Syria in the Post-September 11 Period: Detachment from the New World Order

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Abstract

This work aims to analyze Syria's foreign policy responses in the aftermath of September 11 attacks through two case studies. First is the Syrian foreign policy during the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. In the second case study, Syria's foreign policy in Lebanon and its forced withdrawal from the country in 2005 is analyzed. Through these case studies, it is questioned why Syria did not continue its cooperative attitude that it had displayed towards the West during the immediate after of the end of the Cold War. The answer to that question is given through testing neoclassical realist foreign policy model. It is argued that although the international system determines the boundaries of a state's foreign policy, it is also necessary to analyze how systemic pressures are translated by states. In that sense, this work is aimed at reconciling realist power political arguments with domestic concerns.

Keywords: Syria, September 11, Neoclassical Realism, Iraq War, Lebanon

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11 Eylül Sonrası Suriye: Yeni Dünya Düzeninden Ayrılma

Özet

Bu çalışma, Suriye'nin 11 Eylül sonrasındaki dış politikasını iki örnek olayla analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Birincisi, Suriye'nin 2003 Irak Savaşı esnasında izlediği dış politikadır. İkinci örnek olay çerçevesinde, Suriye'nin Lübnan politikası ve 2005 yılında ülkeden zorunlu olarak çekilmesi analiz edilmektedir. Örnek olaylarla, Suriye'nin Soğuk Savaş sonrasında Batı'ya karşı izlediği işbirlikçi tutumu neden sürdüremediği sorgulanmaktadır. Bu sorunun cevabı neoklasik realist dış politika modeli test edilerek verilmeye çalışılmaktadır. Uluslararası sistem bir devletin dış politika sınırlarını belirlese de, sisteme ilişkin baskıların devlet tarafından nasıl algılandığının incelenmesi gerektiği savunulmaktadır.

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Bu çerçevede, çalışma, güç odaklı realist argümanları, iç siyasete ilişkin kaygılarla bütünleştirmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Suriye, 11 Eylül, Neoklasik Realizm, Iraq Savaşı, Lübnan

سوريا في فترة ما بعد ١١ سبتمبر: الانسلاخ عن النظام العالمي الجديد

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خلاصة:

يهدف هذا المقال إلى تحليل استجابات السياسة الخارجية السورية ما بعد آثار كارثة هجمات ١١ سبتمبر من خلال حالتين من الدراسات. أولاً، السياسة الخارجية السورية خلال الغزو الأمريكي للعراق عام ٢٠٠٣. وفي الدراسة الثانية، تحليل السياسة الخارجية السورية في لبنان وانسحابها القسري من تلك الدولة عام ٢٠٠٥. من خلال دراسة هذه الحالات، تم طرح استفسار لماذا سوريا لا تواصل موقفها التعاوني الذي عرضته على الغرب خلال وفور انتهاء الحرب الباردة. الجواب على هذا السؤال قدم من خلال اختبار النموذج الكلاسيكي الواقعي الجديد في السياسة الخارجية. يقال أنه على الرغم من أن النظام الدولي يحدد حدود السياسة الخارجية لدولة ما، كذلك من الضروري تحليل كيفية ترجمة الضغوط الممنهجة من قبل الدول. في هذا المعنى، يهدف هذا المقال إلى التوفيق بين القوة الواقعية للحجج السياسية وتأثيرها على الاهتمامات الوطنية.

الكلمات الدالة: سوريا، ١١ سبتمبر ، الواقعية الكلاسيكية الجديدة، حرب العراق، لبنان.

Introduction

At the beginning of the 1990s, right after the end of the Cold War, Syria seemed to enter a period of foreign policy change, positioning itself on the right side of the "new world order". Within this framework, it acted to improve its relations with the US and to support the start of an Arab-Israeli peace process. The first expression of this policy was manifested in the war on Iraq, which was initiated in response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on January 17, 1991. Syria's response to the Iraqi crisis was to join the anti-Iraq coalition alongside the US. Syria also became the first state to accept the US proposal of a peace conference. These strategic decisions also created hopes for the beginning of some political and economic reforms in Syria. However, these predictable initial foreign policy decisions did not persist. In the 2000s, Syria responded to the international developments after September 11 through balancing, seeking to prevent the effects of American hegemony in the region by maximizing links to other powers, including Iran, China, North Korea and Russia.

This study questions why Syria did not continue its cooperative attitude that it had displayed towards the West during the immediate after of the end of the Cold War. The answer to that question is tried to be given through testing neoclassical realist foreign policy model. The aim is to analyze and explain Syria's foreign policy behaviour after September 11 attacks. The argument is that, while accepting that the international system structures and constrains policy choices, Syrian leaders' beliefs about the international system, domestic constraints and domestic motivations are determining factors shaping foreign policy during periods of international flux. Syria's foreign policy responses in that period are analyzed through two case studies. First is the Syrian foreign policy during the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. US accusations against Syria during this period are analyzed, and a comparison is made between Syria's actions in the 1991 Gulf War and the 2003 Iraq War. In the second case study, Syria's involvement in Lebanon is analyzed. The factors forcing Syria to withdraw from the country and the consequences of that withdrawal are discussed.

I. Theoretical Framework

According to neorealist thinking, shifts in the external balance of power lead to foreign policy changes. When we adapt this argument to the foreign policy of Syria, it is expected that Syria would have come under

severe pressure to bandwagon with the US. In this way it could divert the greater threat from Israel with the collapse of bipolarity. Syria's entry into the Gulf War coalition (1990-1991) and its participation to the Madrid Peace Conference (1991) can be interpreted in this way. However, the weak and dependent Syrian state did not become a client of the West in the subsequent years, as structuralist thinking proposes.[1] The extent to which Syria is dependent on external powers, and to what extent we can apply balance of power theory to the analysis of its foreign policy behaviour is called into question. Theoretically, strong states are identified as the promoters of alliance-building processes, mainly motivated by self-interest in order to maximize security and power, while states lacking security are expected to construct alliances with stronger states in order to maintain their survival. Syria could thus be interpreted as a small state lacking security from the standpoint of material capacity. Therefore, Syria might be expected to pursue more conciliatory relations with the US. Such moves may have generated economic and political advantages for the current regime and may have brought with them the realization of its strategic and territorial goals. Egypt, Jordan and Libya, for example, had followed this path and gained financially through reconciliation with the US, but Syria did not do so. Its foreign policy behaviour, which was not in conformity with the unitary actor and the objective premises of neorealism, can be considered through neoclassical realism. Rathbun asserts that neoclassical realism "begins with the premise that an ideal state behaviour is that which conforms to the unitary actor and objectivity premises of neorealism but shows that when these conditions are not met empirically, domestic politics and ideas are culprits".[2]

Gideon Rose coined the term "neoclassical realism" in a 1998 *World Politics* article, specifically in reference to books by Thomas Christensen, Randall Schweller, William Wohlforth and Fareed Zakaria, as well as an anthology of articles previously published in the journal *International Security*. Rose notes neoclassical realism "explicitly incorporates both external and internal variables, updating and systematizing certain insights drawn from classical realist thought".[3]

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1   Raymond Hinnebusch, "Globalization and Generational Change: Syrian Foreign Policy between Regional Conflict and European Partnership", *The Review of International Affairs,* Vol. 3, No. 2, Winter, 2003, p. 206.

