Transformations in United States Policy toward Syria Under Bashar Al Assad A Unique Case Study of Three Presidential Administrations and a Projection of Future Policy Directions

Mohammad Alkahtani
Nova Southeastern University, sws1488@hotmail.com

This document is a product of extensive research conducted at the Nova Southeastern University College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences. For more information on research and degree programs at the NSU College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, please click here.

Follow this and additional works at: https://nsuworks.nova.edu/shss_dcar_etd
Part of the Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons

Share Feedback About This Item

NSUWorks Citation

This Dissertation is brought to you by the CAHSS Theses and Dissertations at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Department of Conflict Resolution Studies Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact nsuworks@nova.edu.
Transformations in United States Policy toward Syria Under Bashar Al Assad
A Unique Case Study of Three Presidential Administrations and a
Projection of Future Policy Directions

by

Mohammad Alkahtani

A Dissertation Presented to the
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences of Nova Southeastern University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Nova Southeastern University
2017
Copyright © by

Mohammad Ali Mohammad Alkahtani
September 2017
Nova Southeastern University
College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

This dissertation was submitted by Mohammad Ali Mohammad Alkahtani under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University.

8/30/17
Date of Defense

Approved:

Jason J. Campbell, Ph.D.
Chair

Neil Katz, Ph.D.

Dustin Berna, Ph.D.

9/14/17
Date of Final Approval

Jason J. Campbell, Ph.D.
Chair
Dedication

To my father Ali Alkahtani and my mother Aisha; my parents are a constant reminder that there is great strength in kindness. You were a shining example of kindness and all that is best in humanity. You made me believe that there is hope for this world after all.

You are my pride; constantly reminding me to believe and face the world expressing the noblest parts of me.
Acknowledgments

The author would like to acknowledge his dissertation to the committee members; Dr. Jason Campbell, Dr. Neil Katz, and Dr. Dustin Berna. I thank each of you for allowing me to engage in this thought experiment. I appreciate your guidance and patience during this process.

I would also like to thank my fellow students and colleagues at Nova’s DCAR program, with whom I spent the last three years making this journey. Your passion and dedication to peace is not only inspirational, but also infectious.

I want to extend a special thank you to my wife Norah. You, my love deserves recognition for more reasons than I could possibly list here, mostly for your patience with the process and me.

Finally, I would like to thank the faculty and staff of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at Nova Southeastern University for offering me a proper education and preparing me with the tools and skills, which I will need in my career. Through this three-year journey, I have been surrounded with love, support, encouragement, and guidance from faculty and friends whom I will cherish for the rest of my life.
# Table of Contents

List of Tables .................................................................................................................. iv
List of Figures ................................................................................................................... v
Abstract .............................................................................................................................. vi

Chapter 1: Introduction ................................................................................................. 1
  Background of the Topic ............................................................................................... 1
  Key Stakeholders ......................................................................................................... 9
  Problem Statement ..................................................................................................... 10
  Statement of Purpose ................................................................................................. 13
  Significance of the Study ......................................................................................... 16
  Plan of the Study ...................................................................................................... 17
  Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 17

Chapter 2: Review of Literature .................................................................................. 19
  Introduction ............................................................................................................... 19
  Theoretical Frameworks ............................................................................................. 19
  Theories of International Relations .......................................................................... 21
    Overview of the Section .......................................................................................... 21
    The Realism Approach ......................................................................................... 22
    Liberalism ............................................................................................................... 23
    Democratic Peace Theory ..................................................................................... 25
    Neoconservatism .................................................................................................... 27
    Conflict Theory ....................................................................................................... 29
    Rational Choice Theory .......................................................................................... 31
    Dynamical Systems Theory .................................................................................... 33
  Coalition Building Theory: A Conflict Resolution Strategy ..................................... 35
  Historical Background and Overview of the Syrian Conflict ..................................... 40
    Introduction ............................................................................................................. 40
    Demographic Profile of Syria .............................................................................. 40
    Historical Evolution of the Conflict .................................................................. 43
    The Rise of the Caliphate ..................................................................................... 48
  Summary of the Section ............................................................................................. 54
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table of Contents</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Three Administrations and Their Policies</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Clinton Administration</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The George W. Bush Administration</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Obama Administration</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemical Weapon Use and Two Cases: Iraq and Syria</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the Chapter</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Methodology</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions and Sub-questions</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent and Dependent Variables</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection and Analysis</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Considerations</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations and Delimitations of the Study</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Comparison of Three Presidential Administrations</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Doctrines</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the Chapter</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Conflict Resolution Strategy</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of Conflict Resolution Efforts</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building a Coalition: Resolving the Conflict</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion to the Chapter</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Chronology of Syrian Conflict</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Primary Parties/Coalitions/Groups in Syria</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C: Syrian Opposition: Organization</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 1. Policy Ideology of Three Presidents ................................................................. 139
List of Figures

Figure 1. Competing and Common Goals in the Syrian Conflict .......................... 154
Abstract

Foreign policy development in the United States is constitutionally granted to the Executive Office. The President has the responsibility for determining when, where, and how soft and/or hard power will be employed in the pursuit of national interests. In the case of U.S. policy regarding Syria, over the course of the Clinton, Bush and Obama administrations, some significant policy transformations have occurred. This qualitative research study examines the evolution of such policies over the course of three different presidential administrations, seeking an answer to the question of whether or not it was likely that U.S. Syrian policy would include a military “boots on the ground” presence against the Al Assad regime. The problem is significant in light of the fact that Syria is increasingly becoming a failed state and continues to experience a violent civil war. This violence is a consequence of both resistance to the Al Assad regime and the presence of ISIS. Using International Relations theory (specifically, Liberalism and Realism), and applying the theory of Coalition Building, it is argued that all three presidents were largely Realists in their Syrian policies. It is further argued that it is highly unlikely that even under a new presidential administration that the US will enhance its military presence in Syria to any great extent. The study contributes to the field of Conflict Resolution by highlighting the complexities of establishing and maintaining an effective foreign policy in a situation that is ridden with conflict, essentially fluid, and in which multiple actors are engaged.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Background of the Topic

All governments are required by the nature of their relationships with other sovereign entities to develop foreign policies that directly shape and inform state-to-state interactions and position the country with respect to its objectives, its mission in the world, and its ideological posture (Sodaro, 2004). Some have argued that what makes a foreign policy successful with respect to a country, a region, or the entire community of nations is nothing more and nothing less than the ability to choose ends that can be achieved, and then the capacity to identify the optimum means of achieving those ends (Judis, 2014). This suggestion, while admittedly overly simplistic, acknowledges that a country’s foreign policy under any circumstances contains both a set of goals and objectives and a strategy for meeting those goals and objectives.

Theorists have pointed out that creating an effective foreign policy requires balancing many different, and often conflicting, interests, needs, and values (Genest, 2004). Rarely does a nation develop a policy toward another sovereign state without considering many variables which complicate the entire process. There are many different factors as yet unknown that can and often do essentially hamper the implementation of a consistent policy designed to simultaneously achieve a country’s own goals while respecting the goals, objectives, and interests of both allies and adversaries.

This speaks to the fact that contemporary nation-states function in a complex global environment in which a degree of volatility is likely to be inevitable (Buchan, 2002). Ideally, those individuals in positions of power who are responsible for the
development of effective foreign policies work within the context of a specific theoretical orientation. Common theories found in the field of International Relations (IR) are those of the realist, liberal, neoconservative, and democratic peace constructs; a useful theory in Conflict Resolution (CR) that is particularly applicable herein is Coalition Building Theory, especially important in cases wherein a coordinated effort on the part of several state actors is required or desirable (Sodaro, 2004). These theories, each from a somewhat different perspective, propose that a nation’s foreign policy initiatives are designed to serve specific purposes relevant to the overarching ideology of the country as well as its perceived needs and roles in the geopolitical community. When a conflict of significance involving internal violence exists, and when it is necessary for external actors to intervene in the affairs of a sovereign nation state, Coalition Building Theory lends itself to achieving a resolution to the conflict and a return to order and stability.

These theoretical lenses are particularly useful when one is considering, as is the case here, a longitudinal analysis of a foreign policy program that has evolved and been transformed over time, and projecting a likely continuation or modification of existing policy. The case in point herein is United States’ foreign policies towards Syria beginning in 1993, with the presidency of Bill Clinton, continuing through the eight years of the George W. Bush administration, and through the second term of the presidency of Barack Obama. It should be noted that as this analysis was being finalized, the United States elected Donald Trump as the 45th president; certainly, President Trump will develop and implement his own policies regarding Syria and other nations, but any in-depth discussion of those policies is beyond the scope of this study.
During the target time frame, there have been significant shifts in U.S. policy, shifts that have not yet facilitated a resolution to the conflict that continues unabated in Syria (Kanter & Higgins, 2015). The creation and expansion of the group known as ISIS/ISIL (the Islamic State in Syria or the Islamic State in the Levant), plus the entry of Iran, Hezbollah, and Russia into the situation, add layers of complexity to an already complex situation.

The Syrian situation has changed dramatically during this particular period (Glass, 2015). From the beginning of the ascendancy of the Al Assad family in the 1960s to the present, Syria has been a country experiencing frequent internal conflicts (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2015; Galvani, 1974; Zunes, 2004). Most recently, Syria has devolved into what clearly amounts to a failed state – a state under assault from a number of dissident and rebel groups as well as under attack from the rising tide of Islamic fundamentalism in the form of the Islamic State in Syria (ISIS) which seeks to re-establish the Caliphate and has seized control of substantial swaths of territory in Syria and Iraq (Interfax, 2015).

Syria is geographically positioned in a manner which has rendered it vulnerable to movements from east to west and back again for a prolonged period (Wolley, 1946). As a centrally located Middle Eastern state, Syria as it is now constructed represents a somewhat artificial state that was created in the years following the demise of the Ottoman Empire. Because this is the case, as Sodaro (2004) notes, conflict within Syria has been endemic over time. The remnants of this conflict continue to divide Syria today.

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (2015), noting that until independence in 1946, Syria was governed via a French mandate, further stated that stability was absent
from the Syrian polity from the very beginning of its life as a sovereign state. In its first decades of existence, several military coups occurred. In 1958, Syria partnered with Egypt to create the United Arab Republic which was to last only until 1961, at which time the Syrian Arab Republic and an autonomous Egypt re-emerged. By 1970, Hafiz Al Assad, a socialist member of the Ba’ath Party and the scion of a minority sect known as the Alawis, assumed power and ushered in a period of relative political stability.

When President Hafiz Al Assad died, Bashar Al Assad was made president by popular referendum and has served in that position since July of 2000 (CIA, 2015). The Ba’ath military coup in March of 1963 established this particular party as the dominant authority in Syria (Galvani, 1974). Under the Al Assads, the Alawi sect or tribe gained virtual control over all aspects of the Syrian government and economy. The Al Assads partnered with the Soviet Union, and later with Russia, for which it functioned somewhat as a client state; in return, Syria received hundreds of millions in military and other aid – all of which bolstered the influence of the Al Assads while simultaneously undermining American influence in the region (Chernoff, 2009).

In 2007, Bashar Al Assad was re-elected to the presidency for a second term. However, the CIA (2015) reports that opposition to the Al Assad regime has been ongoing. Attached as Appendix A to this dissertation is a chronology identifying the key U.S. foreign policy approaches toward Syria from 2004, during what amounted to Bashar Al Assad’s first term as president, to 2015. As this chronology demonstrates, the U.S. has been concerned about conditions in Syria for some time, beginning in May of 2004 to impose economic sanctions on Syria because of convictions in the United States that Syria was supporting terrorism (BBC News, 2015).
In the two decades leading up to anti-government protests in March 2011 in southern Dar’a Province, escalating domestic conflict was a key characteristic of Syria’s existence (CIA, 2015). The Muslim Brotherhood introduced Islamist political activism into Syria and helped to politicize opposition to Bashar Al Assad. During anti-government protests in 2011, there were calls to repeal an emergency law the Al Assad regime had issued to permit arrests and detainment without charges and to deny political parties the right to function. Demonstrations quickly spread across Syria, with the Al Assad regime repealing the emergency law and liberalizing local and national elections on the one hand while using security operations to violently put down unrest on the other (CIA, 2015).

Bashar Al Assad is often the target of criticisms leveled against the Syrian government in large measure because he has demonstrated no willingness to compromise on critical issues and no interest in sharing power with opposition forces (CIA, 2015). International pressure directed against Bashar Al Assad has been generated by the United States, neighboring Turkey, the Arab League, and the European Union, among others. These disparate groups have imposed economic and other sanctions on Syria to no avail.

The current crisis – now a full-blown regional crisis that goes far beyond civil war pitting the Al Assads against domestic opponents - can be traced to 2012, when 130 countries recognized the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition forces as the legitimate representative of the Syrian polity. Throughout 2013, the Al Assad regime and various opposition or rebel groups engaged in violent conflict, leading to a death toll in the hundreds of thousands. A January 2014 effort sponsored by the United
Nations to broker a treaty between the Syrian opposition coalition and the Al Assad regime failed to bear fruit (CIA, 2015).

Hubbard (2015) reported that the reality in Syria is that the government, the Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL), and an array of insurgents are engaged in a complex civil war that has spread into neighboring Iraq. The Islamic State or Caliphate represents a major challenge to regional stability as well as to the Al Assad regime. It further represents a challenge for American foreign policy. Hubbard (2015) also pointed out that the United States has struggled to find an appropriate partner in Syria, a partner that would simultaneously reject the Caliphate and oppose the Al Assad regime. One such group is Ahar al-Sham, or the Free Men of Syria, a group that cooperates with the Syrian affiliate of Al Qaeda and has welcomed former associates of Osama bin Laden and who does not meet American criteria for “moderation” (Hubbard, 2015).

The problem, therefore, for the United States as it goes forward with respect to its relationship with Syria, is to determine what local actors have sufficient standing to be viewed as partners for the United States and, just as significantly, if the United States can influence Syrian politics if it provides military action in support of a particular group. The problem is made more complex by the fact that Russia has elected to provide substantial new military support to the Al Assad regime (Interfax, 2015).

As Galvani (1974) reported, the Ba’athist military coup of March 1963 established a socialist government in Syria. When Hafiz Al Assad and his Alawite clan assumed control, a political elite became an entrenched entity that maintained power by exerting violence and tight control on domestic and foreign policy. Bashar Al Assad, an ophthalmologist by profession, returned to Syria and assumed the leadership of the
Ba’ath Party and the presidency when his father died. Re-elected to a second presidential term in 2007, Bashar Al Assad’s regime has experienced conflict from that point forward. Nearly every city in Syria has at one time or another over the past 10 years experienced some type of violent hostilities between regime opponents and the regime itself.

Calls for Assad to step down from power have been forthcoming not only in Syria, but also from outside actors, including Turkey, the United States, and the European Union. The CIA (2015) further reports that efforts since 2012 to broker a ceasefire between the Syrian regime and groups such as the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition forces have been unproductive. Though there have been peace talks underway at the United Nations’ Geneva II Conference since 2014, hostilities have not ended; in fact, escalating domestic conflict has become the order of the day. This has been further exacerbated by the rise of ISIS and its attempts to gain control over large swaths of Syrian territory.

Recently, the Assad regime has received assistance from Vladimir Putin’s Russia, as Russia has entered into the conflict by providing on the ground troop support and air support against domestic opponents but not against ISIS (Snyder, 2015). Iran has also made its presence known in Syria in support of the Al Assad regime (Shuster & Calabresi, 2015). The United States, Turkey, and an assortment of European allies do provide some assistance to the Syrian opposition and against ISIS particularly with respect to air strikes (Powell, Bennett, & Parsons, 2015).

This is the historical background in which the Syrian conflict is positioned. The problem, as described by Snyder (2015) and Martin (2015), is that there are essentially two crises in Syria at the present time. The original crisis centers upon the conflict
between Bashar Al Assad and Syrian opposition groups that find his regime to be oppressive. This has been exacerbated by the emergence of ISIS/ISIL and the intervention of Iran, Hezbollah, and Russia as well as the activities of the U.S. It is the resulting conflict in Syria that has created a sustained civil war and has brought about the massive refugee crisis that is now disrupting life in Syria, in neighboring Lebanon, and in the European Union (Friedman, 2013).

Given that this is the case, examining U.S. foreign policy towards Syria is a timely enterprise that provides a unique opportunity to examine not only the evolution of policy over time, but also to consider future transformations and their possible effects. Researchers, including Berman (2014), argue that the Syrian situation represents a catastrophe of epic proportions, with more than 200,000 people having been killed thus far and entire regions of the country now under the total domination of ISIS. Millions of Syrians have become refugees, leaving behind their homes, careers, and country to seek asylum in Europe.

The Assad administration no longer possesses the capacity for governing in light of the fact that much of the country is in constant turmoil (Glass, 2015). Critics have argued that the policies of the Obama administration, which included the use of drone strikes to target ISIS beginning in early 2015, were ineffective (Yeginsu & Cooper, 2015). Sanctions against Syria impacting the regime of Bashar Al Assad have been combined with political isolation and strategic engagement. Noticeably absent in the policies of Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama are what can be referred to as boots on the ground – direct military engagement on Syrian soil deploying military troops and
material by the United States (Obama, 2011). It is in this general background that the present research effort is positioned.

**Key Stakeholders**

Charap (2013) pointed out that from the very beginning of the Syrian crisis, even before ISIS/ISIL emerged and Russia became involved, there were multiple stakeholders directly impacted by the crisis and its precipitating events and trends. Certainly, there are a number of discrete opposition groups within Syria, such as the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces; the Kurdish Supreme Commission; the Syrian Al Qaeda affiliate Jabhat Al Nusra; the Syrian National Council; the National Co-Ordination Committee; the Free Syrian Army; and other smaller unaffiliated groups (BBC, 2013). These groups are further categorized by regions, as well as the entry of Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah into the theater of war and the presence of ISIS as a key factor in fostering ongoing hostilities (Charap, 2013).

Additionally, Hokayem (2015) suggests that one must include Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates as stakeholders whose engagement on behalf of different groups opposing the Al Assad regime has played a role in reshaping the conflict. The presence of Iran and the major Gulf States, said Hokayem (2015), “has influenced the calculations, positioning, behavior, and fortunes of the principal Syrian players” while also having “exacerbated the polarization of the Middle East” (p. 59). The Al Assad regime is a stakeholder with a great deal to lose in this situation.

Other external stakeholders now include neighboring Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan as well as a number of European countries that have been impacted by the Syrian refugee crisis (Hokayem, 2015). These countries and the United States are stakeholders
not merely by choice but out of necessity. The influx of desperate refugees into European Union countries has placed enormous burdens on those countries. In the United States, there is extensive opposition to admitting Syrian refugees due to fears that terrorists may be included among this population. Thus, from the perspective of Conflict Resolution theory and practice, as articulated by Pruitt and Kim (2004), one must consider the widespread impact of what is no longer a domestic crisis and ought to accept the notion that external actors have a vested interest in bringing about a resolution to the Syrian crisis. One strategy for achieving this is through coalition building.

**Problem Statement**

The problem of Syria and ISIS is of enormous significance; according to Wood (2014), taken together, the Syrian civil war and the assault of the caliphate on regional governments represent enormously destabilizing influences. The question of whether or not a more activist U.S. policy in the form of military intervention or “boots on the ground” would be viable and effective is significant, as is the question of whether or not such a policy is even likely to be forthcoming. This study examines the aforementioned theories, considers the Syrian policies of Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama, and employs a qualitative case study design to explore the potential for transforming U.S. policy to potentially include an enhanced physical presence in Syria as a strategy for bringing about an end to the Syrian civil war and inhibiting the spread of ISIS and its capacity for destabilizing the region (Polonsky, 2015).

The argument advanced herein is that regardless of which particular theoretical lens one applies to the case of Syria, it is highly unlikely that the United States, even under a new presidential administration in 2017, will adopt a boots-on-the-ground
military intervention in Syria or in response to the ISIS effort to establish a new caliphate in the Middle East. It is true that U.S. foreign policies have often played a significant role in shaping the geopolitical structure of the Middle East (Abdul-Aziz, 2014; Sodaro, 2004; Knapp, 1954). That said, a case study of past presidential policies from the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations reveals that American presidents, regardless of their own ideological orientation, tend to develop foreign policies that are framed within the Realist theoretical perspective as they pursue those goals and objectives that most clearly coincide with the needs and interests of the United States itself; similarly, the U.S. has in recent decades pursued the resolution of conflicts and geopolitical crisis through a strategy of Coalition Building that engages multiple actors with a stake in securing a desirable outcome to the crisis (Judis, 2014).

The research problem has been conceptualized in terms of a variety of factors among which shifts in American foreign policy orientations are of significance (Berman, 2014). Further, these crises are seen as a challenge to the world and the region based upon the avowed attempt to establish a jihadist Muslim state that will incorporate large portions of territory legitimately contained within Iraq and Syria (Glass, 2015).

It is also important to recognize that whereas the policies of the Clinton and Bush administrations toward Syria were relatively well defined, some critics, including Glass (2015) and Hirsch (2013), argue that the same cannot be said for the Obama administration’s policies, which never coalesced around a particular strategic thrust or, for that matter, a specific theoretical underpinning. For example, where President Clinton is said by Sodaro (2004) and Miller (1994) to have employed a Realist lens in developing the policies of enlargement and engagement, President Obama’s polices were oriented
toward Realism with the caveat that American activism in any hot spot like that of Syria would be minimalized (Abdulaziz, 2014). President George W. Bush relied upon a Neoconservative ideological posture that was nevertheless rooted in a Realist perspective on the question of what a foreign policy was supposed to do for a country (Genest, 2004). Each of these Chief Executives, to varying degrees, have employed Coalition Building strategies to create a coordinated international response to the Syrian issue and, consequently, to the development of strategies for bringing about an end to the crisis in all its various manifestations.

Guiora (2011) stated that given that international law does not articulate specific standards as to when international humanitarian or military intervention is fully justified, national leaders in a position to do so arguably acquire a responsibility to act when it becomes apparent that a humanitarian crisis is underway. Over its entire life, according to Guiora (2011), the Al Assad rulers of Syria have demonstrated that human rights violations do not trouble them. Bashar Al Assad demonstrably employed chemical weapons against his people but, as Guiroa (2011) states, “the international community has determined – whether actively or passively – that the massacre of the Syrian population by the Assad government does not justify international humanitarian intervention” (p. 215).

Only with the emergence of ISIS, a terrorist group that has far surpassed Al Qaeda in terms of its broad impact upon an already volatile Middle East (Hubbard, 2015), has intervention become more apparent and moved beyond the use of largely ineffective sanctions and isolation. Abdul-Aziz (2014) has criticized the U.S. policy towards Syria, calling it marked by a lack of vision and weakness. ISIS shows no signs at the present
time of retreating and its influence seems to be growing despite American use of drones to target selected ISIS strongholds (Tattersall, 2015). There is ongoing debate over what the ultimate impact of U.S. drone strikes in Syria is likely to be and whether or not a more focused, expansive, and physical U.S. response on the ground would be more beneficial (U.S. drone strikes north Syria, 2015).

As the U.S. approaches the end of eight years of the administration of Barack Obama, there is still opportunity for a policy shift. Identifying the likely effect of one such shift is a useful task not only with respect to demonstrating understanding of conflict management, but also with respect to assessing the efficacy of different foreign policy approaches.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to employ a qualitative research method (i.e., the unique case study) to develop an answer to the following overarching research question:

What are the likely effects of a transformation in American policy towards Syria that would include “boots on the ground” military intervention designed to stabilize a country that is torn by war and the insurgence of military Islam seeking to establish a new Caliphate?

The research sub-questions to be explored in the dissertation are:

1. What specific theoretical perspectives have been employed by the Clinton, Bush, and Obama presidential administrations in the design and implementation of foreign policy toward Syria?

2. What are the situational elements that have contributed, over time and in the present, to the development of American foreign policy toward Syria?
Each of these questions speaks to the purpose of identifying how theory informs the actual development and implementation of a country’s policies vis-à-vis the global community. Foreign policy, as described by Judis (2014), represents a balancing of conflicting interests, needs, and values that are subject to change as circumstances themselves change. Today, a country such as the United States inevitably functions within what Buchan (2002) called a complex and often volatile government environment where change is the one constant.

In the case of Syria, it is within the last several months that Russia has become a key actor – an actor with the potential to reshape American responses and to redefine the crisis in Syria itself (Kalb, 2015). While it may appear, at this juncture, to be somewhat unlikely that the Obama administration in its last months in power will contemplate a shift from its current policy of aerial bombing to a more activist boots on the ground policy, this does not mean that such a shift is impossible. Nor does it mean that a new administration taking office in January of 2017 will not choose a more activist policy in the response to the conditions that are prevalent at that time.

A unique case study design is the research methodology recommended herein. The qualitative method known as the case study is described by Reissman (2008) as a narrative research strategy that produces context dependent knowledge. Rather than operating from rules, experts operate on the basis of detailed case knowledge. While rule-based knowledge and predictive theories are also used in the social sciences, they are relatively rare in this particular discipline. What the case study provides is the opportunity to focus attention on narrative details because as Reissman (2008) put it,
“important insights can unfold from the many sided, complex, and sometimes conflicting stories of actors in the field” (p. 194).

What a theory-based study of this type does is to offer a unique opportunity to examine real world applications of theoretical constructs and to assess their viability and their capacity for long-term use. As Babbie (2004) pointed out, case studies allow for investigation of relevant materials and the development of a comprehensive understanding of those materials.

It should be noted that the study is largely qualitative, focused on exploration rather than specifically on explanation, as is typical in the case of a hypothesis-driven research effort (Babbie, 2004). A qualitative research design, as described by Babbie (2004), is generally one which does not generate a wealth of statistical data. The present study employs a qualitative case study research design. The review of literature incorporates forecasts and projections from scholars, journalists, political officials, and military analysts as to the likely effect of current and transformed American policies toward Syria.

Drawing upon an extensive assortment of relevant textual materials, it is argued that while military intervention is a policy option available to the United States, such an option is not likely to be selected in the near or foreseeable future. Other strategies – ranging from the imposition of new or enhanced sanctions against Syria, to increased air strikes against Syrian and ISIS targets, humanitarian aid, military advisors and arms shipments and so on – are likely to be considered and implemented as opposed to a full military incursion. Coalition Building efforts are likely to continue to serve as the
foundation of U.S. policy initiatives for the remainder of the Obama Administration and under a new Chief Executive.

**Significance of the Study**

The issue is of significance in that Syria and the surrounding region represent a highly volatile hot spot in which unsettled conditions are creating not only a failed state, but also facilitating the rise of a determined terrorist movement in the form of the Islamic State in Syria/Islamic State in the Levant (ISIS/ISIL). The crisis shows no signs of abating, as violence in Syria and the surrounding region continues. Efforts to broker a cease fire in the Syrian Civil War and to effectively eliminate ISIS/ISIL are forthcoming, but such efforts are not as yet successful (Kanter & Higgins, 2015).

The refugee crisis resulting from the Syrian conflict has become an international humanitarian crisis that is quite controversial. The European Union (EU) has itself been under enormous pressure from Germany and other member states to halt the flow of asylum seekers into the 28-nation bloc (Kanter & Higgins, 2015). German Chancellor Angela Merkel led a move in the EU to create a fund of €3 billion Euros (about $3.2 billion) plus other inducements to convince Turkey to assist in stemming the migrant flow and allowing migrants to seek refuge in Turkey as an alternative to attempting to enter Western Europe. With these concerns in mind, the present study focused on an analysis of the policies of three U.S. presidential administrations toward Syria is both timely and useful.

What is lacking in the literature is a synthesis of the three presidential policy regimes and their theoretical foundations specific to the case of Syria. The task of examining this case is made more complex by the fact that the Syrian situation is ongoing...
with events ebbing and flowing on an almost daily basis. Further, the Obama administration has about six months more to run, during which time it is quite likely that there will be a need for reviewing existing policies and moving forward and developing new strategies to bring about an end to the Syrian conflict.

**Plan of the Study**

This study offers an overview of the theories of CR and foreign policy that will be used in assessing U.S. foreign policy. Following this presentation of theory, the study presents an historical overview of the Syrian conflict to identify its transformation over time and to set the stage for consideration of American policies under three separate presidential administrations (i.e., those of Presidents Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama). Included is an analysis of the new intervention of Russia in the crisis and the impact of this intervention on possible U.S. responses under the Obama Administration.

Next, the study focuses more closely on likely changes in present U.S. foreign policy during the remaining months of the Obama administration. It will speculate as to the likely effects of a shift in policy which would include a military presence in Syria and briefly discuss whether or not such a policy shift might be forthcoming as a new president takes office in January of 2017. The study concludes with a summary and recommendations for further research.

**Conclusion**

This study provides a unique synthesis of 24 years of U.S. policy initiatives centered on Syria. These initiatives span three eight-year-long presidential administrations beginning with President Bill Clinton in 1992 through President George W. Bush in 2000 and President Barack Obama in 2008. These three presidential
administrations span a period during which the Syrian situation, with regard to animosity focused on the Al Assad regime, emerged, escalated, and expanded to include not only actors within Syria, but also the creation of an extremist Jihadi movement that has succeeded thus far in establishing a state-like entity known as the caliphate or the Islamic State in Syria/the Levant.

