committed by groups using British supplied arms.⁶²² Though it was instrumental in the embargo being lifted, the British government made no immediate move to provide arms committing, instead, to review the situation in August. The uncertainty over just which groups to arm and growth in Islamist groups likely an important factor in this decision.

⁶²⁰ J Lunn "UK arms export control policy" p3

⁶²¹ Smith, Lang, "Syria: The legality of arming the rebels after the lifting of the EU arms embargo," p4

⁶²² Ibid, p1

This apparently confused policy making had several detrimental effects. Claire Spencer, writing in *Prospect Magazine*, queries the lack of consideration as to the potential fallout from the decision to lift the embargo.⁶²³ The moderate rebels, now looking for more international support, gained the impression they were about to receive it, and were emboldened to maintain their non-negotiating stance against the government, derailing the prospect of a peace conference, something the British government had been working hard to support. In the end they were left, once again, with no real practical support. The radical elements, already better armed and organised than many of the moderate groups due to the support provided from Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, were strengthened; even worse, some moderates were beginning to be radicalised; the exact opposite to what Britain and France had wanted to achieve. A surge in fighting by both the Syrian forces and Hizbullah could also possibly be attributed to the decision.

Pushing through an unpopular decision by, in effect, vetoing the extension of sanctions also did not signal unity in the EU, and somewhat undermined British criticism of Russia and China doing the same thing in the UN. More importantly the decision damaged British overall aims, and left the moderate rebels in a

⁶²³ C Spencer, "Syria: the real costs of diplomacy" *Prospect Magazine*, (04 June 2013) <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/blog/syria-diplomacy-conference-assad-russia/#.Um5MVPm-1k7> (Accessed 16/02/2014)

weaker position. Certainly, the lack of follow through after lifting of the embargo left some groups feeling betrayed by Britain which could affect long term relations if these moderate groups gain power (which was Britain's policy objective), particularly when taken alongside a failure to prevent the large scale humanitarian disaster that the Syrian civil war has become.

The British attitude toward the oil embargo followed a similar pattern. Sanctions on oil were established to increase financial pressure on the regime which was reliant on oil production making up 1/4 of government revenues.⁶²⁴ Again, by May 2013, the EU was reviewing its position on the blanket ban it had placed on oil. The decision to ease these sanctions on oil was much less debated and the British government's position was supportive. Lifting the embargo provided much needed revenue to the opposition who had taken control of the oil fields. At the same time, though, it exacerbated tensions between rebel groups who fought each other for control of the oil fields, playing into the hands of the Asad regime. The oil fields soon fell into the hands of the most anti-Western factions, Jabhat al-Nusra and later ISIS.

Arguably, the EU was trying to apply smart sanctions, however, their attempts strengthened the wrong groups. The Guardian reporting that lifting sanctions

⁶²⁴ B Smith, "The Arab Uprisings" p45

had heightened fighting for control over oil pipelines and wells in areas held by the moderate rebels, resulting in consolidation of control over this key resource ending up in the hands of jihadist groups, it led to the further displacement of Sunni tribes, violently on occasion, and consequently the infighting between opposition groups eased the pressure on regime forces in the north and east of the country.⁶²⁵ Again the planned outcome, for the moderates to be able to access more resources, was not borne out by the situation on the ground.

The Red Line

Nadim Shehadi argues that Bashar used chemical weapons to poison the debate on intervention in Syria. Before July 2012 the regime had not even admitted to possessing them. Having acknowledged their existence, the regime gave a statement saying that they would not be used to quell the unrest, implying that they would be used against any external threat, and giving assurance that the regime was working to ensure rebel groups would not gain access to them. Consequently, the debate turned into one about WMD and intervention triggering a reassurance from the Americans that they held no intention to intervene unless the Syrian government crossed the “red line.” Implicitly, then, Shehadi writes that the message to Bashar was that the regime

⁶²⁵ J Borger, M Mahmood “EU decision to lift Syrian oil sanctions boosts jihadist groups” *The Guardian*, (19 May 2013)

could continue their brutal campaign of oppression with impunity so long as they used only conventional weapons.⁶²⁶

Whether or not Shehadi is correct in this judgement is difficult to assess. What is clear is that the use of chemical weapons on 21 August 2013 seemed to change the debate once again. International outrage at the alleged use of chemical weapons in a rebel held suburb of Damascus and the obvious crossing of Obama's "red line" seemed to make military action inevitable. Britain together with 32 other governments requested that the UN investigative team, already in Syria, be allowed access to the site in order to confirm that chemical weapons had been used⁶²⁷. However, within days of the attack, and even before the Inspectors were given permission to visit the additional site, Hague was warning that the delay in getting the inspectors to the site could mean "that the evidence had been tampered with, degraded or destroyed in the five days since the attack".⁶²⁸ .

Pre-empting the UN report into the alleged use of chemical weapons, information was provided to media saying that UK intelligence agencies had

⁶²⁶ N Shehadi "How Al-Assad used chemical weapons to poison debate on Syria" CNN (26 August 2013) <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/08/26/opinion/syria-chemical-weapons-opinion/> (Accessed 26/08/2013)

⁶²⁷ D Roberts, J Borger "Syria crisis: US hold talks as concern grows over chemical weapons claims" *The Guardian* (23 August 2013)

⁶²⁸ "Syria to allow UN to inspect 'chemical weapons' site", BBC News (25 August 2013) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23833912> (Accessed 25/08/2013)

clear evidence of the regime's use of chemical weapons, and that Britain had tested samples from other sites that had proved positive for presence of the nerve agent Sarin. Taking this information together with credible evidence of at least fourteen other cases of chemical weapons use, Cameron presented a motion to the Commons to support intervention in Syria, condemning the action and appearing to open the path for military intervention.⁶²⁹ The motion was watered down to garner more support from Labour and backbenchers. Thus, it did not give the Government the power to approve direct military action without further referral to Parliament yet still failed to garner enough support to pass.

In trying to demonstrate that the case for intervention in Syria was different from the one presented to Parliament by Blair before the Iraq war, Cameron failed in just about every aspect. Fraser Nelson writes that the presentation of the case could not have highlighted these similarities more, a government not waiting for a UN weapons inspection report "because it believes it knows" that Asad has WMD, the presentation of an intelligence dossier, and secret legal advice⁶³⁰. As to Parliament, its narrative that it had already been "tricked" into supporting the Iraq war, this was a reminder they did not need. What they did want was more quality information and this they did not receive.

⁶²⁹ Full text:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm130829/debtext/130829-0001.htm>

⁶³⁰ F Nelson, "David Cameron failed the test of trust and paid the price" *The Telegraph* (29 August 2013)

Cameron requested advice from the Attorney–General as to the legality of any potential action, stating that whilst the best route would be a Chapter VII resolution it “can’t be the case that this is the only way to have a legal basis for action”. The advice given by the Attorney General thus set out the doctrine of humanitarian intervention as a legal basis for action. Once again this raised the spectre of Iraq in using humanitarian justification as a way to get round the need for UNSC authorisation, though this is not unique. FCO Minister, Lady Symons told Parliament,

"There is no general doctrine of humanitarian necessity in international law. Cases have nevertheless arisen (as in northern Iraq in 1991) when, in the light of all the circumstances, a limited use of force was justifiable in support of purposes laid down by the security council but without the council's express authorisation when that was the only means to avert an immediate and overwhelming humanitarian catastrophe....."⁶³¹

David Cameron argued that any response the British government considered would be “proportionate”, but there was no consensus on what a proportionate response was. A number of MPs simply disagreed on any military intervention on the grounds that the civilian costs would be both unavoidable and unacceptable.

⁶³¹Lady Symons quoted in J Rozenberg, “Syria intervention: it may not be wise. But using force may be lawful”, *The Guardian*, (28 August 2013)

The Government failed also in laying out clearly the purpose of any military response to the chemical attack. Many analysts contended that limited air strikes, the proposal being discussed, would not have significantly disturbed the balance of power on the ground and would hardly have resulted in the fall of the Assad regime. Therefore, the desire to intervene seemed little more than punitive action, hardly humanitarian in nature. Henry Hogger argued that the decision not to intervene was the right one and that there was no military solution to the situation. The intervention would only have resulted in additional civilian suffering.

That the Syrian regime was behind the August chemical attack was widely accepted though German intelligence agencies suggested that Bashar did not personally order the attack. This gave credence to those arguing Bashar may have been holding back elements in his regime from using the weapons before this attack⁶³². The scale of the attack, the target, the trajectory of the missiles all indicated that the attack was carried out by regime forces. The British government also claimed to have evidence of 14 other smaller uses of chemical agents though the evidence that the regime was behind these was less robust. There were reports of rebel groups being found with small amounts of chemical

⁶³² S Tisdall, J LeBlond, "Assad did not order Syria chemical weapons attack, says German press" *The Guardian*, (09 September 2013)

agents⁶³³ making it more difficult to allocate blame for the smaller attacks. The lack of clarity over who was responsible for which attacks fed into the debate over what the appropriate response should be.

Even with evidence of chemical weapons use, this did not provide automatic legal authorisation for military intervention in a sovereign nation. Without UNSC authorisation the legality of intervention in a sovereign state is up for question, and even here if, as previously discussed, when the authorisation is not explicit, the legality of action may be contested. Furthermore, the options for military action had not changed from when they had previously been discussed and dismissed. If the British government intervened on humanitarian grounds, there would be an associated expectation that measures to protect civilians would be taken such as a no fly zone. This carried the risk of being targeted by a working Syrian air defence system, and so the weight of potential loss of life and equipment. Establishing a buffer zone would require ground troops potentially providing a large target not only for regime forces, but for Hizbullah and also jihadist groups. This was not something being proposed nor was it supported by the British government.

⁶³³ I Black, "Did Syrian rebels have sarin gas?" *The Guardian* (03 September 2013)

The disquiet over the Government's case was evident in the questions being asked of the Government in the lead up to the Parliament vote. Shadow foreign secretary Douglas Alexander queried the government objective asking, "Is it a broad objective of changing the civil war or trying to remove (President) Bashar al-Asad or is it a more limited objective of trying to degrade his capability to use these weapons with impunity?".⁶³⁴ Labour insisted that no decision should be made before the UN report was published.⁶³⁵ Conservative Norman Tebbit echoed some of these concerns, querying how the action would improve the situation of the Syrian people, asking for clarification on how, exactly, any action would contribute to peaceful settlement of the crisis. The only certainty, in his view, was that proposed action would worsen British relations with Russia and increase hostility to the West in the region, thereby creating further risk to other British interests in the region. Finally, he questioned who would be strengthened by military action in Syria, the moderate rebels or the extremists, and what this would mean for the people of Syria.⁶³⁶ The government in attempting to make its case, had failed to adequately address what many MPs saw as major issues in their argument.

⁶³⁴ "Syria: UK draws up contingency military plans", BBC News, (27 August 2013) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-23845765> (Accessed 27/08/2013)

⁶³⁵ "Syria Crisis: David Cameron says 'world should not stand by'" BBC News, (28 August 2013) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-23864016> (Accessed 28/08/2013)

⁶³⁶ N Tebbit, "I hope I can support the government tomorrow, but I'm not yet persuaded to do so", *The Telegraph*, (28 August 2013)

The debate in parliament highlighted the weaknesses in the government's position. Former Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, also queried what the action would achieve but made further point, based on experience perhaps, that it was easy to begin a military mission but not as easy to end it. Former Defence Secretary Liam Fox "ridiculed" the idea of arming the rebels, asking how British interests would be served by potentially aiding a jihadi victory in Syria.⁶³⁷ The government's task was as much to overcome the legacy of Iraq as make its case for action in Syria. Parliament being reluctant to sanction military intervention in a crisis in which there were no clear British interests at stake, the goals were unclear, the prospects for success were not only poor, but it was unclear what exactly "success" was in this scenario, and where there was no clarity over an exit plan from a potentially protracted operation.

Opposition to the Government's call for action in Syria was not confined to one party but cut across all political boundaries. For those who may have supported intervention on humanitarian grounds the proposed action did not go far enough, indeed it would likely have left Syrian civilians in a worse situation. The timing of the vote, before the UN report was published, could be seen potentially as undermining its credibility, as it pre-empted its findings and recommendations. Lastly the rush to call the vote in Parliament before an

⁶³⁷ F Nelson, "David Cameron failed the test of trust and paid the price" *The Telegraph* (29 August 2013)

adequate case could be presented combined with the memory of how the case for Iraq was presented, played into the vote going against the government.

Peter Ford described the vote in Parliament as “historic” and that it has “cast its shadow forward.” Parliament showing a brief moment of independence against a clearly strong inclination in Whitehall in favour of intervention, set a new benchmark. Clearly it was a blow to the government. Ford suggests that in its Syria policy London was being swept along by America. However, the government had no choice but to call a vote due to pressure from the strength of feeling in the press and public. The episode was a big failure in British foreign policy, it got it wrong when it predicted the early fall of Bashar then faced a humiliating defeat in Parliament costing, Ford suggests, William Hague his post as Foreign Secretary. If British policy was more concerned with helping Syrian civilians rather than removing Bashar, he suggests, it should have stopped the rhetoric and drum beating, lifted sanctions which only hurt Syrian civilians remaining in the country and stop hindering the efforts of the Syrian army to tackle any insurgents. He further pointed to the hypocrisy of the government encouraging armed opposition against Bashar on one hand whilst criminalising those who have travelled to join that opposition on their return to Britain.⁶³⁸

⁶³⁸ Interview with Peter Ford, 12 December 2014

The desire to “do something” about the situation in Syria was palpably strong in the FCO. Disappointment over the defeat of the government vote, however, was felt much further afield. Reflecting on the episode, former FCO Minister, Alistair Burt, stated that the no vote left the mainstream opposition forces in Syria “absolutely devastated”, and Britain’s government “knew exactly what would happen if there was not a strike against Assad over chemical weapons. He goes on.”⁶³⁹ The vote, Burt stated, also potentially limited foreign policy options further as ministers were left unclear as to what exactly the Parliament vote had ruled out, that is, whether intelligence cooperation or logistical support in the event of a US led intervention was still permitted or whether it require seeking approval from Parliament again. Like Hague, some observers think Burt also lost his position in the FCO over the failure of the Syrian vote in Parliament.⁶⁴⁰

The Government failure in presenting a case for military intervention in Syria that would appear significantly stronger and more robust than the case Blair presented to Parliament before Iraq, clearly contributed to the no vote. Claims of conclusive proof of the Syrian regimes guilt in ordering the use of chemical

⁶³⁹ P Wintour, N Watt, “Alistair Burt reveals anger over Syria vote at Westminster” *The Guardian*, (30 December 2013)

⁶⁴⁰ M Bright, “Why did Alastair Burt lose his job?” *The JC.com*, (18 October 2013) <http://www.thejc.com/comment-and-debate/columnists/112449/why-did-alastair-burt-lose-his-job> (Accessed 10/12/2014)

weapons and claiming to have robust intelligence before the UN weapons inspectors had time to conduct their investigation, calling for Parliament to set in motion the path to a military intervention, and the request for and publication of a legal justification for a military intervention before the UNSC had received, studied or made any decision based on a report from its own investigators echoed, for many, the run up to Iraq. Additionally, the wording of the motion which stated that the government commitment to following the UN process "as far as possible to ensure the maximum legitimacy for any such action" echoed Blair's justification of intervention, his belief that if the moral obligation to intervene was apparent but the will of the UNSC was lacking, then this should not prevent the international community taking action.