2   Brian Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism", *Security Studies*, 1998, Vol. 17, p. 312.

3   Gideon Rose, "Review: Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy", *World Politics*, Vol. 51, October, 1998, p. 152.

According to Rose, in order to understand the responses of states to the external environment, it is necessary to analyze how systemic pressures are translated through intervening unit-level variables. Beginning with the fundamental assumption of neorealism that the international system structures and constrains the foreign policies of states, it is argued that power distribution and structural constraints alone are not enough to explain foreign policy behaviour. Rose asserts that this falls under realism because it accepts that "a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities". On the other hand, it is neoclassical because the adherents of this theory argue that "the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is direct and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level".[4]

The starting point and independent variable in the neoclassical realist model is anarchic international system. According to neoclassical realists, the anarchic international system and power distribution are the primary determinants of a state's interests and behaviours. At this stage, the ways in which relative power establishes the fundamental parameters of a state's foreign policy are analyzed. This is where neoclassical realists converge with neo-realists. Neoclassical realists believe that "over the long run, a state's foreign policy cannot transcend the limits and opportunities thrown by the international environment".[5] They distinguish between power resources and a country's foreign policy interests.

While accepting that states seek security, neoclassical realists argue that states respond to the uncertainties of international anarchy by controlling and shaping their internal environments. They suggest analyzing how systemic pressures are translated by states in order to understand the ways in which they interpret and respond to their external environment. Neoclassical realists argue that systemic pressures are translated through unit-level intervening variables, such as decision-makers' perceptions and the domestic state structure.[6] Domestic intervening variables are among the most central and important innovations of neoclassical realism.

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4   ibid, p.146.
5   ibid, p. 151.
6   ibid, p.151–152.

In Rose's model, the first intervening variable is decision-makers' perceptions, through which systemic pressures must be translated. Neoclassical realists believe that the perceptions of leaders and elites on relative power must be analyzed because "statesmen, not states, are the primary actors in international affairs".[7] Neoclassical realists found neorealists' conception of a black-box corresponding to the state problematic. According to Wohlforth, good theories of foreign policy must deal with the details of statesmen's perceptions of the distribution of power.[8] State foreign policy is the product of leaders' perceptions of their place in the international system, and of domestic considerations like regime survival, risks, rewards and ideological beliefs. The second intervening variable is domestic state power, which constrains leaders' perceptions. Leaders are thought to define "national interests" and to conduct foreign policy according to their perceptions of relative power; however, they are constrained by the domestic environment. Schweller observes four domestic variables constraining leaders: elite consensus, elite cohesion, social cohesion and regime vulnerability.[9] Taliaferro, meanwhile, describes the domestic variables that constrain each state's response as: state institutions, state sponsored nationalism and statist or anti-statist ideology.[10]

In this causal chain, foreign policy outcome is the dependent variable. According to defensive realists, the dominant pattern of state behaviour is security maximization, while for offensive and classical realists, it is power maximization. Here, neoclassical realists offer some insights. Rose argues, for example, that neoclassical realism predicts that increased capabilities lead to an expansion of a country's foreign policy activity, and that a decrease leads to a contraction. This process is described as not depending only on objective material trends but also on how political leaders subjectively perceive them. It is thought to take a longer time for weak powers to translate their increasing capabilities into foreign policy activity.

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7   Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 42.

8   William Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance, Power and Perceptions during the Cold War*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

9   Randall L. Schweller, *Political Constraints on the Balance of Power*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 128.

10   Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, "State Building for Future Wars: Neoclassical Realism and the Resource-Extractive State", in *Security Studies*, Vol. 15. No. 3,(July–September, 2006, p. 468.

A. Theoretical Model

In this work, the theoretical framework of neoclassical theory is adapted. International system is the independent variable and Syrian foreign policy is the dependent variable. The first intervening variable is Syrian leaders' perceptions about the international system; that is, it centres on the political leader. Here, the emphasis is on how decisions by and perceptions of leaders influence foreign policy behaviour. In order to understand Syria's attempts to operate as an independent agent at the global level rather than merely responding to systemic structures, it is necessary to examine Syria's internal attributes. The second domestic intervening variable is domestic political constraints. Domestic political constraints can "constrain or enhance the ability of states to build arms and form alliances".[11] Domestic constraints are directly linked with the calculations of Syria's rulers regarding regime survival. In this study, state formation, identity/ideology and the need for public support are seen as important constraints in Syrian foreign policy-making. The third is made up of domestic motivations which is proposed by Schweller as "state interests and motivations".[12] Schweller rejects the tendency towards oversimplification of neorealism, which suggests that states with comparable positions in the international system will respond similarly to systemic pressures. He asserts that neorealism's suggestion that states predominantly balance against greater powers has been proven wrong by the bandwagoning inclinations of limited-aims revisionist states, which he in turn argues would likely to bandwagon with unlimited-aims revisionist great powers, especially to share in the spoils that come with eventual changes in the international order.[13] His balance of interest approach, which argues that alliance choices are often motivated by opportunities for gain, rather than simply by danger, is helpful in understanding the divergent responses of similarly situated states to similar external constraints.

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11   Randall Schweller, "The Progressiveness of Neoclassical Realism", in Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman (eds.), *Progress in International Relations Theory: Appraising the Field*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), p. 341.

12   It is preferred to use "domestic motivations" rather than the original usage of the term "state interests and motivations" proposed by Randall Schweller with the intention that the term "state" would lead to ambiguity. Since the first intervening variable in this study is the leader's perceptions, it would be hard to distinguish the leader from the state if the term is used in its original version of "state interests and motivations". Here "domestic motivations" used as the opposite of "domestic constraints" which is the second domestic intervening variable of this study. It signifies the factors like security gains, economic benefits, regional and international credibility motivating a state to take certain foreign policy actions.