Conducting a case study designed to synthesize the policies of three quite different American presidents in the context of more prominent theories employed in the field of International Relations and, to a greater extent, Conflict Resolution, will contribute to an understanding of how theory informs practice and how different Presidents have used theory in the actual development of policies. This study highlights options for resolving the Syrian conflict by either facilitating the stability of Syria through diplomatic efforts to transform the Al Assad regime and respond to Syrian opposition concerns or to ignore Syrian sovereignty and directly assault ISIS/ISIL, positioning the Caliphate and not the Al Assad regime as the primary cause for intervention. Answering the research questions posed herein will have contributed not only to our understanding of the situation in Syria as it now exists, but also offer an opportunity to consider how changes to the Syrian situation may ultimately generate new policy initiatives and reshape American activities on the ground in Syria. The study is timely in light of the fact that we are in the last year of the Obama administration and the actual situation in Syria continues to evolve. The presence of Russia and Iran and Hezbollah as actors in the Syria crisis is yet another reason for taking a close look at American policies and their likely transformations.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction

This second chapter of the study focuses on transformations in U.S. foreign policy toward Syria under Bashar Al Assad as represented by three U.S. presidential administrations. A projection of future policy directions surveys four unique bodies of literature. The first is a review of relevant theories addressing both theories of International Relations (IR) that speak to the approaches employed in developing foreign policies at the highest levels of national leadership and a description of the theory of Coalition Building, which is employed in Conflict Resolution. Secondly, the literature will explore the historical evolution of the Syrian crisis and identify its unique nature and position in geopolitical relations. Third, the literature review will examine the actual policies that were implemented during the presidential administrations of Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama. The final section of the literature review will draw heavily upon published presidential and governmental documents and statements as well as scholarly commentary to assess the viability of the theories of IR presented herein. This review of literature provides a background for a comparative case of Iraq and the gassing of Iraqi Kurds, which is developed in subsequent chapters of the study.

Theoretical Frameworks

Two sets of theory are employed within this dissertation. The first set consists of what Spragens (1976) identified as political theories, ways of looking at politics that add up to a symbolic picture of an ordered whole or a vision that functions as a way of understanding the world of politics. Spragens (1976) says that the goal of political theory is “to provide a comprehensive vision of the political enterprise” and a means of
understanding politics “by looking at it against the background of human nature and other features of our world which we must take as givens” (p. 4). Political theory, which is vital in the field of IR, sketches the geography of politics and offers a vision of politics that is a symbolic picture of an ordered whole.

Political theories are essentially metaphors that are viewed as normative in terms of the responses that a nation-state will make with respect to a particular situation or crisis. However, political theory is rarely employed in a straightforward manner. Spragens (1976), for example, pointed out that political theory may shape and inform a particular policy but more often than not policies themselves are the end result of many different views or concerns. A political theory of IR may actually be the result of multiple theoretical streams coming together to create a hybrid approach to policy formulation. Indeed, Zahariadis (2014) offered the idea that Multiple Streams – problems, politics, policy itself, policy entrepreneurs, and policy windows – coalesce to create a policy output that represents a multifaceted response to an issue. Thus, the theoretical lenses presented in this section of Chapter Two derived from the field of IR may be used by each of the three target presidential administrations singly or in combination.

The second theory discussed below is Coalition Building Theory. Cakmak (2007) noted that the theory of Coalition Building in world politics is rarely discussed in the traditional IR literature, but nevertheless Coalition Building is an increasingly significant aspect of the responses undertaken in cases where a particular conflict involves multiple actors. The theory of Coalition Building is examined in this study as it pertains to creating a successful strategy for reconciling the Syrian conflict. While there are many different approaches to resolving or ending violent conflict through peacekeeping
strategies and reconciliation, Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall (2012) make note of the fact that at its core, peacekeeping involves moving towards a settlement of armed conflict via the processes of negotiation and mediation; these processes may in fact require the participation of multiple actors. This theory, therefore, is especially useful in the case of the Syrian conflict, which involves multiple actors each with a vested interest in shaping the outcome of the conflict (Charap, 2013).

Theories of International Relations

Overview of the Section

The theories of IR that are relevant to the formation of foreign policy briefly discussed herein are Realism, Liberalism, Democratic Peace Theory, Neoconservatism, Conflict Theory, Rational Choice Theory, and Dynamical Systems Theory. These broad categories of political theory are seen by Spragens (1976) as useful in both diagnosis and prescription in the political arena. The theories as described hereafter offer unique, yet occasionally overlapping, perspectives on what strategy, in terms of policy development, is most likely to serve the interests of an actor (e.g., a nation-state, a nongovernmental organization, a for profit entity, or an individual) in a given situation. Of course, rarely is a single political theory adequate for explaining the complex process that leads to policy formation.

As Zahariadis (2014) suggests, the Multiple Streams Approach (MSA) is a lens or framework explaining how policies are made by the government under conditions of ambiguity. Ambiguity facilitates “taking appropriate actions and shaping preferences without a priori estimating the consequences” (Zahariadis, 2014, p. 25). Ambiguity refers to a state of having many ways of thinking about the same circumstances or phenomena.
These ways may not necessarily be reconcilable, creating vagueness, confusion, and stress. By identifying problems, policies, politics, policy windows, and policy entrepreneurs as the structural elements that come together to create policy output, Zahariadis (2014) emphasizes the complexity of the policymaking process. Each of the individual theories presented below are likely to have some kind of influence over the development of American foreign policies regarding Syria in each of the three presidential administrations discussed as cases.

The Realism Approach

Of all the theories of International Relations (IR) and of the approaches taken to the development of foreign policy by a sovereign nation state, it is Realism that may in fact be most often encountered in the scholarly literature (Masataka, 2012). At its most basic, Realism advances the idea that nation-states pursue nothing more and nothing less than a balance of power which, when stable, prevents conflict from occurring and creates an environment in which peace is likely. Realists argue, as does Masataka (2012), that the “balance of power has been the primary principle governing international relations since the establishment of an international community in modern Europe and there has been no peace where there was no balance of power” (p. 399). Realism is, therefore, a significant theoretical underpinning of the foreign policy initiatives of many leaders of nation-states; in this study, realism and other theories are applicable as a framework for presidential policies of Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama.

Realists assert that left to its own devices, society becomes chaotic, anarchic, and ultimately unstable (McGraw, 2001). From this particular perspective, states must, out of necessity, work to achieve a balance of power that protects their own interests and, when
possible, advances the interests of the state over the interests of others (Gilpin, 1984; Murray, 1997). Since the eighteenth century, Realism has remained a vital approach to the formulation of state policies, shaping such policies by emphasizing the development and maintenance of those alliances that will be supportive of a country’s own goals and objectives and capable of generating success in the pursuit of short-term goals (Owens, 2007).

Realism, as described by Richmond (2011), gives rise to the notion of states as transitional actors that are focused on supporting their own goals and objectives and approaching external conflicts with a view toward determining how those conflicts will impact on the state. This is not to suggest that Realists do not acknowledge the necessity of supporting their allies. Nevertheless, as Owens (2007) and Sodaro (2004) have argued, Realists purse policies that are self-serving and varied, alternating periods of isolationism with periods of more active engagement. Ford (2013) argued that a Realist policy may very well include elements of both engagement and isolation, as has occasionally been used with respect to the relationship between the United States and Syria. In other words, Realism seems to be a somewhat ubiquitous theory that is incorporated into other approaches on an as needed basis.

**Liberalism**

Bell (2008) notes that Liberalism derives to some extent from Realism, moving beyond classical Realism to emphasize a radical, moral, or normative critique of the state from a leftist perspective. Liberalism, said Bell (2008), is inherently idealist and has become a primary mode of theoretical analysis since World War I and the ideology of President Woodrow Wilson. McGraw (2001) views Liberalism as initiated by the belief
that humans are inherently good and that cooperation between disparate nations is possible and certainly desirable. Liberalism blends, to an extent, with other theoretical formulations in shaping the ideological orientation of a leader’s decision-making; in this study, Liberalism is presented as a background to the policies of Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama vis-à-vis Syria and other issues of significance during their respective tenures in the Oval Office.

Liberalism, said Buchan (2002), “accepts as axiomatic that the domestic nature of the state is a key determinant of its behavior toward other states” (p. 407). This particular assumption derives from the view that peace is a quality that is achieved by civil societies operating within states, while conflict is likely to still be endemic in the external world of relations between states. Liberalism asserts that liberal, civil societies are more peaceful than illiberal states. It also proposes that spreading liberalism will result in a reduction of conflict. One is tempted to conclude that those who promote the spread of democracy or the process of democratization are essentially advancing the Liberalist agenda (McGraw, 2001). Given that spreading democracy was a central concern of the George W. Bush Administration, this theory is useful in describing his approaches to foreign policy.

Liberal IR theorists often take the position that the role of the state is to guarantee individual rights, freedom, and legal protections of life and property to citizens (Buchan, 2002). States that do not do so are seen by Liberalism as prone to conflict, incapable of eliminating violence, and vulnerable to ongoing internecine power struggles as marginalized groups strive for participation (Sodaro, 2004). In this same context, Genest (2004) asserts that states are more likely to cooperate than to compete when their
common interests calls for cooperation and when they are developmentally in a position
to benefit more from cooperation than from conflict.

Liberal theorists, according to Richmond (2011), see military engagement as a
foreign policy tool that is literally a tool of last resort. It is a tool that is brought into play
only when other efforts at bringing about a negotiated end to a conflict have been
exhausted. The Liberal policy initiative deployed in the context of the illiberal state like
Syria focused on peacebuilding through what Richmond (2011) called a culture welfare
paradox. The notion of changing the hearts and minds of actors within illiberal states is
fundamental to this perspective. Of course, as Rada (2014) has commented, Liberalism is
hardly alone in its determination to ensure that illiberal states transform themselves into
democracies or liberal states.

**Democratic Peace Theory**

Tellidis (2012) states that “during the last decade, a multitude of research findings
have critiqued the liberal peace framework concentrating mainly on the illiberal effects
that liberal peacebuilding has had on the countries it was implemented in” (p.429). In
discussing a post-liberal peace, Richmond (2011) strongly suggests that the framework
through which Liberalism and its institutions function depends upon the promotion and
maintenance of a neoliberal economy. Rarely, if ever, do international actors
“contextualize responses to conflict by taking into account the needs and rights of the
populations for whom peace is prepared” (Tellidis, 2012, p. 429). Democratic Peace
Theory, as a shift from Liberalism per se, does focus on building democratic institutions
within societies as a strategy for eliminating conflict. The theory is relevant here in that
all three of the U.S. presidents serving as “cases” for analysis have advanced, to some
extent, the notion that democratic institutions are capable of facilitating a reduction in conflict and the establishment of viable mechanisms for resolving social and other problems.

Democratic Peace Theory derives somewhat from the early philosophical work of Montesquieu, who is described by Patapan (2012, p. 314) as “best known for his theory of the separation of powers that influenced the American founders, determining the contours of American constitutionalism and subsequent international constitutional reforms based on the American model.” This approach further suggested that democratic peace may better be understood as commercial peace, a view that supports the imposition of the neoliberal agenda on the developing world without fully acknowledging the role that is played in fostering inequities by neoliberal economic policies.

Montesquieu’s *Doux Commerce* thesis essentially argues that commercial interactions between sovereign nation-states tend to promote peaceful relationships because it is ultimately in the best interest of states to eliminate conflict. Democratic Peace theorists make the case that excessive engagement in military, boots on the ground, or other forms of conflict is antithetical to the resolution of disputes. Increasing opportunities for mediation, facilitation, and arbitration when conflict occurs underpins the Democratic Peace theory and emphasizes what Rada (2014) sees as an implicit understanding of the liberal notion that democracies do not make war on each other and that spreading democracy is the best solution to the problem of conflict. To an extent, one might argue that the refusal of the various U.S. Presidential administrations to employ military responses in Syria reflects this theoretical posture.
Rada (2014) sees the promotion of democracy as derived from a liberal conviction that there is a universal value to democracy and that a democratic world will be more stable and secure than an undemocratic world. Democratic peacebuilding and democratization seek state interests in the form of improved trade and the flow of foreign direct investment, the securing of collective interests of allies and the entire international community, and an end to authoritarianism. Democratic peacebuilding therefore shares some goals with Realist policies and with those that are Liberal.

Genest (2004) makes the case that cooperation is a key goal in policies generated by Liberal, Democratic peacebuilding, and Realist approaches to International Relations. At the same time, Realists are less focused on the necessity of democratization, as long as undemocratic and even totalitarian states are cooperative and do not pose a direct threat to the interests of the democratic state (Patapan, 2012).

**Neoconservatism**

The fourth theory discussed here is less optimistic than either Liberalism or Democratic Peace theory. Neoconservatism shares with Realism the conviction that the world is more likely to be dangerous than stable and that sovereign nation-states often engage in what amounts to little more than a struggle between good and evil, right and wrong (Owens, 2007). Neoconservatism, best understood within the context of the George W. Bush administration in recent years (Rappoport, 2008; Sukanta, 2006), may have been rooted in Liberalism with respect to its goal of peacebuilding and equality, but it departs dramatically from Liberalism on some key issues such as the necessity of disarmament. The theory, according to Rappoport (2008), is especially applicable to the policies of President George W. Bush.
Neoconservatism, as described by Muravchik (2007), emerged in the 1970s with a negative connotation, attempting to stigmatize liberal intellectuals who had become disenchanted with Liberalism orientation due to its apparent failure to bring about meaningful global stability (Muravchik, 2007). Neoconservatism is aggressively anti-Communist, anti-authoritarian, and pro-democratization. While President Ronald Reagan embraced concepts of Neoconservatism as promoted by thinkers such as Jeanne Kirkpatrick and Elliott Abrams, the general public became more sensitized to Neoconservatism in the George W. Bush administration (Muravchik, 2007).

Muravchik (2007) described Neoconservatives as moralists who were hostile toward acts of aggression committed by individuals such as Saddam Hussain, Slobodan Milosevic and the Al Assads in Syria. Like Liberals, contemporary neoconservatives are internationalists who believe that “depredations tolerated in one place were likely to be repeated elsewhere – and conversely that beneficial political and economic policies exercised their own ‘domino effect’ for the good” (Muravchik, 2007, p. 24). Third, neoconservatives also believe strongly in the value of democracy both domestically and internationally while trusting in the efficacy of military force and doubting that either U.N. supported sanctions or diplomacy would be sufficient to undermine a determined adversary.

Like Realists, neoconservatives see the world as dangerous and as threatening to the security of even the most stable democratic state (Sukanta, 2006). When creating foreign policies, neoconservatives take the position that dangerous regimes cannot and should not be tolerated and that it is essentially incumbent upon a country with the will and the capacity to topple such regimes to do so. The neoconservative approach to
foreign policy is much more complex than its critics would allow. It does not deny the usefulness of military sanctions or of diplomacy. What it does is support the potential necessity of such policy tools as the preemptive strike. Consequently, it has become a policy orientation that many see as overly militaristic, even though it has been successful in some cases (Krauthammer, 2005).

**Conflict Theory**

Conflict Theory owes a great deal to the work of Karl Marx, who argued that the inequalities in any society are derived from the class system and essentially from capitalism, a mode of production that exacerbated class differences, polarized workers and elites, and created the kinds of tensions that would not be readily resolved (Knapp, 1994). Marxism may form the basis of conflict theory, but contemporary conflict theory goes beyond a criticism of capitalism and includes the notion that factors other than economic ones influence such antagonisms and tensions.

For example, Ludwig Gumplowicz proposed that civilization had historically been shaped as a consequence of conflict occurring between disparate cultures and ethnic groups. This theorist saw war and conquest as giving rise to the development of large complex human societies in which a caste system was common (Lenski, 1966). Other theorists, such as Lester Ward, took the position that human nature itself was conflicted and that civilization had from the outset been the locus of a struggle among the competing impulses of altruism and self-aggrandizement or emotion and intellect (Lenski, 1966). Emile Durkheim proposed that certain types of conflict were actually beneficial to society; Max Weber, in contrast, departed from Marx by emphasizing the role played by individuals rather than groups in shaping society (Lenski, 1966).
Modern Conflict Theory owes much to C. Wright Mills’ theory that there are substantial power differences between groups and individuals within society (Knapp, 1994). Mills proposed that social structures are created by individuals who have differing or conflicting interests and resources which, in turn, are influenced by the structures that they create. The end result is that societies experience an unequal distribution of power and resources (Knapp, 1994). For Mills, a power elite in any country employs its resources and capacities to further its own interests and will accommodate the interests of others only when absolutely necessary to serve their own purposes. It was Mills’ conviction that the policies enacted by a power elite would inevitably lead to an escalation of conflict.

Conflict Theory further assumes that all societies are inherently unequal (Sears, 2008). Alan Sears (2008) offered several fundamental propositions regarding conflict theory that are useful in this study. First, Sears (2008) suggests that societies are defined by inequality that produces conflict rather than order. Second, the disadvantaged have structural interests that challenge the status quo while human potential is suppressed via the unequal division of labor that is exploitative and oppressive. Third, Sears (2008) argues that the State exists to serve the particular interest of the most powerful, and even when disadvantaged groups have representation in state organs or legislative assemblies, their actual access to power is minimal. Finally, Sears (2008) asserts that global inequality is the direct result of purposive underdevelopment of certain nations that occurred during colonialism and which continues because global institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the United Nations (UN)
actually serve the interests of multinational corporations and the developed world (Sears, 2008).

**Rational Choice Theory**

Rational Choice Theory, variously referred to as choice theory or rational actor theory, is one of the fundamental theories employed in the field of IR and also in CR. As described by Green and Shapiro (1994), this particular theoretical framework is used in both social and economic applications and is based on the premise that aggregate or group social behavior is the result of the behavior of individual actors. An additional assumption of this theory is that actions are based upon a calculus that is derived from comparing the benefits and losses that are associated with a particular choice; consequently, the theory proposes that people as well as groups make choices that are embedded in rationality or reason and are driven by a recognition of the relationship between cause and effect (Levin & Milgrom, 2004).

Early work in the field of Rational Choice Theory was done by theorists such as George Homas who drew heavily upon behavioral psychology. Other pioneers in the field included Blau, Coleman, and Cook, each of whom during the 1960s and 1970s transformed exchange theory into a more complex theoretical perspective based upon a variety of assumptions as to what motivates human behavior (Levin, & Milgrom, 2004).

The rational agent, either as an individual or a nation-state, is seen in this particular theory as choosing those actions that will be most beneficial to him or herself or to the group. The theory, as described by Sodaro (2004), stems from the fundamental premise that human beings are motivated economically as well as politically by material self-interest. From the economic perspective, people attempt to maximize their utilities to
achieve a net gain rather than a net loss. Behavior aimed at achieving such an objective is considered to be rational. For economists, said Sodaro (2004), a rational choice is “a choice or a decision that is consciously calculated to maximize expected gains and minimize expected risks and losses” (p. 35).

Some early theorists, including Homas, applied concepts of economic rationality to politics, leading to a body of work concluding that even in political behavior people tend to be motivated by narrowly defined notions of pure self-interest. Voters, for example, were said to be likely to vote for a candidate who was most capable of increasing their material well-being. Politicians were assumed to be interested mainly in maximizing their personal power. Sodaro (2004) defines rational choice theory in the political or sociological arena as maintaining “that individuals behave in politics on the basis of self-interest, seeking to increase their expected gains and reduce their expected costs and risks on the basis of personal preferences and priorities” (p. 36).

Rational Choice Theory, therefore, is an analytic framework that looks less at the group than at the individual (Levin & Milgrom, 2004). Applied to the actions of a nation-state, this particular theory appears to suggest that political decisions and policies are ultimately the result of an aggregation of individual preferences that are designed to function in a transitive manner, indicating that the options available for action will be considered in terms of their relative benefits, evaluated in terms of their costs, and ultimately narrowed down to the action or outcome that provides the maximum net benefit.

Further, the rational choice model is based upon the assumption that the individual actor has full or perfect information about the alternatives that are available
and can therefore rank them appropriately. Another assumption is that in circumstances that are uncertain, individuals continue to make judgements and choices based on the best information about likely outcomes. Of course, as Sodaro (2004) points out, this particular theory also assumes that most actors have the ability to identify and weigh alternatives against each other. This suggests that there is sufficient time available for making a rational, decision about which course of action will be most beneficial.

Rational Choice Theory, according to Saari (2001), addresses three imperatives: completeness, transitiveness, and independence of irrelevant alternatives. The fundamental economic underpinnings of the theory may be one of its limiting factors when applied to political actions. Sodaro (2004) notes that the merits of the theory as a general explanation of political behavior are hotly debated. In authoritarian regimes, for example, the theory may actually have greater relevance and utility than it does in democratic regimes. In a dictatorship, the chief of state may very well perceive him or herself to be a rational actor making choices on behalf of the governed without their input or consent. In democracies, where policies promoted even by an extremely popular chief executive or president are subject to debate and modification, the input of multiple stakeholders is very likely to influence a decision (Sodaro, 2004).

Dynamical Systems Theory

Dynamical Systems Theory has been characterized as an area of mathematics that is extremely useful in explaining and describing behaviors of complex dynamical systems via differential equations (Luenberger, 1979). Differential equations are employed in what is known as discrete dynamical system analysis, suggesting that this mathematically driven theory is most applicable to situations that lend themselves to some type of
quantification. An offshoot is chaos theory, which describes the behavior of those
dynamical systems whose state evolves over time and are very sensitive to what is known
as the butterfly effect (Luenberger, 1979).

In the social sciences and political science, Dynamical Systems Theory, as
described by Miller (2002), owes much to the work of Esther Thelen, who drew upon
Newtonian science to identify the ways in which multiple factors determine behavior.
Multiple factors are seen as interrelated with an individual’s goals and objectives,
competencies, the specific task being addressed, and the situation in which these
variables come together (Thelen & Bates, 2003). The system is nonlinear in that it is
based upon the assumption that at any given time a set of factors can combine to create a
number of options for action.

Moreover, the theory is based upon other assumptions, to wit:

- Dynamic interaction between factors has the potential to impact on the system,
evoking change through either stabilization or destabilization.
- When two or more factors interact, results may either be transformative or
destabilizing as there is no guarantee of what outcome will emerge.
- The theory does provide ways of thinking, actualizing, and forming such
interactions and happenings via an understanding of time, the elements involved,
and the procedures being employed.
- The theory provides an opportunity to examine entire systems that are involved in
a global problem and necessitates looking underneath the surface and moving
from the immediate to the normative (Luenberger, 1979).
Clearly, Dynamical Systems Theory allows recognition of the fact that past behaviors shape and inform future choices. In the present case, many analysts are of the opinion that Vladimir Putin’s decision to use Russian military intervention in Syria was predictable in light not only of his earlier intervention in Crimea and Ukraine, but also in light of his determination to return Russia to a position of prominence in the geopolitical arena (Marten, 2015).

Dynamical Systems Theory also proposes that any change in any element of a system will indefinitely affect other components of the system (Thelen & Bates, 2003). The entry of Russia as both a ground and air actor in Syria changes the situation substantially. Where the United States has been using air strikes and other forms of assistance (e.g., provision of equipment, training, intelligence) against the Assad regime and ISIS/ISI, Cohen (2015) maintains that Russia’s goal is in complete opposition to this policy; it seeks to counter support given to anti-Assad forces and to support Assad as he struggles to maintain control of even a relatively small portion of what was once Syria.

**Coalition Building Theory: A Conflict Resolution Strategy**

Any study of policy processes evokes a set of questions related to the behavior of actors who directly or indirectly attempt to influence policy processes. Many of these questions consider the role of coalitions defined by Spangler (2003) as “a temporary alliance or partnering of groups in order to achieve a common purpose or to engage in joint activity” (p. 1). Coalition building is the process by which individuals, organizations, or nations come together to form a coalition with other groups of similar interests, values, and goals (Yarn, 1991). Coalition Building (CB) theory departs from conventional IR theory, which bases its paradigms primarily on “the role of the nation-
state in international politics and the interactions between themselves as the only meaningful activities that should be take into consideration for theoretical analysis” (Cakmak, 2008, p. 2).

This tendency is largely being abandoned in part because policymakers are increasingly cognizant of the growing role that is played by non-state actors on the global stage (Cakmak, 2007). Coalition Building emphasizes the reality that coalitions are essentially outcomes of a pragmatic approach and are not “built because it is good, moral, or nice to get everyone working together. The only reason to spend the time and energy building a coalition is to amass the power necessary to do something you cannot do through one organization” (Bobo, Kendall, & Max, 1991, p. 70).

Coalition building matters because it is a basic skill for those who wish to attain and maintain power and influence (Watkins & Rosegrant, 2001). Coalition building is not only a useful tool for powerful nation-states, it is also “the primary mechanism through which disempowered parties can develop their party base and thereby better defend their interests” (Spangler, 2003, p. 1). The formation of a coalition is widely recognized as shifting, or potentially shifting, the balance of power in a conflict situation and altering the future course of the conflict. Coalition members acting in concert may be able to resist certain threats or begin to make counter threats. Building a successful coalition begins with recognizing compatible interests and similar goals. It is premised on recognition that working together will change members’ capacity for reaching their goals and that the benefits of coalescing will be greater than the costs.

Spangler (2003, pp. 1-2) identified the benefits of coalitions as including the following:
- A coalition of organizations can win on more fronts than a single organization working alone and increase the potential for success.

- A coalition can bring more expertise and resources to bear on complex issues, where the technical or personnel resources of any one organization would not be sufficient.

- A coalition can develop new leaders. As experienced group leaders step forward to lead the coalition, openings are created for new leaders in the individual groups. The new, emerging leadership strengthens the groups and the coalition.

- A coalition will increase the impact of each organization's effort. Involvement in a coalition means there are more people who have a better understanding of your issues and more people advocating for your side.

- A coalition will increase available resources. Not only will physical and financial resources be increased, but each group will gain access to the contacts, connections, and relationships established by other groups.

- A coalition may raise its members' public profiles by broadening the range of groups involved in a conflict. The activities of a coalition are likely to receive more media attention than those of any individual organization.

- A coalition can build a lasting base for change. Once groups unite, each group's vision of change broadens and it becomes more difficult for opposition groups to disregard the coalition's efforts as dismissible or as special interests.

- A successful coalition is made up of people who have never worked together before. Coming from diverse backgrounds and different viewpoints, they have to figure out how to respect each other's differences and get something big
accomplished. They have to figure out how each group and its representatives can make their different but valuable contributions to the overall strategy for change. This helps avoid duplication of efforts and improve communication among key players.

Conversely, Spangler (2003) notes that coalitions are only as strong as their weakest link, and that to maintain a coalition, it is often essential to cater to one side more than another, particularly when negotiating tactics. Further, the “democratic principle of one group-one vote may not always be acceptable to members with a lot of power and resources. The coalition must carefully define the relationships between powerful and less powerful groups” (Spangler, 2003, p. 2). Despite these potential disadvantages, coalitions are viable when they are flexible, issue oriented, and the product of a strategy or strategic plan that targets an issue that must be addressed if desirable outcomes are to be forthcoming (Cakmak, 2007).

Coalition Building, according to Jenkins-Smith, Nohrstedt, Weible, and Sabatier (2014), has become a common feature within CR because of growing recognition that few geopolitical problems can be resolved by single actors. Coalition formation and maintenance has emerged as a means of developing frameworks for addressing complex problems – a characteristic that is certainly applicable to the Syrian case. Researchers, including Cloke, (2008) point out that it is impossible to achieve either “a sustainable peace or an integrated, equitable, and just social order that makes such peace possible unless opposing sides are able to listen, learn, and seek to understand each other” (p. 14). Collaborative action is necessary in conflict resolution because few if any problems are actually amenable to resolution by a single or even a limited group of actors.
Peacemaking as a strategy for resolving conflicts, according to Ramsbotham et al. (2012), necessitates coalition building because no one actor in the post-Cold War world is capable of imposing a resolution on actors in a conflict.

Monteleone (2015, p. 46), stated that:

Denied by realists and neglected by neoliberal institutionalists and constructivists, coalitions are crucial in global leadership and in hegemonic theories: it is the coalition that emerges as the winner after a global competition that gains the power of structural initiation, becoming the dominant coalition.

This analyst takes the position that Coalition Building is, in the post-Cold War world, an absolute necessity. There are too many overlapping interests that could come into play to ignore the usefulness of coordinated action. Further, Monteleone (2015) stated that when a conflict such as that taking place in Syria is underway, there will invariably be competing needs and interests that must be resolved. A coalition is the mechanism that best addresses this complexity.

Thus, Coalition Building is offered herein as the most appropriate strategy for bringing about a reconciliation of the Syrian conflict. Of course, building a coalition in and of itself does not identify or determine the policy approach that the coalition will undertake or address (Jenkins-Smith, et al., 2014). As will be discussed below, Coalition Building Theory can be employed in developing a response to the Syrian crisis that incorporates diplomatic interaction with Bashar Al Assad as a sovereign state leader or as a mechanism for developing a coordinated attack on either ISIS or the Assad regime itself.
Historical Background and Overview of the Syrian Conflict

Introduction

This section of the review of literature examines the historical background of the Syrian conflict, presents an overview of key events in the conflict, and assesses the level of engagement by multiple domestic and international parties in the conflict. A demographic description of Syria establishes a portrait of the state, while a discussion of the emergence of the Al Assad regime provides insight into the onset of opposition in the Syrian state. This section also includes a summary of the current status of the Syrian conflict and introduces issues regarding the roles played by external actors, including the United States, Russia, Iran, and ISIS.