The British criticism of the stalemate in the UNSC over the Syria crisis was strong, possibly adding to the fears of some MPs that Britain might act without UN approval if they voted for the government's motion. Hague condemned the UNSC having not "shouldered its responsibilities,"⁶⁴¹ berating Russian and Chinese vetoes. This could be seen to damage the credibility of the organisation though his frustration was no doubt genuine. More harmful, however, was the apparent willingness to repeat the mistakes of the past as feared by those MPs who voted against the government's motion on the basis

⁶⁴¹ "Syria Crisis: Diplomacy has not worked, says William Hague", BBC News (26 August 2013) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-23840065> (Accessed 26/08/2013)

that they wanted assurance that no military action would take place without a UNSCR.

The result of British reaction to the crisis was that the message to the Syrian opposition was inconsistent. British support and statements encouraged the moderates to stand their ground but lack of practical support meant that they did not have the means to do so. Pushing for an end to the EU arms embargo in the hopes of strengthening a moderate opposition raised expectations that Britain would supply those groups with arms, and discouraged them from taking part in peace negotiations. The failure to follow through, based on fears that jihadist opposition groups might obtain these weapons, resulted in those same jihadist groups strengthening their position both through military gains as they were better equipped than the moderates, and through the disillusioned fighters from moderate groups joining the jihadists. This give the impression policy makers are merely reacting to individual events rather than formulating effective policy with clear, achievable objectives. Endorsing the idea of a "red line" followed by the failure to act after the line was crossed further damaged Britain's reputation in the region and fuelled the growth of Islamic groups in Syria. This played into Asad's narrative of the crisis, and ran counter to British interests.

The British government failed, throughout, to articulate a cohesive policy, a clear plan of action, a precise objective and desirable outcome which contributed to its failure to convince enough MPs to support its motion in Parliament. Following the Parliament vote many suggested that the British appetite for intervention had gone, yet a 2014 YouGov poll found 60% of the public would support British military action in Iraq against ISIS.⁶⁴² Another found a majority of respondents felt Parliament should have full powers in authorising war or military involvement⁶⁴³. This suggests that any British Government recommending intervention in future will have to build a high calibre case in order to convince Parliament and the public to support it, not that the British public is against intervention, and introduces a larger domestic element into the process of making foreign policy.

Foreign intervention in internal conflict has not proven to have stabilised, or even been effective in stopping the killing, in the examples of Iraq, Libya and Mali. Lessons from these cases should be applied to Syria. If military intervention remains an option then consideration of the likely consequences, planning to mitigate the worst consequences and, most importantly, planning for the rebuild, ensuring that the will, resource and skills are available once an action is over, is essential. If not, then for Britain the best option in the Syrian

⁶⁴² T Ross "Poll: Majority back military action against Islamic State" *The Telegraph* (06 September 2014)

⁶⁴³ J Rogers, "Poll: British people still back combat operations abroad" *The Telegraph* (08 December 2014)

case is to continue with the provision of humanitarian assistance while searching for a negotiated solution, using diplomacy and including all relevant parties whilst preparing for the eventual cessation of hostilities in Syria and the possibility that not only will Britain still have to deal with Bashar but that that might now be the best outcome for British interests.

Conclusion

When the events of the Arab Spring began, the international community was still dealing with the ramifications of the terrorist attacks in America and the wars which followed. Following its misadventures in Afghanistan and Iraq, the US was less willing to involve itself in similar interventions in which it had little national interest at stake. With its focus moving to the Asian Pacific region, the Middle East was seen as a European concern, America no longer willing to play global policeman.

Britain, too, recovering from the legacy of previous decades seemed to have resumed its realpolitik approach to international affairs. At the same time the perception of threat to British security, particularly in terms of terrorist activity remained high, largely related to continuing instability in the Middle East. This being so, British foreign policy reverted to traditional ties and interests, bolstering security in the region through arms and defence agreements with

friendly regimes. Despite this Britain was taken by surprise with the outbreak of the Arab Spring, and its lack of consistency in its approach to the different uprisings across the region can be traced back to traditional ties and agreements, and its security priorities which have led some observers to accuse British policy makers, at best, of being inconsistent, at worst, of being hypocritical.

British policy makers taken by surprise by the Arab Spring were further wrong-footed by the Syrian crisis, having assumed that Bashar's popularity combined with his effective security apparatus would prevent any unrest. They made further mistakes when they assumed Bashar would be quick to fall, and have consistently failed to follow rhetoric up with action. This has contrasted with their action in Libya which had been quick and decisive in comparison.

One thing that has been consistent in British foreign policy behaviour, however, is Britain's view of the importance of Syria with regard to stability in the region, and the perception of the Syrian regime as being different than those in Iraq and Libya. Both these elements served to colour initial thinking on how to react to the Syrian crisis. Without the Asad regime in place to maintain stability, the fear was Syria would collapse, and this would spread across its borders. This fear was underscored initially in that there seemed to be no singular opposition group that the British could back in the way they had in the Libyan operation.

It continues to be a concern as the moderate opposition, now backed by Britain, faces opposition not just from the Assad regime but also Islamist groups, groups which are now causing unrest in neighbouring countries.

The perception that the Syrian regime was different from Iraq and Libya, led to the slow British reaction to the brutal repression by the regime. It may also be the reason behind the quick turnaround in British demands that Assad must go, and the assumption that Bashar would be quick to fall. Again there is an idea of weakness here that has been seen before in British thinking toward Syria. For example, after Bashar was forced to order the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon, a number of observers thought he would not survive the humiliation. It also is similar to the assumption that Bashar would be more susceptible to pressure to reform or concede on peace talks as he was not as strong a leader as his father. These assumptions have been proved time and again to be wrong, and in the case of the Syrian crisis failed to take into account that for Bashar and the regime this really was about survival, or the strong ties between the regime leadership and significant elements of the security and military apparatus.

Lastly the British response to the Syrian crisis has to be seen as a legacy of all interventions preceding it, particularly in the light of failures in Iraq and Libya. The Libyan operation affected the debate over intervening in crisis in a number

of ways, in a practical sense it distracted attention away from Syria as the crisis there was in its initial stages; it demonstrated that even when the European powers in NATO took the lead in an operation they could not act without American logistical support, so there would be no involvement in Syria without American backing; the, arguably, liberal interpretation of the UNSCR authorising action by NATO gave Russia and China cause to block any similar resolution on Syria, and Russia, a Syrian ally, used this criticism effectively; lastly, the situation in Libya had significantly deteriorated since the allies intervention, with ongoing loss of life and warring militias, and some commentators were querying whether the Libyans were really better off for the intervention. This scenario, for many, undermined the principle of R2P, making it unlikely an operation in Syria could be justified in this way.

The legacy of Iraq was even more significant. The Syrian situation was seen as more complex than the Libyan one, more on par with Iraq, if not potentially worse. Arguably a simple aerial bombardment would have little impact raising the spectre of a long, protracted operation with British boots on the ground, once again enmeshed in a Middle East conflict from which they could not withdraw. As with Libya, ongoing troubles in Iraq led many to question the value of intervention, with the likelihood that the situation would be made worse for civilians. Yet, for Syria, perhaps the most significant factor from Iraq on British policy was the precedent that it set in taking the vote for intervention

to Parliament, with the standard for evidence and intelligence to back a case for intervening having been raised incredibly high. Ultimately this blocked a British government from agreeing on military intervention in Syria.

Conclusion

Overview Neoclassical realism and British foreign policy

The past century has seen Britain decline in status from a Great power of the 19th Century, with all the capacity and resources of empire, to a European power operating in a bi-polar then unipolar world system. During that time Britain foreign policy makers have had to manage Britain's decline from power then establish a different kind of world role for Britain, more accurately now described as one of several European powers, or perhaps a medium level world power. This process has been predicated both on the reality that British interests are international, and also on the perception that Britain *should* have a world role, its status as a member of numerous multilateral organisations, but particularly as one of the five permanent members of the United Nations, cementing this perception.

Neoclassical realists consider a state's power position as the primary determinant – the constraint or enabler of its foreign policy over the long run which can certainly be seen to underpin an explanation of Britain's "managed" decline of power and its seeking of alliances to maximise its security. At the same time, in the immediate and intermediate term this objective reality is filtered through elite perceptions of the state's power position and their notion of its interests and roles which determines how it reacts to specific circumstances and which policy position it adopts. In this sense British political

elites chose to react to its declining power position by refusing to withdraw from its global interests and roles. Having a global role was deemed as central to British identity, thus the policy options available centred around maximising Britain's power potential.

Thus Britain has maintained interests and a role in the Middle East throughout this century. Its foreign policy there has reflected a need to protect its interests, which has resulted in a strong ongoing relationship with the largely autocratic regimes of the Gulf states, particularly highlighted in its defence and economic relationship with these countries. While the benefit of maintaining these relationships has been explained by proponents in government in terms of their importance to Britain's wealth and security, Britain could be accused of hypocrisy in its failure to condemn these regimes in the same way as they have condemned the Syrian regime, e.g. notably over the repression of reform movements in Bahrain. This has added to the narrative of terrorist groups in ways seen to have weakened the security of British interests, as seen in Lebanon in the 1980s.

In parallel, the perception that Britain has a world role, and a moral responsibility both due to its history in the Levant, and as a member of the United Nations, has kept policy makers in Britain engaged in the MEPP. Here, though, they battle a legacy of betrayal and suspicion directly impacting on

Britain's ability to implement policy in the region even today. Equally, while there has been a perceived moral obligation to be involved in the process, there remains the tendency to see the issue through a Western lens, limiting the process to a consideration of just the Palestinian issue, or seeking to forward the process through speaking to more moderate or "friendly" regimes or agencies. This has often resulted in a failure to take into account the legitimate complaints or demands of the Syrian regime, such as Israel not being held to UN resolutions, or even to consider how proposals being put forward might affect Syrian interests, such as demands they stop supporting "terrorist" groups which they view as legitimate resistance movements; consequently, talks have run up against predictable resistance.

There are a number of factors that can be seen to have impact on British international behaviour as it has pursued its interests and role, particularly the way in which Britain has attempted to maximise its power capabilities through coalition making. As the British capacity to project its own power to protect the national interest has diminished, Britain prioritised two central relationships as a way to "punch above its weight". Central to this are Britain's relationship with the EU and its "special relationship" with the US, yet, simultaneously, these two relationships are also a source of tension and constraint on UK options. Attempting to balance these alliances has directly affected British decision making and British leaders have had varying levels of success in doing so. Blair

stated that there was no inherent competition between maintaining the special relationship and being at the heart of the EU, rather being strong in Europe meant being strong in the US with one relationship strengthening the other. Certainly a number of different US administrations have encouraged UK membership of the European Union, advocating the UK have a strong role in the institution, Obama being the latest president to express his opinion on this matter. John Major also recently expressed this in a lecture he gave at Chatham House saying that the US expects Britain to use her influence in the EU to represent the views the UK and US share, and that further if the US links with the EU weaken then so will the links between the US and Britain.⁶⁴⁴

One factor underlying the American interest in the UK role in the EU is a desire for the UK to lead the EU in taking a greater role in the European defence and security, relieving the US of that role. The Libyan intervention is a demonstration of the desire of the US for Europe to take a more central role in protecting its interests and security in its immediate neighbourhood while at the same time its practical limitations in doing so. There crucial assumption in America's support for British membership, however, is that a UK that is at the heart of Europe will convince the EU to take a position in line with the American one. This is based on the idea that the UK and the US share common values

⁶⁴⁴ John Major "The Referendum on Europe: Opportunity of Threat?" Chatham House (14 February 2013)
<http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Meetings/Meeting%20Transcripts/140213Major.pdf> (Accessed 11/11/2014)

and interests which might be the case generally, but has not always resulted in a common approach in how to achieve these objectives regarding specific issues. This contradiction has been evident in British foreign policy in the Middle East on numerous issues. From approaches to the MEPP, the Iranian nuclear programme, the Iraq war to its Syrian policy, British policy has alternated between taking a more American path or more European one.

Neo-classical realism argues that a state's response to its international environment is filtered through the policy making process. A number of internal factors have affected how Britain pursued its international interests over the last century. One factor that has been particularly important has been the ongoing struggle between the Office of No 10 Downing street and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for primacy in the area of foreign policy making. Two of the most powerful positions in the UK government have traditionally been that of the Prime Minister and that of the Foreign Secretary (the third being the Chancellor). The British Prime Minister has played an increasingly larger role in international affairs as the number of international summits and meetings for heads of states has grown. In the UK this tendency has been exacerbated by the fact the foreign policy has traditionally sat in the hands of the executive with much fewer checks and balances than in domestic policies. The personal inclinations of prime ministers, particularly Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair, towards centralisation of power, combined with a distrust or

disregard of the Foreign Office have also played a role. The impact has been fewer dissenting voices in foreign policy making, and less debate over what really serves the national interest. Further, factors which have demonstrably had impact on the role of the prime minister in foreign policy making in the Middle East is that a leader is likely to have a bigger role in policy making over issues perceived to be of high national interest, and when there is an international crisis. Both these factors are often the drivers when it comes to British Middle East policy, making consideration of the prime minister's role crucial.

Domestic constraints on British foreign policy have traditionally been weak. Gradually however these are becoming stronger, partly a consequence of the information age making it easier for the general public to access information on international affairs and also in increased demands for all democratic governments to be more transparent. Britain's unwritten constitution enabled Blair to increasingly side-line traditional branches of government, such as the Cabinet and the Foreign Office when it came to making foreign policy. However, the decision to go to war in Iraq and the fallout from that decision has in some respects reversed the trend. Whilst inquiries into the war, to date, have not found the government guilty of deliberately misleading Parliament and the public, they have been damaging in their criticism of the informal processes Blair was using in government at the time, making it unlikely that this will soon

happen again. Furthermore, the publicity surrounding these inquiries may serve as a further constraint on government behaviour as the increased likelihood of being exposed to public scrutiny makes robust policy making a necessity. Indeed, the impact of these inquiries may already have been seen in the vote by MPs over whether to intervene in Syria in 2013, sceptical public opinion constraining MPs willingness to vote contrary to their constituent's clear wishes.

Government behaviour has been subject to the scrutiny of parliamentary sub committees for some time now. These, like public inquiries, are limited in their scope, in that they're generally looking at foreign policy that has been enacted already, and are limited in the number of foreign policy issues they can look into in any one-time period. However, they benefit from the increased demand and expectation of transparency by the public and the expansion in communications making it easier for them to publish their findings and reports and consequently easier for the public to access them. It is difficult to judge how this impacts the executive's behaviour with regard to Syria but British responses to the Arab Spring and the situation in Syria are being monitored and queried in FAC reports.