13   Randall L. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In", *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 1, Summer, 1994, p.80.
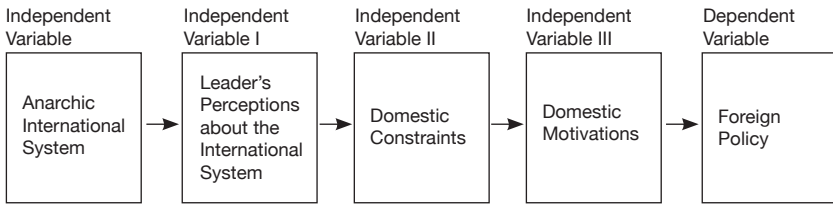
Independent Variable	Independent Variable I	Independent Variable II	Independent Variable III	Dependent Variable
Anarchic International System	Leader's Perceptions about the International System	Domestic Constraints	Domestic Motivations	Foreign Policy

Figure 1. Neoclassical Realist Analysis of Syrian Foreign Policy

II. September 11: Implications for the International System and Syria

The 9/11 attacks and the developments that followed caused systemic shock and raised questions about the international system that had emerged after the end of the Cold War. It is argued that the period following the attacks exposed the limits of America's global reach and created problems for maintaining unipolarity. In that sense, some scholars attributed a significance to the events of 9/11 that was comparable to the collapse of the Soviet empire. It is argued that 9/11 can be compared with the end of the Cold War not just because it caused a shock that reverberated internationally and forced all significant actors to respond, but because it challenged the core conceptions of the existing international system, the one that had emerged from the post-Cold War order.

The impact the September 11 attacks and its aftermath on the international system caused considerable debate. The most important among these was over whether the trend of bandwagoning with the great power that had characterized the initial post-Cold War period was sustainable.[14] The September 11 attacks raised questions for the US about how to maintain its unipolar status. These developments arose after the attacks were interpreted by realists as a shift back towards international instability and great power balancing. In fact, great power balancing against the US had predicted by many scholars following the collapse of the Soviet Union, but this did not come to pass despite the huge surge US power. The September 11 attacks and the US interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq led to the emergence of analyses claiming that balancing had begun to emerge. Some scholars claimed

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14   Ewan Harrison, *The Post-Cold War International System: Strategies, Institutions and Reflexivity*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 137.

that traditional forms of balancing could be observed when internal defence build-ups and external alliance formations were taken into account, but after a while, no evidence of traditional balancing could be found.[15] Some scholars then suggested a new form of balancing, called "soft balancing". Walt describes this as the "conscious coordination of diplomatic action in order to obtain outcomes contrary to US preferences, outcomes that could not be gained if the balancers did not give each other some degree of mutual support."[16] Instead of directly challenging the US, which would be a costly action, states are said to engage in actions that made life difficult for Washington, like constraining and undermining the US's freedom of action or complicating its diplomacy.[17]

Syria's defiance of the global hegemon after September 11 attacks is labelled by certain authors as "asymmetric balancing". "Asymmetric balancing" is defined as "efforts by sub-national actors and their state sponsors to challenge and weaken established states using asymmetric means such as terrorism".[18] In the absence of an international or regional bloc to compete strategically with the US and the lack of latent power potentiality, Bashar al-Assad's motivations, intentions and domestic concerns in the decision to defy the hegemon is analyzed through case studies.

The September 11 terror attacks on New York and Washington opened a new era in Syrian-US relations. On his 36th birthday, which fell on September 11, 2001, Bashar al-Assad encountered an unanticipated surprise, as the first reports of terror attacks by Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda organization on New York and Washington began coming into

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15 IR theorists have developed standards for measuring traditional balancing behavior. As Lieber and Alexander suggest, "the most important and widely used criteria concern internal and external balancing and the establishment of diplomatic "red lines." Internal balancing emerges when states invest heavily in defense by transforming their latent power (i.e., economic, technological, social, and natural resources) into military capabilities. External balancing occurs when states seek to form military alliances against the predominant power. Diplomatic red lines send clear signals to the aggressorthat states are willing to take costly actions to check the dominant power if it does not respect certain boundaries of behavior (Keir A. Lieber and Gerard Alexander, "Waiting for Balancing", *International Security*, Vol. 30, Issue 1, 2005, p. 119.

16 Stephen Walt, "Can the United States Be Balanced?", paper prepared for the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, September 2–5, 2004, p. 14.

17 Lieber, Alexander, op. cit, p. 125.

18 T.V. Paul, "Introduction" in James J. Wirtz and Michel Fortmann (eds.), *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice of the 21st Century*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 3.

Damascus. His first reaction as president was to send a condolence message to the White House, calling for "world cooperation to eradicate all kinds of terrorism."[19]

In the following days, in addition to denouncing the attacks, Syria offered to assist the US in its search for the responsible parties. Since Muhammad Ata, who was identified as the mastermind behind the attacks, was Syrian-born, the US welcomed this offer and sent FBI agents to investigate al-Qaeda activists who had been in Syria or who had had contact with Syrian citizens. US Secretary of State Colin Powell commented that Syria had contributed a "treasure trove" of materials on al-Qaeda, including information on Syrian members of the organization. However, Syria called for a distinction between fighting occupation and acts of terror. Specifically, it distinguished Palestinian resistance to Israel's occupation as distinct from terrorism. Bashar al-Assad gave clear support to the Palestinian *intifada*, stating that Palestinians had the right to determine the form by which to liberate a land that was theirs.[20] Damascus also refused to label Hezbollah a terrorist organization, and continued to cultivate relations with the countries of the "Axis of Evil"—North Korea, Iran, Iraq and Hezbollah—as defined by George W. Bush. Although Syria and the US continued to cooperate on intelligence issues regarding al-Qaeda, the US criticized Syria for its continuing support to a number of Palestinian groups and to Hezbollah. The US became critical of Syria, because not severing its ties with the "Axis of Evil" and terrorist organizations made it a "*de facto* member of the axis of evil".[21] American officials also began to accuse Syria of possessing non-conventional, mainly biological and chemical weapons.[22]

III. Iraqi War of 2003 and Syria

American preparations for the invasion of Iraq created new tension in Syrian-US relations. President Assad clearly objected to a strike against Iraq. He declared that "there was no justification for a US war

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19 "International Reaction to the September 11, 2001 Attacks in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington", http://www.september11news.com/InternationalReaction.htm (Accessed on 15/11/2011).