Demographic Profile of Syria

With a total land mass of 185,180 square kilometers, Syria borders the states of Lebanon and Turkey and is geographically positioned in a region that is certainly no stranger to internecine violent conflict. Like its neighbors, Syria is populated primarily by followers of Islam, with Muslims accounting for 87 percent of the population. This figure includes a 74 percent Sunni majority which has nevertheless found itself marginalized by the dominant Alawite clan represented by the Al Assads (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015). The Alawite, Shia, and Ismaili consists only 13 percent of the total population of Syria. An additional 10 percent of Syrians are members of some Christian faith community, while some three percent are Druze.

Between 1980 and 2010, the population of Syria grew significantly from around nine million to slightly more than 21.5 million. Projections from the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western ASIA (ESCWA) (2011) indicated that the
Syrian population would continue to grow and reach a peak of 36.7 million in 2050. However, given the enormous exodus of Syrians from the country, this seems unlikely at the present time. Interestingly, some 20 percent of all Syrians are under the age of 25 and many of these young people find it all but impossible to make a living in a country that is torn by warfare (United Nations ESCWA, 2011).

Poverty has been recognized as a persistent characteristic of Syria, one that coupled with political oppression has given rise to conflict between the Al Assad regime and the Syrian people (United Nations ESCWA, 2011). The United Nations Development Programme (2014) indicated that approximately 6.4 percent of the Syrian population can be characterized as “multidimensionally” poor, while an additional 7.7 percent of Syrians experience poverty as a consequence of the conflict. The World Bank predicted that poverty rates in 2014 would be 82.5 percent of the population with this number of Syrians experiencing ongoing challenges with respect to meeting basic survival needs (i.e., food, shelter, medical care, and education.)

Economically, the World Bank (2014) characterized Syria as a middle income developing country that is possessed of a diversified economy that included an expanding energy sector. Nevertheless, a combination of a global economic recession in 2008 and the Syrian civil war have coalesced to undermine any economic advances the country may have in fact achieved. The economy is slowed by a number of factors, including state intervention reflecting price, trade, and foreign exchange controls. The public sector is no longer investing in infrastructure and is, in fact, focused almost entirely upon shoring up the military resources of the Assad regime to the detriment of any other meaningful investment in infrastructure (World Bank, 2014).
Prior to the crisis, Syria’s economy was confronted with multiple challenges. Poor development of capital markets, a lack of access to international finance, and limited Syrian monetary policies are all problematic (U.S. Department of State, 2014). The war has brought about escalating unemployment rates and undermined government efforts in the pre-crisis era to improve the standard of living enjoyed by Syrians particularly as a consequence of oil exploration and exploitation.

Politically, the U.S. Department of State (2014) says that Syria has the characteristics of a republican semi-presidential system, a characterization that does not take into account the long-term existence of an authoritarian presidential system wherein the Al Assad family has held the reins of power since 1970. Although there are elections for the presidency held every seven years, it would be patently absurd to suggest that there is a truly democratic system in place in Syria. The Syrian president enjoys virtually unlimited power and can appoint without the advice and consent of a single legislative assembly and key actors such as the vice president, prime minister, Council of Ministers, and top-ranking members of both the armed forces and the ruling Baath Party.

Since March of 2011, antigovernment protests calling for the resignation of President Assad have transformed an opposition movement into a committed military force determined to bring down the Assad regime. Adding to the problems experienced in Syria was the expansion of economic sanctions against the Assad regime on the part of such external actors such as the Arab League, Turkey, the United States, and the European Union (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015). The Syrian National Coalition has been recognized by more than 130 countries as the only legitimate representative of the
Syrian people. Peace negotiations between this coalition and the Syrian regime in Geneva in 2014 did not bring about any meaningful resolution to the conflict (CIA, 2015).

**Historical Evolution of the Conflict**

Some discussion of the background of the Syrian conflict was presented in Chapter One. With this background in mind, other comments are certainly relevant herein. Since March 2011, antigovernment protests demanding the resignation of President Assad have escalated and continue to escalate. These protests began in March 2011 in the south of Syria in Dar’a when 15 young people between the ages of 10 and 15 were arrested and tortured by Syrian secret police after they were found putting up antigovernment graffiti (Spindel, 2011). Protests in Dar’a focused on calls for the repeal of Assad’s emergency laws along with the legalization of a multi-party system and an end to corrupt government activity. Other reforms were demanded as were equal rights for Kurds. Spindel (2011) noted that protests expanded to other parts of the country with security forces employing lethal weapons against protesters as well as an attack on a mosque believed to be the center of protest mobilization.

As March ended, the protests spread even farther throughout the country with demands of protesters in Damascus, Duma, and Banyas intensifying opposition to the Al Assad regime. The Syrian National Council was formed in October of 2011 and its leaders fled the country, seeking refuge in neighboring Persian Gulf nations as well as in Paris and London (International Crisis Group, 2011). While Assad did repeal the emergency laws and passed new laws permitting political parties and liberalizing elections, President Assad refused to step down and ordered the military to continue its progressively brutal response to the protesters.
According to the International Crisis Group (2011, p. 1), the repressive response of Assad’s security forces has been interpreted “as a consequence of their makeup; the praetorian military units (the Republican Guard) and the branches of the secret police (Amn Al-Dawla, Amn Siyasi, Amn Dakhili, Istikhbarat) known under the generic name of Mukhabarat are disproportionately composed of Alawites with no mercy in the efforts of containing the protest units.” It is highly probable that the violence of the government’s response to the protests further inspired the emergence of opposition groups as well as the massive internal and external migration of Syrians seeking an escape from the war.

Attached as Appendix A is a detailed chronology which identifies key acts and events in the Syrian crisis. This detailed chronology provides an opportunity for the reader to examine the activities of the Bashar Al Assad regime over a period of 16 years. The chronology demonstrates that while the regime early on attempted to reach out to segments of the population, this quickly came to an end. The Al Assads’ political reforms included efforts to gain the support of Iran (a key regional actor) and Russia (Branson, 2000). Certainly, Branson (2000) suggests that in 2000, Syria wanted to position itself as a key player in the Middle East. In pursuit of this goal, the Assad regime positioned the country as a quasi-provocateur while also seeking to acquire extensive stockpiles of chemical and nuclear weapons. The relationships between Iran and Russia entered into by the Assads quickly eliminated any signs of outreach to the West (Branson, 2000).

When Bashar Al Assad assumed the presidency in 2007, a number of political reforms were forthcoming. This included the emergence of some independent newspapers, civil society organizations, and intellectual forums. Though relatively brief
and narrowly focused, these particular efforts were indicative of the determination of many in Syria to force the Assad regime to loosen its grip on the political system and civic life (Wood, 2014). The ruling Baath party responded fairly quickly by banning any and all criticism of the president, his family, and the party itself. Blockage of social media followed swiftly, and when mass mobilizations emerged in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, Assad reacted quickly to prevent any manifestation of such protests in his country (BBC News, 2015).

The end result of these repressive actions was the formation of a multifaceted Syrian opposition. BBC News (2015) pointed out that this opposition was in no way coordinated or cohesive and is in fact deeply divided and consisting of multiple “political groups, exiled dissidents, grassroots activists, and armed militants unable to agree on how to overthrow President Al Assad” (p. 1). Attached as Appendices B and C are materials that first identify the key opposition groups in Syria and secondly depict their relationships in an organizational chart.

The Free Syrian Army consists of defectors from the Syrian Army. The Southern Front of the Free Syrian Army is in a coalition with the Free Syrian Army. There are independent groups that are friendly to the Free Syrian Army such as the Syrian Democratic Forces, various coalitions, and transnational jihadi co-belligerents. A key feature of the opposition is that coalitions work together on an ad hoc basis to funnel financial, military, and humanitarian aid to one another (BBC News, 2015). The coalition, headquartered in Doha, Qatar, also has members in Syria and presents itself as the sole legitimate representative of the Syrian people, calling on forces in the country to
overthrow the Assads, shut down the security and military forces of the regime, and create a democratic Syria.

Included in the National Coalition are various Local Coordination Committees that are a grassroots arm of the Coalition as well as members of local revolutionary councils supported by the Supreme Military Council of the Free Syrian Army (BBC News, 2015). The National Coalition is currently recognized by the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) along with France, the European Union, the United States, and the United Kingdom. In opposition to the National Coalition are China, Russia, and Iran – each of which support the Assad regime and have blocked action by the United Nations Security Council and refused to participate in the December 2012 Marrakesh Friends of the Syrian People Conference (BBC News, 2015).

Unfortunately, the National Coalition is underfunded and has been challenged by the Syrian National Council for leadership roles. There is debate among members of the Syrian opposition as to whether violent or nonviolent opposition to the Assad regime is preferable. The Syrian National Council is dominated by Syria’s majority Sunni Muslim community (BBC News, 2015). This group has been challenged by the National Coordination Committee, an opposition bloc functioning in Syria today that rejects Islamists within the Syrian National Council, which is also not on good terms with the Free Syrian Army (BBC News, 2015).

To further complicate the opposition, the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change emerged as an alliance consisting of 14 to 16 leftist political parties, three Kurdish political parties, and some independent activists with no known affiliations. This group is on record as objecting not only to what is perceived as the Muslim
Brotherhood’s domination of the exiled Syrian National Council, but also to the support provided to rebel groups by Turkey and Gulf Arab states (BBC News, 2015). Add to this the Kurdish Supreme Committee, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the Kurdish National Council, and the Kurdish Popular Protection Units (YPG), and it becomes quite clear that the opposition in Syria is in no way a unified group.

Sayigh (2016) commented that these groups operate under multiple disadvantages, not the least of which is their apparent inability to agree on key objectives and strategies. While they all may wish to remove Assad from power and create a new government that is inclusive of all groups within Syria, they are not in agreement as to the best way of achieving these goals and objectives. There are so many semi-independent military units at work in Syria that it is extremely difficult for even the most knowledgeable analyst to determine which of these groups can be said to represent the majority of the Syria people (Sayigh, 2016).

Actors in the region cannot determine which they should support, either. Iran, as noted above, is backing Assad. The Saudis are providing direct support to Salafist and Islamist groups in western Syria. Turkey and Qatar support nationalist Syrian rebels including some Salafists and Islamists. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, which is now headquartered in Turkey, funnels money and weapons to opposition groups in the north of Syria (Cafarella & Casagrande, 2015). Russia has joined with Iran in supporting Assad; the United States and its allies from the European Union and elsewhere have rejected Assad and have participated in limited use of aerial bombing and drones while focusing on ISIS.
The Rise of the Caliphate

Wood (2014, p. 1) Stated:

On June 29, 2014—or the first of Ramadan, 1435, for those who prefer the Islamic calendar to the Gregorian—the leaders of the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) publicly uttered for the first time a word that means little to the average Westerner, but everything to some pious Muslims. The word is “caliph.” ISIS’s proclamation that day formally hacked the last two letters from its acronym (it’s now just “The Islamic State”) and declared Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, born Ibrahim ibn Awwad ibn Ibrahim ibn Ali ibn Muhammad al-Badri al-Samarrai, the Caliph of all Muslims and the Prince of the Believers.

Further, Wood (2014, p. 1) noted that:

The Islamic State has acted like a caliphate from the beginning, but they couldn’t announce themselves as one because they would have sounded ridiculous.” Now that they’ve controlled Raqqa for more than a year—and oversee as much territory as Abu Bakr, the first rightly guided caliph, himself—the claim looks far more credible. The mass executions and public crucifixions have also done much to erase any lingering aura of comedy.

There is no doubt that ISIS/ISIL (or the Caliphate, as it prefers to be called) has become a force to be reckoned with in Syria and the surrounding region. Its very existence and influence create, for countries such as the United States, an even more challenging environment in which policy formation must occur. On the one hand, the Al Assad regime is no “friend” to the United States; on the other hand, there does not appear to be a single opposition group in Syria that the U.S. can either trust (as is the case with any
Islamist group) or which is capable of simultaneously confronting BOTH the Assad regime and the Caliphate.

The new Russian engagement in Syria has further complicated the issues confronting the U.S. For decades, the relationship between the former Soviet Union and the successor state of Russia with Syria was that of patron and client, with the former providing financial, military, and political assistance to the Al Assad regime (La Franchi, 2012). As the regime of Bashar Al Assad began to experience escalating internal conflict, Russia under President Vladimir Putin chose to inhibit United Nations’ efforts to take some sort of meaningful action against the Al Assad regime. The Arab League offered a Security Council resolution on Syria that Russia and China both vetoed in 2012. The result was that the UN General Assembly, responding to Human Rights Commissioner Navi Pillay’s report on humanitarian abuses by the Assad regime, called for appointing a special envoy and supporting the Arab League plan for a peaceful resolution to the Syrian crisis (Williams, 2012).

The basic premise of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine was the underpinning ethos shaping the UN’s determination to provide some message that would help to convince Bashar Al Assad to come to terms with the opposition in his country and bring about an end to the ongoing conflict (Williams, 2012). Any casual observer of the Syrian crisis is certainly aware that the situation has become increasingly critical as the Islamic State in Iraq/ISIS, or, as it now calls itself, the Caliphate, has taken center stage in determining the course of conflict in Syria (Polonsky, 2015). Most recently, Vladimir Putin has chosen to undertake military intervention in Syria, sending troops, armor, aircraft, and other military equipment to Syria. Equally significant is the fact that Putin
has directed his military to target the opponents of Assad by bombing their strongholds instead of ISIS. However, Fred Weir (2015) has reported that Russian air strikes have not been directed at ISIS but against so called moderate rebels that have been fighting to overthrow the Bashar Al Assad dictatorship for over four years with assistance from the CIA, the Persian Gulf states, and Turkey.

The issue that is now emerging with respect to Russia’s intervention in Syria is centered upon Putin’s motives for engaging in the internal affairs of the country. Weir (2015) suggests that Russia’s strategy is focused solely on bolstering Assad in an effort to turn the tide of the rebellion. Russia is disinterested, according to Kremlin sources, in fighting ISIS per se, but is concerned with ensuring that Damascus and Assad will not fall because the Russians believe that should this occur, the so-called moderates will not succeed in taking control of the country.

Polonsky (2015) noted that Putin has ordered the United States to leave Syrian airspace and that Russia is targeting non-ISIS fighters. Others argue that Russia’s concern is based upon the belief that a failure to defeat the moderate rebels will simply result in an even greater influx of refugees into the European Union. Still others, said Snyder (2015), take the position that under Putin, Russian foreign policy, be it focused on Ukraine or Syria, is designed to position Russia once again as a contender for the title of global superpower.

It is Putin’s desire not to merely back Assad and prevent his regime from crumbling. What Putin seems to want is to increase the political influence of Russia in the Middle East and to challenge the notion that the United States and the West should be the dominant participants in any effort to restore peace to the region. As Marvin Kalb
(2015) has reported, Vladimir Putin is intent on restoring Russia’s reputation as a superpower that is capable of influencing events in multiple theaters of operation. To that end, Kalb (2015) said that “Putin has invested billions in modernizing Russia’s military industrial complex – power that he has used to achieve his political objectives” (p.11).

Putin is, therefore, challenging the United States and playing what Mark Leonard (2015) calls the “great game” of power politics. By partnering to an extent not only with Syria but also with Iran and Hezbollah, Russia wishes to replace the United States and its allies as the dominant power broker in the region. Marginalizing the moderates is said by Leonard (2015) to be a direct assault on the United States and the Western desire to support these forces against Assad.

Conflict theory is definitively relevant to the present case of Russia and Syria and airspace control. As Kalb (2015) points out, Russia has long agonized over the national humiliation caused by the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union. It has sought, particularly since Vladimir Putin became the sole architect of Russian policy, a return to global recognition as a superpower. Looking at global conflict as a macro case, it is reasonable to conceptualize Russia’s decision to intervene in Syria as a move toward re-establishing the country’s power and influence on the global stage.

The conflict thus involved goes beyond the conflict on the ground and in the air over Syria. It involves geopolitical competition between a former superpower, a current superpower and its allies, and a struggle for influence in a volatile region of the world (Marten, 2015).

At the same time, one might argue with some legitimacy, as Polonsky (2015) does, that Putin’s Russia perceives the Assad regime as better equipped to return the
region to stability than either the “moderates” supported by the United States and the European Union or ISIS/ISIL. Putin has said publicly, as have individuals such as Sergei Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister, that Russia’s aim is to defeat ISIS in cooperation with other actors including Syria, Iran, and the United States if the United States is willing to participate. While one might certainly argue that Russia’s interests in the region go beyond defeating ISIS and may well include a determination to bolster Russia’s geopolitical image, it is patently apparent that Russia intends to be a permanent actor in Syria and the United States must come to terms with that intention (Cohen, 2015).

In the context of the current case of Russia’s decision to bomb the rebels in Syrian on behalf of the Al Assad regime, one is clearly confronted with decisions that were made by an authoritarian regime led by an individual who holds the reins of state power and who exercises what Martin (2015) characterized as corporatism in decision making. Vladimir Putin, even during the years in which Medvedev was president, was tacitly understood as the prime decisionmaker in Russia and therefore as the country’s “rational actor.”

Decisions taken today with respect to Russia’s intervention in Syria are being undertaken by President Putin, who clearly has an agenda with respect to positioning Russia more favorably in the global geopolitical order (Snyder, 2015). Interestingly, Snyder (2015) argues that from the perspective of Vladimir Putin, there is not a great deal of difference between university students in Ukraine protesting in favor of closer ties with the EU and Islamist terrorists gaining ground in Syria. The rationale for Putin is that,
“if people can gather peacefully in Kiev, why not in Moscow? If Islamic terrorism can work in Syria, why not in southern Russia?” (Snyder, 2015, p. 1).

Putin’s involvement in Syria thus emerges as more than providing help to a beleaguered client (Cohen, 2015). It reflects the rational choice of action made by Vladimir Putin in response to his perception of what is in the best interests of Russia itself. Powell, Bennetts, and Parsons (2015) suggest that Russian engagement in Syria is very much an effort to send the message that Russia will not tolerate rebellion of any kind. Russia’s initial air strikes in Syria targeted, among others, CIA trained rebels located near the city of Homs. Interestingly, Russia is not targeting hard core ISIS/ISIL groups but instead is focusing on groups that the United States has identified as moderate rebels whose conflict with the Assad regime is based upon a desire to bring democracy to the country and not to re-establish a Caliphate that has not existed for centuries (Powell, et al, 2015).

Rational choice theory can be applied to the present case quite directly. Vladimir Putin has chosen intervention in Syria because in his view, it allows Russia to once again take up a position as a global superpower or, at any rate, a major player in the global arena (Shuster & Calabresi, 2015). Economically, Russia is faltering. Billions have been invested in bolstering the Russian military apparatus and in what amounts to a land grab in Crimea and Ukraine. Russia’s intervention in Syria positions Russia as an ally not only of Syria but also of Iran, which is supporting the Assad regime. At a time when the Obama administration was working to fundamentally change the U.S.-Iran relationship, Putin’s move could be seen as a direct counter to American choices and the potential for increased U.S. influence in the region (Shuster & Calabresi, 2015).
The situation in Syria, as it now stands, is a situation complicated further by the outflow of thousands and thousands of refugees. Roughly one-half of Syria’s population has been displaced, moving to escape the violence either internally or leaving the country entirely (Bixler & Martinez, 2015). Some 10.5 million Syrians have now left the nation. This humanitarian crisis has necessitated a response from the European Union and the United States. The refugee crisis is but one of the issues that the Obama administration, now in its final 16 months of existence, must address as it reconsiders its policies toward Syria.

Summary of the Section

This section of the study examined the historical background of the crisis in Syria. It discussed the key actors and the opposition groups that have formed in response to the behaviors of the Assad regime. It explored the role of Russia as a relatively new entrant into the Syrian crisis along with other factors that have impacted on the situation. It serves as a general background for a discussion of the policy initiatives of American presidential administrations which will be addressed in the next three sections of this chapter.

Three Administrations and Their Policies

Introduction

This section of the review of literature focuses on the U.S. presidential administrations of Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama. In each instance, U.S. policies toward Syria reflected (and continue to reflect) the world views of a seated president. Similarly, these policies are best understood in the context of the larger role of the United States in the global geopolitical arena. It is this role, and the perception of
what this role should consist of, that certainly influenced the decisions made by many American presidents and which is likely to continue influencing decisions that will made by the incoming administration of President Donald Trump after he took office in January 2017.

This section is divided into three parts. First, it describes the policies of President Bill Clinton. It then moves to an overview of the policies of George W. Bush, who served at a time when the Syrian situation and that of the Middle East as a whole could be said to have taken center stage in Washington’s list of concerns (Colucci, 2013). Finally, the policies of Barack Obama are examined. Events in Syria as described in preceding sections of this study have changed the environment of American decision-making quite significantly in the period from 1992 when President Clinton took to 2016 as President Obama winds down his tenure in the Oval Office.

The Clinton Administration

The Clinton administration began at a time when the priorities of the United States on the global stage had shifted in response to the end of the Cold War, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and what essentially amounted to the collapse of the bipolar world (Miller, 1994). The inability of the Soviet Union to maintain its domestic economy rendered it equally unable to continue supporting its network of client states - a transition that certainly impacted upon Syria as well as other countries in the Soviet sphere of influence such as Cuba. President Bill Clinton took office as the United States and other countries were still coming to terms with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of the bipolar world order (Miller, 1994; Sodaro, 2004). Whereas the United States had previously shaped many of its policies in response to actual or perceived threats from the
Soviet Union, the collapse of the Soviet Union and Russia’s subsequent economic difficulties created new opportunities for the United States to influence relations with countries that were once under the Soviet sphere of influence.

In discussing the policies of President Clinton, Miller (1994) suggests that what emerged was a set of policies that were driven by relief regarding the end of direct competition with the Soviets and new anxieties regarding emergent instability in a number of regions in the world. With the Cold War over, countries that once depended upon the Soviets for economic and military support found themselves internally threatened by dissident groups whose opportunities for rebellion had been minimal in the past. Some of these countries, lacking authoritarian central governments and home to opposition groups that were long dissatisfied with their situation, erupted in civil war.

Further, Miller (1994) takes the position that with the demise of the Soviet Union and retrenchment within its former core territories, President Bill Clinton developed a foreign policy posture that was driven by a complex mixture of anti-climactic relief and free floating anxiety. The mere absence of the Cold War rivalry did not result in global peace. In fact, Miller (1994) makes the case that the end of the Cold War introduced a new type of anxiety into global affairs that in turn necessitated a new foreign policy approach for the United States.

Similar comments were offered by Sodaro (2004), who noted that the Cold War ushered in an era that was characterized by genuine revolution from below; this consisted of a broad-based mass movement that shook the foundations of authoritarian rule in many different places and regions. In some instances, former Soviet satellite countries, said Sodaro (2004, p. 210), “decided to impose democratization from above,” something that
occurred even in the remnants of the Soviet Union itself. The Clinton administration confronted such challenges in hot spots such as Bosnia, Rwanda, Eretria/Ethiopia, and Somalia (Sodaro, 2004). Miller (1994) makes the case that the Clinton administration perceived an opportunity to create policies that would guarantee continued protection of American interests – a policy orientation that is congruent with Realism as described above. For President Clinton, what mattered largely was the kind of policy initiative that would benefit the United States.

The impact of the Soviet collapse with respect to the Balkans and other locales in Eastern Europe was, perhaps, more profound than it was in the Middle East. However, in both cases, Miller (1994) believes that the Clinton administration perceived that the United States had the opportunity to craft a foreign policy that would assure continual protection of American national interest. This is, quite clearly, the actions one would associate with a realist foreign policy.

In the case of Syria, now bereft of its communist/Soviet support, the United States as the sole remaining superpower became a necessary ally. The Clinton Administration was approached by the Al Assads with the intent of creating a new alignment of interests. This did not occur for several reasons; the main reason was that Syrian support for groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad – and ongoing animosity toward Israel – prohibited the development of a meaningful Damascus-Washington rapprochement throughout the 1990s and the presidency of Bill Clinton (Miller, 1994).

During President Clinton’s tenure, Syria was under the rule of Hafiz Al Assad, who was characterized by Henry Siegman (2000) as both temperamental and unpredictable and as a “maddeningly clever negotiator” whose enigmatic behavior made
firm policy initiatives difficult to maintain (p. 2). Syria at that time played a significant role in the context of peace in the Middle East in part because of conflict between Syria and Israel. In January of 2000, President Clinton succeeded in bringing both Israel and Syria to the table to begin peace talks in Shepherdstown, West Virginia and again in Geneva, Switzerland in March of 2000. Siegman (2000) pointed out that in both of these encounters, President Hafiz Al Assad played a double game: on the one hand he appeared to be willing to cooperate with respect to peace between his country and Israel, but on the other hand he continued to permit Hezbollah to operate in southern Lebanon with assistance from Syria itself. In fact, Syria was “the great holdout in the peace process and the leader of Arab hardliners who reject accommodation with the Jewish state” (Siegman, 2000, p. 3).

Clinton’s approach toward Syria was based in large measure on concern regarding the Arab-Israeli peace process – an issue that had preoccupied American foreign policy regimes since partition in 1948 (Sodaro, 2004). Ongoing American support for the state of Israel was then a key pillar of U.S. Middle Eastern policy. However, it should be noted that the Clinton administration believed that Syria had at least the potential to play a key role in achieving a permanent end to the Arab-Israeli conflict; this led to a new willingness on the part of the United States to enter relationships with the Syrian regime.

Negotiations between Syria and Israel, brokered by the United States, began in earnest in 1994 at the Wye Plantation in Maryland in the aftermath of the Israeli-Palestinian pact that was negotiated at Oslo in 1993. Israel broke off those talks in 1996 after Syria refused to condemn a spree of terrorist assaults on Israelis buses by Hamas. With the election of Ehud Barak as Israeli Prime Minister, expectations of a peace deal
gradually emerged with President Clinton calling for a deal in which Israel would swap the Golan Heights for peace. Indeed, President Clinton and President Al Assad (1994) jointly stated in Geneva in January of 1994 that they believed that they were moving toward a brokered agreement that would restore peace between Israel and Syria. Specifically, President Al Assad stated that:

"Historical evidence, both past and present, has proved that separate peace and partial solutions are not conducive to the establishment of real peace in the region. In this regard, I would like to express my satisfaction that President Clinton himself has committed to the objective of comprehensive peace. On this basis, we have agreed to work together for successful efforts aimed at putting an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict and at reaching a genuine and comprehensive peace that enables the peoples of the region to focus on development, progress, and prosperity.

This meeting has also provided us with the opportunity to exchange views on a number of issues, including those related to bilateral relations between our countries. We have agreed that the noble objective toward which we are working requires a qualitative move in these relations. We have also discussed questions related to the regional situation as well as all matters that might constructively contribute to the achievement of security and stability in the Middle East. Syria seeks a just and comprehensive peace with Israel as a strategic choice that secures Arab rights; ends the Israeli occupation; and enables all peoples in the region to live in peace, security, and dignity. In honor we fought; in honor we negotiate; and in honor we shall make peace. We want an honorable peace for our people"
and for the hundreds of thousands who paid their lives in defense of their
countries and their rights (Clinton & Al Assad, 2000, p. 36).

Responding to President Al Assad, President Clinton affirmed his country’s commitment
to an enduring peace, noting that:

Crucial decisions will have to be made by Syria and Israel if this common
objective is to be achieved. That is why President Assad has called for a peace of
the brave. And it is why I join him now in endorsing that appeal. Accordingly, we
pledged today to work together in order to bring the negotiations that started in
Madrid over two years ago to a prompt and successful conclusion.

Critical issues remain to be resolved, especially the question of relating
withdrawal to peace and security. But as a result of our conversation today, I am
confident that we laid the foundations for real progress in the negotiations
between heads of delegation that will begin again next week in Washington.

President Assad and I also discussed the state of relations between the United
States and Syria and agreed on the desirability of improving them. This requires
honestly addressing the problems in our relationship. Accordingly, we've
instructed the Secretary of State and the Syrian Foreign Minister to establish a
mechanism to address these issues in detail and openly (Clinton & Al Assad,
2000, p. 37).

Some analysts have suggested that much of President Clinton’s efforts regarding
Syria were a consequence of his determination to make a permanent contribution to
defusing world tensions (Kiefer, 2000). In fact, Kiefer (2000) argues that due to
President Clinton’s efforts and those of Israel’s Ehud Barak, there was some reason to
believe in early 2000 that Syria and Israel would come to terms and that Israel would both withdraw its troops from Lebanon and put an end to 50 years of conflict with Syria. President Clinton, as early as 1994 (Clinton, 1994), had been working with President Al Assad to bring about a viable resolution to the Syria-Israel conflict. Addressing the Knesset, President Clinton (1995) stated that “Syria has made a strategic choice for peace with Israel…. We have been urging President Assad to speak with you in a language of peace that you can understand... I believe something is changing in Syria” (p.32).