A longer lasting consequence of Blair's premiership is the decision to take the vote over whether to go to war in Iraq to Parliament. Regardless of the

ultimate outcome of the decision to go to war itself, the vote set a precedent, and while there is no constitutional requirement for it to do so it seems unlikely a British government would go to war without allowing Parliament to vote on the decision first. This has had direct consequences for Anglo-Syrian policy with the vote in the Commons coming out against intervening militarily in the crisis there. Making the decision on military action subject to parliament makes it more subject to public opinion. Supportive of those who argued that the failure of the Syrian vote was simply down to the fallout from the Iraq campaign and the British public being war weary, recent polls have found a majority would support military action in Iraq against ISIS. The expectation for a robust and high quality case with clear aims and objectives is key however.

In a number of ways then internal factors both shape the way in which the UK perceives what its interests are and then shape the policies it pursues in order to secure its interests.

Impact on Anglo – Syrian Relations

Extending this neo-classical realist approach to the analysis of British foreign policy towards Syria, focusses analysis on how these factors impacted on the decisions taken and the consequences for the Anglo-Syrian relationship.

While Britain has little direct national interest in Syria, Syria is a key state in the Middle East. It is a consequence of Syria's strategic geographic position that has brought it, periodically to the attention of UK policy makers as they have pursued its wider interests in the Middle East. Syria is a state that has suffered historically from both local and international meddling in its affairs, and its history, in the Syrian perception, is one of external encroachment into Arab lands, and affairs, since the time of the crusades to the present Israeli occupation of Arab lands. British foreign policy is a central facet of this narrative, in particular its imperial legacy in the shape of its role in the Balfour Declaration and Sykes-Picot agreement.⁶⁴⁵

British national interests in the Middle East, broadly defined, have not changed; that is British interest in regional stability and the security of access to natural resources. What this has meant, in terms of policy direction and short term interests however has been impacted by how British governments have reacted to events in the region, and its perception of security and threat at any given time. This has affected Anglo-Syrian relations as Britain has pursued policies in the Middle East which have challenged or threatened Syrian interests. These include attempts by the British government to carry out what it sees as obligations over the MEPP, or fighting international terrorism, or where British policy has been influenced by its prioritising the "special relationship", such as

⁶⁴⁵ Agha & Khalidi *Syria and Iran* p42

Lebanon and Libya in the 1980s, or the War on Terror and conflict in Iraq in the 2000s.

A number of internal factors influence precisely how Britain has responded to Syrian linked issues. For a large part, the formulation of that policy has been tightly in the hands of the executive, particularly in the case of military intervention, but other forces have had impact over both the process and the application of policy. It has long been accepted that the executive has far more freedom in the arena of foreign policy than domestic yet recent events with regard to the Syrian case has shown this can no longer be taken for granted. British capacity to manoeuvre with regard to the current crisis for example has been limited by Parliament voting against military action there.

Chapter one demonstrates a number of the factors described above. Britain fought two world wars to preserve her status as a world power and protect her interest, whilst trying to prevent Germany's growth as a great power. Peace time saw Britain working assiduously to shape peace agreements to her favour. British activity in the Middle East reflected this. Agreements made during war time were made on the basis of what was necessary to maximise resources to fight the war, they were further complicated in that they were made by different agents, who were given a remit for pursuing these different agreements with little coordination as to the promises made. British policy in

the interwar period was about preserving British access to resources and limiting the influence of other great powers in the region. Following the Second World War, the policy pursued again was one of limiting the influence of other great power rivals, which underlay Britain's support for Syrian independence from France. Further, the realisation that Britain's capacity to project its influence in the region had significantly diminished, combined with the fear of Soviet incursion, led Britain to connive with friendly regimes, such as the governments in Turkey, Jordan and Iraq, in order to counter the threat and protect its interests, and also to the view that America must play a key role in the region.

These events were significant to the Anglo-Syrian relationship and marked the beginning of what would be an antagonistic relationship between British governments and Syrian regimes. They also marked a pattern where Syrian interests were not acknowledged or were not seen to be a priority for British decision makers. Ultimately in the period after World War Two this worked against the British, as the assumption that Arab interests must coincide with British interests, led to British interference in Syrian affairs. This backfired and ultimately led to the failure of the Baghdad Pact, since Syria's decision not to join, but to back Egypt's opposition to the pact was instrumental in its demise. Neoclassical realism helps in the analysis of this period in that it both explains Britain's drive to preserve the balance of power in the region, firstly in its

interaction with the Arabs then latterly in its attempts to draw the US into the region as security against the perceived Soviet threat. Yet, it adds to understanding of the foreign policy itself, as it gives weight to the policy making process. The recognition by policy makers that Britain no longer had the power capacity to maintain its presence in the Middle East during the first half of the 20th century, did not lead to an immediate withdrawal, rather to an attempt to manipulate regional politics in the Levant to its advantage and to draw the US into the Middle East to contain Soviet influence. British policy was dictated both by the perception elites held of the threat of the SU to its interests in the region, and thus the need to balance that by drawing in the US, but also by the perception of British elites that Arab regimes would naturally see their interests to be in line with Britain's. This brought Syria directly into British foreign policy makers sights, as it was central to the creation of a Western backed line of defence. But policy makers failed to recognise that Syrians did not believe their interests would be served by British policy, cementing an antagonistic relationship.

By the time Thatcher came to power, the period described in chapter two, Britain had completed its withdrawal from the Middle East. In terms simply of relative power, it may have seemed that British interests would be best served by maintaining this distance. Here the mechanism for maximising British power, its alliances, was central to its policy-making. Several factors would

draw it back into the region, following policies that in many ways seemed detrimental to its interests there. While the period seemed to start positively, with British leadership in the creation of the 1980 Venice declaration appearing to indicate willingness to pursue a European approach to the Middle East, the prioritisation of the Atlantic alliance, given that the US was seen as central to combating the spread of Soviet influence in the Middle East and more generally as guarantor of European security, dragged Britain into disputes in the Middle East that directly brought it into conflict with Syrian interests.

Overall, a number of analysts would say that British interests in the Middle East were not served well in this period, and certainly the policy pursued was detrimental to the Anglo-Syrian relationship with a consequent four year break in relations. Here studying the unit level variables of policy making, particularly the role of the Prime Minister, is essential to understanding the policy of the time. The role of Margaret Thatcher in foreign policy making was significant, and its impact was felt more deeply as, not only were key British interests at stake such as stability in the Middle East, and US involvement there, but Britain had to react to a number of crises such as Israel's invasion of Lebanon and various terrorist attacks, the importance of these issues and the crisis situation making sure Thatcher would take a tighter grip of foreign policy in response. Again analysing unit level factors prove central to explaining British foreign policy here. The maintenance of its alliances was central to maximising British

power capacity, but the significant relationship for Britain in terms of the Middle East was Britain's relationship with the US. It was this that dragged Britain back into Middle East conflicts, as a show of commitment to that relationship.

For Syria this was significant. Thatcher's black and white take on international events, her commitment to the US alliance, her distrust of Soviet influence in the region and her suspicion of the FCO, which might have advised a more cautious approach to events, all put British policy on a collision course with Syrian interests. British policy embroiled it in Lebanon and in support of the US raid in Libya, putting it directly at odds with Syrian interests. Britain's too close alignment with the policy of the Reagan administration led it to fail to adequately take into account legitimate Syrian concerns over Israeli encroachment into its sphere of influence in Lebanon. There was a failure to understand the Syrian perception that those groups Britain and the US labelled "terrorist" were seen as legitimate resistance groups, further exacerbated by the tendency to see all terrorist groups as the same. As long as there was no equal pressure on Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories, particularly the Golan Heights, there could be no question of the Syrian regime ending its support for what it saw as groups resisting Israeli occupation. Even in its approach to the MEPP, something in which Britain and Syria may have found common ground, British policy makers were limited by the insistence that it must run complimentary to US efforts (restricting the sense in which the UK

could “balance” US excessive support for Israeli policy). Further, by giving central roles to the PLO in the Venice Declaration, or inviting a Palestinian-Jordanian delegation to London, as a way, as Damascus saw it, of excluding Syria (owing to its Soviet alignment) from the peace process, the two Western powers challenged the Syrian role as Pan-Arab champion, and the Syrian concept that settlement of the peace process was something bigger than simply a settlement for the Palestinians.

The lack of understanding of Syria’s interests during the Thatcher period, combined with a strong Prime Minister determined to make a stand against terrorism would see a complete break in relations with Syria despite significant elements of the UK government who disagreed with this course of action. Here British policy would be distinct but not in a positive way. While there was immediate solidarity with the British in the aftermath of the Hindawi affair, given Syria’s importance to key issues of the day such as the hostage situation and Lebanon, it was soon evident it was the Thatcher government which was left behind and isolated in Middle East issues, much to the detriment of British interests. Despite this, it took the resignation of a Prime Minister before the relationship could be repaired.

In many ways the Blair era, considered in chapters three and four, demonstrates many of the characteristics of the Thatcher era yet initially there

did seem to be some ground for hope that the Anglo-Syrian relationship would become warmer. With no crises ongoing, and no overarching threat in the now unipolar world, there was potential for a more normalised relationship. As such a UK government willing to engage in constructive dialogue potentially could have forged a new relationship.

Neo-classical realists hypothesize that states which are politically and territorially secure are more likely to pursue objectives with less direct links to pure national interests. In this sense there is less constraint on their behaviour, these states pursue ideological goals as ends in themselves, an impact felt more when foreign policy making is highly centralised in government. The Blair government faced a world that had changed significantly from previous periods, with Britain now pursuing its policies in a unipolar world, and for Western leaders the primacy of their style of government established. The lack of an existential threat to Britain, could be seen to have impacted on the thinking of political elites now the question being asked not "what must we do", to "what shall we do."⁶⁴⁶

As Blair's role grew in foreign policy decision making, his perception about the moral obligation on nation states to intervene in conflicts on humanitarian

⁶⁴⁶N Kitchen, "Systemic pressures and domestic ideas: a neoclassical realist model of grand strategy formation" *Review of International Studies*, 36 (1) (2010) p141

grounds, where there are no obvious national interests became more important for British policy, illustrative of the impact leader's perceptions have on foreign policy making particularly in the British system of government, and in Blair's period the increasing centralisation of decision making on foreign policy.

Blair's government saw a brief moment of hope for a new relationship with Syria. As previously discussed, perceptions within the political elite saw Britain committed to a global role, and also viewing commitment to the MEPP as a moral obligation. Under Blair, a commitment to promoting good governance and international stability further fostered a reengagement of British interest in the MEPP and also support for the EU Association Agreements as a way to promote economic liberalisation as a route to political change in the region. Both initiatives, potentially paved the way for a more constructive relationship with Syria.

Yet even initially some traditional characteristics of British foreign policy impacted decisions: thus there was the somewhat confused approach to the Ilisu Dam project which illustrated that discrepancies and inconsistencies continued where different foreign policy priorities competed with each other, in this case economic interests, pursued by the DTI and supported by Blair, overriding concerns for human rights and the environment. This project also showed the difficulties where the Foreign Office sets an overarching priority for

foreign policy behaviour but another department leads on the ground with its own priorities taking precedence.

Before long, moreover, 9/11 and the War on Terror changed the international context dramatically, with the UK growing closer to the US, and the Americans increasingly taking an anti-Syrian stance. Again, the significance of how the perception of the international system had changed was significant, particularly the concept of threat. Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the elite perception was that rogue regimes posed an unacceptable threat to international stability, and that not supporting the US in defending against that threat was inconceivable. In this, Blair's role in foreign policy making was vital to understanding British policy. Britain's participation in Iraq was in direct conflict to Syrian interests. With this change, Blair's increasing control over British foreign policy, his inclination to intervene, and his over identification with US foreign policy now became issues for the Syrian regime, and voices within the UK policy process advocating a more moderate approach were not heard. At the same time, it restricted the British government's ability to pursue a different policy with Syria even had it wanted to and even impacted on EU efforts to forge a different path. British foreign policy behaviour was also not constrained by its membership of multilateral organisations. In matters of vital interests, the primacy of its security relationship with the US overriding the constraining

potential of British commitment, for example to the norms and values of the UN in the face of what the British executive saw as a key threat to security.

Crises in the international arena can have the effect of exacerbating existing tensions in British foreign policy. The Iraq war of 2003 highlighted the impact on British policy of taking an overly pro-American line, damaging Britain's standing in the European Union and limiting its options to pursue an independent policy in the region, particularly with regard to Syria. This impacted not only British bilateral relations with Syria, but limited options within the EU as American pressure prevented the signing of the Association Agreement with Syria, thus, missing an opportunity to advance reform in Syria. While other EU partners joined Britain in requiring additional clauses be added to Syria's Association Agreement, there is no doubt that having troops on the ground in Iraq with the Americans restricted Britain's ability to act independently of US policy.

Lastly, the recent crisis in Syria has shown, once more, a number of weaknesses in British foreign policy, many of them echoing the history of Anglo-Syrian relations. This in part is the legacy of the Blair government. It has cast its shadow over the present governments ability to intervene in the conflict – both in the general reluctance to get involved in another messy war in the region and practically, in setting the precedent of having to take the vote to

Parliament in the first place. British political elites, in a more uncertain world context, whilst still adhering to the concept of a British role in world politics once again questioning what that role is, and what capacity Britain has to deliver on its world role.

The reluctance of the British government to extend support to the Syrian uprising can be seen as reflecting the fact that with little direct interests there Britain is unwilling to expend resources, economic or human, in order to help militarily. Further, its recent experiences with intervention in the Middle East - in Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan - has made decision makers sceptical of the impact such military intervention could have. Urgency to act has only really come recently as a result of the influx of refugees to Europe, with the impact that might have among the electorate. Significantly, despite its membership of important multilateral institutions such as the UN and the EU and its "special relationship" with the US Britain has failed to make any particular impact in its attempts to help bring the crisis to an end.

Final Summary

Neoclassical realism shares a number of central assumptions with other realist theories, such as that the state remains the most appropriate unit of analysis, that the international system is anarchic and fundamentally states relations are

defined by competition for scarce resources in the absence of an external arbiter, and that power is the essential tool that states have in that competition, particularly the power of material capabilities.

Neoclassical realism argues that a state's relative power in the international system drives its foreign policy. This can be seen to help explain British foreign policy over the past century, a central aspect of which has been its decline in power from being a great power to a European power, and, simultaneously its attempts to preserve its remaining power capacity through alliance-making. This helps provide an understanding of British foreign policy in the Middle East, a region in which it is essentially interested in preserving stability in a way which ensures its access to resources there. The Middle East is considered a region of vital British interests; Britain is perceived to have both a historical relationship with the region that makes it well placed to "understand" Middle East issues, and a moral obligation to it as a result of this historic relationship; finally, the Middle East region, as a result of British involvement in creation of the modern middle east structure, is unstable and prone to crises which inevitably draw it to the attention of policy makers in London. While the UK has little direct interests in Syria itself, it is through its wider involvement in Middle East issues that most Anglo-Syrian interaction has occurred, and often set the interests of the two states in conflict with each other.