20 ibid.

21 Robert G. Rabil,, *Syria, the United States and the War on Terror in the Middle East*, (Westport: Prager, 2006). p. 133.

22 *The Times*, December 13, 2002.

on Iraq, it would kill millions of people and plunge the Middle East into uncertainty".[23] In spite of the fierce opposition to the US invasion of Iraq, Syria acted prudently and backed off under US threats. It closed its four official border posts with Iraq and expelled some former Iraqi officials. However, it is argued that Syria also facilitated a pre-invasion sale of arms to Iraq. Its anti-American stance before the invasion of Iraq put Syria on the wrong side of the "with us or against us" dictum of the Bush regime.

In spite of efforts to postpone an attack against Iraq, the US military intervened in Iraq on March 19, 2003. The tension between the US and Syria intensified, with Syria becoming the leading critic of "Operation Iraqi Freedom". In an interview after the war broke out, Bashar al-Assad declared that the US was incapable of controlling Iraq; he also warned that Syria might become its next target of the US, adding that it was ready for a confrontation.[24] Syrian Foreign Minister al-Sharaa made the sentiment explicit: "We want Iraq's victory".[25]

After the war started, the US accused Syria of activities that interfered with the American war effort in Iraq. First, it was charged with providing Arab resistance fighters across the Iraqi border to aid the movement, and with giving refuge to some Iraqi officials fleeing Iraq after Saddam's regime fell.[26] Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld charged the Syrian administration with transferring night vision goggles and other military equipment to Saddam Hussein's forces and with engaging in illegal arms sales to Iraq. Second, during the war, the Bush administration declared that Syria had a big arsenal of chemical weapons and one of the more active chemical weapons programs in the Middle East.[27] Third, the US administration escalated demands for Syria to scale back sponsorship of groups such as Hezbollah. The US also asked Syria to expel Palestinian elements (the Islamic Jihad and Hamas) from Syria.

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23   Reuters, November 18, 2002.

24   "Bashar Al-Asad's Interview to Al-Safir", March 27, 2003. http://www.memri.org/report/en/ print839.htm. (Accessed on 17/11/2011).

25   Eyal Zisser . *Commanding Syria: Bashar Al-Asad and the First Years in Power*, (London: IB Tauris, 2007). p. 140.

26   Raymond Hinnebusch, "Syrian Foreign Policy under Bashar al-Asad", *Ortadoğu Etüdleri*, Cilt 1, Sayı 1, Temmuz, 2009, p. 18.

27   Barbra Slavin, "Syria's support for Saddam draw US Wrath", *USA Today*, April 15, 2003.

A. A Neoclassical Realist Analysis of Syrian Foreign Policy during 2003 Iraqi War

1. The International Level

Since the 9/11 attacks, the US military had become determined to safeguard national security and the American political leadership had adopted rhetoric of the "war on terror". The first target of the US on this war was Afghanistan, followed by Iraq. The invasion of Iraq created a feeling of insecurity in the international community, especially in the Middle East. Despite the turbulence in the international system due to the opposition of major powers to the American invasion, no bloc emerged to balance the US.

Given that the international system was hegemonic over the course of two wars and both of these reinforced the logic of supporting the United States, the question is why Syria did not cooperate with the US in the invasion of Iraq in 2003 as it had during the 1991 Gulf War. The answer to this question is important to an understanding that structural factors are not adequate to explain a country's foreign policy decisions. The reasons for Bashar al-Assad's harsh anti-American stance during the invasion have also been discussed at length. Neorealist theories of International Relations expect weak powers, insofar as they are rational actors, to bandwagon with a superior threatening power. Therefore, from a realist point of view, a rational Syrian regime should have bandwagoned in order to neutralize US hostility, since it did not have the ability to deter the US.[28] In the analyses that compare the Gulf War period when Hafiz al-Assad bandwagoned with the US, it is argued that Syria, on the way to reform under the leadership of Bashar al-Assad, had more incentives to bandwagon than it had under his father. However, the situation during the US invasion of Iraq was entirely different.

In making a comparison between Syria's responses to 1991 Gulf War and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, it is also necessary to examine the position of the international community. As oppose to the Gulf War, the international community was highly fragmented during the US invasion

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28 Raymond Hinnebusch, "Defying the Hegemon: Syria and the Iraq War" paper given at the conference of the European Consortium on Political Research Conference, Budapest, September 2005, p.16.

of Iraq in 2003. The US tried to rally an international support before the attack. The members of the United Nations Security Council did not authorize the March 19, 2003 attack on Iraq. Security Council passed Resolution 1441 on November 8, 2002, calling for new inspections in Iraq intended to find and eliminate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. The US began to seek a second UN resolution sought for a second UN resolution to declare Iraq in material breach of its obligation to disarm. However the France, Russia and China as the permanent members of the UN as well as a number of other members decided to give inspectors more time and the U.S. pulled its proposal on March 17.

Although the official public list of the United States' allies as of March 21, 2003 contained 31 countries, the members of the coalition have had very strong objections to the invasion at some level.[29] Britain and Japan provided the main international support for the US in the War in Iraq. The war also led to a fragmentation within the European Union. While, the member states including Britain, Denmark, Italy and the Netherlands supported the invasion France and Germany were the major opponents of the US-led military intervention against Iraq.

2. The Domestic Level

a. Leader's Perceptions about the International System

The policies adapted by Bashar al-Assad during the American invasion of Iraq have long been debated. This was an important test, and in the assessment of many commentators, he failed. His strategy was perceived as irrational, motivated by Arab nationalist and anti-Western feelings. He was accused of lacking experience, self-confidence, a functioning decision-making apparatus and experienced advisors. Although the leadership characteristics played a role, it is believed that the position of the international community contributed to the policies followed by Bashar al-Assad during the US invasion of Iraq. The international community was highly fragmented during the US invasion of Iraq. The United Nations Security Council did not approve US' invasion. The occupation has been officially condemned by 54 countries and worldwide huge protests were organized including millions of participants. Even some of the NATO allies strongly criticized the war. The

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29 Steve Schifferes, "US says 'coalition of willing' grows," BBC News, 21 March 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/2870487.stm, (Accessed on 01/02/ 2012).

invasion led to a deep rift in transatlantic relations. In such an international environment, it would be hard to expect Syria to ally with the US during the US invasion. Rather, Bashar al-Assad tried to be benefited from the fragmented international environment in diversifying his ties with other countries, especially the members of the European Union opposing the invasion.