This optimism was not reflected in the response of the U.S. Congress to President Clinton’s efforts. Miller (1994) states that despite a highly skeptical U.S. Congress, the Clinton administration chose to ignore concerns regarding negotiation with a state that had been accused of sponsoring terrorism and violating Lebanese sovereignty while seeking to acquire weapons of mass destruction. There was a sense that Syria might possibly be able to play a key role in facilitating a lasting Middle East peace agreement. Here, one sees a realist orientation in that the Clinton administration, like those that had gone before it, felt that it was in the interests of the United States to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, to continue supporting Israel because of strong domestic support for Israel, and the need to maintain the flow of oil from the Middle East to the West.

G. Robert Hillman (2000) stated that after the Geneva talks, there was no meaningful reason to assume that the differences between the two countries had in fact been resolved. While the talks were considered by their participants to have been useful and a mechanism for clarifying and articulating the needs of the parties, they were not necessarily a success. In fact, one analyst said that President Al Assad was actually immovable during the Geneva meeting with President Clinton and seemed to be laboring
under the belief that President Clinton would be able to give him what he wanted from Israel (Perlez, 2000).

Initially, the United States appears to have hoped that the Geneva meeting would produce sufficient common ground for peace talks directly between Syria and Israel to be renewed. However, Perlez (2000) states that “Mr. Assad was obstinate in his long-held view that there must be a full Israeli withdrawal to the Israeli-Syrian frontier that existed on June 4, 1967, before the Arab-Israeli war of that year” (p.1). Syria was determined then that the border issues had to be settled before security issues could be addressed, while Israel countered that it could not get its citizenry to agree to return the Golan Heights until security arrangements had been resolved. It was in this standoff that President Clinton inserted himself with the knowledge that this administration was “playing a high stakes poker game with Mr. Assad,” which was going to be influenced by the fact that President Clinton at the time was a lame duck and momentum for a peace agreement had stalled. Some analysts take the position that Hafez Al Assad had a “wholly tactical attitude toward peace (which) certainly advanced his cause in Washington” (Shed no tears, 2000, p. 9).

President Clinton’s administration attempted to frame the policy toward Syria within the context of an argument that President Al Assad had made a “strategic choice for peace,” but failed to understand that President Al Assad’s choice “was to recover all of the Golan Heights and to rehabilitate his seriously crippled army”, which could only be accomplished under cover of the peace process (Shed no tears, 2000, p. 9). President Clinton received the news of the death of Hafez Al Assad somewhat wistfully because President Clinton remained convinced, despite evidence to the contrary, that President Al
Assad had been open and straightforward with him and that a strategic choice for peace drove the Syrian policy initiative (Shed no tears, 2000).

In fact, as President Clinton was preparing to leave office, he was convinced that there was a distinct possibility that the ascension of Bashar Al Assad would usher in a modernizing turn in Syrian life and that the efforts of his own administration would ultimately bear fruit (Shed no tears, 2000). Despite the optimism of President Clinton, critics argued in 2000 that there was no reason to anticipate that Bashar Al Assad would in any way repeal the system of oppression instituted by his father, retreat from Syrian colonialism in Lebanon, or otherwise back down on the demand for a restoration of the 1967 border with Israel (Shed no tears, 2000). What Bashar Al Assad may in fact have wanted from the United States at that time, because Russia was in no position to provide assistance, was an extensive amount of help in modernizing and rehabilitating the Syrian armed forces. Bashar Al Assad was certainly aware that this country’s military was in desperate need of upgrading and that most of the “hardware used by Syria’s ground forces represents the technologies of the 1960s and 1970s, and much of the material has also been cannibalized, and most of Syria’s air force has been practically grounded for lack of spare parts” (Shed no tears, 2000, p. 10).

In this situation, Nathan Jones (2000) reports that Israel was not in any way encouraged to believe that President Clinton’s efforts would succeed. Jones (2000) noted that:

Israel's highly politicized media analysts don't agree on much, but in dealing with the "peace process" and "the Palestinian track" they start from a set of assumptions far removed from those of American editorial writers and
commentators. While the Americans seem mesmerized by the whirlwind of activity whipped up by President Bill Clinton's pressure on Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and the State Department's Middle East peace team," the Israelis see unbridgeable gaps between themselves on the one hand and Palestinians and Syrians on the other. Israeli commentators also warn that in dealing with White House pressure for substantive concessions that would lead to a Middle East "legacy," for Clinton, Prime Minister Ehud Barak's government will fall if he tries to give away more than Israelis will accept (p.46).

Furthermore, said Jones (2000), there is no doubt that in 2000, President Clinton was as focused on his own legacy as he was on bringing about genuine peace in the Middle East. It is quite possible that Hafez Al Assad contributed to a lessening of the hope of any substantive Middle East peace agreement during President Clinton’s remaining months in office. Israel’s Ehud Barak was troubled by the fact that he had to deal not only with a lame duck American president along with an ailing Yasser Arafat (at the time a serious influence over all decisions taking place in the Middle East), but also with a novice in the person of Bashar Al Assad who had never expected to take over the government of his country.

Realist theory is applicable in identifying why the Clinton administration was willing, to a degree, to ignore authoritarianism and oppressive regime activity in Syria. Having been relatively negligible in terms of US foreign policy prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union because of its association with the Soviets, Syria in the early 1990s emerged as a potential source of support for US policy vis-à-vis the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Israel was a priority then as now for the U.S. government.
Philip Wilcox, then the US Department of State’s coordinator of counterterrorism adviser, defended President Clinton’s willingness to reach out to Syria by stating: “diplomacy is not always a pleasant business and you don’t always deal with people of perfect virtue but the United States has interests and responsibilities in the world and we are willing to engage with many different kinds of states to protect our own interest (Miller, 1994, p. 271).” It is difficult to imagine a more succinct statement of realist theory than this.

Former U.S. Department of State Coordinator of Counterterrorism advisor Philip Wilcox said of Clinton’s outreach to Syria that diplomacy can be unpleasant, that one is not always able to deal with virtuous counterparts, and the overarching goal of foreign policy is to serve the interests of the state (Miller, 1994). This is a clear reflection of the fundamental tenets of Realism. President Clinton was willing to go to the table with Syria in order to secure support for U.S. policy toward Israel. As it happened, however, Hafez Al Assad rejected this overture, refusing to discuss the issue with President Clinton at a Geneva peace summit, and later publicly stating his refusal to participate in any further talks with Israel (Miller, 1994).

Criticisms of the Clinton administration’s policies were forthcoming both during his time in office and after. Colucci (2013) stated that President Clinton proved unable to articulate and then implement a national security policy that represented America’s real role as the order maker and keeper in the global arena. This analyst said President Clinton to have been concerned with public response to the potential for excessive military casualties and to have feared that engagements leading to such casualties would be detrimental to the political fortunes of the Clinton administration itself.
Just as significantly, Colucci (2013) said that the Clintonian doctrine of engagement and enlargement generated poorly conceived policies that were ineffective in Somalia, Haiti, Rwanda, and Yugoslavia. These policies complicated the American relationship with Russia and China and reflected Clinton’s conviction that the United States was unwilling to take decisive action when such action was in fact necessary. Colucci (2013) further contends that Clinton’s foreign policies signaled to terrorist groups, such as the emergent Al Qaeda, and to state actors like Syria that the United States would resist participation in conflict and generally lacked enough will to act decisively.

While a Syrian-Israeli peace agreement was a priority of the Clinton administration, and while it may well have been in Syria’s own best interest to come to an accord with the United States over this issue, Miller (1994) states that it maintained a reluctance to respond to Washington brokered peace overtures. In fact, Assad refused to interact with President Clinton at a Geneva summit, flatly refusing to engage in further peace talks with Israel. This certainly led to an increase in tensions with Washington, and also served to underscore the failure of the Clinton policy of seeking a new relationship with Syria.

In summarizing the entire thrust of the Clintonian foreign policy, Lamont Colucci (2013) stated:

The Clinton team never succeeded in articulating a national security policy that meshed with America's role as the world's order-maker. It specifically feared any casualties among American military personnel and used this as an argument for inaction. It produced ill-conceived policies that led nowhere in Somalia and Haiti,
counter-productive ventures in Yugoslavia, non-serious blustering in Iraq and horrible miscalculations in North Korea. It caused confusion to America's allies, and delivered a tortured relationship with Russia and China (p.2).

Moreover, Colucci (2013) stated that “The recent debates concerning Syria illustrate the desire to return to the perception held by the Clinton administration about foreign policy: a benign world governed by globalism, free markets, technology advances and soft liberalism” (p.1). Liberalism as a corollary of realism was, therefore, instrumental in forming the foundation of the Clinton administration’s approach to global issues. Colucci (2013) goes on to note that:

During the Clinton presidency, al-Qaida changed from a petty Muslim extremist group wandering the deserts, on the margins of international relations, to a full blown terror network operating in 55 countries. The conduct of American foreign affairs took the path of least resistance. The Clinton years signaled to both transnational terrorist groups and state actors that the United States was unprepared to face conflict, and lacked the will to take decisive action (p.2).

Such a posture, in the view of Colucci (2013), undermined any meaningful efforts to create a lasting Middle East peace deal and further exacerbated the tensions between the United States and countries such as Syria.

After Clinton left office, Syria’s missteps continued and Damascus’ support for the Iraqi insurgency, in which thousands of U.S. soldiers have been killed, and its alliance with Iran illustrated the failure of the Clinton policy. Clinton did attempt, along with Secretary of State Madeline Albright, to broker a Syrian-Israeli deal that would resolve the conflict over the Golan Heights. For a brief period, it even appeared that such a deal
might be possible. President Clinton (2000) exhibited some optimism regarding the possibility that Al Assad and Syria would assist in brokering a bilateral peace treaty affecting the Golan Heights, which Israel had taken from Syria in the 1967 war. President Clinton (2000), speaking as a Realist, affirmed the fact that he fully expected the Al Assads to act in Syria’s best interest, but he also expressed a feeling that there was a genuine desire for peace in Syria which boded well for a resolution to the conflict over the Golan Heights. One suspects that there is a small strain of Liberalism and its inherently optimistic world view at work in this statement, which proved over time to be misplaced.

President Clinton stated in March of 2000 that he was positive about such a possibility:

There is more than one issue here. And if we're going to have a negotiation, I don't think it's enough to say, I don't like your position, come back and see me when I like your position. And I understand how strongly he feels about it, but if he disagrees with their territorial proposal, which is quite significant, then there should be some other proposal I think, coming from the Syrians about how their concerns could be handled. And that's what I meant by that. I did my best to try to just present what I thought the options were ideas - or three sides, in this case, if we are being asked to mediate it.

He, obviously, has the perfect right to take whatever position he believes is in Syria's interests and whatever he thinks is right, but if there is a genuine desire for peace here on both sides, and I believe there is, and if both sides face certain significant political constraints within their countries, and I believe they do, then
they both need to come up with some ideas and start talking. I mean, the one thing there should be no doubt about is that there is a real effort being made here to resolve this. And I think it is clear that Prime Minister [Ehud] Barak would like to resolve it, and I think President Assad would like to resolve it. So once you know what the other side wants and you don't think you can do it, then you ought to come up with some alternative way of trying to respond to the underlying concerns that are behind the position. That's what I've suggested, and I hope that will happen (p. 1).

This optimism – more suited perhaps to the liberal perspective than the realist perspective – proved premature. It would become necessary for the George W. Bush administration, faced with escalating global tensions and the fallout from the terrorist attack against the United States on September 11, 2001, to develop a new paradigm for U.S.-Syria relations.

Under the Clinton administration, an opportunity to structure a new and more favorable relationship with Syria and the Al Assad regime was available and seemingly promising. President Clinton, said Miller (1994), chose not to take advantage of this opportunity for a number of reasons. The key rationale for refusing to become more closely tied to Syria was its ongoing support for anti-Israel groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. There is no doubt that political pressures from the powerful Israel lobby in the United States, coupled with longstanding Israel partnerships, underpinned the Clinton administration’s decision in this matter.

The Arab-Israel peace process, as noted earlier, was also a concern on the part of the Clinton administration as it had been since the state of Israel was created in 1948.
Support for Israel and its right to exist has been, and continues to be, a major pillar of all American policies targeting the Middle East. While the Clinton administration did believe that Syria could be instrumental in assisting in brokering a permanent peace between the Arabs and the Israelis, the U.S. Congress was not particularly supportive of this belief (Miller, 1994).

In floating the idea that engagement between the United States and Syria could facilitate a favorable outcome to the Arab-Israeli peace process, one must conclude that President Clinton had adopted a Realist posture that was underpinned by the notion that Syria (like the United States) would function as a rational actor. While the Clinton administration does not appear to have been convinced that Syria would in any way modify its authoritarianism or open up its domestic regime to opponents of the Al Assads, the Clinton strategy for engaging Syria was inherently Realist. It was then in the best interests of the United States to find supporters in the region for the state of Israel and in support of convincing groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to enter into a permanent peace treaty with Israel.

As Franks (2006) would suggest, this is based on the Realist theory that the state system is maintained by the existence of a political relationship between governing machinery and a governed population and an acceptance of these concepts in other sovereign states. While the Clinton administration did not consider the regime of Hafez Al Assad to be without flaws or even acceptable in terms of its authoritarianism, it was nevertheless willing to engage in diplomatic relationships in the interests of the Middle Eastern peace process.
President Clinton stated after meeting with Hafez Al Assad that he was a “ruthless but brilliant man who had once wiped out a whole village as a lesson to his opponents, and whose support of terrorist groups in the Middle East had isolated Syria from the United States” (Bill Clinton about President Hafez Al Assad, 2013, p. 1). Early in their relationship, President Clinton appeared to have been convinced that Assad was serious about making peace and establishing normal relationships with Israel and withdrawing Syrian forces from Lebanon. He seems to have based this belief on his personal impression of Hafez Al Assad after a few hours of personal interaction with him and his conviction that the collapse of the Soviet Union and Syria’s loss of that country’s support created a unique opportunity for a rapprochement with the United States. Quite simply, he was wrong.

**The George W. Bush Administration**

When presidential administrations change, and when this is also accompanied by a shift in political perspectives and beliefs, it is reasonable to assume that some type of ideological transformation in foreign policy will also occur. This is what took place when George W. Bush took control of the Oval Office after defeating Democratic presidential candidate (and former Clinton Vice President) Al Gore. The realism-with a dose-of-liberalism ethos of the Clinton years was replaced in short order by neo-conservatism, or conservatism with compassion, as various analysts have characterized it (Krauthammer, 2005).

Of course, one must acknowledge that the seminal event shaping the Bush foreign policy program was the terrorist attack on the United States on September 11, 2001 – an event that illustrated the vulnerability of the world’s remaining superpower, the
increasing animosity of elements of the Islamic *umma* toward the West in general and the United States in particular, and the growing power of Al Qaeda. Two years after the attack of 9/11, the Bush administration identified the existence of an “Axis of Evil” containing Iraq, Iran and North Korea – an alliance that contained Syria within its sphere of influence due to Syrian ties to Iran (Malici & Buckner, 2008).

The shift toward neo-conservatism became readily apparent in short order. Malici and Buckner (2008) noted that the goal of the new policy initiative was to “increase U.S. power in a world order carrying with it the risk of an unconstrained superpower pursuing foreign policy for narrowly defined domestic interests and of the development of a repressive order unsympathetic to calls for an end to inequality” (p.783). Realist pessimism is self-evident, as is realist emphasis on putting one’s domestic interests ahead of all others, including the liberal push for an end to inequality and oppression. Conservatism with a conscience, as articulated in the Bush administration, did not ignore the liberal call for putting an end to inhumane, brutal oppression in authoritarian regimes; in fact, such attributions in addition to a firm (if flawed and ultimately invalid) conviction that Saddam Hussein harbored weapons of mass destruction shaped Bush policy.

Though hardly a full-fledged member of the Bush identified Axis of Evil, the Bush administration did in fact lump Syria into this particular category. Malici and Buckner (2008) stated that “Washington sees Syria as routinely providing a safe haven, substantial resources, and guidance to terrorist organizations, providing political and material support to a number of Palestinian groups and engaging in actions justifiably threatening to the USA” (p.783). Additionally, Charles Krauthammer (2005), a leading neoconservative thinker, suggested that once the United States succeeded in establishing
a democratic regime in Iraq and Afghanistan, Lebanon and Syria should be then targeted for democratization or what could be considered nation building.

Krauthammer (2005) described Syria at the time of the Bush presidency as “a critical island of recalcitrant in a liberalizing region stretching from the Mediterranean to the Iranian border” (p.25). Some 10-plus years later, it is difficult at best to find any evidence of liberalization (much less democratization) in this region. The principle of democratization was exemplified in the 2007 State of the Union address given by President Bush, who referenced Syria and its government as wanting “to kill Americans, kill democracy in the Middle East, and gain the weapons to kill on an even more horrific scale” (Bush, 2007, p. 1).

Earlier in the Bush administration, Undersecretary of the Department of State John Bolton described Syria as a rogue state in a speech titled “Beyond the ‘Axis of Evil’: reflecting a shift from the moderate realist-liberal American foreign policy in the Middle East.” This shift was toward neoconservatism (Zunes, 2004). Stephen Zunes (2004) declared that “the neoconservative unilateralist world view now dominates the Middle East policies of both Republicans and Democrats” (p.52). Sanjay Gupta (2008) argued that “in the run-up to the 2003 Iraq war, a foreign policy doctrine of preemption was outlined as another major fundamental Middle Eastern policy” (p.181). A speech given at West Point affirmed the Bush administration’s contention that the type of threats posed by Iraq and other rogue nations provides the United States with a legal foundation for acting in self-defense as described in Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.

Gupta (2008) commented that it was this speech which formed the core of the Bush policy; it was then formalized in a document titled “The National Security Strategy
of the United States.” This strategy emphasized American rights to military preemption, unilateral action, and a commitment to the extension of democracy across the world. Democratization, though certainly a central pillar of the Bush Doctrine, was in many ways subordinate to such concerns as national security and maintaining the flow of oil to the West.

The Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003, as described by President Bush (2003), was intended to strengthen the ability of the United States to conduct an effective foreign policy particularly with regard to both Syria and Lebanon. Integral to this Act was the threat to employ sanctions against Syria unless it ended its sponsorship of terrorist organizations, the development of weapons of mass destruction, and the occupation of neighboring Lebanon. Some critics argue that this particular Bush administration effort had the potential to obstruct diplomatic efforts to induce Syrian President Bashar Assad to voluntarily curb some of the activities of his regime. Stronger than the Syria Accountability Act proposed earlier and then tabled by the Bush administration, the new legislation proposed in 2003 sought to empower the president with the right to waive sanctions if he determined that this would be in the vital national security interest of the U.S. (Focus on: The Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act, 2003).

The Bush administration’s decision to invade Iraq was accompanied by accusations that Syria was actively undermining American efforts in Iraq. Anders Strindberg (2004) reported from Damascus that “Syria was charged with harboring members of Saddam Hussein’s leadership, helping foreign fighters travel to Iraq, hiding Iraq’s elusive weapons of mass destruction, and manufacturing their own” (p.53). Syria
was clearly identified as a threat to peace in the region, and the 2002 Syria Accountability Act, which introduced six sanctions against the country, was affirmed. These sanctions, said Strindberg (2004), included a ban on Syrian aircrafts in US airspace, the freezing of Syrian assets in the United States, a ban on US exports to, and investment in, Syria, downgrading the US diplomatic representation in Damascus, and restricting the movement of Syrian diplomats in the US to either the Washington, D.C. or New York City areas.

As Killgore (2004) reported, when President George W. Bush imposed sanctions on Syria on May 11, 2004, he was to some extent acting in response to concerns by American Zionists who were convinced that Syria’s activities in the Middle East were antithetical to the security of the state of Israel. Certainly, there was reason to believe that Syria was continuing to provide aid to Hezbollah, but at the same time Killgore (2004) states that Damascus under Bashar Al Assad was continuing to provide the United States with intelligence and also tried to limit the infiltration of foreign fighters into Iraq. However, Syria barely avoided being designated by President as being a member of the axis of evil, something that was indicative of legitimate concerns regarding Syria’s reliability as a friend to American interests in the Middle East.

President Bush (2004), in a “Statement on Syria Sanctions,” identified the rationale for these sanctions:

Since 1979, the United States has designated Syria a State Sponsor of Terrorism due to its support for groups such as Hizballah and Palestinian terrorist organizations. In 2003, Congress passed the SAA because of Syria's continued support for terrorism, pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, occupation of
Lebanon, and actions undermining U.S. and international efforts with respect to Iraq. Based on Syria's failure to take significant, concrete steps to address the concerns we have raised, I have determined that further economic sanctions be imposed.

The Syrian government must understand that its conduct alone will determine the duration of the sanctions, and the extent to which additional sanctions may be imposed should the Syrian government fail to adopt a more constructive approach to relations with its neighbors, weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism.

If the Syrian government demonstrates a genuine intention to seek true peace by confronting terror and violence, ending its pursuit and development of weapons of mass destruction, and respecting the sovereignty and independence of Lebanon, the United States will respond positively (p.1).

Thus, while the doctrine of preemption was not applied by the Bush administration to Syria, the notion of engagement that had been integral to the Clinton policy was no longer present. The success or failure of the Bush administration was discussed by former Deputy National Security Adviser Elliott Abrams, who argued that the Bush administration temporarily isolated Syria but gained nothing strategic for the US. The conduct of the Al Assad regime did not in any way change (Petrou, 2009).

McArthur (2004), commenting on the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act, noted that this Act prohibited the export of any dual-use goods to Syria and permitted the president to impose any two of six different sanctions unless it could be certified that Syria had cut its ties to Palestinian resistance groups. The Act included full presidential waiver authority and allowed President Bush to also invoke
sanctions if it was revealed that Syria had not withdrawn its troops from Lebanon and stopped the development of medium and long range ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction.

Equally important for President Bush’s foreign policy was the Act’s focus on the presidential right to use sanctions in cases where Syria was suspected of facilitating terrorist activities inside Iraq (McArthur, 2004). It is worth noting that when he signed the Act into law, President Bush reserved presidential authority to employ a core constitutional power with respect to conducting the nation’s foreign affairs and functioning as commander in chief. Additionally, President Bush stated that he would maintain the right to refrain from reporting certain matters to Congress relating to Syria and terrorism if in his view such reports would impair foreign relations, national security, or the performance of the Executive’s duties. In essence, while approving the basic tenets of the Act, President Bush was determined to reserve to the office of the president of the United States sufficient powers to conduct foreign policy without first obtaining, in all instances, the support or approval of Congress.

Driven by a neoconservative agenda, the Bush administration’s policy emphasized nation building and preemption. It reflected a departure from realism and liberalism and embodied a moralistic stance that emphasized the efficacy of military force. As Muravchik (2007) points out, even though they employed economic and other sanctions, actors in the Bush administration were not convinced that either such sanctions or UN intervention would result in an elimination of activity by rogue or evil states or any determined adversary. Similarly, the neoconservatism of George W. Bush reflected a commitment to the idea that democracy at home and abroad was the most crucial
requirement for global peace and domestic security. However, this should not be confused with democratic peace theories.

On October 21, 2005, President Bush called on the United Nations to convene a session on a report that named relatives of President Bashar Al Assad as likely suspects in the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri (Pisik, 2005). At that time, President Bush instructed Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to call on the United Nations to convene a session as quickly as possible to deal with this issue. A central concern for President Bush was the fact that Syrian occupation which began during Lebanon’s civil war had only ended in the spring of 2005 after the UN Security Council passed a resolution calling for Syria’s withdrawal. Although that withdrawal had taken place, the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri, and the intelligence indicating that members of the Al Assad family and the Syrian government and military were involved, galvanized opposition to Syria.

The threat of additional sanctions and new political pressures was certainly integral to President Bush’s agenda at this time (Pisik, 2005). Syria was in a difficult position in light of the fact that it could no longer depend upon support from the Soviet Union and in essence needed to become more accommodating with the West (Hinnebusch, Kabilan, Kodmani, & Lesch, 2010). The animosity and enmity that had characterized Bashar Al Assad’s early years in office were at odds with his initial West-centric reform agenda. Under President Clinton, according to Hinnebusch et al. (2010), Syria had viewed the United States, despite its role as the primary backer of Israel, as a necessary broker in a regional peace settlement. It would appear that Syria was more responsive to the Clinton administration than it was to that of President Bush, under
whom disagreements between Syria and the United States escalated in tandem with the influence of neoconservatives.

Hinnebsuch et al. (2010) contend that rather than Israel, it was Iraq that led to worsening Syrian-U.S. relations. In 2001, Bashar Al Assad had attempted to become more engaged with Iraq, which coincided with the Bush administration’s efforts to prevent Iraq from inching out of the isolation the U.S. had tried to maintain for Iraq since 1990. In fact, President Bush was of the opinion that Syria’s efforts to withhold legitimation from the U.S. led invasion of Iraq positioned it in opposition to American security needs. Though Syria did little to actually oppose the U.S. invasion of Iraq, it did permit the movement across the Iraqi border of thousands of Arab resistance fighters. Many of these fighters were Muslim militants who would later emerge as key actors in the region. The Bush administration was also quite displeased with the fact that once the Saddam Hussein regime fell, Syria gave refuge to some Iraqi Ba’ath officials seeking asylum.

Thus, Bush, upon taking office, moved dramatically away from the Clintonian enlargement and engagement posture into Neoconservatism. Often conceptualized as conservatism with compassion, the Bush approach was shaped, as noted above, in large part by the terrorist attacks against the U.S. which occurred on September 11, 2001. The attack on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon convinced the Bush administration that the United States had become terrifyingly vulnerable to terrorism and that all policies targeting countries and actors known or suspected to be involved in terrorism needed to be rethought.
This movement, according to Hinnebusch et al. (2010), was reflected in the fact that many neoconservatives in Washington “were keen for the U.S. to make an object lesson of Syria to convey the message that Arab nationalism was very costly and clear the way for a pro-Israeli Pax Americana in the region” (p.17). Unrelenting pressure was placed by the Bush administration on Syria, which made some incremental but significant concessions to appease Washington. Its borders with Iraq were tightened, Syrian forces were withdrawn from Lebanon, as noted above, and Bashar Al Assad proposed to restart the peace negotiations with Israel. Nevertheless, since President Bush had developed a policy not to offer inducements to rogue states, the concessions offered by Bashar Al Assad only served to encourage American hardliners to demand more.

The 2006 Baker Commission recommended that the U.S. should engage with Syria and Iran. However, President Bush rejected this advice and continued to insist on a rigorous response to what the administration perceived as ongoing recalcitrance on the part of Syria (Hinnebusch et al., 2010). President Bush’s policies ultimately succeeded in depriving Syria of some of its capacity for exercising political leverage in regional politics and particularly towards Israel. Further, according to Hinnebusch et al. (2010), “Equally important the Bush administration’s devaluation of the traditional goals of U.S. Middle East policy, regional stability (for which the neo-cons substituted ‘creative destruction’) and the peace process, correspondingly devalued the cards by which Syria could promise to deliver or obstruct these goals” (p.18).

Franks (2006) pointed out that the terrorist discourse of Al Qaeda and the terrorist attack on the United States gave rise to the doctrine of the preemptive strike. Two years after the 9/11 terrorist attack, President Bush identified Iran, Iraq, and North Korea as an
axis of evil that needed to be brought down in order to protect the security of the United States and to prevent further attacks like September 11, 2001 (Malici & Buckner, 2008). Certainly, one would have to acknowledge that the use of preemptive strikes is an integral element of tools that are available to Realists as well as Neoconservatives.

Additionally, President Bush firmly positioned Syria as hostile to American interests and as a rogue state. President Bush outlined the doctrine of preemption in the months prior to the 2003 invasion of Iraq and made this doctrine a central pillar in American Middle Eastern policy (Gupta, 2008; Zunes, 2004). The National Security Strategy of the United States identified the Bush administration’s conviction as one arguing that America had the right to employ military preemption, to undertake unilateral action, and to implement policies with the goal of extending democracy. While one sees that democratization and democratic peacebuilding are elements of the Bush Doctrine, these elements are subordinate to the doctrine of preemption in support of American interests.

When President Bush decided to use a preemptive strike in the invasion of Iraq, the argument was advanced that Syria had been actively engaged in supporting terrorist and other activities targeting the United States and in harboring members of Saddam Hussain’s inner circle (Strindberg, 2004). The Syria Accountability Act of 2002 extended American sanctions against Syria and included a ban on the entry of Syrian aircraft in U.S. airspace. This Act froze Syrian assets in the United States and banned U.S. exports to Syria. It also reduced American diplomatic presence in Syria and restricted the movement of Syrian diplomats entering the United States to either Washington, D.C. or New York City (Strindberg, 2004).
President Bush (2004) vehemently defended his administration’s decisions in this regard and called upon Syria to take concrete steps to reform its behavior in a number of areas. Certainly, President Bush (2004) viewed Syria as an undemocratic, authoritarian, and tyrannical state. Bush’s neoconservative ideology shaped his world view, as did his belief in the necessity of democracy as the foundation of peacebuilding in the Middle East and elsewhere. At the same time, President Bush did not appear to be fully convinced that sanctions or a United Nations’ intervention would have the desired effect of stopping Syria from supporting anti-American or anti-Israeli movements (Muravchik, 2007).

President Bush (2007) did not call at any point for U.S. military engagement in Syria, although he did consistently characterize Syria as a rogue state giving substantial support to states that were antithetical to the United States and the terrorist groups that perpetuated the 9/11 attacks. Perhaps because of the extent of American involvement on two fronts – in Iraq and Afghanistan - President Bush did not elect to employ a preemptive strike against Syria. Nevertheless, the extensive use of sanctions is ample evidence of President Bush’s Neoconservatism and his conviction that Syria represented a threat to the United States that had to be addressed, at least to some extent.