Neo-classical realism's value added compared to other realist theories is that it does not consider there to be a direct logical connection between the nature of the system and how states behave. While it still holds that power, interests and alliance-making are central to this behaviour, it accepts that at the state level the perceptions and ideas of decision makers factor into foreign policy behaviour.⁶⁴⁷ Thus Britain's international behaviour can be explained in part by changes in the international system, as it has declined from being a great imperial power, to a European power. As it has pursued alliances to enhance its power this has also impacted on British behaviour.

Neoclassical realism argues that a state's relative power in the international system drives its foreign policy alongside its relative power. This can be seen to help explain British foreign policy over the past century, a central aspect of which has been its decline in power and, simultaneously its attempts to maximise its power capacity through its alliances. This has aided in understanding the various interactions in the Anglo-Syrian relationship throughout this period since, while the UK has little direct interests in Syria, it is through its wider involvement in Middle East issues that most Anglo-Syrian interaction has occurred, and often set the interests of the two states in conflict with each other.

⁶⁴⁷ Kitchen "Systemic pressures and domestic ideas: a neoclassical realist model of grand strategy formation". P140

A central aspect of this has been the impact of the executive in the making of British foreign policy. As a result of the key perceived importance of the Middle East and the periodic crises that erupt there, decision making on Middle East policy has often been concentrated in the executive, and particularly as the British system has been inclined to centralisation, this has focussed on the prime minister; as such their preconceptions and world views have influenced British foreign policy in the Middle East to a great degree. Where the Prime Minister's position has been relatively strong, such as in the Blair and Thatcher periods, rather than a nuanced world view, this has often resulted in issues being considered in fairly black and white terms. This has complicated the Anglo-Syrian relationship, as legitimate Syrian opposition to British policy is conceived as simply the intransigence of an autocratic regime, and has been given little weight in British thinking. The lack of direct British interests in Syria has also meant that there have been fewer important dissenting voices in the British political elite to project moderating influence on British policy direction toward Syria.

The importance of Britain to Syria has often been in her alliances. Britain has established these alliances in order to defend her declining power position and protect her remaining interests in the region but its capacity to utilise these alliances effectively has been seen to be constrained by its need to balance its

essentially economic alliance with the EU and its American alliance, one seen primarily as important in security terms. The failure of Britain to balance these, often linked to the executive's belief in the primacy of the "special relationship", has, on numerous occasions, brought British interests into conflict with Syrian regional interests, and limited the effectiveness of the EU in pursuing alternative policies which could have resulted in more constructive Anglo-Syrian relations.

Anglo-Syrian relations, initially defined by British involvement in the creation of the modern Middle East state system, have continued to be defined in the broader context of British interest in the region. British interests in the Middle East have persisted even after Britain's withdrawal from the region, and its pursuit of them since has involved working through alliances. Neoclassical realism provides an explanation for this behaviour, in terms of Britain's attempt to mobilize the power to protect its national interests, but also shows how the policy process is essential to understanding British behaviour, taking into account elite perceptions both of what these interests are and how best Britain can achieve them. This adds a layer of understanding as to why foreign policy outcomes do not always conform with what would be predicted purely in terms of the pursuit of the national interest.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Interviews

Anonymous, Interview at the Foreign & Commonwealth Officer, 02 July 2014

Ivor Lucas, Ambassador to Syria 1982 – 1984, Correspondence 08 July 2014

Basil Eastwood, Ambassador to Syria, 1996 – 2000, Correspondence 19 June 2014

Henry Hogger, Ambassador to Syria, 2000 – 2003, Interview, 28 August 2014

Peter Ford, Ambassador to Syria, 2003 – 2006, Interview 12 December 2014

Government- Statements & Hansard

Michael Stewart Foreign Affairs, HC Deb 09 December 1969
<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1969/dec/09/foreign-affairs>
(accessed 14 November 2015)

Lord Carringdon, AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST, HL Deb 09 July 1980 vol 411
cc1176-279 <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1980/jul/09/africa-and-the-middle-east> (accessed 01/04/2016)

Douglas Hurd, HC Debate 18 November 1981 vol 13 cc269-70,
<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1981/nov/18/middle-east>
(accessed 11 November 2015)

Sinai Multinational Peacekeeping Force, HC Deb 23 November 1981 vol 13
cc620-9, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1981/nov/23/sinai-multinational-peacekeeping-force>

Engagements, HC Deb 08 June 1982 vol 25 cc14-8,
<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1982/jun/08/engagements>
(Accessed 10/12/2015)

The Middle East, HC Deb 22 June 1982 vol 26 cc210-71,
http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1982/jun/22/the-middle-east#S6CV0026P0_19820622_HOC_465 (Accessed 10/12/2015)

G Howe House of Commons Debate, Syria, HC Deb 25 January 1984 vol 52 cc909-10, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1984/jan/25/syria> (accessed 19 November 2014)

M Thatcher, Statement to the House of Commons 15 April 1986, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1986/apr/15/libya#S6CV0095P0_19860415_HOC_157 (Accessed 15 Nov 2013)

M Thatcher, "US Bombing of Libya" House of Commons Speech, Hansard HC [95/875-81], 16 April 1986, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106363> (Accessed 08 March 2012)

G Howe, House of Commons Questions, Terrorism, HC Deb 07 May 1986 vol 97 cc139-42
http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1986/may/07/terrorism-1#S6CV0097P0_19860507_HOC_98 (Accessed 10 March 2012)

Tokyo Economic Summit, HC Deb 08 May 1986 vol 97 cc259-69, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1986/may/08/tokyo-economic-summit> (Accessed 10/12/2014)

T Renton, Syria, HC Deb 12 May 1986 vol 97 cc447-53, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1986/may/12/syria#S6CV0097P0_19860512_HOC_193 (accessed 10/12/2015)

G Howe, Secretary of State for Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs statement on Anglo Syrian relations 24 October 1986, <http://www.apnewsarchive.com/1986/Text-Of-Howe-s-Statement/id-78732fd5e4f3cfd24b1443ce3412db20> (accessed 07 March 2012)

Douglas Hurd, Parliamentary Business, Nuclear Trigger Devices (Iraq), 29 March 1990
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-03-29/Debate-1.html> (accessed 20/01/2016)

M Thatcher, Engagements HC Deb 03 May 1990 vol 171 cc1203-8, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1990/may/03/engagements#S6CV0171P0_19900503_HOC_122 (accessed 12/12/2015)

Douglas Hurd, Hostages HC Deb 09 May 1990 vol 172 cc175-7
http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1990/may/09/hostages#S6CV0172P0_19900509_HOC_14 (accessed 19 November 2014)

Kevin McNamara MP "Ilisu Dam" HC Deb 15 February 2000 vol 344 cc155-75WH http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/westminster_hall/2000/feb/15/ilisu-dam (accessed 14 November 2014)

Hansard Written Answers, Ilisu Dam, 23 Jan 2001,
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200001/cmhansrd/vo010123/text/10123w02.htm> (Accessed 14 November 2014)

Tony Blair "The value of dialogue with Syria", 16 December 2002, FCO publication, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/newsroom/latest-news/?view=News&id=2035037> (accessed 15 November 2008)

Jack Straw, "British Contributions to Middle East Peace Plan, FCO Release dated 02 October 2003, www.fco.gov.uk (accessed May 2010)

Tony Blair's Speech: A "Renaissance" in Foreign Policy 01 August 2006
<http://www.spiegel.de/international/tony-blair-s-speech-a-renaissance-in-foreign-policy-a-429977.html> (Accessed 20 May 2010)

"Foreign Secretary condemns ongoing violence in Syria", 30 April 2011,
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-condemns-ongoing-violence-in-syria> (accessed 03 May 2014)

William Hague, Commons Hansard 20 May 2013,
http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm130520/debt_ext/130520-0001.htm#13052013000004 (Accessed 14 November 2014)

David Cameron, Daily Hansard, 29 August 2013
http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm130829/debt_ext/130829-0001.htm (accessed 15 November 2014)

Other Speeches

Margaret Thatcher speech "Foreign Policy of Great Britain" 18 Dec 1979
<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/essential/default.asp> (Accessed 19 May 2013)

Excerpts from speech by Hafiz al Asad, "Syrian President discusses Terrorism at 27th May Athens dinner" *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts* 30 May 1986

Charles Powell, BBC4 radio interview, 08 September 2002,
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/news/withus/powell.pdf> (Accessed 10/10/2011)

Documents

Letter from Sir Henry McMahon to Sharif Hussein, October 24, 1915,
<http://www.icsresources.org> (accessed 19 April 2012)

Letter from Sir Henry McMahon to Sharif Hussein, October 24, 1915,
<http://www.icsresources.org> (accessed 19 April 2012)

The Council of Four: Minutes of Meetings March 20 to May 24, 1919,
<http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/FRUS/FRUS-idx?type=turn&id=FRUS.FRUS1919Parisv05&entity=FRUS.FRUS1919Parisv05.p0018&isize=M> (accessed 13 Jan 2012)

Cabinet Office paper – Most Confidential Record C.C (57) 64th Conclusion
minute 6th September 1957
<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D7664478pdf> (Accessed 10 October 2010)

Conclusions of Cabinet held 10 Downing Street Tues 27th Aug 1957
<http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-128-13.pdf> (Accessed 10 October 2010)

No 10 record of conversation (MT-Reagan) 12 Oct 1981
<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/125898> (Accessed 10/12/2015)

Thatcher, Carrington, No.10 record of conversation 15 October 1981
<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/125902> (Accessed 10/12/2015)

FCO to UK Embassies and Missions, 15 October 1981,
<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/125900> (accessed 10/01/2016)

FCO to UK Embassies and Missions, 15 October 1981,
<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/125900> (accessed 10/01/2016)

Carrington, Haig, Haig message to Carrington ("Sinai") 27 October 1981
<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/125912> (Accessed 10/12/2015)

Pym message to Shultz, 25 June 1982
<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/140020> (Accessed 01/01/2016)

FCO letter to No.10 ("Israeli Invasion of Lebanon: Arms Sales, 25 June 1982
<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/124649> (Accessed 10/12/2015)

President Asaad of Syria letter to MT (situation in Lebanon), Sep 1983
<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/132095> (Accessed 10/12/2015)

MT letter to President Asaad of Syria (situation in Lebanon), 20 December 1983
<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/132125> (Accessed 10/12/2015)

Reagan telegram to MT (Lebanon) [plan for phased redeployment of US
element in MNF to ships offshore 06 Feb 1984,
<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/136653> (Accessed 15/11/2015)

MT letter to President Reagan (Lebanon) 09 Feb 1984,
<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/136668> (Accessed 15/11/2015)

President Reagan letter to MT, 08 April 1986,
<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/143431> (Accessed 10 Dec 2015)

President Reagan letter to MT (Libyan terrorism) [reply to MT's points] 09 April 1986, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/143432> (Accessed 01/12/2015)

M Thatcher, Letter to David Owen 21 April 1986,
<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106367> (Accessed 15 March 2012)

Minutes of Full Cabinet - CC (86) 20th, 15 May 1986,
<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/136948> (Accessed 12/12/2015)

European Union Code of Conduct on Arms Exports, Brussels, 5 June 1998
<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/08675r2en8.pdf> (Accessed 01/01/2016)

The Council of Europe, European Security Strategy: A secure Europe in a better world, 2009 <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf> (accessed 12 April 2016)

Government & Parliamentary Publications

Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, Second Report, Session 1998 -99, 3 February 1999
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199899/cmselect/cmffaff/116/11603.htm> (Accessed 01/12/2015)

Trade and Industry – Sixth Report, Session 1999-2000, 28 February 2000
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199900/cmselect/cmtrdind/200/20002.htm> (accessed 14 November 2014)

Trade and Industry – Twelfth Report, Session 2000 – 2001, 9 May 2001
<http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200001/cmselect/cmtrdind/512/51202.htm> (accessed 14 November 2014)

House of Commons Research Paper “11 September 2001: the response” RP 01/72 03 October 2001,
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/briefing-papers/RP01-72/11-september-2001-the-response> (Accessed 10 November 2011)

Youngs, Tim, Bowers, Paul "Iraq and UN Security Council Resolution 1441"
Research Paper 02/64, House of commons Library, 21 November 2002
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/briefing-papers/RP02-64/iraq-and-un-security-council-resolution-1441> (accessed 12 November 2014)

House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, "Foreign Policy Aspects of the War against Terrorism" Second Report of Session 2002 – 2003 HC 196 London: The Stationery Office Limited 2002

Taylor Claire Youngs, Tim, "The Conflict in Iraq" House of Commons Research Paper RP03/50, 23MAY 2003

House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, "Foreign Policy Aspects of the War against Terrorism" Tenth Report of Session 2002-03, HC 405, London: TSO, 31 July 2003,
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmcaff/405/405.pdf>

House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, "The Decision to go to War in Iraq", Ninth Report of Session 2002–03, Volume I, HC 813-I, London: The Stationery Office Limited, 2003;

FCO Report *UK International Priorities: A Strategy for the FCO*, Crown Copyright Dec 2003 <http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Politics/documents/2003/12/02/FCOstrategyFullFinal.pdf> (Accessed 12 November 2010)

House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, Foreign Policy Aspects of the War against Terrorism Tenth Report of Session 2002–03, HC 405, London: The Stationery Office Limited 2003

Report of a Committee of Privy Councillors, "Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass destruction" HC 898, London: The Stationary Office 14 July 2004

House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, " Foreign Policy Aspects of the War against Terrorism" Seventh Report of Session 2003–04 HC 441-I; London: The Stationery Office Limited 2004

Leonard, Small, Rose "British Public diplomacy in the 'age of schisms'" The Foreign Policy Centre, Feb 2005 <http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/407.pdf> (Accessed November 2010)

Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Departmental Report 01 April 2004 – 31 March 2005, CM6533, London: TSO, June 2005
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmcaff/522/522.pdf> (Accessed 10 June 2012)

Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Departmental Report, 1 April 2003 – 31 March 2004 cm 6213, June 2005

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/250619/0460_ii.pdf, Accessed (10 June 2012)

Report of the International Independent Investigation Commission established pursuant to Security Council resolution 1595 Detlev Mehlis, Commissioner Beirut, 19 October 2005 <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/98787d84-41cf-11da-a45d-00000e2511c8.html#axzz3Q0pG4BSW> (Accessed 10 November 2012)

Blair, Tony, *A Global Alliance for Global Values*, The Foreign Policy Centre, London, Sept 2006

Fourth Report from the Foreign Affairs Committee, Session 2005-06, "Foreign Policy Aspects of the War Against Terrorism" Response of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs London: TSO 2006

Foreign & Commonwealth Office Departmental Report, 1 April 2005 – 31 March 2006, Cm 6823 London, TSO May 2006

FCO Report *Active Diplomacy for a Changing World: The UK's International Priorities*, Crown Copyright March 2006