Despite opposing the invasion and the denying the legitimacy of the new regime established in Iraq, over time, Bashar al-Assad tried to find a way to accommodate the US to prevent being its "next target". Syria's vote in favour of UNSCR 1511, which affirmed the Governing Council's sovereignty in Iraq and the closure of Syria's four official border posts with it, along with the expulsion of several Iraqi senior officials due to American demands, could be seen as examples of the strategy of accommodation. While challenging the US, Syria also continued to send it messages of cooperation. In one interview, Bashar al-Assad commented, "When our interests matched, the Americans have been good to us, and when the interests differed, they wanted us to mold ourselves to them, which we refused."[30] The Syrians always tried to maintain a dialogue with the Americans in this process in order to ensure their national interests. This ambivalence reflected Bashar al-Assad's difficult position after the occupation of Iraq. While strongly opposing to the invasion, Bashar al-Assad also tried not to defy UN legitimacy in order to rescue its interests in Iraq and to extract concessions on Syrian-US relations.

Hinnebusch asserts that "policy zigzags and paralysis" were indicative of incoherence in Syrian policy.[31] It was also argued that there was a conflict between the Syrian elites on how to deal with the US. However, the conflict did not turn into clear factions. The main divergence was said to have occurred between Bashar al-Assad and Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa. While Bashar al-Assad had been willing to make some concessions and to maintain a dialogue with Washington, some members of the "old guard" headed by Sharaa found little room to accommodate the US. The absence of a Syrian delegate in the voting for UNSC Resolution 1483 was also interpreted as having resulted from a dispute between Sharaa, who opposed the resolution as legitimizing

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30   "Bashar Al-Asad's Interview to Al-Safir", March 27, 2003.

31   Raymond Hinnebusch, "Syria after the Iraq War: between the neo-con offensive and internal reform", *Deutsches Orient-Institut (DOI)-Focus*, Nr.14, March 2004, p. 10.

the invasion, and Bashar al-Assad, who did not want to put Syria outside the UN framework.[32]

Bashar al-Assad tried to find a path between defiance of the US and cooperation during the American invasion of Iraq. In order to realize this objective, he first of all tried to show the US that he had enough "cards" to play to make its cooperation important. Syria had tried to play a spoiler role in Iraq and tolerated if not encouraged transit to Iraq and insurgent operations. However, Washington's accusations, for example that it was funnelling insurgents and arms across its border into Iraq became the key issue of contention between the countries. This strategy also created some problems for Bashar al-Assad over the course of time. With the possibility that just over its border a state would divide itself into three separate ethnic identities and that this could lead to a flow of refugees into Syria caused him concern. He then began to give his support to efforts that would stabilize Iraq rather than trigger further chaos.

b. Domestic Constraints

In terms of domestic considerations, in the Gulf War of 1991, Iraq was the aggressor against another Arab state; however, in this case, an Arab state was the victim of a foreign power. In the 1991, most of the countries in the region supported the liberation of Kuwait and participated in the American-led coalition. Syria's contribution to Kuwait was rewarded by countries around the region, alleviating its regional isolation. However, with its invasion of Iraq in 2003, even the US's long-term allies hesitated to grant it their open support, for fear of domestic public opinion.

To have participated in an alliance with the US in the 2003 Iraq War would have been in contradiction with the Arab nationalist values that were rooted in Syrian thinking. For the Syrian regime, in which this identity was strongly institutionalized, cooperation with the US in this case would have meant sacrificing domestic legitimacy. It is known that some half-a-million Syrians protested the war in Damascus.[33] Syria's Grand Mufti, Ahmad Kaftaru, urged Muslims throughout the world

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32   ibid.

33   Stalinsky and Carmelli, "The Syrian government", Oxford Business Group, Online Briefing, March 31, 2003, cited in Hinnebusch, 2004, op. cit, p. 14.

"to use all means and martyrdom operations to defeat the American, British and Zionist aggression on Iraq".[34] There was strong propaganda in the Syrian media against the US invasions, which described US actions as "genocide", "terror", and "war crimes", comparing President Bush to Hitler and American claims to those of Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels.[35] Syrians of all ages, sects and classes shared a very strong dislike of Bush. Even the key opposition figures in Syria were against concessions to the US, and the regime was criticized over its vote for UNSCR 1441.[36] The war on Iraq was seen as a strategy to maintain Israel's national interest and to seize Iraq's oil. In such an atmosphere, the regime needed to make clear to its population that it would absolutely not participate in a military action against Iraq. Cobban asserts that the need to reverse Iraq's occupation of Kuwait in 1991 had given Hafiz al-Assad an "Arab-liberationist" spin to his support for the American intervention. However, in 2003, such a spin seemed unavailable. She asserts that certain acts by Syria that violated Arab norms, such as the policy against the Palestinians in 1970 and 1976, had been taken without putting any spin on them, but that the situation now was different because public awareness was shaped by possession of satellite dishes and the Internet connections.[37]

c. Domestic Motivations

While Hafiz al-Assad had been given incentives to bandwagon with the United States in the Gulf War, including ending its isolation, removing it from US state-sponsored terrorism lists and the promise of a US peace effort, Bashar al-Assad was only offered threats. During his visit to Syria after the fall of Baghdad, Secretary of State Colin Powell conveyed a long list of demands for regime behavioural change without offering anything in return.

However, because of the strong hatred for US policy in Arab public opinion, Bashar al-Assad's defiance of the US helped to legitimize him. In that sense, he became successful. His behaviour during the war granted him immediate political rewards in Syrian and inter-Arab opinion.

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34   ibid.

35   ibid.

36   Hinnebusch, 2004, op. cit, p. 22.

37   Helena Cobban, "Waiting for War in Damascus", *Boston Review*, February-March, 2003.

In reality, Bashar al-Assad's defiance of Washington "[was] both a legitimacy asset and a security liability".[38] Although opposition against the US increased the regime's credibility at home, it was weakened against strong external threats. Defiance of US power had some consequences for Syria. Syria began to feel insecure, and was ill-prepared for the neo-con offensive against it. The US began a campaign of accusations against it including that it supported Iraqi resistance, had close ties with terrorist organizations and possessed weapons of mass destruction. As a part of Washington's revenge strategy, the US bombed the Syrian Trade Centre in Baghdad; shut down the oil pipeline to Syria, which had been an important source of revenue; and sent continual messages to Syria that it would be its next target.