Gareau (2004) said that the road map to the War on Terror reflected a combination of Realist and Neoconservative conviction that the world is a dangerous place in which the U.S. must, at times, operate unilaterally and preemptively. Gareau (2004) stated that the Bush administration was convinced that whatever “its form, whether the bearing the legitimacy of government or existing underground, the enemy
must be destroyed. To do this, we must sometimes act alone, unilaterally. Other times we can act with our allies” (p.191).

Samuel Huntington (1996) described what he saw as two broadly different processes that precede foreign policy decisions. He labeled these processes executive and legislative and stated that a legislative policymaking process is defined by the facts that the units participating in the process are relatively equal and must bargain with each other, important disagreements exist concerning the goals of the policy, and there are many possible alternatives. Conversely, Huntington (1996) described a process as executive in character to the extent that the participating units differ in power, fundamental goals and values are not at issue, and the range of possible choices is limited. These two processes to some extent overlap with the characterization of foreign policy development as either driven by a crisis or functioning as an extension of domestic interests and needs during periods of relative geopolitical stability. In the latter instance, one could clearly argue that despite very real differentials in the power of the United States and many of the nations with whom it interacts, there are many possible alternatives for policy formation.

The situation changes dramatically when one considers the formation of American foreign policy in the years after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack. At that time, as Kissinger (1974) would argue, the domestic structure became less significant in terms of creating a foreign policy initiative than the crisis itself. The crisis was of enormous significance in leading both President George W. Bush and a generally unified U.S. Congress to transform policy to incorporate leading a coalition to invade Iraq, hunt down Al-Qaeda terrorists in Afghanistan and otherwise modify policies impacting on
countries that President Bush identified as comprising an Axis of Evil (Iran, Iraq, and North Korea)

Hook and Spanier (2010) contend that President Bush declared that the task confronting the nation “went far beyond capturing Osama bin Laden and putting Al-Qaeda out of business. A global fight against terrorism and the evil it represented had to be mounted on all fronts” (p.286). This is clearly an example of a crisis driving a dramatic shift in foreign policy based on two new pillars consisting of the virtues of American primacy and the right of the country to wage preemptive war against perceived threats. This essentially constituted the Bush Doctrine, which moved quickly away from the Clinton Doctrine of enlargement and engagement and had led President Clinton to adopt the carrot rather the stick in his dealings with China.

These two different approaches to forming foreign policy are certainly influenced by public opinion, by the personal beliefs and values of decision-makers at all levels of government, by the bureaucracies that implement policies, by bankers and industrialists, and by the military. There are many who would even argue that the decision taken by President George W. Bush to invade Iraq and topple the regime of Saddam Hussein was as much motivated by a desire to maintain a vital flow of oil to the United States as it was by any true conviction that Iraq had played a role in the 9/11 terrorist attacks or that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction (Hook & Spanier, 2010). Nevertheless, the crisis of the terrorist attack was the seminal event which precipitated the deployment of American troops to Afghanistan and, later, to Iraq, along with American involvement in the internal affairs of Pakistan.
It is therefore important to recognize that while many variables shape the American economy, a small handful of variables do tend to predominate this process. Oil matters and it matters more to America than most Americans are willing to admit. Power politics, as understood by Dahl (1999), also matters, as countries seek a degree of hegemony or influence in shaping relationships in the geopolitical arena. As significantly, under the leadership of President George W. Bush, democratization and nation building have taken on enormous significance in developing America’s policies (Birth of a Bush Doctrine, 2003; Jervis, 2003).

One can certainly argue that America’s policies in a country such as Iraq have a strong humanitarian thrust and that there are other important economic trade considerations that influence policies in the entire region. Furthermore, it has often been suggested that a dominant influence over America’s Middle Eastern policies is its commitment to survival (Night turns into day, 2005). No casual observer of the past half century of Middle Eastern U.S. policymaking can deny that Israel occupies a place near center stage on the American agenda. However, 9/11 was perhaps the seminal event in America’s most recent history and one which made this country’s citizens and leaders conscious of the growing influence not only of terrorism, but also militant Islam.

Robert Jervis (2003) said that President Bush’s policies vis-à-vis the Middle East represented a sharp break from the president’s pre-9/11 views that saw American leadership restricted to defending narrow and traditional vital interests. Describing the Bush Doctrine, Jervis (2003) stated that it had four elements:
1. a strong belief in the importance of a state’s domestic regime in determining its foreign policy and the related judgment that this is an opportune time to transform international politics;

2. the perception of great threats that can be defeated only by new and vigorous policies, including preventive war;

3. a willingness to act unilaterally when necessary; and,

4. an overriding sense that peace and stability require the United States to assert its primacy in world politics.

Critical to this doctrine is the American belief in democracy, understood as the sole system of government ideology consistent with guarantees of human rights, support for human freedom, and other universal values that will ultimately lead to an eradication of terrorism and greater geopolitical stability.

The foreign policy of the United States under President Bush, according to Gary Rosen (2005), moved into an era in which realism was somewhat repudiated in favor of a more assertive posture for the sole remaining global hegemon (the United States). This represents what Rosen (2005) sees as a movement away from traditional realist approaches to foreign policy such what is evident in the Cold War doctrine of containment. The Bush administration argued for promoting the national interest by unilateral and preemptive action if necessary, while simultaneously building institutions of democratic governance in states where democratization has largely been unknown. These are the elements that were seen by many analysts, including Edmund O’Sullivan (2005), as shaping foreign policy on the Middle East for eight years.
Walter LaFeber (2002) commented that months before the September 11 attacks, some observers in the Washington D.C. beltway argued that the United States was an empire and that its people were the fortunate “Chosen” selected to spread an imperialism beneficial to all. Imperialism in this context has less to do with controlling territory than it does with global expansion of American ideas based on capitalism and democracy. Within this general framework, the United States emerged as the only nation possessed with the various capabilities needed to ensure that globalization proceeds appropriately and to promote the ethnocentric and inherently nationalistic idea that American culture is inherently superior to that of other nations. This was significant in the Bush years as well.

Similarly, Godfrey Hodgson (2005) argued that the oil issue was central in driving the development of both domestic and foreign policy under the Bush administration. On the domestic front, this administration called for drilling in the vast, virgin Alaskan Wildlife Reserve and for energy deregulation. In terms of foreign policy, imperialist ambitions linked to oil control were also at work. Hodgson (2005) is one of the analysts arguing that simply examining the major players and influences in the Bush administration leads one to the inescapable conclusion that oil interests are at work. These actors included Vice President Dick Cheney (former chief executive of Halliburton), former Secretary of State James A. Baker III (a Texas energy industry super lawyer), and until his fall, Kenneth Lay of Enron, along with Robert Zoellick. While the administration consistently claimed that the invasion of Iraq and sanctions against Syria were not about oil, Hodgson (2005) stated that oil predominated many of the decisions made by the Bush administration in this entire region.
The second theory offered by geopolitical power strategists who are members of the Realist school of American foreign policy suggests that national interests were at work in shaping the Bush policy. A related theory is that democracy promotion as a neoconservative ideological underpinning of foreign policy is most highly influential. With respect to these two approaches, John Mearsheimer (2005) suggests that “the dispute about whether to go to war in Iraq was between two competing theories of international politics: Realism and the Neoconservatism that underpins the Bush Doctrine” (p.1). On the one hand, neoconservative theory is filled with an idealist strand and a competing power strand. It is idealistic, for example, to take the neoconservative position that democracy promotion is the special purview of the United States.

Mearsheimer (2005, p.1) calls this “Wilsonianism with teeth.” From the ideals of Woodrow Wilson, the neoconservatives have acquired the idealistic view that democracy is, to paraphrase Voltaire’s “Candide,” “the best of all possible governments” and consequently should be advanced throughout the world regardless of whether or not a particular country wishes to become a democracy.

Michael J. Mazarr (2003) states that there are many ways to understand the complexion of George W. Bush’s foreign policy and the group that ran it. One lens that is useful is the lens of realism. Virtually every Bush foreign policy appointee identified himself or herself as a realist during the administration’s first year. For example, Mazarr (2003, p. 503) points out that national security adviser Condoleezza Rice said both “I am a realist” and “power matters.” Donald Rumsfeld identified himself as an old-fashioned realist while Bush said during his candidacy that a president must be a clear-eyed realist.
Realists who practice power politics are, according to Mazarr (2003), individuals fully able to understand that military power is a tool to be used in the pursuit of national interests and in order to reshape the world. Such a perspective tends to elevate military power over diplomacy and to emphasize the viability of unilateral rather than multilateral actions. Certainly, no casual observer of American policy in the wake of 9/11 would fail to recognize that military power has been and still is being used to achieve American ends, in Afghanistan as well as in Iraq and, to some extent, today in Syria.

In terms of foreign policy initiatives, the Bush posture presupposes that the American systems of governance and the American culture is superior to that of other countries. It further assumes that the cultures and countries of the Middle East are in an early, immature stage of development; because this is the case, the foreign policy initiatives of the United States, whatever their theoretical foundations, should assist such target countries in advancing developmentally. As Mearsheimer (2005) notes, this set of assumptions leads almost invariably to the neo-conservative perspective and even operates subtly in both the imperial and realist perspectives.

Influencing President Bush in his policymaking efforts regarding Syria and the larger region was a need to overcome the bifurcation between those who propose a foreign policy in the region that is built on the pursuit of the national interest and those who believe that the promotion of democracy should take precedence. Regardless of which set of interests tend to dominate U.S. policy, the fact of the matter is, according to Kahwaji (2004), that the Middle East and the Persian Gulf are important targets of U.S. policy.
Kahwaji (2004) suggests that instead of simply deterring regional aggressors on behalf of status quo states, the U.S. under President Bush actively engaged in an effort to transform political practices throughout the Gulf via the promotion of democratic institutions and the elimination of terrorist threats. The states of the GCC, stated Kahwaji (2004), “joined the American alliance in the war on terrorism” (p.55). This certainly suggests, to some degree, that the GCC and the states considered in this study have found common cause with the U.S. on some crucial issues.

If oil matters – and of course it does – then the Middle East matters for other reasons as well. Lincoln Bloomfield (1997) suggests that beyond oil, the strategic location of the region is significant. It includes a major sea route between East and West, as well as a growing population with economic resources that are a desirable market for multinational firms and financial investors. As a locus for Islamic political activism – and for the resurgence of a conservative, politically radical Islamist revival – it is a “fault line” as understood by Huntington (1996/2001). Israel’s position and the resolution of the plight of the Palestinians remains a vital element in the international political arena. Terrorism, as has been shown in recent years, has also flourished in the region, which serves as a cauldron for stirring up antagonisms toward the U.S. and the West (Korb, 2005). These were clearly issues that were significant to President Bush as he considered responding to the issues emerging in the region.

Nevertheless, as Joseph Moynihan (1997) points out, the target states (including Iraq in the aftermath of the U.S.-led invasion of that country) share many security interests. These interests also encompass economic matters that are related to oil and trade, which should not be underestimated in terms of their significance in shaping
foreign policy in Washington (Moynihan, 1997). Korb (2005) commented that for many
decades, under presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt through George W. Bush, American
security interests in the Middle East primarily required maintaining the unhindered flow
of oil from the Gulf to world markets at stable prices while preventing the Soviet Union
from gaining support in the region.

George W. Bush will also be remembered as the president who secured the support of Congress in obtaining overwhelming consent to the USA PATRIOT Act. Under the terms of this legislation, the federal government has acquired the legal standing to use its technological and other resources to investigate the lives and behaviors of citizens and non-citizens alike in this country. Coupled with the doctrine of preemption, George W. Bush succeeded in concentrating enormous power in the executive branch and broadening the scope of intelligence gathering activities to a degree that no previous president contemplated (Kamp, 2005).

In summarizing the Bush Doctrine, Jones (2016) affirms that it grew out of neoconservative dissatisfaction with President Clinton’s handling of the Saddam Hussein regime in the 1990s. Many neoconservatives were angry that the U.S. did not depose Saddam Hussein after the successful conclusion of the 1990 Iraq War. Even before President Bush took office, in January of 1998, a group of neoconservative political figures, including Donald Rumsfeld (who became President Bush’s first Secretary of Defense) and Paul Wolfowitz (who became Undersecretary of Defense), sent a letter to President Clinton calling for the removal of Saddam Hussein and arguing that the Iraqi refusal to permit UN weapons inspections made it impossible to gain any concrete intelligence about the Iraqi weapons programs. The attitude underpinning this letter,
argues Jones (2016), became an integral element in President Bush’s doctrine, which had an element of “America First” unilateralism that revealed itself before the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

By January of 2002, President Bush’s foreign policy had moved toward one emphasizing preemptive war, which would become a central element in his policies regarding the entire Middle East. The Bush Doctrine appears, however, to have essentially died in 2006, at which time the U.S. army in Iraq was focused on damage report and pacification and the military preoccupation with Iraq had allowed the Taliban in Afghanistan to reverse American successes there (Jones, 2016). American dissatisfaction with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq enabled Congressional Democrats to reclaim control of Congress and ultimately forced President Bush to eliminate Donald Rumsfeld and other neo-cons from his cabinet.

The Obama Administration

The election of Barack Obama to the US presidency in 2008 resulted in yet another ideological paradigm shift in US foreign policy. This constituted a shift away from neoconservatism toward a liberal institutional approach which came under intense fire as ISIS/ISIL emerged as a destabilizing force throughout not only Syria but neighboring Iraq also. Initially, observers believed that the election of President Obama had the potential to create a new set of relationships between the United States and Muslim nations – a relationship that would be mutually respectful and beneficial (Judis, 2014).

Liberal institutionalism, as practiced by the Obama administration, sought to use global institutions such as the United Nations and other nongovernmental organizations
(NGOs) as alternatives to military intervention to bring about changes in a particular
country or region. There was a sense of a return, at least in part, to the Clintonian
dojctrine of “enlargement and engagement in the early years of the Obama administration
(Abdul-Aziz, 2014). However, critics of President Obama have stated that “when it
comes to the Syrian conflict or any conflict of Syrian proportions, no American
government has been marked by such a state of confusion as that of Barack Obama’s

When Robert Ford, the US Ambassador to Syria, testified before the Senate
Foreign Relations Committee in October of 2013, he characterized the conflict in Syria as
“a grinding war of attrition” and stated that “the regime is suffering serious manpower
shortages” and the moderate opposition supported by the United States was “fighting on
two fronts, both against the regime and against militants, extremists directly linked to Al
Qaeda in Iraq” (Ford, 2013, p. 1).

In the summer of 2012, a conference at Geneva had, in the view of Michael
Hirsch (2013), the potential to generate a workable plan to end the violence in Syria
which had erupted into a full blown civil war. President Obama did not take advantage of
the opportunity to broker a peace deal, as he was engaged in a political campaign for re-
election in which GOP candidate Mitt Romney accused him of being soft on Syria.

Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei
Lavrov had jointly signed a June 2012 communique calling for a political transition in
Syria that had been drafted by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. At that time,
the US and Great Britain jointly issued public calls for removing Assad from office, and
Obama’s UN ambassador Susan Rice offered up a Chapter 7 resolution opening the door
to using force against Assad at a time when President Obama was dealing with fallout from his failure to maintain the red line in the sand that he had previously drawn (Hirsch, 2013).

Such a line, if crossed, was at least in theory supposed to reflect the set of conditions which would lead President Obama to authorize some type of meaningful intervention against Syria if it was proven that the Syrian government was using chemical weapons against its own people. Judis (2014) reported that President Obama in August 2013 was informed that there was no doubt that Assad had used chemical weapons in northern Syria and elsewhere and against rebels in the Damascus suburbs. President Obama “insisted that retaliation be limited to Assad’s chemical weapons facilities and, after Britain balked at joining the American attack, said he would not bomb without Congressional approval” (Judis, 2014, p. 2).

At that juncture, Russia convinced Basher Al Assad to give up his chemical arsenal, which put an end to the American threat but also served to demoralize rebel forces in Syria and led to a split between the Obama-backed Syrian National Coalition and the Islamic Front and other Islamic groups. The Obama administration then turned once again to negotiation via the United Nations and in Geneva in June 2012, it joined with Russia, the European Union, Turkey, and various Arab countries in calling for a coalition government in Syria to end the conflict. Many in the Obama administration, including Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, CIA Chief David Petraeus, and Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, proposed to the White House that it arm the rebels, but Obama refused (Judis, 2014).
In discussing the Obama foreign policy, Berman (2014) positions President Obama’s policy in a global context and says that it has become “characterized by strategic drift, with serious consequences for American interests abroad. The list of failures is legion, from a lack of leadership on Russia to faulty assumptions about the feasibility of détente with Iran to a rudderless pivot toward Asia – but it is Syria that is perhaps President Obama’s greatest foreign policy failure to date” (p.1).

Inaction, rather than action, characterizes what could be called a combination of the liberal and democratic peace theory perspective that seem to be typical of President Obama’s ideological orientation. Berman (2014) reported that “what was once an internal conflict has become an incubator for global jihad. The past three years have seen a steady Islamization of Syria’s fractious opposition, complete with the rise of a constellation of radical religious forces and the birth of a local Al Qaeda affiliate” (p.1). Further, they have also seen an influx of hundreds of foreign fighters from abroad. The latter trend has become such a problem that Western governments have begun collaborating with the Assad regime to get an accurate handle on just how many of their own nationals are fighting on Syria's killing fields. Berman (2014) goes on to note that the contradictions in the Obama policy toward Syria were among the reasons why ISIS/ISIL has emerged as a major actor in the region. Essentially, one could argue that the failure of the U.S. and her allies in Europe to adequately assist moderate rebel forces struggling to topple the Assad regime created a situation in which a determined Islamist group could seize the day and control over the Syrian conflict. Berman (2014) concluded that “All this has diluted international support for comparatively moderate political forces within the Syrian opposition. It also bolsters the legitimacy of the Syrian regime — which, once
discredited, is now increasingly seen as the only viable political option by the West, despite its brutality” (p.2).

George Friedman (2013), commenting on Obama’s policies, said:

When he took office, Obama did not want to engage in any war. His goal was to raise the threshold for military action much higher than it had been since the end of the Cold War, when Desert Storm, Somalia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq and other lesser interventions formed an ongoing pattern in U.S. foreign policy (p.2). Whatever the justifications for any of these policies, Obama saw the United States as being overextended by the tempo of war. He intended to disengage from war and to play a lesser role in general in managing the international system. At most, he intended to be part of the coalition of nations, not the leader and certainly not the lone actor.

President Obama was definitively opposed to the Doctrine of Pre-emption favored by the Bush Administration, and while not as committed to nation-building or democratization, was convinced that diplomacy was preferable to military intervention in most cases (and specifically in the case of Syria, where determining which of the rebel forces was the ‘right’ partner was all but impossible).

Friedman (2013, p. 1) also suggests that:

Obama tried to find a balance where there was none between his strategy that dictated non-intervention and his ideology that demanded something be done. His solution was to loudly threaten military action that he and his secretary of state both indicated would be minimal. The threatened action aroused little concern from the Syrian regime, which has fought a bloody two-year war. Meanwhile, the
Russians, who were seeking to gain standing by resisting the United States, could paint Washington as reckless and unilateral.…. The alignment of moral principles with national strategy is not easy under the best of circumstances. Ideologies tend to be more seductive in generalized terms, but not so coherent in specific cases. This is true throughout the political spectrum, but it is particularly intense in the Obama administration, where the ideas of humanitarian intervention, absolutism in human rights, and opposition to weapons of mass destruction collide with a strategy of limiting U.S. involvement — particularly military involvement — in the world. The ideologies wind up demanding judgments and actions that the strategy rejects. This has created a tension in current U.S. foreign policy, which itself was exacerbated by the emergence of ISIS/ISIL as a tremendously destabilizing force in the region, and the use of U.S. drones to attack ISIS/ISIL positions in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere.

Facing the Obama Administration was not merely the question of how to deal with the Assad regime; the more significant issue, perhaps, was what can and should be done to contain (and ideally eliminate) ISIS/ISIL. President Obama (2014) made the following statement, underscoring the significance of this issue:

So, ISIL poses a threat to the people of Iraq and Syria, and the broader Middle East -- including American citizens, personnel and facilities. If left unchecked, these terrorists could pose a growing threat beyond that region -- including to the United States. While we have not yet detected specific plotting against our homeland, ISIL leaders have threatened America and our allies. Our intelligence community believes that thousands of foreigners -- including Europeans and some
Americans -- have joined them in Syria and Iraq. Trained and battle-hardened, these fighters could try to return to their home countries and carry out deadly attacks (p.1).

The notion that ISIS/ISIL had been “contained,” let alone “eliminated” or “controlled,” is itself controversial in light of the ongoing acts of terrorism claimed by ISIS/ISIL. They are, as President Obama (2014) rightly commented,

ISIL is certainly not a state. It was formerly al Qaeda's affiliate in Iraq, and has taken advantage of sectarian strife and Syria's civil war to gain territory on both sides of the Iraq-Syrian border. It is recognized by no government, nor the people it subjugates. ISIL is a terrorist organization, pure and simple. And it has no vision other than the slaughter of all who stand in its way.

In a region that has known so much bloodshed, these terrorists are unique in their brutality. They execute captured prisoners. They kill children. They enslave, rape, and force women into marriage. They threatened a religious minority with genocide. In acts of barbarism, they took the lives of two American journalists -- Jim Foley and Steven Sotloff (p.1).

That said, the question of whether or not limited military engagement or intervention (largely in the form of unmanned drones and a small contingent of military “advisors” with “boots on the ground” in the region) represents a movement away from the Obama policy of liberalism bolstered by a touch of realism remains unanswered even today. Certainly, President Obama (2014) has made it quite clear that he does not favor American military intervention and as the Obama Administration is ending, President Obama, as he has throughout his tenue in office, refused to countenance unilateral
American action in Syria or elsewhere; he called repeatedly for building coalitions and involving local actors in any and all efforts to end this crisis.

He has stated that “Moreover, I have made it clear that we will hunt down terrorists who threaten our country, wherever they are. That means I will not hesitate to take action against ISIL in Syria, as well as Iraq. This is a core principle of my presidency: if you threaten America, you will find no safe haven” (Obama, 2014, p. 1). Such a statement is somewhat at odds with the actual policies he put in place. One might be tempted to argue that ISIS/ISIL itself did not threatened the “country” governed by President Obama, even though it declared its intent to do so and takes American lives as casually as it has taken the lives of Coptic Christians from Egypt, Yazidis, Kurds, Shi’as, and aid workers as well as journalists from England and Japan.

The various theoretical lenses applied herein are useful in both academic and practical settings because they assist analysts in determining the underlying rationale for specific foreign policy decisions and other actions by nation-states (Buchan, 2002). The case of Syria, considered over a period of time from 1993 to 2015, is particularly useful in comparing how each of these policy orientations can impact the decisions of an American president. There has clearly been at times, as this report demonstrates, dramatic transformation in US policy. Currently, Hussein Abdul-Aziz (2014) believes that the constant shifts in American attitudes toward Syria have undermined the capacity of any seated president to undertake definitive action. At the same time, this analyst is convinced that President Obama’s antipathy toward military action and his belief in the power of negotiation represents the liberal view of foreign policy as a mechanism for building peace.
The problem, of course, is that peacebuilding requires willingness on the part of all involved in a conflict. There has been no indication that the Assad regime has any intention at all of ceding power, or even a reasonable share of power, to any of its opponents. There is also no reason to believe that ISIS/ISIL has any intent of backing down from its stated goal of establishing first a regional and then a global Islamic Caliphate that will introduce Shari’a law into new territories. Despite its loss of territory in recent months, it remains committed to its goals and objectives.

The use of American drones to weaken, if not eliminate, ISIS/ISIL was part of President Obama’s overarching strategy which now appears to have accepted the idea of keeping Assad in power. Whereas the neoconservative policy of George W. Bush sought to eliminate Assad as part of the Axis of Evil and the policies of both George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton emphasized engagement with Syria, the Obama administration did not succeed in articulating a consistent policy. While consistency may well be the hobgoblin of little minds, the fragmented and constantly evolving policies of the past several American presidential administrations have not served the country well.

Guiora (2011) pointed out that identifying the underpinning ideology shaping the activities of any presidential administration is challenging in part because most presidents are likely to combine more than one ideological approach to the creation of foreign policies. There is no doubt that President Barack Obama represented a significant shift in terms of a fundamental worldview when compared to his predecessor, George W. Bush. In no sense a Neoconservative, Obama has nevertheless continued throughout his presidency to maintain many of the sanctions that were initiated in the Bush
administration, and in a number of instances has extended and increased those sanctions against Syria (U.S. Department of Treasury, 2015).

Sanctions have been, therefore, a key foreign policy tool employed by Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama (U.S. Department of Treasury, 2015). Presidents and Bush and Obama have been, if anything, more aggressive than President Clinton in terms of the use of sanctions as a tool for bringing about desired outcomes in the case of Syria and its ongoing civil war. Interestingly, Guiora (2011) pointed out that the foreign policy of President Obama “has been particularly problematic on two distinct fronts: inconsistency in determining under what conditions intervention is justified and a sharp dissonance between suggested expectations and actual delivery” (p. 253).

President Obama has in the view of this analyst called for intervention and executed it in Libya but not in Syria. Attempting to determine what differentiated the Libyan and Syrian crises, Guiora (2011) argues, is difficult at best. Both regimes were brutal and both were antagonistic to the United States and its interests in the region. Guiora (2011) stated that “in both Libya and Syria a brutal regime was deliberate torturing, imprisoning, and killing its own citizens” (p. 267). The United States and NATO directly engaged the Gaddafi regime in Libya with the intent of forcing the leader to either step down or leave Libya. President Obama employed American resources to the conflict in Libya but did not introduce American troops into the country.

In 2011, President Obama called for President Bashar Al Assad to step aside and increased sanctions against Syria, but he also specified that he and the U.S. would not impose force upon Assad to remove him from office. President Obama (2011) stated that “it is up to the Syrian people to choose their own leaders and we have heard their strong
desire that there not be foreign intervention in their movement. What the United States will support is an effort to bring about a Syria that is democratic, just, and inclusive for all Syrians” (p.21).

Critics of the Obama policies toward Syria include Hussein Abdul-Aziz (2014), who said that “Obama’s policy toward the Syrian crisis has been marked by weakness and a lack of vision, both of which have informed two principal approaches thus far” (p.1). The first approach supported by the Obama administration was allowing the international system to play a greater role in the conflict while the second focused on placing political and economic pressure on Al Assad from a distance. Abdul-Aziz (2014) argued that the Obama administration exhibited at least four notable shifts in its Syria policy as of 2014, including supporting the opposition in Syria rather than using sanctions, withdrawing support from the opposition, alienating the regime’s allies, and finally, acknowledging that none of these efforts had succeeded.

A red line drawn in the sand, according to Bryant (2013), was largely ignored by Assad and many American partners have expressed disappointment that Washington delayed action in favor of engaging Russia to convince Syria to place its chemical weapons under international control. With hundreds of thousands of Syrians killed, millions more living as refugees, and the emergence of ISIS/ISIL, many critics, including Bryant (2013), believed the Obama policies have failed.

At one point, while considering military intervention in Syria, Obama sought to obtain Congressional authorization for a military attack against Syria (Mayer, 2014). While democratization was not specifically the goal of such a move, Mayer (2014) asserts that the frequency of drone attacks undertaken by the American government under
the terms of the War Powers Act represent a unilateral approach to resolving the Syrian crisis. Congressional approval was not forthcoming.

Realists, as has been noted above, acknowledge the necessity of unilateral actions (Mayer, 2014). This does not necessarily mean that it would be appropriate to identify Barack Obama as a Realist. President Obama was hesitant with respect to expanding U.S. activities in Syria beyond the drone bomb program (Mayer, 2014). Whether or not a true “Obama Doctrine” emerged is difficult to determine. Murray (2013) suggested that President Obama prefers a calibrated, multilateral response to egregious humanitarian crises. Such a doctrine represents an attempt to clarify and institutionalize responses to human rights violations. It seeks to pursue reform, then commitment to stability and attempts to emphasize diplomatic engagement as opposed to military intervention (Murray, 2013).

The problem is that the Obama policy has not been as comprehensive as either the Bush policies in Iraq and Afghanistan or as removed as the Clinton engagement and enlargement effort. Whether one chooses to criticize the Bush administration’s penchant for military intervention or not, one must conclude, as does Glass (2015), that this policy was at least consistent. In sharp contrast, the Obama policy did not succeed in crystallizing around a particular ideological approach.

Hirsch (2013) argued that President Obama had the opportunity to broker a Syrian peace deal in 2012 but failed to do so even though then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov had reached an accord on a political transition in Syria that would have eliminated Bashar Assad from power. Unfortunately, though the United Nations had supported such a move, as was evident in the attitude of
the Special UN Syria envoy, Kofi Annan, the United States, and Great Britain prematurely issued public calls for Assad’s ouster. This undermined any potential for a peace deal at that time (Hirsch, 2013).