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/272260/6762.pdf (Accessed 12 November 2010)

House of Lords Select Committee on the Constitution "Waging war: Parliament's role and responsibility" 15th Report of Session 2005-2006, London: The Stationery Office, 2006

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200506/ldselect/ldconst/236/236i.pdf> (Accessed 14 December 2014)

House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee "Foreign Policy Aspects of the Detention of Naval Personnel by the Islamic Republic of Iran" Sixth Report of Session 2006–07, HC 880 London: The Stationery Office Limited 22 July 2007 <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmffaff/880/880.pdf> (Accessed 12 November 2010)

Eighth Report of the Foreign Affairs Committee Session 2006-7, "Global Security: The Middle East" HC 363, 13 August 2007

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/243180/7212.pdf (Accessed 19 November 2013)

Eighth Report of the Foreign Affairs Committee Session 2006-7, "Global Security: The Middle East" Government response CM 7212, October 2007

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/243180/7212.pdf (Accessed 19 November 2013)

"Building on Progress: Britain in the World", HM Government Policy Review, Prime Ministers Strategy Unit, London April 2007

Lunn, Miller, Smith, "British Foreign Policy since 1997" Research Paper 08/56, House of Commons Library, 23 June 2008, <http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/RP08-56/british-foreign-policy-since-1997> (Accessed December 2010)

Youngs, Tim "The Middle East Peace Process: prospects after the Palestinian Presidential Elections" *House of Commons Research Paper*, 05/29, 29 March 2009 <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/briefing-papers/RP05-29/the-middle-east-peace-process-prospects-after-the-palestinian-presidential-elections> (Accessed 10 May 2010)

Jones, Steven "Syria: An Introduction" Standard Note SN/IA/05111, House of Commons Library, 19 June 2009, www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN05111.pdf (Accessed 28 June 2012)

Smith, Ben "The Arab Uprisings" Research paper 11/73, House of Commons Library, 15 November 2011, <http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/rp11-73.pdf> (Accessed October 2013)

Smith, Ben "Unrest spreads to Syria, Standard Note SN/IA/ 5928 House of Commons Library, 10 June 2011, <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/briefing-papers/SN05928/unrest-spreads-to-syria> (Accessed November 2012)

Human Rights and Democracy: The 2011 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report, April 2012, Cm 8339 01 May 2012 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-democracy-the-2011-fco-report> (Accessed Nov 2012)

Smith Ben "The Syria Crisis – Update" Standard Note SN/IA/6271, House of Commons Library, 09 May 2012 <http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN06271/the-syrian-crisis-update-may-2012> (Accessed November 2012)

Smith Ben "Syria: no end in sight?" Research Paper 12/48, House of Commons Library 30 August 2012 <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/briefing-papers/RP12-48/syria-no-end-in-sight> (Accessed 14 November 2012)

Smith, Ben, Lang, Arabella "Syria: The legality of arming the rebels after the lifting of the EU arms embargo," Standard Note SNIA/6667, House of Commons Library, 18 June 2013 <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/briefing-papers/SN06667/syria-the-legality-of-arming-the-rebels-after-the-lifting-of-the-eu-arms-embargo> (Accessed 14 November 2014)

Lunn, Jon "UK arms export control policy" Standard Note SN/IA/2729 House of Commons Library, 21 November 2014

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/briefing-papers/SN02729/uk-arms-export-control-policy> (Accessed November 2014)

Other Reports

Euro-Med Partnership, "Regional Strategy Paper 2002-2006 & Regional Indicative Programme 2002 - 2004",
http://www.eeas.europa.eu/euromed/rsp/02_06_en.pdf (Accessed 09 June 2010)

Euro-Med Partnership, Syria Country Strategy Paper 2002 – 2006 & National Indicative Programme 2002 – 2004,
http://eeas.europa.eu/syria/csp/02_06_en.pdf (accessed June 2010)

Iraq, The Last Pre-War Polls 21 March 2003 <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/newsevents/ca/287/Iraq-The-Last-PreWar-Polls.aspx> (accessed 01/12/2014)

Prados, Alfred, Sharp Jeremy "Syria: Political Conditions and relations with the US after the Iraq war" CRS Report for Congress, 10 Jan 2005
<http://www.cfr.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/syria-political-conditions-relations-united-states-after-iraq-war/p8311> (Accessed May 2010)

Veronique De Keyser, "Report containing the European Parliament's recommendation to the Council on the conclusion of a Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the Syrian Arab Republic, of the other part," Committee on Foreign Affairs, Session document, EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT 2004 – 2009, FINAL, A6-0334/2006, 10.10.2006

Baker James A III & Hamilton Lee H co Chairs "The Iraq Study Group Report," Vintage Books, New York Dec 2006

ENPI Euro-Mediterranean Partnership: Regional Strategy Paper (2007-2013) and Regional Indicative Programme (2007-2010) 2007 <http://www.enpi-info.eu/library/content/enpi-euro-mediterranean-partnership-regional-strategy-paper-2007-2013-and-regional-indicativ> (Accessed November 2013)

ENPI, Syrian Arab Republic Strategy Paper 2007 -
http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/csp-nip-syria-2007-2013_en.pdf (Accessed November 2013)

European Commission, <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/regions/euro-mediterranean-partnership/>

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY First review of the National Security Strategy 2010 Oral and written evidence September 2011 <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/joint-committees/national-security-strategy/nsscollatedevidencefinal.pdf> (accessed May 2014)

Secondary Sources

Newspaper Articles

"Principles of Foreign Policy", *The Times* (London), 23 October 1946

OUR LONDON STAFF "Labour defence of Foreign Policy" *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959); 17 May 1947

Our Parliamentary Correspondent "Mr Bevin's Firm Statement of Middle East Policy: Brit Interests will be Maintained" *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959); May 17, 1947

A Diplomatic Correspondent "Three-power move to stop Middle East Arms Race" *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959), 26 May 1950

Huizinga, J. H "The Arabs & the West" *The Manchester Guardian*, (1901-1959); 30 March 1951

Price, M. Philips, MP "Middle East Defence: Suez Canal or Turkey?" *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959), 04 February 1952

"Jets for Middle East not wanted by NATO" *The Manchester Guardian*, (1901-1959), 18 Feb 1953

"The Suez Base" *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959) 28 April 1953

"Syrian Protest to Br: 'Enemy of the Arabs'" *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959) 23 May 1953

"Syria Driving a hard oil Bargain: Western fears for future of Pipeline" *The Price*, M. Philips, MP "Syrian Opposition to Zionism Unchanging" *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959) 31 Oct 1953

"Driving a hard oil bargain: Western fears for future of pipeline", *The Manchester Guardian*, (1901-1959) 19 November 1955

"Warning to Israel", *Manchester Guardian*, (1901-1959) 16 December 1955

"A New Policy for ME? Foreign Office Conference Today" *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959) 04 Jan 1956

"Wooing Jordan away from the West" *The Manchester Guardian*, (1901-1959); 12 January 1956

"French divergence on Baghdad Pact" *The Times*, London, 28 January 1956

"'Crippling blow' to Egypt's Air Force" *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959) 02 Nov 1956

A Diplomatic Correspondent "Sabotage to oil Pipeline: Syria held responsible" *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959) 06 Nov 1956

A Diplomatic Correspondent "blow to Bagdad Pact" *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959) 10 Nov 1956

A Diplomatic Correspondent "Shattering Blow to Br: Position in the Middle East" *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959) 12 Nov 1956

A Diplomatic Correspondent "Soviet Arms in Egypt: Technicians & Advisers Also" *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959) 12 Nov 1956

A Diplomatic Correspondent "Jordan to end Pact" *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959) 28 Nov 1956

"Support for Baghdad Pact Nations" *The Times*, London 29 Nov 1956

"US voices Concern to Syria" *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959) 29 Nov 1956

"US oil for western Europe" *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959) 01 Dec 1956

"Reasons for America's Decision to be More Friendly" *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959) 01 Dec 1956

A Diplomatic Correspondent "Russia alleges western plot to invade Syria" *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959) 01 Dec 1956

Cooke, Alistair "No threat of war' from Syria" *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959) 04 Dec 1956

"Franco-Brit Agreement on Suez" *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959) 04 Dec 1956

"Syria & Iraq" *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959) 05 Dec 1956

"Syria & Jordan warned: Cutting oil supplies" *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)* 19 Dec 1956

"US initiative needed: British support" *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)* 19 Dec 1956

"Conspiracy Charges in Syria" *The Times, London* 24 Dec 1956

"Britain's part in Baghdad Pact" *The Times, London* 22 January 1957

"Gradual Thawing by Syria" *The Times, London* 8 March 1957

"Closer to Bagdad: New US link with Pact" *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)* 23 March 1957

"Syria ready to talk with Britain" *The Times, London* 18 May 1957

"Syria Making Overtures to the West" *The Times, London* 20 May 1957

Adams, Michael "Middle East After Suez" *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)* 26 July 1957

"Anglo-US talks on Syria" *The Times, London* 20 August 1957

"Brit Anxiety over Syria" *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)* 10 September 1957

"Col. Nasser promises to help Syria" *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)* 10 September 1957

"Syria a problem for the West" *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)* 21 September 1957

"Unfounded Fears over Syria?" *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)* 05 October 1957

Jenkins, Peter, "Lord Carrington's new Priorities" *The Guardian (1959 - 2003)* 05 March 1980

Keel, Paul "Nine fell for PLO propaganda, says Callaghan" *The Guardian (1959 - 2003)* 17 June 1980

Safire W, "British – American affinity could become ruffled, Lord Carrington cast a long shadow", *Lawrence Journal-World*, 23 Feb 1981

Palmer, John "Arab disillusion threatens dialogue with EEC" *The Guardian (1959 - 2003)* 29 September 1981

Keatley, Patrick "Britain cautious on Sinai peace force." *The Guardian* (1959-2003), 22 October 1981

Kramer, Michael, "The US and Israel: it will get worse" *New York Magazine* 11 January 1982

"Israel condemned by PM", *The Guardian*, (1959 – 2003) 09 June 1982

Political Staff, "Israel must withdraw" *The Guardian* (1959 – 2003) 23 June 1982

Palmer, John "EEC call for Palestinians in peace negotiations" *The Guardian* (1959 - 2003) 30 June 1982

Palmer, John "Europeans may be back tracking on Sinai force" *The Guardian* (1959 - 2003) 29 October 1981

Palmer, John "Europe under pressure to join in peacekeeping" *The Guardian* (1959 - 2003) 20 September 1982

Keatley, Patrick "Arab trip planned by Pym" *The Guardian* (1959 - 2003) 17 September 1982

Keatley, Patrick "Pym to visit Syria" *The Guardian* (1959 - 2003) 08 October 1982

Stanhope, Henry "Pym mission to Syria" *The Times*, London 08 October 1982

MacManus James "A tilt toward peace" *The Guardian* (1959 – 2003) 08 October 1982

MacManus, James "A tilt toward peace" *The Guardian* (1959 - 2003) 09 October 1982

BBC Summary of World Broadcasts "Palestinian Affairs; Francis Pym's Statement after Visit to Syria" Part 4 The Middle East & Africa; A. THE MIDDLE EAST; ME/7155/A/1 13 October 1982

McManus, James "Pym Attacks 'aggressive' Israelis" *The Guardian* (1959 - 2003) 13 October 1982

Langdon J, Keatley P "Arabs place blame for rift on Thatcher" *The Guardian* (1959 – 2003) 08 January 1983

Powell, Enoch "Bad days for foreign policy" *The Guardian*, (1959 – 2003) 17 September 1983

Booth Cathy "Anger & amazement in Middle East at US raid" *United Press International* 04 December 1983

Aitken, Ian "Commons rebellion over Lebanon force" *The Guardian* (1959 – 2003) 06 December 1983

"No unilateral withdrawal of British Troops" *The Guardian* (1959 - 2003), 06 December 1983

Comment "What are we doing in Lebanon?" *The Guardian* (1959 - 2003) 08 December 1983

Langdon, Julia "Thatcher insists UK force stays in Lebanon" *The Guardian* (1959 – 2003) 08 December 1983

Black Ian "Whitehall's' uneasy role" *The Guardian* (1959 – 2003) 20 December 1983

MacManus, James "Syria to set high price on Lebanon peace" *The Guardian* (1959 – 2003) 13 January 1984

Apple Jr, R W, "US & Britain discuss alternatives for Lebanon" *The New York Times*, 21 January 1984

Dobbes Michael "Europeans look for ways to get out of Lebanon" *The Washington Post* 08 February 1984

Fisk Robert "Assad the great manipulator/ the role of Syria's president in the TWA hostage crisis" *The Times* London 05 July 1985

"Foreign Office wilts as the heat goes on" *The Guardian*, (1959 – 2003) 15 October 1985

Mason David "Thatcher against sanctions or military action against Libya" *Associated Press*, 10 January 1986

Pick, Hella "UK to put Pressure on Syria" *The Guardian* (1959 - 2003) 01 March 1986

Anonymous, "Syria leads Arab world in opposition" *The Guardian* (1959 – 2003) 14 April 1986

Flint, Julie "Britons lie low in Beirut as hostages die" *The Guardian*, (1959 – 2003) 18 April 1986

Dowden, Richard "British hostages shot – 400 saved in jet/ Arab terrorists retaliate against US bombing raid" *The Times*, London, 18 April 1986

Travis, Alan "Hostage position was considered before strike" *The Guardian*, (1959 – 2003) 18 April 1986

Naughtie, James "Thatcher facing attack backlash" *The Guardian* (1959 - 2003) 18 April 1986

Be Anthony "Thatcher vow never to bow to terrorism/ Brit Premier will not rule out possible future support of UN military action" *The Times*, London 28 April 1986

Carvel, John "Thatcher toughens Stand on terrorism/ Brit premier calls on other nations to halt arms contracts with Libya" *The Guardian* (1959 - 2003) 28 April 1986

Brummer, Alex "Reagan jubilant at terrorism accord" *The Guardian*, (1959 - 2003) 08 May 1986

Ashford, Nicholas "Syrians deny El Al plot link" *The Times*, London 09 May 1986

"Parliament: All committed to fighting terrorism / Tokyo summit" *The Times*, London 09 May 1986

Travis, Alan "Britain 'will act' warning to Syria over terrorism" *The Guardian* (1959 - 2003) 13 May 1986

Comment "Mr Assad in the firing line" *The Guardian*, (1959 - 2003) 08 May 1986

Hirst, David "Behind the Syrian lines" *The Guardian*, (1959 - 2003) 12 May 1986

Simmons Michael "Syrians Expel Three British Diplomats" *The Guardian* (1959 - 2003) 12 May 1986

Travis, Alan "Britain considers moves against Syria" *The Guardian*, (1959 - 2003) 13 May 1986

"Parliament: British threat to take further measures against Syria/Terrorism" *The Times*, London 13 May 1986

"The Trouble with Syria/ Possible action against Syrian involvement in Terrorism" *The Guardian*, (1959 - 2003) 14 May 1986