IV. Syrian Foreign Policy in Lebanon

Syria's role in Lebanon became another issue of contention between the country and the West in the post-September 11 period. Syria had been involved in Lebanon since its troops entered in 1976 during the Lebanese Civil War. Over a fifteen-year period it increased the number of its troops in Lebanon; political and intelligence services maintained a presence throughout the country and considerable number of Syrians moved there. The Ta'if Agreement, designed to end the decades-long civil war, recognized Syria's "special relationship" with Lebanon in 1989. The agreement also set a date for Syrian withdrawal two years later. In spite of this commitment to withdrawal, the administration of George H.W. Bush implicitly allowed Syria to "stabilize" its neighbour by maintaining its troops there.[39] This act was interpreted as a prize to Syria by the US for its involvement in the American-led Gulf War coalition.

In 2003, the US, which had consistently perceived Syria as a force of stability in Lebanon, openly called on Damascus to withdraw its occupying army. The international community followed US suit and called on Syria to withdraw from Lebanon. The Lebanese also began to challenge Syrian hegemony, and an internal opposition against Syria arose with the 2000s.

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38   Hinnebusch, 2004, op. cit. p. 4.

39   William Harris, "Bashar al-Assad's Lebanon Gamble", *The Middle East Quarterly*, Summer, 2005, pp. 33–44.

In the wake of the Iraq War, the US increased its calls for Syrian withdrawal. This hardening of the US stance was first reflected in Colin Powell's speech on March 13, 2003, in which he declared that the "US wanted to see Syria withdraw its occupation army from Lebanon".[40] National Advisor Rice also called Syria to move beyond its partial redeployments and to end the occupation in Lebanon completely.[41] As the Iraq War got underway and relations between Syria and the US began to deteriorate, the US further increased its pressure for withdrawal. Syria's backing of Hezbollah and the close relationship between Bashar al-Assad and Nasrallah had irritated the US, causing it to strengthen its position that Lebanese sovereignty must be restored. All these developments led to the re-introduction of the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Act by Congress. In December 2003, the House and Senate passed the bill, and in May 2004 President Bush signed it into law. Syria was called upon to end its occupation in Lebanon in order that it be able to restore its sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity; to deploy its army in the South, and to evict all terrorist and foreign forces, including Hezbollah and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard.[42]

In order to internationalize the Lebanese issue, the US and France sponsored a UNSC Resolution. At the same time, the Lebanese lobby was sustaining campaigns in most European capitals in order to promote approval of the Resolution. On September 2, 2004, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1559 with the support of nine members, while the other six abstained.[43] The resolution called for respecting Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity, and political independence under the sole and exclusive authority of the Government of Lebanon, the withdrawal of all foreign forces and the disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias. By passing the resolution, Syria was introduced explicitly as an occupying power and the channels for putting international pressure on Syria were opened.

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40   Secretary Powell's testimony on Iraq, Europe before House Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, Export Financing and Related Programs, 13 March 2003, cited in Syria Under Bashar (I): Foreign Policy Challenges ICG Middle East Report No. 23, Amman, Brussels, 11 February 2004, p. 14.

41   ibid.

42   The text of the act can be found at http://www.coherentbabble.com/PublicLaws/HR-1828PL108-175.pdf. (accessed on 12/06/2011).

43   By a vote of 9 in favour (Angola, Benin, Chile, France, Germany, Romania, Spain, United Kingdom, United States) to none against, with 6 abstentions (Algeria, Brazil, China, Pakistan, Philippines, Russian Federation), the Council adopted resolution 1559, 2004.

While the international community increased its attention to Syria's presence in Lebanon, a provocative action came from the Syrian administration. Damascus began to pressure for three-year extension of Lebanese President Emile Lahoud's term of office. A constitutional amendment and two-thirds majority vote in favour of the extension was required to take this decision. Despite French and American calls for the election of a new president, Bashar al-Assad summoned Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri in August 2004 to change the constitution on Lahoud's behalf. Emile Lahoud's term was now to be extended, under exceptional terms, for another three years. After the passing of UNSC Resolution 1559 and Lahoud's resultant extension of term, opposition to Syria's role in Lebanese politics grew stronger than ever.

A few months after pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud's term was extended, Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri was assassinated in a car bombing on February 14, 2005. The Lebanese opposition pointed the finger of responsibility at Syria, claiming it had previously threatened to force him out of office. In reality, Hariri had previously cooperated with Damascus, although he had not been comfortable doing so. In spite of his constant conflict with Lahoud, Hariri and his parliamentary bloc had voted in favour of the constitutional amendment that made possible the extension of Lahoud's term. However, it is known that behind the scenes, he played a key role in the drafting of Resolution 1559 in collaboration with the American-French axis.

A. A Neoclassical Realist Analysis of Syria's Lebanon Policy

In order to understand Syrian foreign policy with regard to Lebanon, it is necessary to analyze the international and domestic levels. It is argued that the pressures of the international system and the perceptions of Bashar al-Assad and his domestic concerns did not match, and as a result Syria was ultimately forced to withdraw from Lebanon.

1. The International Level

The US had supported the Syrian presence in Lebanon for many years. However, the September 11 attacks radically changed the US approach with regard to the Middle East. According to Hirst, getting Syria to withdraw from Lebanon became central to its post-9/11 de-

sign.[44] The roots of the struggle to reclaim Lebanon from Syrian occupation flourished in reaction to Damascus' continuing links with groups deemed to be "terrorists" by the US, Hezbollah in particular. The Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon in May 2000 and the growing opposition among the Lebanese people to Syria facilitated this pressure. The US Congress took certain steps to make this happen, beginning with Bush's signing of SALSRA in December 2003.

It is important to note that an international consensus emerged against Syria. For the first time, the United States, European countries and most Arab states were united on the need to exert pressure on Syria to withdraw from Lebanon. Until recently all these countries preferred to maintain the *status quo* in Lebanon.[45] In September 2004, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1559 jointly sponsored by the United States and France. The resolution called on "all remaining forces to withdraw from Lebanon" and for Hezbollah's armed faction to be dismantled. The international pressure increased with Syria's insistence on the extension of Emile Lahoud's presidential term and then Hariri's assassination. In brief, the international environment shaped after the 9/11 attacks forced Syria to withdraw from Lebanon.