President Obama acknowledged the rise of ISIS/ISIL and the necessity of addressing the problems that this poses for the stability of the Middle East and for the United States. U.S. drones originating at the U.S. Air Force’s Turkish base in Incirlik have targeted ISIS/ISIL in north Syria since August 2015 (Tattersall, 2015). The U.S. and Turkey worked together to provide air cover for those groups that have been identified by the Obama administration as moderate. The overarching goal of the U.S.-Turkish alliance has been to decimate the ISIS/ISIL forces and to flush them from a rectangle of border territory near Turkey where many Syrian refugees have taken residence.

Tattersall (2015) reported that Turkey joined the fight in support of the United States and because of its own fears regarding the long-term effect of regional instability. That said, as Yeginsu and Cooper (2015) contend, the United States behaved under President Obama somewhat pragmatically in light of the fact that Turkey’s record of dealing with its own Kurdish population is not substantially better than that of Bashar Al Assad. There is something of the Realist ideology underpinning the U.S.-Turkey agreement on using manned and unmanned American war planes to carry out aerial attacks on ISIS/ISIL. The United States had clearly chosen to be pragmatic with respect to its Turkish partnership.

Overall, Berman (2014) assessed the Obama Syrian policy as characterized by strategic drift and a list of failures that ranges from a lack of leadership on the question of Russia to faulty assumptions about the feasibility of détente with Iran and the failure to
act in a timely manner with respect to Syria. President Obama emerges as more generally oriented towards liberalism and a belief that with diplomacy, it is possible to engage in peacebuilding. Certainly, it is quite clear that President Obama, from the outset of his tenure in the White House, did not want to engage in any new wars, saw the United States as overextended as with respect to Iraq and Afghanistan, and was even anxious for the United States to disengage from war and assume a lesser role in managing the international system (Friedman, 2013).

President Obama sought to find a balance in a situation that was increasingly incoherent. His strategy, with respect to Syria, was the direct opposite of the Bush doctrine of preemption. He was convinced that diplomacy was almost always preferable to military intervention and that nation-building and democratization were best achieved by modeling such activities rather than imposing them on others (Friedman, 2013).

Friedman (2013) says that in the Obama administration, “ideas of humanitarian intervention, absolutism, in human rights, and opposition to weapons of mass destruction collide with a strategy of limiting U.S. involvement – particularly military involvement – in the world” (p. 1).

The end result of President Obama’s policy was the view of some – but not all - analysts that there was no clearly defined “doctrine” or policy orientation that can be said to represent U.S. attitudes and actions vis-à-vis Syria from 2008 to 2016 (Friedman, 2013). Certainly, President Obama made it clear that the military “boots on the ground” option for intervention in Syria – even with the rise of ISIS/ISIL – was not viable from his perspective. This was due to several reasons: fear of further regional destabilization; increased antipathy toward America and the West among Muslims; a lack of perceived
will on the part of the American people to support such an intervention; a conviction that it is in the best interest of the United States to “lead from behind” by supporting concerted efforts on the global stage rather than through unilateral action; and a genuine sense that Syria’s destiny should be in the hands of Syrians and not external actors (Friedman, 2013).

This has inevitably led to the emergence of a certain tension in American policy toward Syria. ISIS/ISIL and the dangers posed by a determined Islamist movement notwithstanding, President Obama (2014) chose to severely limit the options he would employ in developing and implementing policy toward Syria. He acknowledged the threat posed by ISIS/ISIL, admitted that if left unchecked it would undoubtedly continue to wreak havoc on the region (and potentially affect U.S. national security), and nevertheless was willing only to employ air strikes against this threat.

President Obama (2014) has spoken harshly and critically about ISIS/ISIL and the dangers it poses. His efforts in tandem with Turkey – and his tacit acceptance of Iran’s support for the Al-Assad regime – did not signal a change in policy orientation. Russia entered the fray in support of the Al-Assad regime and, in so doing, called on the United States to remove itself from Syrian airspace. This represented a new political issue in an already complex situation, and one that calls for negotiation.

Globally, as Ramsbotham et al. (2012) would undoubtedly agree, there is a fundamental ideological divide between Syria under Bashar Al-Assad and the United States on the one hand and between Russia and the United States on the other hand. This is a division that Marten (2015) identifies as integral to any understanding of the Syrian situation which must, out of necessity, include references to the case of Iran and its
hegemonic ambitions in the Middle East. Similarly, regional conflict is involved with
cross-border conflict exacerbated by the emergence of ISIS/ISIL and a diaspora of
Syrians and Iraqis leaving a war-torn region. Inter-state conflict is also endemic in Syria
itself, where a highly authoritarian state under a regime that has been at the very least
dismissive of opposition and at the worst brutally repressive with respect to its opponents
is now under attack (Marten, 2015).

Perhaps the most comprehensive effort to identify the specific nature of an Obama
Doctrine was undertaken by Jeffrey Goldberg (2016) in a lengthy article appearing in the
April 2016 edition of *The Atlantic*. Goldberg (2016) notes that Obama saw Syria as
representing a slope potentially as slippery as Iraq and convinced that only a handful of
threats in the Middle East warranted direct U.S. military intervention. These threats
included that posed by Al Qaeda, threats to the continued existence of Israel, and the
threat posed by a nuclear armed Iran. Until the summer of 2012, noted Goldberg (2016),
when President Obama drew the red line in the sand after the Assad regime used
chemical weapons against its own citizens, the evidence that President Obama was
reticent at best to intervene in Syria because of his conviction that the threat posed by the
Assad regime to the United States was not sufficient.

Obama was convinced that there was no reason to doubt that Assad would fall
without American intervention and equally convinced that it was important for the United
States to conclude its military engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan before becoming
involved in Syria. Further, Obama did not embrace the doctrine known as responsibility
to protect and in fact, Goldberg (2016) states, “unlike liberal interventionists, [Obama] is
an admirer of the foreign policy realism of President George H.W. Bush and, in particular, of Bush’s national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft” (p.6).

Many believed that when the red line in the sand was drawn, President Obama was ready to authorize military intervention in Syria. In fact, he had authorized the Pentagon to develop target lists and called for the deployment of five Arleigh Burke-Class destroyers in the Mediterranean (Goldberg, 2016). However, President Obama then developed doubts as to whether or not a strike was called for and expressed concern regarding whether or not he should undertake military action without the consent of Congress. He was willing, Goldberg (2016) said, to upset America’s allies, including France and Saudi Arabia and to antagonize those in the U.S. Congress who were in favor of intervention in Syria. When he asked Congress to authorize the use of force and received an ambivalent response, President Obama quickly backed down with respect to the violation of the red line that he had drawn himself.

Goldberg (2016) stated that history may record August 30, 2013 “as the day Obama prevented the U.S. from entering yet another disastrous Muslim civil war... or it could be remembered as the day he let the Middle East slip from America’s grasp, into the hands of Russia, Iran, and ISIS” (p.19). Later, President Obama would argue that even ISIS, unlike climate change, was not an existential threat to the United States and that at all costs, the United States needed to avoid being caught up in tribal conflicts. In fact, President Obama does appear, in the view of Goldberg (2016), to view tribalism as a fundamental problem confronting the world. Obama sees American foreign policy as focused either on isolation, realism, liberal interventionism, and internationalism, and describes himself as both a realist and an internationalist with idealistic tendencies. The
Obama Doctrine, therefore, may very well be a combination of multiple theoretical perspectives involving off-loading some of America’s foreign policies to her allies.

Goldberg (2016) says that President Obama is thoroughly cognizant of the forces that drive apocalyptic violence among radical Muslims and has “a tragic realist’s understanding of sin, cowardice, and corruption, and a Hobbesian appreciation of how fear shapes human behavior” (p.26). Simultaneously, he often expresses optimism that change is possible and a willingness to question the conventional wisdom regarding if some countries identified as allies are actually allies and all those identified as enemies are actually enemies.

Further, it is quite possible that the American experience in Libya influenced President Obama’s decisions regarding Syria. Goldberg (2016) suggests that regardless of how successful the Libyan experience may have been, President Obama saw it as a failure and essentially as having not worked as planned due in part to tribalism and also the fact that the Middle East represents a potential quagmire for the United States.

Obama is also said to be extremely resistant to refracting radical Islam through Samuel Huntington’s clash of civilization prism. He sees terrorism as a threat, but not as the kind of threat that should engender the level of fear that has emerged in the United States. Obama told Goldberg (2016) that “a group like ISIL is the distillation of every worst impulse” (p. 47). His approach to fighting terrorism, with respect to the Syrian situation as a whole, has included a drone air force, Special Forces raids, and a clandestine CIA aided army of 10,000 rebels battling in Syria. Obama has steadfastly refused to move beyond a foreign policy posture that focuses on deliberate, nonthreatening, diplomacy-centered approaches to foreign policies.
Overall, Goldberg (2016) says that President Obama has insisted that overextension in the Middle East will harm the American economy, inhibit national capacity for finding other opportunities and dealing with other challenges, and would endanger the lives of American service members for reasons that are, in his view, inadequate. The Obama Doctrine, therefore, is a doctrine in which interventionism is not considered to be in the best interests of the country and its peoples simply because a possible threat exists.

A word at this juncture regarding the situation in Syria is necessary. Hubbard and MacFarquhar (2016) reported that as December of 2016 ended, a ceasefire between the Syrian government and significantly weakened rebel forces took effect. Brokered in large measure by Russia, the United States welcomed this truce. The rebels’ loss of Aleppo was a major blow to their movement. Excluded from the ceasefire, however, were the jihadists including the Islamic State, the Syrian affiliate of Al Qaeda and groups linked to them. As of this writing, there was no indication that the ceasefire would hold or that hostilities would not break out, nor was there was any determination as to whether or not the Assad regime would step down, become more inclusive, or change its policies. Finally, it should be noted that the Obama administration played no role of any substance in obtaining this ceasefire.

**Chemical Weapon Use and Two Cases: Iraq and Syria**

While there are any number of similarities and dissimilarities that can be introduced in a discussion of American foreign policy toward Middle Eastern countries from the administrations of President Bill Clinton through President Barack Obama, no study of these policies would be complete without some discussion of how a regime’s use
of chemical weapons played into U.S. policy formation. Beginning with President George H.W. Bush and the first Persian Gulf War, a cornerstone of American foreign policy for a prolonged period of time derived from the acknowledgement that Saddam Hussein not only possessed chemical weapons and other weapons of mass destruction but also had a history of using those weapons against his enemies domestically as well as externally (Tracey, 2007). There is evidence that from the 1960s to the 1980s, Saddam Hussein undertook an aggressive program of developing multiple weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, in which Iraq received assistance from companies in Germany and France as well as Russia (Chivers & Schmitt, 2015).

As part of what is now known as Project 922, German companies, including Karl Kobe, facilitated the development of Iraqi chemical weapons facilities and further assisted the country in developing mustard gas, sarin, tabun, and tear gases. As reported by Timmerman (1991), Iraq produced 150 tons of mustard gas agent and 60 tons of tabun in 1983 and 1984, respectively, drawing in large measure on assistance from German companies. Under the aegis of the State Establishment for Pesticide Production (SEPP), Saddam Hussein’s factories turned out mass quantities of chemical weapons that the regime deployed in its war with Iran beginning in 1980.

Timmerman (1991) pointed out that Iraq employed chemical weapons against Iranian forces throughout 1984 and 1985 and also used such weapons against domestic dissidents from the Kurdish minority population. It is estimated that more than 100,000 Iranians were affected by Saddam Hussein’s chemical weapons during the eight-year war and that internally, some 7,000 Kurds were killed by chemical weapons in Iraq while 20,000 Kurds were wounded at the town of Halabja. The event at Halabja was not an
isolated incident. Hirst (1988) reported that in response to growing evidence that Saddam Hussein was using chemical weapons against his own people, and particularly as a consequence of the Halabja poison gas attack, the U.S. Senate proposed the Prevention of Genocide Act of 1988 while also cutting off all American assistance to Iraq and eliminating U.S. imports of Iraqi oil, despite objections from the Reagan administration.

One of the key factors leading to the Persian Gulf War, at least in terms of providing a moral foundation for American intervention, was knowledge of Saddam Hussein’s ongoing use of chemical weapons and his determination to continue developing nuclear and other weapons despite sanctions from the United Nations (Timmerman, 1991). Even the success of the first Persian Gulf War, in which Saddam Hussein was forced to retreat from his invasion of Kuwait, did not bring about an end to Iraq’s efforts to continue developing its weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

Moving forward several years, inspections by the United Nations Special Commission on Iraq (UNSCOM) proceeded with difficulty. Tracey (2007) notes that there was a substantial body of evidence indicating that Iraq was intent on continuing research related to the use of such toxins as anthrax, botulinum, ricin, and aflatoxin. British educated Iraqi biologist Rihab Rashid Taha ultimately admitted to UNSCOM inspectors that under orders from Saddam Hussein, Iraqi researchers had been conducting research into smallpox, cholera, salmonella, and camel pox. As Tracey (2007) states, Iraqi opposition groups contended that scientists used political prisoners, including some who were transferred to Iraq from Abu Ghraib, as human guinea pigs when anthrax treated shells were exploded.
Additionally, in response to UNSCOM pressure, Saddam Hussein’s government willingly and knowingly lied about its chemical weapons program, generally underestimating and minimizing its investment in such weapons and research. For President George W. Bush, ongoing concerns regarding Iraq’s chemical weapons programming were instrumental in the decision to go to war against Iraq in what would become Gulf War II (Tracey, 2007). Essentially, while no nuclear WMD were ultimately located in Iraq by the invading Coalition forces that overthrow Saddam Hussein’s regime, there was a substantial body of evidence supporting the conclusion that Iraq had used, and would continue to develop, chemical weapons.

According to Tracey (2007), it is probable that Saddam Hussein did not destroy all, or perhaps even most, of the chemical weapons that he had developed, some of which he had in fact used both domestically against Kurds and in the Iran-Iraq War. Similarly, the National Ground Intelligence Center reported to the U.S. House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence that since 2003, coalition forces recovered approximately 500 weapons which contained degraded mustard or sarin gas nerve agents (Shrader, 2006). These chemical weapons were identified as constituting weapons of mass destruction, and though they may not have been as potent or viable several years after their development as initially planned, they were nevertheless evidence of an Iraqi effort to develop and to use such weapons.

President George W. Bush certainly based his policies vis-à-vis Iraq on a conviction that chemical and other WMD required a response from the United States of a military nature because such weapons represented a very real threat to the security not only of the Middle East, but also of the United States (Tracey, 2007). Whether one agrees
or not with the justification used by President Bush to invade Iraq, the fact of the matter is that Iraq did have a history of using chemical weapons and that it did have a substantial investment in chemical weapons research. President Bush (2003) called upon Saddam Hussein in May of 2003 to give up power and leave the country and told the world that if Saddam Hussein did not comply with this demand, the U.S. would have no choice but to pursue him as a war criminal.

It is clear that in this instance chemical weapons as a reality and as a potential threat were instrumental in shaping American foreign policy toward an autonomous nation-state. While no nuclear weapons were identified as present in Iraq, in contradiction to the intelligence given to President Bush, chemical weapons are weapons of mass destruction and offer legitimate support for his decision to invade Iraq. That said, of course, there is still the question of whether or not Saddam Hussein’s regime itself presented a clear and present threat to the United States something which William R. Pitt (2002) suggests is far more difficult to demonstrate. Coupled with the actual and verified use of chemical weapons, Iraq’s dogged resistance to compliance with UN sanctions made the Bush Administration view this as sufficient to justify a military “boots on the ground” pre-emptive strike.

Customary international law, until relatively recently, has upheld the right of a nation-state to use force and go to war in order to obtain redress for wrongs or to gain political or other advantages over another state, particularly in cases where such acts would be a form of self-defense (Ackerman, 2003). The law of nations, beginning with statements from Hugo Grotius, continuing in the writing of Emmerich de Vattel, and former U.S. Secretary of State Daniel Webster, affirms the use of preemptive force in
anticipation of an attack and in the interest of preservation of the security of a state. Thus, necessity along with Webster’s concept of proportionality are essential in legitimizing preemptive force (Ackerman, 2003).

Under the Charter of the United Nations, specifically Article 51, this right to wage war in the pursuit of individual or collective self-defense is affirmed with the caveat that this right emerges when an armed attack occurs. However, many legal scholars, including David Ackerman (2003), point out that moving away from a literal construction of Article 51 has occurred in recognition of the fact that a preemptive strike that is defensive in nature can be legitimate if there is reason to believe that an attack is pending or probable. In the case of Iraq, the conclusion drawn by the Bush administration, based on best available intelligence at the time, was that Iraq may have possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD), did have and had used chemical weapons, and may have had ties to terrorist groups that sought to use such weapons against the U.S.; consequently, the Bush policy reflected the belief that traditional law of preemption should apply.

The United Nations has failed to provide definitive guidance on Article 51 applicability in such a situation (Ackerman, 2003). Nevertheless, it should be noted that the United Nations has at times supported preemptive strikes – something that was apparently sufficient for the Bush Administration. The U.S. invasion of Iraq was, according to Bush, justified under the customary law requirement of necessity but not under the requirement of proportionality in that there was no evidence directly linking Iraq to a readily apparent immediate threat to the United States or any of its extraterritorial holdings. Anticipatory self-defense as a matter of national survival must be justified based on necessity and proportionality.
Like Iraq, Syria also had a chemical weapons program that it began in the 1970s with the assistance of both Egypt and the Soviet Union. Production of chemical weapons in Syria did not officially begin until the mid-1980s. According to the Congressional Research Service (CRS) (2013), Western intelligence services were convinced for over two decades that Syria possessed and was stockpiling chemical weapons with the intent to use such weapons on an as needed basis. Hinnebusch et al. (2010) pointed out that unlike Iraq, which was subject to UN and other sanctions based on the actual validated use of chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq War, Syria was able to invest in stockpiling chemical weapons with relative ease.

By September of 2013, reports from French intelligence agencies indicated that Syria had a stockpile of some 1,000 tons of such weapons including sarin, Yperite, and VX. In September of 2013, Syria joined the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and agreed to destroy these weapons under the supervision of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). Prior to joining the CWC, Syria was one of only five states failing to sign and even refusing to ratify the Convention, although in 1968, Syria had agreed to the Geneva Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous of Other Gases (Willsher, 2013).

Syria, it is argued, adopted a chemical weapons development initiative for several reasons, including a perceived need to develop a deterrent against Israel and her capacity to deploy nuclear weapons against Syria, to improve its domestic security after losing Egypt as a military ally, to act as a deterrent against neighboring Turkey in the event this would be necessary, and in recognition of the vulnerability of Syria’s military forces with respect to those of Israel (Diab, 1997). That said, Syria’s participation in CWC required it
to not only cease its chemical weapons program but also to disarm and to destroy its existing stockpiles. At the end of 2013, Syria was revealed as having stockpiled some 1,300 metric tons of different chemical weapons that were stored at various sites throughout the country.

Acting jointly, the United States and Russia announced on September 14, 2013 that they would undertake responsibility for overseeing a disarmament effort to eliminate Syria’s chemical weapons programs and stockpiles (Gordon, 2013). A joint mission between the United Nations and OPCW was established to oversee the process and many of the weapons were in fact destroyed. Nevertheless, there was a substantial body of evidence supporting the assertion that the Bashar Al Assad regime and that of his father had deployed chemical weapons against dissidents and rebels in such cities as Homs, Khan al-Asal, and Jobar as well as Saraqib. These attacks were seen as the work of the Syrian government, although Al Assad claimed that his government was not responsible and that any chemical weapons that were deployed in Syria were deployed by opposition forces (Mazzetti & Gordon, 2013).

President Barack Obama, responding on August 20, 2012, made the following statement: “we have been very clear to the Assad government, but also to other players on the ground, that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized. That would change my calculus. That would change my equation” (Baker, 2013, p. A1). Problematically, one year later, the Syrian government used chemical weapons at Ghouta, leading President Obama to claim that he had not in fact set a red line but that this was a line set by many governments in response to the use of chemical weapons (Goldberg, 2016).
The reaction to President Obama’s apparent retreat from a firm stance on the use of chemical weapons was highly negative. As Goldberg (2016) points out, many international leaders and domestic American opposition politicians believed that President Obama had failed to act as he clearly intended to act a year earlier. There was a perception that by refusing to mount a focused military response to Assad’s use of chemical weapons, the United States was backing down from its oft-stated commitment to bringing about an end to the conflict in Syria.

Certainly, the Obama reaction to definitive proof that Syria had used chemical weapons against its own people is vastly different from the reaction of President George W. Bush when confronted with similar issues in the case of Iraq. According to Goldberg (2016), President Obama did not categorize Syria’s civil war as a top tier security threat. George W. Bush did adopt such a posture with respect to Iraq, although one must acknowledge that President Bush had been provided with intelligence indicating that in addition to chemical weapons, the Saddam Hussein regime also possessed other WMDs, including nuclear weapons.

Goldberg (2016) questioned President Obama and asked whether or not he perceived himself as having been too cautious in the case of Syria. President Obama said that he did not see himself as overcautious and speculated that he did not know whether or not he would have ordered military action in Syria had the U.S. not invaded Iraq and still been deeply invested in Afghanistan. Critics of President Obama contend that he is naive and that he was bluffing and posturing when he made the famous “red line” statement. Goldberg (2016) concludes that “in the matter of the Syrian regime and its Iranian and Russian sponsors, Obama has bet, and seems prepared to continue betting,
that the price of direct U.S. action would be higher than the price of inaction. And he is sanguine enough to live with the perilous ambiguities of his decisions” (p.58).

This brief discussion demonstrates that there are some critical differences between the decisions made by President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama with respect to military intervention when there is evidence that a regime has used and/or is developing chemical weapons. The difference seems to rest on the question of how one specifically defines a threat to the security of the United States. One can at least tentatively conclude that President Obama does not, or did not, see the Syrian civil war in and of itself as presenting a major threat to the United States and that consequently he did not believe that there was any reason for the United States to move to enhance its engagement in Syria because of the use of chemical weapons. President Bush took a different position when he chose to become engaged in Iraq. This case highlights the very real differences between the foreign policy orientations of the two presidents and their attitudes toward U.S. military involvement in foreign countries.

**Summary of the Chapter**

The purpose of this chapter of the study was to provide a thorough analysis of the relevant literature that depicts the theoretical environment in which the study is positioned, the political and military situation in Syria, the actions of three separate American presidential administrations, and a generalized comparison of two cases in which chemical weapons have been deployed and the response by the United States to this event. A literature review, as described by Babbie (2004), provides the foundation on which a qualitative study generally proceeds. The more complex the case under investigation, the more detailed and complex the literature review itself must be.
Given that two discrete sets of theory are employed herein, this chapter describes theories of International Relations as well as theories of Conflict Resolution. It is generally true, as Cloke (2008), suggests that resolving conflict is a central activity within the larger field of international relations and one of the goals of foreign policy initiatives which may alternatively seek to prevent rather than to resolve conflicts.

The theory of Coalition Building, as described by Spangler (2003), was identified in the foregoing review as the most appropriate theory for developing a meaningful solution to the Syrian issue. It is certainly worth noting that there are three or more broad sets of coalitions currently operating in Syria. The United States and her allies represent one such coalition whereas the partnership between the Assad regime, Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah represent another. Added to this, one must include the various rebel groups in Syria (depicted in the attached Appendices as well as the remaining elements of ISIS/ISIL or the Caliphate). One should recognize that alliances in these latter groups are often in flux and that this has been a characteristic of the Syrian situation for quite some time, going back to the presidency of Bill Clinton (Kiefer, 2000).

Coalition Building, as described by Spangler (2003), is a particularly useful tool in analyzing a situation such as that of Syria because it is recognized as the primary mechanism through which both powerful and disempowered parties can extend or develop a power base and in the process better defend their interests. Generally speaking, groups with lower power acquire enhanced capacity to protect their own interests when they participate in coalitions and powerful groups are able to expand their own sphere of interest through this process. Coalition building is one of the fundamental tools that is employed by actors in the field of conflict resolution.
The difficult in constructing a comprehensive review of literature in this research effort centers upon the fact that the Syrian situation is a situation in which change occurs on a virtually daily basis and that interactions between coalition members or partners tend to be dictated by conditions that cannot, in fact, be predicted and which are not in any way held constant. The result is that any description of the Syrian conflict written on a Monday in January of one year will be out of date by February of that same year and will be history by January of the following year.

These are considerations that certainly complicate the creation of a literature review that will stand up to scrutiny. The challenge for the researcher, therefore, centers upon identifying a point at which one will elect to cut off analysis of the literature and develop a discussion based on what may ultimately prove to be an inaccurate scenario. That said, this chapter of the study has been focused on events occurring in Syria up to January of 2017.

This covers three presidential administrations – those of Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama. At the discretion of the researcher, no effort was made to include any presidential policies which may have been developed or implemented in the initial months of the Trump administration. As noted above, the situation is still evolving in Syria and as of this writing, no significant policy initiatives had been introduced, let alone implemented, by the Trump administration with respect to U.S. military involvement in Syria itself. The only presidential initiatives under President Donald Trump related to Syria, as of this writing, have focused on the Syrian refugee and immigrant situation, neither of which are germane to the overarching research questions posed herein.
The bulk of the chapter was focused on a description of the Syrian policies of three very different American presidential administrations and the theoretical or ideological orientation of those administrations. As Goldberg (2016) pointed out in his quite extensive analysis of the Obama policy orientation, while all three of these presidents have employed aspects of Realism as a fundamental theory of policy development, their perception of the proper role of a U.S. policy differed.

Where we see President Clinton exhibiting a somewhat optimistic belief in the capacity of Syria under Hafez Al Assad to play the role of peace broker in the Middle East, no such perspective is identified in the views of either President Bush or President Obama. Clintonian engagement and enlargement gave way to preemption and democracy promotion and nation building under President Bush. In turn, President Bush’s interest in these policy concerns was not central to the decisions made by President Obama, whom Goldberg (2016) says resisted calls for action because he assumed, based on intelligence given to him, that Assad would fall without U.S. involvement.

Of course, this did not occur and President Obama departed from liberal interventionists and refused to escalate U.S. military participation in Syria beyond the use of drones and military advice. In fact, as Goldberg (2016) says, Obama did not believe that the U.S. could succeed militarily and that any effort to do so would be disastrous. This dovetails with his conviction that President George W. Bush acted without adequate forethought in the case of Iraq, something that President Obama refused to contemplate in the case of Syria. These issues will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 4.

Included in this chapter was a brief case comparison of two seminal events in which a sovereign nation-state employed chemical weapons against its own people and/or
against an acknowledged enemy. This case was included to illustrate how a particularly troubling, devastating, and admittedly inhumane use of weaponry influenced the formation of American foreign policy. The case demonstrates that when Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons against rival Iran in the Iran-Iraq war and against dissident Kurds and others in Iraq itself, the United States instituted a no-fly zone over Iraq that prevented Saddam Hussein from using chemical weapons or bombs against his own people.

President Obama, having drawn a red line in the sand, nevertheless did not intervene on the ground in Syria or established a no-fly zone when it became apparent that Basher Al Assad was using chemical weapons against his people (Goldberg, 2016). What this suggests, perhaps, is that as heinous as the use of chemical weapons may be, it in and of itself is not something that is likely to generate a change in Obama’s foreign policy.

In sum, this chapter of the study serves as the foundation for the forthcoming analysis; Chapter 4 will describe the critical differences between the three presidential administrations with respect to the Syrian issue. It also offers a foundation on which a detailed description of the potentials for coalition building can be presented; this will occur in Chapter 5. The study will conclude in Chapter 4 with answers to the research questions posed herein and recommendations for using Coalition Building to bring about a peaceful end to the Syrian crisis. That chapter will also include recommendations for further research. Before the analysis, however, a discussion of the methodology is necessary; this will occur in the following chapter.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Questions and Sub-questions

As noted in Chapter 1, the purpose of this study was to employ a qualitative research method (i.e., the unique case study) to develop an answer to the following overarching research question:

What are the likely effects of a transformation in American policy towards Syria that would include “boots on the ground” military intervention designed to stabilize a country that is torn apart by war and the insurgence of military Islam seeking to establish a new Caliphate?

The research sub-questions explored in the dissertation are:

1. What specific theoretical perspectives have been employed by the Clinton, Bush, and Obama presidential administrations in the design and implementation of foreign policy toward Syria?

2. What are the situational elements that have contributed, over time and in the present, to the development of American foreign policy toward Syria?

What a theory-based study of this type does is to offer a unique opportunity to examine real world applications of theoretical constructs and to assess their viability and their capacity for long-term use. As Babbie (2004) pointed out, case studies allow for investigation of relevant materials and the development of a comprehensive understanding of those materials.

Research Design

A unique case study design is the research methodology employed. The qualitative method known as the case study is described by Reissman (2008) as a
narrative research strategy that produces context dependent knowledge. Rather than operating from rules, experts operate on the basis of detailed case knowledge. While rules-based knowledge and predictive theories are also used in the social sciences, they are relatively rare in this particular discipline. What the case study provides is the opportunity to focus attention on narrative details because, as Reissman (2008) put it, “important insights can unfold from the many sided, complex, and sometimes conflicting stories of actors in the field” (p.194).

The six steps involved in the case study are:

- Determine and define the research questions
- Select the cases and determine data gathering and analysis techniques
- Prepare to collect the data
- Collect data in the field
- Evaluate and analyze the data
- Prepare the report

The steps are followed sequentially.