Comment, "Mrs Thatcher breaks new territory", *The Guardian*, (1959 - 2003) 24 May 1986

Young, Karen "Britain implicated Syria in El Al Bomb Attempt", *LA Times*, 15 July 1986

Lederer, Edith "Britain becomes first Western power to break with Syria" *Associated Press*, 24 October 1986 <http://www.apnewsarchive.com/1986/Br->

Becomes-First-Western-Power-To-Break-With-Syria/id-9435c07c4998dc982ae14db59366c995 (Accessed November 2013)

Black, Ian "Aircraft banned in retaliation" *The Guardian*, (1959 – 2003) 25 October 1986

Pick, Hella "Determined Thatcher calls Assad to account" *The Guardian* 25 October 1986

Murtagh, Peter "The front man for Damascus/ The role of Nezar Hindawi in the Syrian-inspired El Al bomb plot" *The Guardian* (1959 – 2003) 25 October 1986

Evans, Michael "The Hindawi case: How MI5 bugged the embassy for years" *The Times* London 25 October 1986

Tendler, Stewart "Damascus and the European Bombings" *The Times*, London 25 October 1986

White, M "Reagan withdraws ambassador in support of Brit move" *The Guardian*, (1959 – 2003) 26 October 1986

"Thatcher forced through tough stance" *The Guardian*, (1959 – 2003) 26 October 1986

Brown, Derek "Europe refuses to back Howe on Syria" *The Guardian*, (1959 – 2003) 28 October 1986

Black, Ian "Suspicion & mystery in Hindawi's wake" *The Guardian*, (1959 – 2003) 28 October 1986

Brummer, Alex "US ready to take limited steps against Damascus" *The Guardian*, (1959 – 2003) 28 October 1986

Comment, "The act that won't come together" *The Guardian*, (1959 – 2003) 29 October 1986

Pick, Hella "Thatcher takes EEC to task on Syria" *The Guardian* (1959 – 2003) 29 October 1986

Owen, Richard "Whitehall accused of arrogance/EEC refuses to back Britain over Syria" *The Times*, London 29 October 1986

Page, Campbell "France hints at new line on terror" *The Guardian*, (1959 – 2003) 29 October 1986

Travis, Alan "Howe Pledges veto against EEC £100m aid to Syria" *The Guardian*, (1959 – 2003) 29 October 1986

"The Hindawi Case: Syrian Connexions" *The Institute for Counter Terrorism*, 01 November 1986, <http://www.ict.org.il/> (accessed 22 June 2009)

Beeston, Nicholas "Syria and Britain complete their rift" *The Times*, London 01 November 1986

"The secret web that Syria blew", *The Guardian*, (1959 – 2003) 07 November 1986

Brown, Derek "Europe backs sanctions against Syria", *The Guardian*, (1959 – 2003) 11 November 1986

Young, Hugo "Commentary: A terrible price to pay for the love of Ronnie/ The political relationship between British Premier Thatcher & US President Reagan", *The Guardian*, (1959 – 2003) 18 November 1986

Beeston, Nicholas "Whitehall admits it has upgraded diplomatic presence in Damascus" *The Times*, London, 16 February 1987

Palmer John "UK denies Syria deal over Waite" *The Guardian* (1959 – 2003) 17 February 1987

Palmer John "Thatcher pressed to renew Syria tie" *The Guardian* (1959 – 2003) 08 April 1987

Sharma, Y "Syria: Britain ready to lift ban on EEC-Syria contacts" *Inter Vol. 110 Issue 9 Press Service* 29 June 1987

Palmer John, "EEC aid to Syria resumes", *The Guardian* 08 September 1987

Fisk, Robert "Freedom for British hostages linked to UK – Syria relations" *The Times*, 18 September 1987

Flint, Julie "Hostage prospects bleak without political deals" *The Guardian* (1959 – 2003) 02 December 1987

Pick, Hella "Thatcher sticks to hard line on deals with terrorists" *The Guardian* (1959 – 2003) 06 May 1988

Walker Christopher "Syria accuses Thatcher of causing rift" *The Times*, London 27 January 1989

Palmer John "Britain forfeits allies' sympathy" *The Guardian* (1959 - 2003) 22 Feb 1990

"Purity of Progress" *The Guardian*, (1959 – 2003) 12 April 1990

Walker, Christopher "Syrian role in the hostage story puts onus on Britain" *The Times*, London 24 April 1990

Simmons, M, White, M, Palmer, J "Britain willing to talk on hostages", *The Guardian*, (1959 – 2003) 04 May 1990

Norton-Taylor, Richard, Simmons, Michael "Severed links hinders release efforts" *The Guardian*, (1959 - 2003) 04 May 1990

"Foreign Office may restore relations with Syria" *The Independent*, 08 May 1990

Tran Mark "US seeks help of Syria & Iran" *The Guardian*, (1959 - 2003) 10 August 1990

"Dealing with Syria" *The Times*, London 21 August 1990

White, Michael "Britain may seek renewed links with Iran & Syria" *The Guardian* (1959 - 2003) 27 August 1990

McEwen, Andrew "Hurd consents to EC opening aid talks with Syria", *The Times*, 20 September 1990

Sheridan, Michael "Crisis in the Gulf: Syria 'ready to renew ties with Britain', Douglas Hurd will this weekend learn of Syrian interests in the release of British Hostages" *The Independent* 12 October 1990

"British Minister visits Syria" *United Press*, 28 May 1997

Matar, F "Syria vests hopes in Labor Britain", *Mideast Mirror*, 14 July 1997

Binyon, Michael "Britain to press EU for code on arms exports", *The Times*, London 02 January 1998

Freedman, Lawrence, "Will the buck stop with Blair" *The Times*, London, 21 April 1998

Walker, Martin "Anger as arms code is diluted" *The Guardian*, (1959 – 2003) 26 May 1998

Norton-Taylor, Richard "Ethical arms policy in disarray" *The Guardian*, (1959 – 2003) 24 June 1998

Cornwell, Rupert "No let-up in UK arms sales abroad" *The Independent* 24 June 1998

"Ethics, Arms, Cook & Blair", *The Scotsman*, 25 June 1998

Comment, "Why take such a defensive view of foreign policy?" *The Independent*, 09 July 1998

Wallace, William "Spent Force; Following the Americans up and down the Gulf scarcely justifies us spending billions on new aircraft carriers", *The Guardian*, (1959 – 2003) 09 July 1998

Abrams, Fran "Cook's ethical policy 'was watered down'" *The Independent*, 19 September 1998

Binyon, Michael "Ethical Foreign Policy eroded by Whitehall" *The Times*, London 23 September 1998

McEwan, Andrew "MPs urge restoration of ties with Syria" *The Times*, London 21 October 1998

Joseph, "Is callousness preferable to hypocrisy?" *The Times*, London 27 January 1999

Brown, Paul "Britain Backs controversial dam; £1bn Turkish scheme threatens Kurd lands" *The Guardian* (1959 – 2003) 01 March 1999

Brown, Paul "Britain is warned not to fund Turkish Dam" *The Guardian*, (1959 – 2003) 08 May 1999

Norton-Taylor, Richard "In the swamp: Robin Cook should pull Britain out of the arms trade altogether" *The Guardian*, (1959 – 2003) 02 September 1999

Ridley, Yvonne "Focus: The Arms Trade – Selling death in the suburbs" *The Independent* 05 September 1999

Castle, Stephen "UK arms export figures give lie to 'ethical' policy" *The Independent* 01 October 1999

Brown, Paul, Maguire, Kevin "Ethics policy in shreds as dam approved" *The Guardian* (1959 – 2003) 22 December 1999

Sadeh, Sharon "A Quiet Victory" *The Times*, London 16 December 1999

Davis, Douglas "Blair admits major Barak contributor is personal envoy to Mideast" *Jerusalem Post*, 24 February 2000

Brown, Paul "Dam could lose £200m aid", *The Guardian* (1959 – 2003) 04 July 2001

Ahmed Kamel "UK drops Turkish dam plan" *The Guardian* (1959 – 2003) 04 July 2001

Whitaker, Brian "Listed as an enemy, wooed as a friend in a crisis" *The Guardian* 31 October 2001

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/October/31/afghanistan.terrorism4>
(Accessed 06 June 2012)

Wintour, Patrick "Blair undertakes mission to Middle East", *The Guardian*, 31 October 2001

<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2001/October/31/uk.September> 111
(Accessed 10 June 2012)

Wintour, Patrick "Blair gets a public lecture on the harsh realities of the Middle East" 01 November 2001,

<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2001/November/01/afghanistan.israel>
(Accessed 06 June 2012)

Brogan, Benedict "Assad hits at Blair over war deaths" *The Telegraph*, 01 November 2001

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/1361190/Assad-hits-at-Blair-over-war-deaths.html> (accessed 11 October 2012)

Wintour, Patrick "Blair ponders diplomatic failure" *The Guardian*, 02 November 2001,

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/November/02/September11.israel2>
(Accessed 10 June 2012)

Nicholas Watt "No regrets over trip to Syria, says no 10" 03 November

2001 <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2001/November/03/israel.Septemberember11> (Accessed 12 November 2009)

Whitaker, Brian "Misplaced politics in Damascus" *The Guardian*, 03 November 2001

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/November/05/worlddispatch.Septemberember11> (Accessed 10 June 2012)

Bone, James "Bush & Blair win crucial Syria vote" 9 November 2002

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/article1985665.ece> (Accessed 12 November 2009)

Beeson, Richard "Blair attempts to woo Assad with London summit" *The Times*, 29 November 2002

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/article1986146.ece> (Accessed 20 May 2010)

MacAskill, Ewen, White, Michael "Assad told to cut links with terror" *The Guardian* 16 December 2002,

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/December/16/israel.foreignpolicy>
(Accessed 19 November 2014)

La Guardia, Anthony "Blair stakes reputation on dialogue with 'rogue' state" *The Telegraph* 16 December 2002,

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/1416281/Blair-stakes-reputation-on-dialogue-with-rogue-state.html> (accessed 20 May 2010)

Steele, Jonathan, Whitaker, Brian "US missile kills five Syrians on bus" *The Guardian*, 25 March 2003
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/March/25/iraq.syria> (Accessed May 2010)

Steele, Jonathan "Assad predicts defeat for invasion force" *The Guardian*, 28 March 2003 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/March/28/iraq.syria> (Accessed 20 May 2010)

"Ministers face probe on UK arms for Syria", *The Observer*, 06 April 2003
<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/April/06/uk.armstrade> (Accessed March 2004)

Tempest, Matthew "No Plans to invade Syria, insists Blair" *The Guardian* 12 April 2003 <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/April/14/foreignpolicy.uk2> (Accessed 20 May 2010)

Webster, Philip "Blair dampens speculation that Syria is next" *The Times* 15 April 2003,
<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/middleeast/iraq/article1989567.ece> (Accessed 20 May 2010)

Green, Andrew "Comment: Why Syria is America's new target" *The Guardian* 17 April 2003
<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/April/17/foreignpolicy.syria> (Accessed May 2010)

Whitaker, Brian "Suspicious Sanctions", *The Guardian*, 17 May 2004
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/may/17/syria.usa> (Accessed 10 June 2012)

"A UN report turns the spotlight on Syria" *The Guardian*, 11 October 2004

"Terrorism: Questions About a Damascus Connection" Jill Smolowe (21 June 2005) <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/ /0,9171,1075211-1,00.html#ixzz1MnhFRFmA> 9 (Accessed May 2010)

Wintour, Patrick, MacAskill, Ewan "Downing Street and Foreign Office at odds on Lebanon" *The Guardian*, 21 July 2006,
<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2006/July/21/syria.israelandthepalestinians> (Accessed May 2010)

Hooper, John, MacAskill, Ewan, Steele, Jonathan "Frustration as summit fails to end conflict" *The guardian* 27 July 2006
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/July/27/syria.israel2>

Tisdall, Simon "Playing second fiddle in Syria" *The Guardian*, 01 November 2006,
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/November/01/tisdallbriefing.politics>

Jones, George Moore, Malcolm, Bishop, Patrick "Pressure on Blair to push for ceasefire in Lebanon" *The Telegraph*, 27 July 2007
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1524957/Pressure-on-Blair-to-push-for-ceasefire-in-Lebanon.html> (Accessed May 2010)

Beeston, Richard, Philip, Catherine, Angus, Oliver "Britain re-establishes high-level intelligence links with Syria" *The Times* 19 November 2008,
<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/middleeast/article2604008.ece>
(Accessed 19 November 2008)

Macleod, Hugh "Syria to share intelligence on terrorism after Miliband visit" *The Guardian* 20 November 2008,
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/November/20/syria-security-terrorism-miliband-deal> (Accessed November 2008)

Macintyre, Donal "Is Syria getting ready to come in from the cold?" *The Independent* 04 April 2009

Black, Ian "Assad keeps Europe waiting" *The Guardian*, 30 March 2010,
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/March/30/syria-assad-keeps-europe-waiting>, (Accessed March 2010)

Jones, Tim "Is the G8 supporting or undermining the Arab Spring?" *The Guardian*, 03 June 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2011/June/03/g8-arab-spring> (Accessed 03 June 2011)

Rawnsley, Andrew "Mr Cameron gets a lesson on the need for a proper foreign policy" *The Observer*, 27 February 2011
<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/feb/27/andrew-rawnsley-cameron-foreign-policy> (Accessed 27 February 2011)

Norton-Taylor, Richard "Britain has allowed its weapons to be used for internal repression", *The Guardian*, 05 April 2011
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/April/05/britain-let-weapons-be-used-for-repression>(Accessed 05 April 2011)

Pickard, Jim, O'Docherty, John "Arms sales to Arab States under fire", *FT.com*, 05 April 2011, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/7b433662-5ee0-11e0-a2d7-00144feab49a.html#axzz3Q0pG4BSW> (Accessed 14 November 2014)

Norton-Taylor, Richard "Britain has allowed its weapons to be used for internal repression, MPs say", 05 April 2011

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/April/05/britain-let-weapons-be-used-for-repression> (Accessed 04 November 2012)

Seale, Patrick "If Assad falls, we will see all the region's alliances unravel" Comment is Free, *The Guardian*, 11 April 2011
<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/April/11/assad-falls-region-alliances-unravel> (Accessed April 2011)

Swanson, David "Libya: another neocon war", *The Guardian* 21 April 2011
<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2011/April/21/libya-muammar-gaddafi> (Accessed 21 April 2011)

Mulholland, Borger, Black "Not too late for Syria to do the right thing" *The Guardian* 27 April 2011 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/April/27/not-too-late-syria-do-right-thing-hague> (Accessed 27 April 2011)

Booth, Robert, Quinn, Ben "Syrian Officers received training in Britain", *The Guardian*, 27 April 2011
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/April/27/syrian-officers-trained-in-britain> (Accessed 27 April 2011)

Black, "Six Syrians who helped Bashar al Assad keep an iron grip after his father's death" *The Guardian* 28 April 2011
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/April/28/syria-bashar-assad-regime-members> (Accessed 28 April 2011)