2. The Domestic Level

As neoclassical realism suggests, in addition to international system structures and constraints on the foreign policy choices of states, it is also necessary to analyze how systemic pressures are translated at the domestic level. In Syria's policy toward Lebanon in the aftermath of 9/11, it is seen that although the international system forced Syria's withdrawal, Syria had been resisting these calls because of Bashar al-Assad's perceptions, the historical and ideological importance of Lebanon for Syria and the material interests it had in Lebanon.

a. Leader's Perceptions about the International System

It is argued by most scholars that Bashar al-Assad misread the international atmosphere on the issue of Lebanon. According to Harris,

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44 David Hirst, *Beware of Small States: Lebanon, the Battleground of the Middle East*, (New York: Nation Books, 2010). p. 297.

45 Moshe Ma'oz, "Washington and Damascus: Between Confrontation and Cooperation", United States Institute of Peace, Special Report, August 2005, http://www.usip.org/publications/washington-and-damascus-between-confrontation-and-cooperation (accessed on 27/11/2011). p. 7.

"international pressure for Syrian withdrawal resulted from a cascading series of Syrian miscalculations". Although Bashar al-Assad realized that it is necessary to cooperate with Washington vis-à-vis al-Qaeda, he failed to understand that Washington's war on terrorism included Hezbollah. Hezbollah was a serious subject for Washington, seen as responsible for the October 1983 bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut that killed 241 US marines.[46] In a similar way, Zisser talks about a series of Syrian efforts leading to its expulsion from Lebanon. First was its decision to force an extension of Lebanese Prime Minister Emile Lahoud's term of office. Syria was insistent on this issue in the face of international pressure, and in response UNSCR 1559 was passed. The timing of the parliamentary vote, which took place just one day later, was interpreted as a challenge to UNSCR 1559. Hariri's assassination in February 2005 led to another crisis. Although it had not proven that the Syrian regime was directly responsible for the murder, this was the general belief, especially following the revelation that Hariri had been threatened by Bashar al-Assad on the issue of the presidential extension.

Harris characterizes Bashar al-Assad as not having weighed the strategic implications of defying the United States and France. If it had selected anyone other than Lahoud as Lebanese president, it might easily have prevented trouble.[47] Syria made a strategic mistake when it compared the extension of President Elias al-Hirawi's term in 1995, which had been supported by the US, with that of Lahoud's term in 2004. As Bashar al-Assad put it, "They [the Americans] have said publicly that they are against the extension [of Lahoud's term]. If they are against the extension in principle, why did these countries and the same people agree to 1995 extension, [yet] oppose it in 2004—even though the section [of the constitution] is exactly the same section?".[48] Bashar al-Assad's words revealed that he did not fully appreciate the differences in the international context between 2004 and 1995.

Bashar al-Assad seemed confident about Syria's role in Lebanon, which had long been supported by the US and Europe. He failed to understand that perceptions had changed due to the changes in the international environment. Bashar al-Assad continued to overestimate

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46   Harris, op. cit.

47   ibid.

48   Syrian President Bashar al-Asad's speech at the Conference of Syrian Expatriates, Damascus, October 8, 2004. MEMRI, Special Dispatch No. 799, October 14, 2004.

Syria's strategic weight in Lebanon, believing it to be immune to US and French retaliation. In an interview after Hariri's assassination, he commented that sooner or later, Washington would realize how much it needed his help.[49]

During this process, Bashar al-Assad made no attempts to cooperate with the US, France or the Lebanese opposition. To the contrary, his confidence led him to adopt a harsh attitude. As the US increased its pressure on Syria, rather than retreating, he adopted an offensive position, labelling the Bush administration "extremists".[50] According to Harris, "the US occupation of Iraq confirmed to the Syrians the judiciousness of their policy". During the occupation of Iraq, Syria once again realized that its continued occupation in Lebanon provided it with strategic depth and a diplomatic and political card.[51]

Reacting to the international community's attitude towards Syria on the passing of UNSCR 1559, Bashar al-Assad not only denied any connection to the extension of President Lahoud's term, but asserted that Syria's goals included "the internationalization of the internal situation in Lebanon—which means Lebanon's return to the atmosphere of the 1980s and a blow to the existing relationship between Syria and Lebanon".[52] He rejected using the term "withdrawal", asserting instead that "Lebanon has no border with the US, so [redeployment] cannot be an American demand. Thus, it is an Israeli demand".[53]

b. Domestic Constraints

In order to understand Syria's Lebanon policy, it is also necessary to understand the importance of Lebanon for Syria, which served as a domestic constraint. Historically and ideologically, Syria perceived Lebanon as a detached part of "Greater Syria", and thus a part of Syria's natural sphere of influence. This is why Syria has never had formal diplomatic relations with Beirut.[54]

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49   An Interview with Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, in *La Repubblica,* February, 28, 2005.

50   Hirst, op. cit, p. 300.

51   Harris, op. cit.

52   Syrian President Bashar al-Asad's speech at the Conference of Syrian Expatriates, Damascus, October 8, 2004, MEMRI, Special Dispatch No. 799, October 14, 2004.

53   Syrian President Al-Assad Interviewed by Al-Hayat, *MEMRI*, Special Dispatch No. 589, October 15, 2003.

54   Ma'oz, op. cit, p. 7.

Syrian troops moved into Lebanon in 1976 after the outbreak of the civil war and remained there until 2005. Through the 1989 Ta'if Agreement Syria's role as "stabilizer" in Lebanon was implicitly recognized by the international community. In coordinating Lebanese policy, the Syrian regime emphasized Lebanon's Arab identity and followed a policy of "one people in two states". Command of Lebanon was a matter of Syrian regional prestige and fundamental to the Syrian regime's internal staying power.[55] As Harris argued before the withdrawal, "For Bashar al-Assad, the loss of command in Beirut may mark a psychological tipping point toward overall erosion of his authority".[56] In that sense, fearing the loss of his authority in Lebanon and the regional prestige, Bashar al-Assad long defied the appeals of the international community on this issue. After the passage of UNSCR 1559, which called for "all remaining forces to withdraw", Damascus declared that it would not comply with the resolution, claiming its troops in Lebanon were not "foreign".[57] Withdrawal was a painful process for Syria, but eventually it was left with no more options. Afterward, Bashar al-Assad emphasized Syria's continuing influence in Lebanon, noting that "foreign policy is guided by the principle of protecting pan-Arab interests by holding onto Arab identity".[58] He also declared that "Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon does not mean the absence of Syria's role. Syria's strength and its role in Lebanon are not dependent on the presence of its forces in Lebanon".[59]

c. Domestic Motivations

In addition to the ideological and historical importance of Lebanon for Syria, it is also necessary to analyze Syrian state interests in Lebanon as a third domestic variable. State interests are important for understanding why Syria had so long resisted to the demands of the international community to withdraw.