Levy (2008) examined the use of case studies in international relations and argued that the unique case study can fall under the aegis of theoretical, interpretive, hypothesis generating, theory confirming, theory informing, and/or deviant cases. Such typologies, including the unique case study, combine research objectives and case selection techniques. Inductive case studies include plausibility probes and are particularly useful, according to Levy (2008), when one is dealing with autonomous nation states with potentially conflicting goals and objectives. An example given by Levy (2008) is the
Cuban missile crisis, which can be approached as a single case or as an assortment of cases.

Bennett and Elman (2007) reviewed the key role that case study methods have played in the study of international relations in the United States. These researchers referred to a variety of case study strategies and also noted that such studies include comparisons of different national revolutions such as those of the United States, Russia, France, Iran, China, and Mexico as well as most similar case comparisons of the Fashoda Crisis (a diplomatic crisis between Britain and France at the end of the nineteenth century) and the Spanish-American War (a conflict between a democracy and an autocratic state). In other words, even in a unique case study, it is possible to introduce comparative cases or examples to garner additional understanding of the primary case itself.

Deviant cases, which may well be unique cases (such as the present case), are seen by Bennett and Elman (2007) as offering an opportunity to consider theory via a small N study. Finland’s war with Great Britain during World War II is one example of such a case. Qualitative international relations scholars, described by Bennett and Elman (2007) as mainly political realists, use case study to examine issues such as the national use of military power, the rise of the United States as an expansionist state, and the formation of the Chinese empire. The unique case study can also compare and contrast positions of two rival parties with respect to the situation of a third party, as is the focus herein.

The “unique case” is that of the Syrian conflict itself. The conflict and the necessity of developing a viable and effective set of foreign policy initiatives that would
serve the interests of the United States has been an issue for some time. This includes the presidential administrations of Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama. As the BBC (2013) pointed out, over time, the conflict in Syria has expanded to include what appears to be an ever-larger group of actors on the ground. Equally affected are actors outside of Syria, including, but not limited to, neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan as well as countries in the European Union which have become the destination of many Syrians fleeing the war.

Other regional actors such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey have a vested interest in the outcome of the conflict (BBC, 2013). The entry of the coalition led by the United States and the subsequent entry of Russia into the conflict further complicates the process of creating a viable policy framework for the United States. For this reason, the unique case of the Syrian conflict was viewed herein under the general umbrella of Small N research described as “an inquiry investigating a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (Dooley, 2002, p. 338).

The methodology, therefore, can encompass an historical analysis strategy, as is the case here (Lange, 2013). While Syria’s conflict is the case, the comparative elements consist of the policy initiatives of three separate American presidential administrations. As the preceding review of literature demonstrated, it is clear that Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama employed substantially different doctrinal foundations in selecting their responses to the Syrian conflict as well as other critical geopolitical crises and events. Because this is the case, the use of a comparative-historical Small N strategy has facilitated the process of contrasting initiatives that have both similar and dissimilar
characteristics. It is this feature of Small N comparative-historical research that allows one to draw meaningful conclusions about a complex case and a case that can be seen as changing over time (Lieberson, 1991).

Such case studies have been characterized by Ragin (1989) as inherently interpretive and oriented toward the task of accounting for “specific historical outcomes or sets of comparable outcomes or processes” (p. 3). The rigor of a Small N study rests upon a systematic assessment of these similarities and differences. Where Small N case studies diverge from the characteristics and techniques commonly employed in quantitative analysis is in terms of the emphasis on descriptive analytic strategies rather than one dependent on inferential statistical analysis tools.

Small N studies have a fundamentally deterministic, as opposed to a probabilistic, approach. These studies seek to answer questions of why, how, and/or when certain events occur or certain policies were developed, as is the case herein. As a case study strategy, such an approach is useful when it is impossible to manipulate the behavior of actors whose actions are the focus of the study and when it is essential to examine contextual conditions assumed to be relevant to the phenomena being examined (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The methodological logic of the unique and Small N case study is consistent with an effort to derive observational implications while simultaneously considering the observations in light of empirical observations. The approach requires the exercise of reason and care in selecting the case, determining variables, examining relationships, and considering the case in the context of one or more theoretical lenses. Such a strategy, said
Lange (2013), further permits a researcher to optimize insights and to address the challenge of balancing the very general and the very particular.

It is possible to consider the Syrian conflict as a single case while acknowledging that U.S. foreign policies impacting on Syria are not a single entity and that these policies have, in fact, changed over time. Each of the three American presidential administrations can be said to have some similarities. Each has lasted, or will last, for eight years or two full presidential terms. Each administration has faced the necessity of periodically reevaluating existing policies vis-à-vis Syria in particular and the Middle East and North Africa in general. Each of the three presidents (Clinton, Bush, and Obama) have had to deal with multiple foreign crises over the course of their time in office. Each of these presidents has been forced to modify policies over time.

That said, the analysis also reveals that, as the literature suggests, there are significant differences among these U.S. presidents. Therefore, the goal of this research methodology is to explore the possible causal antecedents of policy shifts in the target timeframe. This is to some extent an example of what is known as policy process tracing, itself a case based approach to causal inference. Causal inferences, as identified by Lange (2013), include various types. Often, there are many causes for a single effect or causes may be dependent on time variables. Identical causes may generate different outcomes; they themselves may be the product of multiple causes that are interdependent or examples of circular causality. Process tracing allows for examining how different causal mechanisms create opportunities for policy changes or transformations. These are the essential elements of the case study methodology that was employed in this research effort.
In sum, the case study may not offer insights and rigor that are comparable to other methods from the quantitative realm (Babbie, 2004). Nevertheless, qualitative case studies allow a researcher to embrace both quantitative data and multiple research paradigms. As described by Baxter and Jack (2008), this method allows one to examine multiple studies, to explore issues of mass mobilization and strategy via a variety of data sources, and to provide a detailed examination of concepts and theories that allow for the development and testing of historical explanations that may be generalized to other events.

**Independent and Dependent Variables**

The independent variable in this study was identified as the presidential administration. Thus, the three independent variables consist of the eight-year-long administrations of U.S. Presidents Bill, Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama.

The dependent variable consists of foreign policy initiatives specific to Syria. This variable is many-faceted, consisting of such initiatives as sanctions (economic and otherwise), military interventions (e.g. military advisors, equipment/weapons supplies, physical presence of troops in the theater of war, use of drones or air assaults, etc.), humanitarian aid (direct and indirect), and/or sole vs. coalition engagement.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The study employed a highly focused literature review and thematic analysis that was based upon an assortment of relevant primary and secondary source materials. This included government documents, presidential statements, United Nations resolutions, scholarly analyses, mainstream press reports, and theoretical texts. It proceeded as a form
of content analysis over the course of several months during which research materials were assembled, analyzed, compared, and contrasted.

Any study employing a literature review as the research design and method, as described by Babbie (2004), is exploratory rather than explanatory in nature. It is based on an assessment of published literature, observations, theory, and case analyses. It may generate new data by reinterpreting previously generated data sets, but for the most part, qualitative research is narrative rather than statistical.

Similarly, the central and dominant goal of any research study is to explain systematically and predict discipline-specific phenomena (Babbie, 2004). In the case of a literature review, explanation rather than prediction is predominant. According to Babbie (2004), explanation can be achieved via qualitative or quantitative research methodologies. Babbie further noted that before any quantitative study of an educational, religious, sociopolitical, or purely political phenomena is undertaken, a qualitative research effort is a fundamental necessity. Such an approach enables the researcher to identify relevant variables affecting a specific situation and narrowly define the area to be quantitatively investigated.

A literature review is distinct from quantitative research, and serves one or more of four purposes:

- Description, to reveal the nature of a phenomenon;
- Interpretation, to gain insights about the nature of a phenomenon, develop new concepts or theoretical perspectives about the phenomenon, or discover problems within the phenomenon;
Verification of certain assumptions, theories, or generalizations within real world contexts; and

Evaluation to judge the effectiveness of particular policies, practices, or innovations (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001).

As a qualitative study, sampling strategy herein refers solely to obtaining appropriate materials for analysis. Using a variety of published materials – speeches, policy statements, press releases, scholarly commentary, executive orders, and so on – the study analyzed these materials and provided a foundation for identifying key themes and issues. The analysis also included secondary materials, such as commentary by scholarly analysts, and reports from the popular press. When and where possible, statistical data are included in the analysis, which would seek to answer the questions of why and how rather than what.

Access to data is not an issue of any significance. The Internet provides near instantaneous access to a wide range and variety of popular and scholarly materials. It also contains public statements and policy documents published by governments and international organizations. Consequently, there was a wealth of information available for the research process. The resulting challenge for the researcher centered on selection of appropriate materials for inclusion.

Using targeted Boolean keyword and phrase searches on a variety of scholarly Internet databases, the aforementioned narrative materials were assembled over time. The challenge was not finding relevant materials, but rather limiting selection of such materials. Nexus/Lexus, ProQuest, and EBSCO Host as well as a general Google search provided near instantaneous access to a wide variety of relevant sources.
The data were analyzed through what amounts to content analysis. This is, as Corbin and Strauss (2008) noted, a strategy for finding key themes expressed as terms or phrases in a set of documents. The strategy is clearly a narrative method that looks at what is said and finds meaning in what is said and what is written. It allows for what Reissman (2008) described as understanding of unity and coherence over time, generating knowledge that is useful in understanding and comparing experiences and situations in historical contexts. Therefore, as a form of narrative analysis, this particular strategy provides a unique opportunity to explore an event that is timely and of vital significance in determining the overall safety and security of an entire region. In qualitative research studies, data may be analyzed using descriptive or inferential statistics or through narrative methods (Reissman, 2008). These processes tend to be sequential with the research question preceding a determination of what data will be collected, who will participate, instrument development, ethical concerns, and instrument administration.

Data were analyzed using the basic steps of content analysis. These are:

1. Copy and read the texts - make brief notes in the margin when interesting or relevant information is found;
2. Go through the notes made in the margins and list the different types of information found;
3. Read through the list and categorize each item in a way that offers a description of what it is about;
4. Identify whether or not the categories can be linked any way and list them as major categories (or themes) and/or minor categories (or themes);
5. Compare and contrast the various major and minor categories;

6. If there is more than one text, repeat the first five stages again for each transcript;

7. When you have done the above with all of the texts, collect all of the categories or themes and examine each in detail and consider if it fits and its relevance;

8. Once all the data is categorized into minor and major categories/themes, review in order to ensure that the information is categorized as it should be;

9. Review all of the categories and ascertain whether some categories can be merged or if some need to them be sub-categorized; and

10. Return to the original transcripts and ensure that all the information that needs to be categorized has been so (The ten steps to content analysis, 2013, p. 1).

Based on these steps, the data were summarized and presented as indicated in a narrative format in Chapter Four.

**Ethical Considerations**

A note about ethics is necessary at this point. As Babbie (2004) suggests, case studies do not involve any sort of manipulation of individuals. No interventions are required. Confidentiality and anonymity for sources is not an issue in light of the fact that all materials have already entered the public domain via publication.

**Limitations and Delimitations of the Study**

The present study was limited due to the research design. Literature reviews have limitations that quantitative research does not due to the nature of the design. It limits the ability to generalize the results to the larger population, in this case, other U.S. presidential administrations or, for that matter, the leadership and policies of other
countries. Because the study is a narrative, literature-based review, it does not develop new primary data, nor does it test any hypothesis or intervention with human subjects.

While this study was a synthesis of literature, and not a meta-analysis (which directly compares the findings of studies that are selected in accordance with specific inclusion criteria), the present study provided a foundation on which professionals in the field of foreign policy development can compare and contrast the efficacy of different approaches to a specific geopolitical relationship.

The study is delimited to the initiatives of three U.S. Presidents, one of whom recently left office, ushering in a new U.S. presidential administration. Further, the situation in Syria has proven in recent years and months to be exceptionally fluid and volatile. New actors – ISIS/ISIL, Russia, and Iran – have entered into the conflict and reshaped it and its effects. Constructing the assortment of narrative texts (i.e., elements of the literature review) was further complicated by the evolving nature of the Syrian conflict.
Chapter 4: Comparison of Three Presidential Administrations

Introduction

From the time that President Bill Clinton took office to the recent inauguration of President Donald J. Trump, the Middle East has been a central focus of American foreign policy development and strategy. Throughout this period, as various analysts have noted, a number of regional crises impacting upon the nations of the Middle East and the allies of those countries have occupied the attention of American presidents (Jones, 2016). To argue that U.S. policy in the Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama eras has been an activist policy is to understate the case (Goldberg, 2016). Each of these American presidents has been called upon one or more times to develop a coordinated policy response to Middle Eastern crises that have gone well beyond the endemic conflict between Israel and her Arab neighbors. As Sodaro (2004) noted over a decade ago, the Middle East has been a hotbed of both internal conflict and cross-border conflict, often experiencing multiple conflicts simultaneously and thereby challenging outside actors to implement policies that are able to assist in crisis resolution while also protecting domestic interests.

In Chapter 2, Review of Literature, a lengthy discussion of the policies toward Syria under Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama was presented. In each case, efforts were undertaken to determine which particular theory of international relations was most applicable. In general, James Mann (2014) may very well be correct in his assertion that regardless of the specific elements that an American president in the post-World War II era chooses to incorporate in foreign policy, all of the serving presidents since that time have been to some extent or another Realists. As discussed earlier, Realism is a theory of
international relations that pursues a balance of power, works to protect the interests of the nation-state, and perceives the state as the primary actor in the global political environment (Gilpin, 1984; Murray, 1997; Owens, 2007).

With some critical differences, Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama can be viewed as Realists whose individual “doctrines” reflect the conviction that the world is characterized by conditions of ambiguity (Zahariadis, 2014) that give rise to instability, which must be managed in order to provide for acceptable levels of growth and domestic security (McGraw, 2001). Of course, that said, none of the three presidents can be characterized as “pure” or classical Realists, because each brought to their presidency both a unique approach to geopolitics and the necessity of adapting U.S. policies in response to the exigencies of volatile external situations.

This chapter of the study seeks to directly compare and contrast Clintonian, Bush, and Obama Realism approaches vis-à-vis the single case of Syria. It will demonstrate that for each of these post-Cold War presidents, Realism was the foundation on which alternate ideological postures such as Clinton’s Liberalism, Bush’s Neoconservatism, and Obama’s Idealism were grafted. It is these grafts or individual contributions that most clearly delineate the policy differences of the three target administrations. One must also add that of the three presidents, it was President Bush whose policies in the Middle East contained elements of boots on the ground military engagement (Jones, 2016). While it is true that President Obama took office while the U.S. military was actively engaged on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan as a consequence of decisions by President Bush and equally true that President Obama’s administration continued to deploy military force in
both Iraq and Syria, there are critical differences between the Bush military strategy in the region and that of Obama (Goldberg, 2016).

**Three Doctrines**

President Bill Clinton (2000) stated that fundamental to his foreign policy orientation was determining an answer to the question of what are the consequences to American security of allowing conflicts to fester and spread. The Clinton Doctrine centered on concepts of enlargement and engagement. Clinton (2000b) described enlargement and engagement in “A National Security Strategy for a New Century” as based on differentiating between national and humanitarian interests. The former he characterized as those matters that do not affect national survival but which do affect national well-being and the character of the global environment in which the country is positioned.

In his Doctrine, national interests included, but were not limited to, interests in regions where the country had a sizable economic stake or commitments to allies as well as a moral imperative to protect the global environment from severe harm. Humanitarian interests, in contrast, were seen by Clinton as the obligation to respond to natural and manmade disasters or cases where human rights are being violated or democratization efforts are underway. Humanitarian interests in this perspective reflected an understanding of what American values, separate from American interests, demanded. Both the notions of enlargement and engagement reflect these perspectives, which were evident in Clinton’s response to events taking place in Bosnia and Kosovo on the one hand and the ongoing Arab-Israeli crisis on the other hand.
The Clinton approach to Realism was also based on the notion that the United States was an indispensable nation – a nation that, because of its unique history and its philosophical orientation, had a role to play in ensuring that American privileges were extended to other countries (Mann, 2014). Engagement and enlargement embraced protection of the American national interest (Miller, 1994), but Syria in and of itself did not play a major role in Clinton’s policy efforts. What mattered to Clinton, with respect to Syria, was the role played by Syria with respect to conflict between Israel and groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

As a Realist, Clinton (2000; Clinton & Assad, 1994) was thoroughly cognizant of the potential usefulness of Syria as a mediator in the Middle East and also as a direct supporter of those non-state actors seeking the destruction of the Israeli state. Clinton is said to have wanted to facilitate the emergence of a world in which the United States, though indispensable, was not the only super power capable of bringing combatants to the table and brokering a resolution to conflict. Certainly, Clinton was pragmatic in his willingness to work with Syria and President Hafiz Al Assad, who was viewed by many in the U.S. Congress as a terrorist or at least a sponsor of terrorism and as a key obstacle to any peaceful resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict (Hillman, 2000; Miller, 1994).

Realist theory can help to explain to some extent Clinton’s willingness to work with the Al Assad regime despite the fact that this regime was authoritarian and oppressive with respect to its own people and its neighbors. Colucci (2013) takes the position that in addition to being a Realist, Clinton himself was a soft liberal – an individual who perceived the potential for a benign world that was governed by globalism, free markets, and cultural transfer. Such an attitude is optimistic rather than
pessimistic, and pessimism, of course, is a key feature of Realism. Despite this caveat, one can conclude that the Clinton approach to foreign policy in general and to Syria in particular represents a Realist effort to engage a country in an ongoing dialogue giving rise to a relationship that could benefit all concerned.

As Franks (2006) has suggested, the concepts of enlargement and engagement as promoted by President Clinton directly evolve from the Realist conviction that the global state system functions because of political relationships between governing institutions. These political relationships are critical if the global political order is to survive and if any progress is to be made with respect to resolving conflicts.

It is worth noting, as Collucci (2013) did, that President Clinton was, at best, a reluctant commander in chief when it came to deploying American military forces. The entire boots on the ground strategy of military engagement was exercised by Clinton only a few times during his presidency to any great extent. Twenty-one individual military engagements occurred on President Clinton’s watch, but of those engagements, only a few involved any significant number of military forces. Colucci (2013) identified the use of 20,000 or so military troops in Haiti as part of Operation Uphold Democracy. President Clinton also used air strikes, including in the case of raids against suspected training terrorist camps in Afghanistan, and a suspected chemical weapons manufacturer in Sudan.

A limited number of initiatives undertaken by President Clinton deployed American military forces to increase security forces at U.S. embassies, assist in the evacuation of American citizens from hot spots, or to participate in NATO and/or United Nations activities such as that in Macedonia in 1993 and 1994. President Clinton did
increase the number of American troops in Somalia from 5,300 to 7,000 in what is very likely to have been his most substantive use of military force as part of his foreign policy (Colucci, 2013).

As has been suggested elsewhere herein, President George W. Bush took office at a time when many in the United States were dissatisfied with Clintonian policies both foreign and domestic (Krauthammer, 2005). The Realism tempered by the Liberal posture of President Clinton did not resonate particularly well with many of the more conservative Realists who supported President George W. Bush, or, for that matter, with President Bush himself. Even before the terrorist attack on 9/11 that became the dominant determinant of the Bush Doctrine, the Bush White House had moved away from Liberalism and embraced the notion that democratization and democracy building were in the best interests of the United States. Krauthammer (2005) said the Bush Doctrine incorporated elements that were not found in the Clinton Doctrine of enlargement and engagement. These elements were unilateralism, the use of pre-emptive strikes against enemies, support for democratic regime change, and direct attacks, both economic and military in nature, on countries that harbor terrorists (Malici & Buckner, 2008).

Bush (2007) also saw the United States as an indispensable nation, particularly after 9/11, when there was no doubt that American interests and the American homeland had been directly attacked by a determined enemy who happened to be a non-state actor, albeit one supported by state actors (Malici & Buckner, 2008). The Clintonian optimism left the building, so to speak, after 9/11, when pessimism based on actual experience of revealing America’s vulnerability entered that building. Certainly, President George W. Bush had no problem positioning American boots on the ground in the Middle East,
where two of the countries contained in the Axis of Evil (Iraq and Iran) enjoyed some support (tacit or otherwise) from Syria. While Syria per se was not a central focus of President Bush’s preemption program in the Middle East, the country was well within the orbit of those countries that were attacked.

Additionally, Realism can be seen as instrumental in leading President Bush to view Syria with skepticism and to take steps such as those embedded in the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003. Bush (2003) introduced the use of sanctions against Syria and clearly linked these sanctions to other actions that he was undertaking in the invasion of Iraq. Sanctions such as those presented by President Bush (2003; 2004) were a direct move away from enlargement and engagement and a reflection of President Bush’s conviction that the security environment that he confronted, and which threatened the United States, was radically different from the environment in which President Clinton functioned.

While Clintonian policies vis-a-vis Syria sought to engage Syria as a partner in resolving the larger Arab-Israeli crisis, it is clear that President Bush did not in any way see Syria as a potential partner in this process. Further, whereas Clinton approached the entire Middle East issue through the lens of the Arab-Israeli conflict (at least for the most part), President Bush had other concerns in the region. Not only did President Bush want to eliminate the putative threat posed by Iraq’s supposed possession of weapons of mass destruction and the support given by Iraq and Syria to terrorists, he also wanted to foster democratization in Iraq (McArthur, 2004).

Neoconservatism in general is hostile toward authoritarianism and communism while extremely supportive of democratization and the belief that only through the
actions of democracies will global stability be achieved and then maintained (Muravchik, 2007). This is a description that certainly fits the Bush Doctrine, which was used not only to justify a military boots-on-the ground invasion of both Iraq and Afghanistan, but also to explicitly lend support to sanctions against Syria as yet another rogue state destabilizing the Middle East. President Bush (2007) was convinced that bringing democracy to the Middle East in states that had previously been run by actual or virtual dictators was necessary for the United States. President Bush believed as a matter of faith that only by promoting democracy would peace be achieved and that only through unfortunate, but sometimes necessary, unilateral action would the United States achieve its goals with respect to security and stability.

One should certainly point out, as does Sodaro (2004), that the world in which President George W. Bush functioned as president of the United States was a very different world than the one in which President Clinton functioned. While it is true that a terrorist attack on the United States in New York City had occurred on Clinton’s watch (the first attack on the World Trade Center), the scope of 9/11 was much more extensive and the impact more devastating (Sodaro, 2004). Putting an end to the threat was the goal of President Bush’s decision to invade Iraq, employing preemption in this particular case because he saw it as a necessary exercise of the country’s inherent right of self-defense (Bush, 2007).

Thus, one can see a dramatic shift in the Realist trajectories of the policies of Presidents Clinton and Bush. Liberalism, to the extent that it was present in the Clinton Doctrine, disappeared from President Bush’s National Security Strategy, which called for confronting threats before they materialized and advancing liberty and democracy as very
real and achievable alternatives to ideologies of repression and fear. Parenthetically, one should note that President Bush (2007) supported a general political platform that called for supporting NATO expansion in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. While willing to act unilaterally if needed, President Bush also saw the value of building coalitions, which Cakmak (2007) contends is also elemental within the Realist approach to international relationships. This is because few countries, including an indispensable superpower, are ultimately able to go it alone.

In describing President Bush’s use of military intervention, Chivers and Schmidt (2015) make the case that the Bush Doctrine incorporated a collection of strategy principles, practical policy decisions, and a set of rationales designed to guide and inform U.S. foreign policy.

Involving the military was integral to this Doctrine because President Bush and his administration were convinced that the United States was locked in a global war of clashing ideologies. It would appear that President Bush accepted many of the ideas advanced by Huntington (1996). Jervis (2003) suggested that President Bush perceived the U.S. as under attack by a combination of failing states and nongovernmental or non-state actors who were hostile toward the United States and her interests.

Realists tend to view the world with a highly pessimistic viewpoint and to perceive their country as challenged by multiple threats, demanding a response. It is from this basic posture that President Bush authorized extensive use of U.S. military assets in the Middle East and in Afghanistan. His position was also influenced by a fundamental conviction that democratic regime change was necessary not only for the United States, but also for the countries that it would most immediately impact. We must therefore
conclude that whereas President Clinton was a Realist with a strong tendency towards Liberalism, President Bush was a Realist who was influenced by the desire to spread democracy throughout the world.

When President Barack Obama took office after the election of 2008, his election signaled the likelihood of a shift from President Bush’s emphasis on military intervention to foreign policies that would rely on other strategies. Judis (2014) also points out that it is unlikely that President Obama considered that it was possible to structure a new and more productive and mutually supportive relationship between the Muslim world and the West. He clearly did not believe, as did President Bush, that the Huntington (1996) thesis regarding clashes of civilizations was valid or that conflict between disparate civilizations was inevitable.

It is necessary to understand that President Obama took office as a former senator who had opposed American involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan and as a presidential candidate who was committed to reducing American involvement in foreign wars. Moreover, President Obama did not believe that it was the obligation of the United States to participate in nation building or democratization (Hinnebusch et al., 2010).

The Obama Doctrine was, as noted above, described extensively by Goldberg (2016). It included a number of elements that were drawn from a diverse set of ideological and philosophical postures. Obama was a Realist, but he was also simultaneously a moral Utilitarian (Mann, 2014). Unlike President Bush, President Obama did not see the United States as in any way obligated to facilitate democratization through the use of military force. Like President Bush, President Obama did see that there were some occasions for the unilateral deployment of American military forces, but he
was equally convinced that such actions should be undertaken only when national core interests require such actions. He did not believe that indirect causes or humanitarian crises were sufficient (Murray, 2013).

Interventionism was not a central tenet of the Obama Doctrine, as it was in the Bush Doctrine. Here, one is tempted to argue that President Obama shared some of the views of President Clinton, particularly with regard to the use of American military in support of an intervention undertaken by coalitions such as those of NATO and the United Nations. Certainly, there was a much more idealistic and optimistic thread running through the Obama Doctrine than that of President Bush. President Obama was at best reluctant to use such Bush era phrases as “radical Islamic terrorism” or “global war on terrorism.” President Obama also called for engagement with the Muslim world, which seems to speak more to Clintonian ideas than those of President Bush.

President Obama felt that the United States was a necessary leader on the global stage but did not believe that U.S. military action should be the only, or even the primary, mechanism for putting American leadership into play (Monteleone, 2015). President Obama also felt that partnerships rather than preemption should be fundamental elements in foreign policy and that putting American military forces on the ground or in a theater of war should be undertaken as a last resort.

This is not to say that President Obama was unwilling to use certain kinds of military activity to achieve policy initiatives, as was the case in Syria. He did send some 3,500 special operations forces into Syria to help fight ISIS but his primary strategy against ISIS in Syria was the use of drone attacks. Sanctions and other economic tools
played a more significant role in Obama’s foreign policy initiatives than they did in those of either Clinton or Bush.

Abdul-Aziz (2014) has commented that in the early years of the first Obama administration there were some signs of a return to concepts of enlargement and engagement but these aspects of Obama’s foreign policy were thwarted to a large extent by the refusal of a number of Muslim states to accept engagement on American terms. In Syria, the infamous red line is said to have highlighted President Obama’s extreme reluctance to use military engagement as a major foreign policy tool (Judis, 2014).

After the Iraq war, liberals, according to Mann (2014), regarded Realism as a reflection of anti-interventionist policies. President Obama began his term in office as a fairly classic Realist who did not want to act in a way that would be in any detrimental to the fundamental interests of the United States. However, while President Obama distanced himself from a number of Middle Eastern hot spots, he did appear to become convinced, as a consequence of the Arab Spring, that a new wave of democratic change was in fact emerging in the Middle East. Consequently, the president chose to abandon American ties to Egypt’s President Hosni Mubarak and to authorize the use of force against Libya’s Muammar Gadhafi with the intent of forcing him out of office. He justified these strategies by stating that the U.S. supported a set of universal rights and opposed those authoritarian regimes that denied fundamental freedoms to their people (Mann, 2014).

He refused consistently to commit American troops to Syria and oversaw the withdrawal of American troops en masse from Iraq. Goldberg (2016) takes the position that President Obama favored diplomacy over military involvement and engagement via
non-military strategies and actions. To the extent that he was an idealist, President Obama felt that it was certainly possible for the United States to pursue the protection of its own interests while assuming a leadership position in the world that emphasized humanitarian responses over military ones. During President Obama’s time in office, humanitarian intervention was supported over military intervention.

Friedman (2013) suggested that President Obama was certainly cognizant of the threat posed by ISIS/ISIL and was aware of the ways in which Russia was assuming a dominant role in Syria. That said, critics of President Obama and his policy on Syria have argued that he lacked both vision and adequate strength with respect to pursuing necessary actions that would have prevented many of the atrocities that took place in Syria (Friedman, 2013).