Jenkins, Simon "In Libya, Britain has slid into every interventionist fallacy", *The Guardian*, 17 May 2011
<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/may/17/bombing-libya-gaddafi-exit-strategy> (Accessed May 2011)

Doward, Jamie, Stewart, Philip "UK training Saudi forces used to crush Arab spring", *The Observer*, 28 May 2011
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/may/28/uk-training-saudi-troops> (accessed 29 May 2011)

"Government rules out military intervention in Syria", *The Telegraph*, 01 August 2011
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/8675735/Government-rules-out-military-intervention-in-Syria.html> (Accessed 01 August 2011)

Blomfield, "William Hague says no possibility of military intervention" *The Telegraph* 01 August 2011
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/8674396/Syria-William-Hague-says-no-possibility-of-military-intervention.html> (Accessed 01 August 2011)

Stratton, "Assad should go for the sake of the Syrian people" *The Guardian* 22 August 2011 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/August/22/assad-go-syria-nick-clegg> (Accessed 22 August 2011)

Norton-Taylor, Richard "London arms fair faces protest by anti-weapons trade campaigners" *The Guardian* 12 September 2011 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/September/12/london-arms-fair-protest> (Accessed 14 November 2014)

Norton-Taylor, Richard "Bahrain receives military equipment from UK despite violent crackdown" *The Guardian*, 14 February 2012 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/feb/14/bahrain-military-equipment-uk> (Accessed 14 February 2012)

Black, Ian "Arabs are 'losing faith' in America: lessons from Lebanon 1982" *The Guardian* 04 Jan 2013 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/on-the-middle-east/2013/jan/04/lebanon-israel-palestinians-thatcher-reagan> (accessed 11/12/2015)

US shale oil supply shock shifts global power balance" BBC News, 14 May 2013 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-22524597> (Accessed 14 May 2013)

Borger, Mahmood "EU decision to lift Syrian oil sanctions boosts jihadist groups" *The Guardian*, 19 May 2013 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/19/eu-syria-oil-jihadist-al-qaida> (Accessed November 2014)

Traynor, "UK forces EU to lift embargo on Syria rebel arms" *The Guardian* 28 May 2013 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/28/uk-forced-eu-embargo-syria-rebel-arms>

Roberts, Dan Borger Julian "Syria crisis: US hold talks as concern grows over chemical weapons claims" *The Guardian* 23 August 2013

"Syria to allow UN to inspect 'chemical weapons' site", BBC News 25 August 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23833912> (accessed 25 August 2013)

Shehadi, Nadim "How Al-Assad used chemical weapons to poison debate on Syria" CNN 26 August 2013 <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/08/26/opinion/syria-chemical-weapons-opinion/>

"Syria Crisis: Diplomacy has not worked, says William Hague", BBC News, 26 August 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-23840065> (accessed 26 August)

"Syria: UK draws up contingency military plans", BBC News, 27 August 2013 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-23845765> (accessed 27 August 2013)

Tebbit, Norman "I hope I can support the government tomorrow, but I'm not yet persuaded to do so", *The Telegraph*, 28 August 2013, <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/normantebbit/100232856/syria-i-hope-i-can-support-the-government-tomorrow-but-im-not-yet-persuaded-to-do-so/> (Accessed 20 November 2014)

Rozenberg, Joshua "Syria intervention: it may not be wise. But using force may be lawful", *The Guardian*, 28 August 2013 <http://www.theguardian.com/law/2013/August/28/syria-intervention-force-lawful> (Accessed August 2013)

"Syria Crisis: David Cameron says 'world should not stand by'" BBC News, 28 August 2013 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-23864016> (accessed 27 August 2013)

Nelson, "David Cameron failed the test of trust and paid the price" *The telegraph* 29 August 2013 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/10273841/David-Cameron-failed-the-test-of-trust-and-paid-the-price.html> (Accessed 29 August 2013)

Helm, Toby "Poll finds 60% of British public oppose UK military action against Syria" *The Guardian* 31 August 2013 <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/August/31/poll-british-military-action-syria> (accessed 01/12/2014)

Milmo, Cahal, McSmith, Andy, Kumar, Nikhil "Revealed: UK Government let British company export nerve gas chemicals to Syria" *The Independent* 2 September 2013 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/revealed-uk-government-let-british-company-export-nerve-gas-chemicals-to-syria-8793642.html> (Accessed 02 September 2013)

Black, Ian "Did Syrian rebels have sarin gas?" *The Guardian* 03 September 2013 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/September/02/syria-crisis-questions-answered> (Accessed 03 September 2013)

Platt, Gareth "Syria: Why Cameron should kill off the UK-US 'Special Relationship'" 06 September 2013 <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/special-relationship-britain-america-barack-obama-david-504331> (Accessed September 2013)

Tisdall, Simon, LeBlond, Josie "Assad did not order Syria chemical weapons attack, says German press" *The Guardian*, 09 September 2013 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/September/08/syria-chemical-weapons-not-assad-bild>

Bright, Martin "Why did Alastair Burt lose his job?" *The JC.com*, 18 October 2013 <http://www.thejc.com/comment-and-debate/columnists/112449/why-did-alastair-burt-lose-his-job> (accessed December 2014)

Wintour, Patrick, Watt, Nicholas "Alistair Burt reveals anger over Syria vote at Westminster" *The Guardian*, 30 December 2013 <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/December/30/alistair-burt-anger-syria-westminster> (Accessed 15 December 2013)

Ross "Poll: Majority back military action against Islamic State" *The Telegraph* 06 September 2014 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/11079549/Poll-Majority-back-military-action-against-Islamic-State.html> (Accessed 14 December 2014)

Rogers, "Poll: British people still back combat operations abroad" *The Telegraph* 08 December 2014 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/11276077/Poll-The-British-people-still-back-combat-operations-abroad.html> (Accessed 14 December 2014)

Peter Kellner, "Analysis: sharp fall in support for air strikes within Syria" *YouGov.uk*, 02 December 2015 <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2015/12/02/analysis-sharp-fall-support-air-strikes-syria/> (accessed 01/01/2015)

Books

Alden, Chris & Aran, Amnon, *Foreign Policy Analysis: New approaches*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2012

Ashton N, "A rear guard action: Harold MacMillan and the Making of British Foreign Policy, 1957 – 63" in Otte, T.G. (ed) *The Makers of British Foreign Policy: From Pitt to Thatcher*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002 pp238-260

Beach, Derek *Analysing Foreign Policy*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan 2012

Bell, Phillip M H, *France and Britain 1940-1994: the Long Separation* Abingdon: Routledge

Blair, Tony, *Tony Blair: A Journey*, London: Arrow Books, 2011

Blanford, Nicholas *Killing Mr Lebanon*, London: I.B. Taurus & Co, 2009

Campbell, Alistair, *The Blair Years*, London: Arrow Books

Carlton, D *Britain and the Suez Crisis*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1998

- Carol, Stephen *Understanding the Volatile and Dangerous Middle East: A Comprehensive Analysis*, Bloomington: iUniverse 2015
<https://books.google.co.uk> (accessed 01/03/016)
- Clarke, Michael "The Policy Making Process" in M Smith, S Smith, B White (Eds), *British Foreign Policy: Tradition, Change and Transformation*, London: Unwin Hyman Ltd, 1988
- Clarke Michael, "Foreign Policy" in A Seldon (ed) *Blair's Britain 1997 – 2001*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007 p593 - 614
- Cleveland, William, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (3rd Edition), Oxford: Westview Press, 2004
- Cogan, Charles, *French Negotiating Behaviour*, Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 2003
- Coles, John, *Making Foreign Policy*, London: John Murray (Publishers) Ltd, 2000
- Cox, Michael, Oliver, Tim "Security Policy in an Insecure World" in P Dunleavy, R Hefferman, P Cowley, C Hay (Eds), *Developments in British Politics*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan
- Cradock, Percy, *In pursuit of British interests*, London: John Murray (Publisher) Limited, 1997
- Curtis, Mark *Web of Deceit*, London: Vintage, 2003
- Dawn, Clarence E "King Abdullah's project of greater Syria: An historical appreciation" in Beshara, Adel (ed) *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood* Abingdon: Routledge 2011 p304
- Dickie, John *The New Mandarins: How British Foreign Policy Works*, London: IB Tauris & Co Ltd, 2007
- Edwards Geoffrey "Britain" in D Allen, A Pijpers (Eds) *European Foreign Policy-Making and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1984 pp 47 -59
- Evans, E, *Thatcher and Thatcherism* (2nd Ed), Taylor & Francis Kindle Edition
- Frankel, Joseph British Foreign Policy 1945 – 1973 London: Oxford University Press, 1975
- Fieldhouse, D K, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East 1914 – 1958*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006

Freedman, Lawrence & Clarke, Michael (eds), *Britain in the World* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991

Fromkin, David *A Peace to end all Peace*, New York: First Owl Books Edition, 2001

Gaunson, AB *The Anglo-French Clash in Lebanon and Syria, 1940 – 45*, New York: PalgraveMacmillan 1987

George, Allen, *Syria: Neither Bread nor Freedom* London: Zed Books, 2003

Greenwood, Sean "Ernest Bevin: Reluctant Cold Warrior" in Otte, T.G. (ed) *The Makers of British Foreign Policy: From Pitt to Thatcher*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002 pp190-218

Greilsammer, I, Weiler J "European Political Cooperation and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: An Israeli perspective" in D Allen, A Pijpers (Eds) *European Foreign Policy-Making and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1984, pp47 – 59

Harvey(ed), *The World Crisis after Iraq*, London: Constable & Robinson Ltd, 2008

Hefferman, "The Blair Style of Central Government" in P Dunleavy, R Hefferman, P Cowley, C Hay (Eds), *Developments in British Politics*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006

Hill, Christopher, *The Changing Politics of Foreign Policy*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003

Hollis, Rosemary, *Britain and the Middle East in the 9/11 era (Chatham House Papers)*, London: John Wiley & Sons, 2010

Hinnebusch, Raymond, *Syria: Revolution from Above*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2002

Hinnebusch, Raymond "The Foreign Policy of Syria" in R Hinnebusch & A Ehteshami (eds) *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States* London: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc 2002 pp141 - 166

Hourani, Albert, *A history of the Arab Peoples* London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 1991

Howe, Geoffrey "British Foreign Policy: The Folly of Iraq" in R Harvey (Ed), *The World Crisis after Iraq*, London: Constable & Robinson Ltd, 2008 pp65 - 74

Hudson, Valerie M, *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and contemporary theory*, Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc 2007

Kavanagh, Denise "The Blair Premiership" in A Seldon (ed) *Blair's Britain 1997 – 2001*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007 pp3-15

Kampfner, John, *Blair's Wars* London: The Free Press, 2004

Kettell, Steven *Dirty Politics? New Labour, British Democracy and Invasion of Iraq*, London: Zed Books Ltd, 2006

Leveret, Flynt, *Inheriting Syria*, Washington DC: The Brooking Institution, 2005

Levy, Lord Michael, *A Question of Honour*, London: Simon & Schuster Kindle Edition, 2008

Levey Zach, Podeh, Elie (Eds) *Britain and the Middle East: From imperial power to junior partner*, Sussex Academic Press, Brighton, 2008

Lobell, S, Ripsman, N, Taliaferro, J, *Neoclassical Realism, the State and Foreign Policy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009

Louis, Wm Roger, *British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-51*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984

Meyer, Armin *Quiet diplomacy: From Cairo to Tokyo in the Twilight of imperialism* Lincoln: iUniverse

Merkel, Peter, *The Rift Between America and Old Europe: The Distracted Eagle* Abingdon: Routledge 2005

Milton –Edwards, Beverly *Contemporary Politics in the Middle East*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006

Northedge, FS *Descent from Power: British foreign policy* London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1974

Parsons, Sir Anthony "The Middle East" in P Byrd (ed) *British Foreign Policy under Thatcher*, Oxford: Philip Allan Publishers Limited, 1988

Persson, *The EU and the Israeli – Palestinian Conflict 1971 – 2013: In pursuit of a just peace*, London: Lexington Books, 2015 p83

Rahmann, Timo The Al-Asads and the dog that did not bark. EU Democracy Promotion in the Middle East - The case of Syria, GRIN Verlag – Publisher, - 16 January 2006
https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=W93aNZFOArMC&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&authuser=0&hl=en_GB&pg=GBS.PA3 (Accessed March 2011)

Rathmell, Andrew, *Secret War in the Middle East*, London: IB Tauris & Co Ltd, 2014

- Rentoul, John, *Tony Blair: Prime Minister*, London: Warner Books, 2001
- Rey, Matthieu "'Fighting colonialism' vs 'non-alignment'" in Miskovic & Fisher-Tine, *The Nonaligned movement and the Cold War* Abingdon: Routledge 2014 pp163 -183
- Reynolds, David *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the 20th Century (2nd Ed)*, Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd, 2000
- Ross, Carne, *Independent Diplomat*, London: C Hurst & Co (Publishers) Ltd,
- Rubin, Barry, *The Truth about Syria*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007
- Sachar, Howard M, *Europe Leaves the Middle East*, London: Allen Lane, 1972
- Sampson, Anthony, *Who runs this place?* London: John Murray (Publishers), 2005
- Sanders, Dave *Losing an Empire finding a role* Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan,1990
- Schneer, Jonathon, *The Balfour Declaration*, New York, Random House, 2010
- Schultz, Kirsten *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 1999
- Seale, Patrick, *The Struggle for Syria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1965
- Seale, Patrick, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East*, London: University of California Press Ltd, 1992
- Sedgewick, "Britain and the Middle East: In pursuit of eternal interests" in J Covarrubias, T Lansford (Eds), *Strategic Interests in the Middle East: Opposition or Support for US Foreign Policy*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2007 p3 - 26
- Sharp, P "British Foreign Policy under Margaret Thatcher" in Otte (Ed) *The Makers of British Foreign Policy: From Pitt to Thatcher* 2002 pp261 - 285
- Short, Clare, *An Honourable Deception? New Labour, Iraq and the misuse of power*, London: Simon & Shuster UK Ltd, 2005
- Smith, Charles *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004
- Smith, S. Hadfield, A. & Dunne, T (eds) *Foreign Policy: Theories Actors Cases (2nd ed)*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012

Smith, Michael "Britain and the United States: Beyond the Special Relationship" in P Byrd (ed) *British Foreign Policy under Thatcher*, Oxford: Philip Allan Publishers Limited, 1988

Straw, Jack, *Last Man Standing*, London: MacMillan, 2012

Thornhill, Michael "Britain and the politics of the Arab League, 1943 – 50" in M Cohen, M Kolinshy (eds), *Demise of the British Empire in the Middle East*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1998 pp41-63

Tugendhat, Christopher, Wallace, William Options for British Foreign Policy London: Routledge 1988

Ware, Richard "Case Study II: the Libyan raid" in C Carstairs, R Ware (eds) *Parliament and International Relations* Buckingham: Oxford University Press, 1991 pp103-