Syria had vital security interests in Lebanon. The Biqa Valley in particular was regarded as a strategic asset in the event of a war with Israel.[60] Through controlling Lebanon, Syria was able to keep Israeli influence

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55   Harris, op. cit, p. 1.

56   ibid.

57   Ma'oz, op. cit, p. 7.

58   Rabil, op. cit, p. 174.

59   *The Washington Post*, March 6, 2005.

60   Ma'oz, op. cit, p. 7.

out of Lebanon, and additionally to prevent Lebanon from becoming a base for the Syrian opposition elements that had sometimes made it a safe haven. The Hezbollah-Syrian alliance also became strategic for Damascus. According to Hinnebusch, Hezbollah's ability to stand up against Israel was an important part of the Israeli-Syrian power balance.[61]

The command of Lebanon also provided Syria with political benefits, especially given the tacit approval of the Syrian presence by the international community. Lebanon obediently followed Damascus in the areas of foreign policy and security, and fully supported its policies in both the inter-Arab and international arenas. This situation gave Syria a second voice in Arab councils and in peace negotiations.[62] Lebanon functioned as a strategic card in any peace negotiations with Israel. Syria linked the Lebanese and Syrian tracks in peace negotiations. It had the ability to veto a separate Lebanese peace with Israel. According to Zisser, an Israeli-Lebanese peace agreement could have been achieved relatively easily since there were no territorial demands between the two sides. However, any separate peace agreement between Lebanon and Israel became impossible because of the linkage between Lebanese and Syrian tracks.[63] Bashar al-Assad also benefited from his close personal ties with Hezbollah's leader Nasrallah, who had won enormous prestige in the Arab realm by standing up to Israel.

Economic benefits were another dimension of this dynamic. There is no actual data concerning Syrian revenue from Lebanon. First, we can talk about regime patronage networks under the heading of indirect profits, which were obtained by Syrian army officers and politicians from commissions and payments. Direct profits included smuggling and the cultivation and trade of drugs.[64] The Biqa Valley was known for producing high quality hashish. It is argued that it became a major global narcotics producer under Syrian occupation. According to a 1992 report by the US House of Representatives Subcommittee on Crime and Criminal Justice, it was estimated that the Syrian military earned between $300 million and $1 billion from narcotics production and trafficking in Lebanon.[65]

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61   Hinnebusch, 2009, op. cit, p. 20.

62   Daniel Pipes, "We Don't Need Syria in Lebanon", *Middle East Quarterly*, September, 2000, p. 1.

63   Zisser, op. cit, p. 177.

64   ibid.

65   Garry C. Gambill, "Syria's Failure in Iraq", *Middle East Bulletin* Vol. 5, No. 11, November 2003.

Lebanon also provided job opportunities for Syrian workers, which became a remedy for the major unemployment problem in Syria. The flow of remittances from Syrian workers in Lebanon has been estimated to range from \$2–\$4 billion annually,[66] which is a significant contribution to the Syrian economy. The actual data regarding the number of Syrian workers in Lebanon is not clear. Estimates varied from 600,000 to 1.5 million in 2000–2001.[67] Since Syria's gross domestic product was smaller than that of Lebanon, workers were willing to accept lower wages and without insurance. As unemployment rates soared in Lebanon, the presence of the Syrian workers created disturbance among the Lebanese.

In brief, the Syrian regime's consolidation of power in Lebanon directly challenged US President George W. Bush's Middle East vision. The Syrian government underestimated the seriousness of US policy with regard to Lebanon. Washington had also grown increasingly disturbed with Syria's links to Hezbollah. The international community, as well, opposed the Syrian role in Lebanon, which resulted in the passage of resolutions calling for its withdrawal. Although Syria understood that there was no way of securing its presence in Lebanon, it was determined to defy the calls, and took provocative action to this effect. However, this strategy had considerable risks. The Lebanon issue brought an end to Syria's reconciliation with the West and led to its isolation both internationally and regionally.

Conclusion

With regard to the question asked at the beginning of this study: "Why Syria did not continue its cooperative attitude that it had adopted in the immediate after of the end of the Cold War?" this study has arrived at the conclusion that it was interaction between the international and domestic environments that determined Syrian foreign policy behaviour in the aftermath of September 11 attacks. It is obvious that the international system had an important impact on Syria's foreign policy orientation. However it is argued that decisions taken by the Syrian regime in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks were the result of this interaction between the external and internal environments. The conflict between the international and domestic environments in the

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66   ibid.

67   Zisser, op. cit, p. 178.

post-September 11 period that led Syria to defy the US resulted in its international isolation. The operative question is, "Why did Syria not cooperate with the US in the invasion of Iraq in 2003 as it had during the Gulf War in 1991?" In both cases, there was strong pressure for Syria to bandwagon with the US in the absence any great power balancing. However, it is argued in this work that to compare these two periods just at international level is insufficient. The perceptions of Bashar al-Assad with regard to the international environment, the domestic constraints and the absence of any positive incentives to cooperate with the US, determined Syria's position during the Iraq War of 2003. Syria's Lebanon policy became another issue of contention with the West in the post-9/11 period. Bashar al-Assad's decisions with regard to the Lebanon in that period were interpreted as "misconduct" and based on "misperception". At the domestic level, due to the historical, symbolic, strategic and the economic importance of Lebanon to Syria, Bashar resisted withdrawal.

It is concluded that Syria was motivated by state interests as well as security concerns in forming its alliances. Neoclassical realist Schweller's balance of interest theory is a useful tool in explaining Syria's alliance behaviour in the aftermath of September 11 attacks. US approach to Syria was an important factor determining the evolution of relations in that period, since the US used threats as opposed to incentives. Walt's theory regarding the bandwagoning behaviour of small states did not work in Syrian foreign policy. Although threatened by an aggressive and great power that had also become its neighbour, Syria did not bandwagon with the US. This conforms to Schweller's balance of interest theory; in order to survive and to protect its values, Syria engaged in balancing even though it was a costly activity move. The absence of any such incentives from the US in the post-September environment was a determining factor in Syria's strategy of defying the hegemon.

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