Wieland, Carsten, *Syria at Bay*, London: C Hurst and Co (Publishers) Ltd, 2006

Williams, Paul, *British Foreign Policy under New Labour, 1997 – 2005*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005

Zeine, Zeine N, *The Struggle for Arab Independence*, Beirut: Khayat's, 1960

Zisser, Eyal "Britain and the Levant 1918 – 1946: A Missed Opportunity?" in Z Levey, E Podesh (Eds) *Britain and the Middle East: From imperial power to junior partner* Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2008 pp133 -151

Journals & Articles

Abbot, Chris, Slobba, John "The 'Blair Doctrine' and after: five years of humanitarian intervention" *Open Democracy*, 21 April 2004, https://www.opendemocracy.net/globalization-institutions_government/article_1857.jsp (Accessed March 2014)

Agha, Hussein & Khalidi, Ahmand *Syria and Iran: Rivalry and Cooperation (Chatham House Papers)* London: Pinter Publishers 1995

Allaf, Rime "Point of no return", *The World Today*, Nov 2004

Allaf, Rime "Open for Business: Syria's Quest for a political deal" Chatham House Briefing Paper MEP BP07/03, 2007

Allison, Roy "Russia and Syria: explaining alignment with a regime in crisis" *International affairs*, Vol 89 No 4 July 2013 pp 795 - 823

Ashton, Nigel "The Hijacking of a Pact: The Formation of the Baghdad Pact and Anglo-American Tensions in the Middle East, 1955-19582" *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Apr 1993 pp123-137

Asseburg, M "The EU and the Middle East Conflict: Tackling the Main Obstacle to Euro-Mediterranean Partnership" *Mediterranean Politics* 8:2-3 2003 pp 174 – 193

Barkawi, Tarak, Brighton, Shane "Brown Britain: post-colonial politics and grand strategy" *International Affairs* Vol 89 No 5 Sept 2013 Pp1109-1123

Biscop, Sven "The UK and European defence: leading or leaving?" *International Affairs*, Vol 88 No 6 Nov 2012 pp 1297 - 1313

Bluth, Christoph "The British Road to War: Blair, Bush and the Decision to invade Iraq" *International Affairs*, Vol 80 No 5 Oct 2004 pp 871 – 892

Bromley, Mark, Cooper, Neil, Holtman, Paul "The UN Arms Trade Treaty: arms export control, the human security agenda and the lessons of history", *International Affairs*, Vol 88 No5, Sept 2012, pp1029 – 1048

Bulley Dan, "The politics of ethical foreign policy: A responsibility to Protect whom?" *European Journal of International Relations*, 16 (3) March 2010 pp441-61

Byers "Agreeing to Disagree: security Council Resolution 1441 and Intentional ambiguity" *Global Governance*, 10, 2004 pp165 – 186

Bulmer-Thomas, Victor, "Blair's Foreign Policy and its Possible Successor(s)" Chatham House Briefing Paper, Dec 2006

Busch Nathan E, Pilat, Joseph F "Disarming Libya? A reassessment after the Arab Spring" *International Affairs*, Vol 89, no 2, mar 2013 pp451-475

Chandler, David "Rhetoric without responsibility: the attraction of 'ethical' foreign policy" *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 5, No. 3, August 2003, pp. 295–316

Colman, T UK Seeks to Strengthen Middle East Ties, *International Policy Digest*, 13 November 2012, <http://www.internationalpolicydigest.org/2012/11/13/uk-seeks-to-strengthen-middle-east-ties/> (Accessed 19 November 2014)

Chammari & Stainer "Guide to Human Rights in the Barcelona Process" Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network, Copenhagen, Sept 2000 <http://www.euromedrights.org/files/emhrn-publications/Guide-to-Human-Rights-in-the-Barcelona-Process.pdf>

Danchev, Alex 'Tony Blair's Vietnam: The Iraq War and the 'special relationship' in historical perspective' *Review of International Studies* (2007) 33 189 - 203

Daddow, Oliver "Tony's War? Blair, Kosovo and the interventionist impulse in British Foreign Policy" *International Affairs* 85:3, 2009 p550

Dickey, Christopher "Assad and His Allies: Irreconcilable Differences?" *Foreign Affairs*. Fall 1987 <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/42526/christopher-dickey/assad-and-his-allies-irreconcilable-differences> (Accessed 06 May 2012)

Dorstal, "The European Union and Economic Reform in Syria" Syrian and the Mediterranean Partnership, *St Andrews Papers on Contemporary Syrian Studies*, 2009 <https://ojs.st-andrews.ac.uk/index.php/syria/article/download/711/607> (accessed 19 November 2014)

Dyson, Stephen "Personality and Foreign Policy: Tony Blair's Iraq Decisions" *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 2, 2006 pp289 – 306

Eames, Anthony M "Margaret Thatcher's Diplomacy and the 1982 Lebanon War" in *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 25:4 fall 2014, pp27 - 44

Everts, Steven "The Ultimate test case: can Europe and America forge a joint strategy for the wider Middle East?" *International Affairs*, 80,4 2004 pp665-686

Gasgarth, Jamie Discourses and Ethics: The Social Construction of British Foreign Policy *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 2006 2, 325–341

Gilmore, Jonathan 'The uncertain merger of values and interests in UK foreign policy' *International Affairs* Vol 90 No 3 May 2014 pp 541 - 557

John Gray, 'Blair's project in retrospect' *International affairs*, Vol 80, No 1 (2004) pp 39 – 48

Fawcett Louise 'The Iraq War ten year on: assessing the fall out' *International Affairs*, Vol 89, no 2, mar 2013 pp325-343

Fisher, John, "Syria and Mesopotamia in British Middle Eastern Policy in 1919" *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol 34, No.2, 1998 pp129 – 170

Hall, Ian "'Building the Global Network?' the Reform of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office under New Labour" *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 2012

Halliday Fred "The Barcelona Process 10 years on" 11 Nov 2005 http://www.opendemocracy.net/globalization/barcelona_3019.jsp

Hewitt, B, Dickey, C, Clifton, T "Syria: Forgive and Forget?" *Newsweek*, Vol 10 Issue 9 31 August 1987

Hill Christopher "British Foreign Policy Priorities" *The World Today* Vol 66 No 4 April 2010 pp11 – 14

Hinnebusch, "Syrian Foreign Policy under Bashar al-Asad", *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, Vol 1, No 1, July 2009, pp7-26

Hollis, Rosemary, "The British Middle East Policy after the Election" *The World today*, Feb 2010, pp17 – 19

Kaplan, Fred Resolution Dissolution: How the U.S. and France botched U.N. Resolution 1441. *Slate* MARCH 6 2003
http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/war_stories/2003/03/resolution_dissolution.html (accessed November 2014)

Jones, M "The 'Preferred Plan': The Anglo American Working Group Report on Covert Action in Syria 1957" *Intelligence and National Security*, 19:3, 2004 pp401 – 415

Kitchen, Nicholas "Systemic pressures and domestic ideas: a neoclassical realist model of grand strategy formation" *Review of International Studies*, 36 (1) (2010) pp117-143

Kramer, Steven Philip "Blair's Britain after Iraq" *Foreign Affairs* 82:4_2003 pp90 – 104

Kfir, Isaac (2006) "British Middle East Policy: The Counterterrorism Dimension" *The Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol 10, No 4 <http://www.gloria-center.org/2006/12/kfir-2006-12-03/> (Accessed 09 November 2010)

Lalevee, Thierry "Thatcher takes lead against Syrian terrorism" *EIR*, Vol 13, No 44, Nov 1986

Lalevee, Thierry "Herr Genscher's message for Assad" *EIR* Volume 13, Number 20, May 16

Lane, Anne "Modernising the management of British diplomacy: towards a Foreign Office policy on policy-making?" *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 20:1, Mar 2007, pp179-193

Levey, Zach, "Britain's Middle East Strategy, 1950-52: General Brian Robertson and the 'Small' Arab States" *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Mar., 2004), pp. 58-79

Loveluck, "What's non-lethal about aid to the Syrian opposition?" *Foreign Policy* 20 September 2012, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/09/20/whats-non-lethal-about-aid-to-the-syrian-opposition/> (Accessed November 2014)

Ma'oz, Moshe "Syria's role in the region Mediator, Peacemaker, or Aggressor?" *A Century Foundation Report*, New York: The Century Foundation Inc, 2007 http://tcf.org/assets/downloads/tcf-maaz_syria.pdf, (accessed 19 November 2014)

Mathieson, David "Blair, human rights and the Barcelona Process, 13 January 2005, <http://www.fride.org/publication/172/blair,-human-rights-and-the-barcelona-process> (Accessed 06.02.2013)

Morris J "Libya and Syria: R2P and the Spectre of the Swinging Pendulum" *International Affairs* 89:5 August 2012 1265 - 1283

Niblett, Robin "Choosing between America and Europe: a new context for British foreign policy" *International Affairs*, 83:4 2007 pp 627 - 641

Payne, Rodger "Neorealists and Foreign Policy Debate: The Disconnect Between Theory and Practice" *Perspectives on Politics*, Volume 5 , Issue 03, September 2007, pp 503-514

Persson, Anders "To Manage, Resolve or Transform? The way forward for the EU in the Middle East Peace Process" *New Middle Eastern Studies* 1 (2011) <http://www.brismes.ac.uk/nmcs/archives/317>

Pearson, Ivan "The Syrian Crisis of 1957, the Anglo-American 'special relationship', and the 1958 landings in Jordan and Lebanon" *Middle Eastern Studies*, 43:1 2007, p45-64

Rynhold Jonathan, Spyer, Jonathan 'British policy in the Arab – Israeli Arena 1973 – 2004', *British Journal of Middle Eastern studies*, Vol 34 No 2, Aug 2007 pp137 – 155

Ralph, Dr Jason, 'Tony Blair's 'new doctrine of international community' and the UK decision to invade Iraq' *POLIS Working Paper* No 20, August 2005

Reynold, Jonathan, Spyer, Jonathan British Policy Post Cold War Intelligence and National Security, 19:3, 401-415

Salhani, Claude "The Syrian Accountability Act: Taking the wrong road to Damascus" *Policy Analysis*, No 512, March 18 2004, <http://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/syria-accountability-act-taking-wrong-road-damascus> (Accessed 10 May 2010)

Schmacher, Tobias "Riding the Winds of Change: The Future of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership" *The International Spectator* 2/2004

Sharp, Jane "Tony Blair, Iraq and the Special Relationship: Poodle or Partner?" *International Journal*, 59:1, Winter 2003/04 pp59-86

Simon Steven, Stevenson, Jonathan "The Road to Damascus" *Foreign Affairs*, 83:1 2004 <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/59898/steven-simon-and-jonathan-stevenson/the-road-to-damascus> (Accessed 10 Novemebr2010)

Spencer, Clair "British Policy – Middle East and Terrorism: Talk long, Reflect Little" *The world today*, Dec 2006

Spencer, Claire "Syria: the real costs of diplomacy" *Prospect Magazine*, 04 June 2013, <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/blog/syria-diplomacy-conference-assad-russia/#.Um5MVPm-1k7> (accessed February 2014)

Stavridis, Stelios "The Barcelona Process, Twelve Years On: A Critical Overview" *Agora Without Frontiers Volume 13 (4) 2008: 243-261*

Stokes, D, Whitman, RG "Transatlantic Triage? European and UK 'grand strategy' after the US rebalance to Asia" *International Affairs* Vol 89 No 5 Sept 2013 Pp1087- 1107

Wallace, William, "The Collapse of British Foreign Policy" *International Affairs* Vol 81, No 1, 2005 pp53 – 68

Wallace, William "British Foreign Policy after the Cold War" *International Affairs*, July 1993, pp423 – 442

Wheeler, Nicholas J, Dunne, Tim "Moral Britannia? Evaluating the ethical dimension in Labour's Foreign Policy" Foreign Policy Centre, <http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/233.pdf> (accessed 10 November 2012)

Wheeler, Dunne "Good international citizenship: a third way for British Foreign Policy" *International Affairs*, 74:4, 1998 p847 -870

Wieland, Carsten "Syria's challenges after the election year: Is Bashar al-Asad part of the problem or part of the solution in the Middle East?" *Pap. Polít. Bogotá (Colombia)*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2007 pp209-236,

Williams, Paul "Who's making UK foreign policy?" *International Affairs*, Vol 10 No 5, 2004 pp909 – 929

Hood Frederick "Atlantic Dreams and European Realities: British Foreign Policy After Iraq, *Journal of European Integration*, 30:1 pp183-197

Youngs, Richard "Trans-Atlantic Cooperation on Middle East Reform: A European misjudgement?" London: The Foreign Policy *Centre* Nov 2004

Zamir, Meir "De Gaulle and the Question of Syria and Lebanon during the Second World War: Part I" *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol 43: No 5, September 2007 pp675 - 708

Zisser, Eyal "Does Bashar al-Assad Rule Syria?" *The Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2003 <http://www.meforum.org/517/does-bashar-al-assad-rule-syria> (Accessed 19 November 2014)

Youngs, Tim "Trans-Atlantic cooperation on Middle East Reform: A European misjudgement?" *The Foreign Policy Centre, 2004*, <http://fpc.org.uk/publications/MiddleEastReform> (Accessed 05 Feb 2011)

Zorub, "Trade Liberalization and Adjustment via Regional Integration: The Syrian-European Association Agreement", Syrian and the Mediterranean Partnership, *St Andrews Papers on Contemporary Syrian Studies*, 2009 <https://ojs.st-andrews.ac.uk/index.php/syria/article/download/711/607> (accessed 19 November 2014)

Levy, Zach. "Britain's Middle East Strategy, 1950 – 52: General Brian Robertson and the "small" Arab States", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 40.2 March 2004 pp58 - 79

Interview 1. Hafiz al-Asad: Terrorism and the Anti-Syria Campaign, Hafiz al-Asad, Ben Bradlee, Jim Hogland, Jonathan Randall and Samuel Kerbitte, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Summer, 1986), pp. 3-16

Lectures & Speeches

Lochery Neil "Present and Post-Blair British Middle East Policy", The Annual Madame Madeleine Feher European Scholar Lecture No9, 01 March 2007

Hollis, Rosemary "The Union and the Arab – Israeli Conflict: From Venice to Madrid" <http://www.passia.org/seminars/95/s1-27.htm> (Accessed 11 November 2014)

Wallace of Saltaire, "Britain between America and Europe", Speech at Chatham House and Chatham Foundation Annual Members Conference: New Foreign Policy Directions for Britain, 25 October 2007

John Major speech "The Referendum on Europe: Opportunity of Threat?" Chatham House 14 February 2013 <http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Meetings/Meeting%20Transcripts/140213Major.pdf> (accessed 11 November 2014)

Other Secondary

Mark Curtis, Mark, Close, Helen, Dury, Vanessa, Ibister, Roy "The Good, The Bad and the Ugly: A decade of Labour's arms exports" London: Safer World, May 2007 <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/264-the-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly---a-decade-of-labours-arms-exports> (accessed November 2012)