With these comments in mind, some fairly broad conclusions can be advanced as to the ideological orientation of the three presidents discussed herein. These conclusions are reflected in the following table, which was constructed by the researcher based upon the foregoing narrative.
Table 1

*Policy Ideology of Three Presidents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Clinton</th>
<th>Bush</th>
<th>Obama</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World is hostile</td>
<td>Realist:</td>
<td>Realist:</td>
<td>Realist:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>World is hostile</td>
<td>World is very hostile</td>
<td>World is sometimes hostile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-military</td>
<td>• Non-military engagement is needed</td>
<td>• Boots on ground</td>
<td>• Military engagement rarely needed/useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Support global organizations</td>
<td>• Pre-emption</td>
<td>• Peacebuilding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sanctions</td>
<td>• Sanctions</td>
<td>• Sanctions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Diplomacy</td>
<td>• Diplomacy</td>
<td>• Coalition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• “Leading from behind”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarain</td>
<td>Humanitarian intervention</td>
<td>Humanitarian Intervention</td>
<td>Humanitarian Intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intervention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalitions/Partnerships valued</td>
<td>Unilateralism Acceptable/Necessary</td>
<td>Coalitions/Partnerships Essential</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other influences: Liberalism</td>
<td>Other influences: Neoconservatism, Democratization</td>
<td>Other influences: Idealism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement &amp; Enlargement</td>
<td>Military Solutions when under attack</td>
<td>Engagement and Non-interventionism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The foregoing summary highlights the conclusion that all three of the presidents discussed in this study were essentially Realists who incorporated other theoretical or ideological positions into their policy decisions. One could argue, as does Zahariadis (2014), that each of these political actors reflect the Multiple Streams Approach (MSA), in that they exercised their authority in situations that were ambiguous, chaotic at times, and subject to varying degrees of volatility. As a consequence, each of these Realists have acknowledged that the state is first and foremost committed to protecting its own interests, and, secondly, committed to addressing a number of goals and objectives that do not directly speak to national security or core interests. Because this is the case, one would expect, as has proven to be the case, that each of the presidents who have served
the United States in the past 24 years have at times retreated from a classically Realist position to a somewhat more modified position in which other interests become paramount. Certainly, Presidents Bush and Obama illustrate the reality of a necessity of responding to changing geopolitical circumstances, as is readily apparent in the case of Syria.

**Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter brought together elements of the foreign policies of Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama with a view toward answering the research sub-question of what specific theoretical perspectives have been used by these three U.S. presidents to design and implement foreign policies toward Syria. First, it should be acknowledged that President Clinton’s involvement with the Syrian question was much more limited than that of President Bush, whose own concerns regarding Syria were significantly less than those of President Obama due to President Bush’s focus on Iraq and the Iraq war. That said, it is important to recognize that each of these three presidents continued to function in the Realist tradition that has permeated American foreign policy since World War II (Murray, 1987; Patapan, 2012).

Whereas Presidents Clinton and Obama appear to have taken many steps to avoid unilateral American activity, President Bush not only embraced unilateralism but made it a fundamental element in his foreign policy doctrine. At the same time, President Bush was more committed both practically and theoretically to using American power (both hard and soft) to facilitate democratization in those countries where authoritarianism had ruled. Both Presidents Clinton and Obama emphasized, albeit to varying degrees, the
importance of engaging with one’s rivals or putative foes to a greater extent than did President Bush.

The next chapter of this study will take up the question of which approach to conflict resolution appears to be most beneficial in resolving the Syrian crisis. The final chapter of the study will present answers to each of the primary and secondary research questions posed herein. It will identify possible American policy shifts under the new presidential administration of Donald Trump. It will offer recommendations for both conflict resolution and for further research on a topic that remains critical today.
Chapter 5: Conflict Resolution Strategy

Introduction

Integral to the present study is a hypothetical analysis of how Coalition Building Theory can be employed in bringing about a resolution to the ongoing Syrian conflict. Cakmak (2007) pointed out that this particular theory, though rarely employed in the literature on International Relations to any great extent, is particularly applicable in cases where there are multiple participants in a conflict with conflicting agendas, needs, and interests. Spangler (2003) suggests that coalitions can be temporary rather than permanent, but they are designed to bring about consistency in any effort to resolve a conflict by linking those actors with mutual goals and objectives. Similarity of interests, values, and goals, as Yarn (1991) suggests, makes for cohesion at the negotiating table and empowers individual actors far more than they would be empowered if they did not join forces with those with whom they share some fundamental characteristics.

It should be noted that the purpose of this study was not to focus on creating either a coalition for resolving the Syrian conflict or even identifying a conflict resolution strategy for this conflict. The overarching goal was to compare and contrast three different American presidential policies relevant to Syria and, ideally, to offer an answer to the question of whether or not there was any likelihood that the United States would respond to the crisis with an enhanced military presence in the Syrian theater of war and conflict. This question and the secondary research questions identified in earlier chapters of this study will be answered in Chapter 6.

In presenting a tentative descriptive of a coalition driven strategy for resolving the Syrian conflict, the study enters into new and largely hypothetical territory. No longer is
the United States led by President Barack Obama. The 2016 U.S. presidential election placed Republican Donald Trump in the White House and President Trump has as yet to articulate (much less implement) anything resembling a comprehensive policy vis-à-vis Syria. Thus, speculation as to the likely goals and objectives of a U.S. participant in any coalition negotiating on the Syrian question must be viewed as hypothetical.

That said, this chapter of the study considers how both state and non-state actors engaged to some extent in Syria today can be brought to the negotiating table in Geneva or elsewhere. The proposed strategies discussed herein acknowledge that coalition building is a pragmatic strategy that embodies the pursuit of power and influence and which functions as what Spangler (2003) characterized as a means for disempowered parties to develop greater influence and defend their interests. There is no doubt that coalitions are beneficial (Spangler, 2003).

Coalition building is crucial in global leadership and facilitates coordinated action on behalf of multiple actors (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014). This chapter describes the likely parings or partnerships that would come into being in a coalition building exercise in Syria. The strategy assumes that all actors (both state and non-state) will be committed to bringing about a permanent ceasefire and peace which would allow life in Syria to eventually return to something resembling normalcy. This was a point made by Kenneth Roth (2016), who argued that while peace talks which resumed in Geneva in January of 2016 are now in abeyance, many of the key actors among the foreign players in Syria’s civil war have agreed to some basic principles. Since then, a number of talks have been held with various domestic and international actors participating. The next section of this
chapter describes the coalitions and conflict resolution processes that have thus far been put in place since 2011.

**History of Conflict Resolution Efforts**

Magnus Lundgren (2016) described mediation in Syria from 2011 to 2016, depicting a process that has moved not only in terms of its physical location but also in terms of the composition of the participants. According to Lundgren (2016), the process began with efforts by the Arab League from November 2011 through January 2012 to convince the Al Assad regime and the Syria opposition to begin speaking to one another; despite these efforts, the Arab League found it necessary to end its engagement in the mission to monitor the conflict.

In 2012, the Russian Foreign Minister called for informal negotiations to take place in Moscow, but the Syrian National Council objected to any dialogue with the Al Assad regime. Throughout 2012 and 2013, various groups, including the United Nations Security Council, Russia, and selected European countries attempted to broker a peace; however, most Western participants were determined to see the end of the Al Assad regime. The so-called Friends of Syria group, including France, sought to create an international contact group to find a solution while Joint Special Envoy for the United Nations and the Arab League Kofi Annan attempted to convince the opposition and the Syrian government to commit to a ceasefire and negotiations in March of 2012 (Lundgren, 2016).

Other early efforts at resolving the conflict were described by Lundgren (2016) as including the following:
The Geneva I Conference on Syria in June of 2012 took place in Switzerland and was attended by the United States, Russia, China, Great Britain, and Kofi Annan.

In Tehran in August of 2012, 120 members of the Non-Aligned Movement failed to reach consensus on a peace resolution, while efforts in September of 2012 by the United Nations also failed as fighting briefly stopped and was renewed.

The United Nations, U.S., and Russia met at Geneva II in 2014 but failed to reach any agreement on bringing parties to the negotiating table and forming a transition government.

In Astana, Kazakhstan in 2015, Syrian Opposition groups convened for peace talks and in September of 2015, Hezbollah announced a six-month truce in portions of Syria held by rebels and Shiah forces.

Ongoing talks in Vienna involving the U.S., Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, China, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Germany, and others addressed the peace process with anti-government Syrian groups participating at various times but without any resolution regarding the role of President Bashar Al Assad.

In December of 2015, Syrian opposition groups, not including Kurds and Al Nusra, met in Riyadh with the goal of forming an opposition delegation for negotiating with the Syrian government but Russia rejected this group.

In February of 2016, the International Syria Support Group (ISSG), under the auspices of the United Nations and with the support of Russia and the United States, established a temporary ceasefire between the Syrian government and an American backed coalition of putatively mainstream Syrian opposition groups.
• In December of 2016, Turkey and Russia met in Astana, Kazakhstan to broker a Syrian nationwide ceasefire. The Syrian Democratic Council, ISIS, Al Nusra, and the Kurds were excluded from the agreement.

• In January 2017 and February 2017, talks respectively at Astana and Geneva were held with the Astana Process supporting a peace framework in accord with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 (Lundgren, 2016; Astana talks become…., 2017).

Beginning in January 2017, efforts have continued at both Astana and in Geneva. Representatives of the Syrian opposition met in Astana, representing a shift in which Syria opposition groups actively engaged in military operations took part in the talks, as opposed to Syrians with political influence alone (Astana talks become…., 2017). Under the title International Meeting on Syrian Settlement, the Astana talks in January 2017 sought to support the United Nations framework for brokering peace. Iran, Russia, and Turkey – the three major external actors participating in the talks – formed a monitoring body tasked with enforcing UN Security Council Resolution 2254 and its ceasefire components.

At the same time, Russia (which has emerged in the absence of the United States as the major player in the Syrian conflict) offered a draft of a possible constitution for the Republic of Syria in which elements of federalism, decentralization of authority, new powers for parliament, reduced presidential authority, and the elimination of Islamic jurisprudence as the foundation of legislation were all proposed (Kazakhstan welcomes results…., 2017).
Simultaneously, at Geneva IV, the Syrian government and the Syrian opposition, represented by the High Negotiations Committee, met in late February and early March 2017 with limited progress. At those talks, the Assad regime representative was focused primarily on counterterrorism. Alternatively, the opposition group was more concerned with political transition away from the Assad regime (Syria peace talks…, 2017).

In March of 2017, yet another round of talks in Astana took place. Russia, Iran, and Turkey dominated the talks, emphasizing the urgent need to improve conditions on the ground through stronger enforcement of the existing ceasefire regime (Kazakhstan welcomes results…, 2017). It would appear that Russia, Iran, and Turkey-and not the Al Assad regime-are the key actors in attempting to bring about a final resolution to the Syrian conflict. Absent from all of these talks is the United States. Russia has apparently expressed a desire for others to join in these talks. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov indicated that Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iraq, and Jordan would be welcome at the Astana negotiating table. He also expressed hope that the Trump administration would join in the negotiations, but thus far there is no indication that this will actually occur (Astana talks end…, 2017).

The breakthrough occurring at Astana should not, however, be considered as either permanent or as likely leading to an end to hostilities. Several important groups are not participating in these talks, including many of the Syrian opposition groups, Al Nusra, or ISIS/ISIL. Further, while Russia and Iran appear to be functioning with the tacit approval of the Al Assad regime, President Al Assad himself has not committed to any of the recommended restructuring activities that are inherent in the Russian peace plan. There is also no clear indication, as of this writing, that the opposition groups discussed
in previous sections of this study would also be willing to accept a settlement in which President Assad remains in power.

One can conclude that as promising as the Astana talks are, renewed hostilities on the ground in Syria suggest that no clear resolution has emerged. In fact, in Geneva in March of 2017, Miles and Nebehay (2017) reported that Syrian government and opposition negotiators are once again trading insults as the Al Assad regime has refused to discuss any political transition. The government claims instead that the future of the country will be settled by Syrians and not by the United States or any other external actor.

There are ongoing military activities taking place on the ground. While the ceasefire remains in effect, at least in theory, fighting in Damascus and the Hama countryside has resumed. Opposition groups led by Nasr Hariri of the High Negotiations Committee have charged that the Assad regime killed 15 civilians and wounded 70 more in the last week of April, 2017 (Nabehay, 2017). The Syrian Network for Human Rights reported at Geneva that it had documented 948 civilians who were killed at the hands of the Syrian regime and Russia since the Geneva IV talks ended on March 3 of 2017 (Nabehay, 2017).

These developments suggest that the much-touted ceasefire brokered in large measure by Russia, Turkey, and Iran has failed. It is this kind of volatility that definitively complicates the development of a conflict resolution strategy derived from the principles of coalition building. Nevertheless, this is precisely the task that will be undertaken in the next section of this chapter of the study.
Building a Coalition: Resolving the Conflict

First, it is essential to acknowledge that any successful CR effort in the case of Syria will, of necessity, include both state and non-state participants on the one hand, and domestic (i.e., Syrian) parties and external actors on the other hand. Second, given the presence in Syria and neighboring Iraq of the forces of the shrinking but still deadly ISIS/ISIL caliphate, the al-Nusra Front, and Jaysh al-Muhajirin Wa al-Ansar (Army of the Emigrants and Helpers; a group comprising hundreds of mostly foreign fighters, many of them from the North Caucasus, that was formed in March 2013), any agreement reached by the negotiating parties will most likely not include all parties to various aspects of the conflict.

As Roth (2016) pointed out, there is no willingness on the part of either the Al Assad regime or the non-Jihadi Syrian opposition groups to include the self-identified Jihadi forces. These groups have not been present either in the various Geneva or Astana negotiations. In essence, what this means is that any solution to the Syrian conflict will leave forces on the ground that are determined on continuing to disrupt Syrian society and to directly confront the Syrian government (Astana talks end..., 2017). With this in mind, any comprehensive effort at resolving the conflict must bring together the following groups.

First, the Al Assad regime is a key participant in the resolution process. It is already engaged in a coalition with Russia and Iran, both of which are backing the established Syrian government and would undoubtedly require that any negotiations include ongoing acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the Al Assad regime, even if concessions must be made with respect to power sharing. This coalition of three states
will be a key element in any negotiation and its basic negotiating point will revolve around the maintenance of the Al Assad government in power.

Turkey has emerged as a major external actor that is focused on resolving the conflict. Turkish Foreign Minister Deputy Undersecretary Sedat Onal is likely to be a key participant in the negotiation (Astana talks end…, 2017). Supporting Turkey at the negotiations, one can expect to find the UN Syria Envoy (currently Staffan de Mistura) as well as probable representatives of key countries in the region as well as representatives of the West. The United States, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and other European actors may signify a coalition supporting Turkey.

For these groups, conflicting primary goals are likely. The overarching goal of these state actors is to restore peace and to facilitate the rebuilding of civil society. A related goal will undoubtedly focus on securing some concessions from the Al Assad regime in order to accommodate concerns expressed by the main rebel coalitions now functioning in Syria. As the BBC (2013) has noted, there are as many as 1,000 armed opposition groups in Syria commanding as many as 100,000 fighters. While many of these groups are small and tend to function on a local level, some are quite powerful and must be participants in any negotiations. What this means is that the main rebel coalitions will need to present a united front and to arrive at the negotiating table with a cohesive agenda for change.

The main rebel coalitions include the Supreme Military Council of the Free Syrian Army and its affiliate brigades (Martyrs of Syria brigades, Northern Storm brigade, and the Ahar Souria/Free Men of Syria brigades). There is also the Islamic Front, Harak Ahar Al-Sham al-Islamiyya, Jaysh al-Islam, Suqour al-Sham, Liwa al-
Tawhid, Liwa al-Haqq, Kataib Ansar al-Sham, and the Kurdish Islamic Front. These groups are all affiliated with the Supreme Military Council of the Free Syrian Army. According to the BBC (2013), a number of these affiliates are either Salafists or otherwise in pursuit of the establishment of an Islamic state.

The Syrian Islamic Liberation Front contains about 20 rebel groups ranging from moderate Islamist to ultra conservative Salafist in outlook (BBC News, 2013). There are independent groups (brigades and fronts). There are also Kurdish groups, including the YPG or the Popular Protection Units, which function as the armed wing of the Kurdish Political Party (the Democratic Unity Party and the Kurdistan Workers Party). The Kurds are seeking either an autonomous Kurdish territory that is separate from the Syrian government or, at the very least, the establishment of a Kurdish administrative district functioning within Syrian society as a semi-independent territorial unit.

If the goal of the Al Assad regime and its key supporters of Russian and Iran is the maintenance of the regime with minimal sharing of power, all of the rebel groups are seeking opportunities to participate in the government, limits placed on the power of Bashar Al Assad at a minimum, and an end to the use of military or police force against the Syrian opposition. The sticking point in any negotiation is clearly going to be the issue of whether or not Bashar Al Assad and his regime will remain in control of Syria and/or the extent to which this government is willing to reduce its own authority and permit opposition groups to play a meaningful role in government decision-making.

For Russia and Iran, the maintenance of the Al Assad regime is critical because these two countries tend to see Syria as something of a client state (Astana talks become…., 2017). Turkey backs the rebel groups and wants to see an end to the conflict
because it is being overburdened by the ongoing flow of displaced Syrians. Similarly, EU countries also have a personal stake in halting the flow of refugees as do Syria’s neighbors, such as Lebanon and Jordan.

Roth (2016) reported that one of the most difficult issues that has emerged, and will continue to emerge in the peace negotiations, focuses on the future of Bashar Al Assad and his closest supporters. Many of the opposition groups insist that Al Assad relinquish power; but, at the present time, it seems unlikely that he will agree even though Russia and Iran have hinted “that they could accept his departure if he steps down through negotiations” (Roth, 2016, p. 2). Realistically, it is likely that any condition or set of conditions for such a withdrawal from power would include amnesty for Bashar Al Assad and his inner circle. Negotiators on all sides may be willing to accept limitations placed on presidential power by a new Syrian constitution that is supported at the present time by Russia and Iran (Astana talks end…, 2017).

If the negotiations can be structured in a way to permit the development of a new Syrian constitution that would include new open elections overseen by the United Nations with the understanding that Al Assad could run for office again, it is possible that opposition groups would accede to such a plan. The constitution would need to include protection for opposition parties and establish a multi-party political system in Syria. Offering other concessions to opposition groups could include the following:

- Greater autonomy for administrative units, including the Kurdish region of the country.
- Devolution of power from the central government to administrative units in which free and open elections occur, allowing opposition groups such as the Syrian Islamic Front and the Free Syrian Army to mount campaigns for elected office.
- Limitations on the power of the Executive Branch with respect to the use of military and police force.
- New legislative authority that is vested in the national parliament or majlis.
- The establishment of a United Nations-backed presence of external observers to ensure the integrity of new open, free elections.
- Identification of ISIS/ISIL and Al Nusra as unacceptable opposition groups and the only focus of government military activity.
- The elimination of economic and other sanctions against Syria pending substantive changes in the national government.

The development of a new advisory council supporting the executive branch of the Syrian government is also recommended as an agenda item which should be included in any negotiations. Russia, Turkey, and Iran are the guarantor states for the Astana talks and as such must come to the negotiating table willing to achieve the following:

- A reduction in, or elimination of, the power exercised by the Al Assad regime.
- A resolution to the refugee crisis.
- Maintenance of the ceasefire.
- Oversight of a military effort to corner Al Nusra and ISIS/ISIL, taking back Raqqa and the northwestern province of Idlib where Al Nusra holds power.
- The use of Russian, Iranian, Turkish, and other countries’ military in continuing to target Al Nusra and ISIS/ISIL
What, if any, role exists for the United States, which is not now a party to the Astana negotiations? It is likely that the United States would work with Turkey on any further negotiations and would support the development of a new constitution for Syria, free and open elections, and limits to the authority and power of Bashar Al Assad. Turkey has clearly called for American participation in future Astana talks and Russia has apparently been willing to consider some reduced role for the United States in future negotiations (Astana talks become…, 2017). (Incidentally, one should note that a number of the opposition groups have publicly stated that they will not accept anything less than the removal of Al-Assad from power. This may be a sticking point in ongoing negotiations.)

As nearly as can be determined at the present time, the new American presidential administration is likely to be focused on putting an end to ISIS/ISIL and Al Nusra (Astana talks become…, 2017). Were this item entered into the negotiations, it is likely that other actors from the region would also be supportive of the outcome. It is clear that as long as the jihadi movements function in Syria and elsewhere in the region, there will be some form of violent conflict. Refocusing efforts in a post-negotiation era on defeating ISIS/ISIL and al-Nusra would be a desirable outcome for all parties.

Presented below is a figure depicting the conflicting goals and objectives ascribed variously to the US, Russia and Iran with respect to the ongoing Geneva and Astana negotiations. The figure depicts areas of mutual accord as well as goals that are unique to each party.
Figure 1. Competing and Common Goals in the Syrian Conflict. Note. (Russian air force destroys, 2015, p. 3)

The foregoing figure may be somewhat outdated, but it is essentially correct with respect to the primary motives of Iran, the United States, and Russia. Including a commitment from various state actors to fighting the Islamic State would be beneficial at the negotiating table because it is an area that three major actors consider to be equally vital.

At the same time, the biggest challenge for negotiators will be overcoming the determination of selected opposition groups to remove Bashar Al Assad from office. It is perhaps in the interest of Iran and Russia as Al Assad’s major backers to broker a deal in which he agrees to step down in return for a general amnesty for himself and selected officials whom he might wish to protect. A guarantee of amnesty with respect to possible
war crime charges may be instrumental in convincing this particular leader that it is in his best interest to stand down.

If the suggestions presented herein can be implemented at Astana and/or Geneva, it may very well be possible to bring about an end to Syria’s civil war. This in turn could result in the establishment of a more effective coalition of state and non-state actors who are able to mount a comprehensive assault on ISIS/ISIL and Al Nusra. Restoring stability to the region will inevitably necessitate the elimination of these threats. As Syria moves forward, and as external actors join in common cause, eliminating what appears to be a major threat to regional peace and stability can take center stage.

**Conclusion to the Chapter**

This chapter of the study offers an admittedly tentative and hypothetical analysis of what could occur in a conflict resolution strategy that is designed to put an end to Syria’s crisis with respect to opposition to Bashar Al Assad. Creating coalitions of internal and external actors will be needed if the negotiations are to succeed. The Astana talks have proven to be relatively beneficial thus far. Expanding them to include the United States and other state actors would strengthen a coalition capable of convincing Bashar Al Assad to stand down.
Chapter 6: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

**Introduction**

This final chapter of the study summarizes its key findings, answers the research questions posed at the outset, and presents conclusions regarding both the likely direction of American policy toward Syria and the viability of coalition building as a conflict resolution strategy. It offers recommendations for ongoing research, which is particularly necessary in light of the fact that a new presidential administration is in office in the United States and the crisis in Syria remains a critical determinant of stability in the Middle East. As Roth (2016) pointed out, resolving the Syrian crisis is an issue that is of significance not only to Syrians and their neighbors in the Middle East, but also to nation-states in Europe and the West. With the engagement of Russia and Iran and Hezbollah in the crisis as guarantors for Syria, new geopolitical questions have certainly emerged, not the least of which for the United States is the question of its role in the Middle East (Syria peace talks..., 2017).

**Summary**

The overarching research question posed in this study is: what are the likely effects of a transformation in American policy towards Syria that would include “boots on the ground” military intervention designed to stabilize a country that is torn by war and the insurgence of militant Islam seeking to establish a new Caliphate? This is a complex question which can be answered only hypothetically in light of the fact that the United States has a fairly minimal position in the Syrian conflict compared to the position of Russia and Iran.
With the departure of President Barack Obama from the White House, it became quite clear that there would be no significant change in U.S. policy towards Syria that would involve an enhanced military presence (Obama, 2014). During the political campaign of 2016, candidate Donald Trump focused less on the Syrian conflict itself and more on mounting a response to ISIS. Goldberg (2016) noted that in his “doctrine”, President Obama positioned military intervention almost as a policy of last resort. Were the United States to contemplate a policy involving an enhanced military presence physically in Syria, various researchers, including Snyder (2015) as well as Shuster and Calabresi (2015), suggest that there would need to be a new level of cooperation between the United States and both Iran and Russia. At the present time, this does not appear to be high on the policy list of President Trump.

Theoretically, one could argue that an increased American military presence in Syria would change the dynamics of the conflict significantly. Depending on the focus of such American military action, the “moderate” Syrian opposition forces might feel newly empowered to continue their assault on the Al Assad regime. If the U.S. military targeted the Caliphate, and if Russia and Iran joined in such an effort, it is quite possible that the Caliphate would be significantly reduced in terms of its territorial presence or, ideally, eliminated entirely. Again, it is speculative at this juncture to advance any finding with respect to American policy changes, because no changes have been offered by the new administration.

Two sub-questions were included in this study’s design. The first was: what specific theoretical perspectives have been employed by the Clinton, Bush, and Obama presidential administrations in the design and implementation of foreign policy toward
Syria? The research presented herein supports the finding that each of these three American presidents were to some extent or another Realists in terms of their policy orientation.

Realism, as described by Masataka (2012), is based on the premise that states must use their capacity to achieve a balance of power that protects their own interests and advances those interests when and where possible. Realists are pessimistic, but they perceive states as the most appropriate actors in the geopolitical arena. Realist policies can include both engagement and isolation as needed to benefit the state (Ford, 2013).

For President Bill Clinton (2000), Syria mattered because of its geographic position and the possibility that the Al Assad regime could be useful in brokering a Middle East peace agreement. For President George W. Bush (2003; 2004), Syria was a state to be viewed with great suspicion and a country whose behavior was often antithetical to the best interests of the United States. The Bush administration used sanctions to impress upon Syria the contention of the United States that no aid or comfort should be given to the Iraq regime of Saddam Hussein after the United States invaded the country.

We should also note that President George W. Bush was very much focused in all of his foreign policy activities on building democracies (Rada, 2014). As a neoconservative, President Bush saw the world as dangerous and unstable and also positioned America as a necessary actor in building democracies where democracies did not previously exist (Muravchik, 2007). President Bush as a neoconservative Realist was convinced that dangerous regimes should not be allowed to function or to remain in place. Unlike both Clinton and Obama, Bush was committed to the use of preemptive
strikes and may well have turned his attention toward a military response to Syria had he
remained in office longer (Krauthammer, 2005).

President Obama, also a Realist, can be thought of as a Liberal Idealist. He viewed military engagement as foreign policy tool of last resort (Richmond, 2011). He resisted calls to enhance the American military presence in Syria, even after having drawn a red line in the sand regarding Bashar Al Assad’s use of chemical weapons against his own people. Criticisms of President Obama include the idea that his policies regarding Syria were confusing (Abdul-Azziz, 2014) and poorly focused. The red line in the sand, once established, was never further addressed let alone enforced.

Judis (2014) pointed out that the Obama administration turned to the United Nations for a solution to the crisis, but Berman (2014) suggests that the ideological orientation of President Obama towards Liberalism and Idealism undermined his Realism. Friedman (2013) stated that President Obama’s strong desire to meld moral principles and national strategy created a very real tension in American foreign policy and further created a situation in which only unmanned drones and were deployed by the Obama administration as his term came to an end.

The second sub-question asked at the outset of this study was: what are the situational elements that have contributed, over time and in the present, to the development of America foreign policy toward Syria? One can certainly conclude that the situation in Syria and in the region surrounding Syria has changed dramatically in the 25 years since Bill Clinton took office. At that time, Syria was a country that the U.S. perceived as a potential ally in the Middle East (Clinton, 1994; 2000). President Clinton and Hafez Al Assad (1994) pledged mutual cooperation with regard to negotiating a
peace agreement between Israel and her Arab enemies. At that time, it was believed that the U.S. and Syria could work effectively together as coalition partners. There were no significant concerns being expressed in the United States at that time with regard to major humanitarian issues emerging from the treatment of Syrian citizens by the Al Assads (Abdul-Azziz, 2014).

No such peace deal was forthcoming. President George W. Bush (2004; 2007) perceived Syria as directly associated with the Axis of Evil consisting of Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. President Bush and his Undersecretary of State John R. Bolton regarded Syria as a rogue state – a state that sponsored terrorism, a state pursuing or having the potential to pursue weapons of mass destruction, and a state whose behavior was antithetical to the interests of the United States. This led President Bush to enthusiastically support sanctions against Syria and to criticize Al Assad for being an ally of Iran and a country making mischief in the Middle East, especially in Lebanon.

Certainly, during the period when President Bush was in office Bashar Al Assad became engaged in conflict with his own people. As President Bush left office, the Obama administration attempted to reset American relations with Syria, even though the crisis had escalated dramatically (Roth, 2016). Syria’s civil war had become a full-blown conflict made more complex by the emergence of ISIS/ISIL. Rather than increasing American military presence in the region, President Obama decreased it. One can certainly conclude that over time, Syria became an increasingly troubling hot spot and one that became a more significant element in the formation of U.S. foreign policy. As of this writing, Syria remains a country in crisis and is essentially a failed state that will
continue to occupy the attention of leaders across the world as efforts to maintain a ceasefire, end the refugee crisis, and resolve domestic conflicts go forward.

Conclusions

If we assume that each of the three American presidents discussed herein represent a version of the Realist orientation, then we must also determine whether or not Realism in and of itself is likely to be more or less associated with military policies. It seems, based on this study, that while George W. Bush was more than willing to use military power when he felt it was necessary, Presidents Clinton and Obama were substantially less likely to do so. President Obama has used military actions on a limited basis, providing on the ground advisers to the Syrian moderates and supporting them with air strikes. However, there was no indication in the final months of President Obama’s time in office that he was interested in the use of enhanced military engagement in Syria. This was the case before the Russians and the Iranians became critical actors in Syria and has remained the case ever since.

At the present time, there is no indication that President Donald Trump will be using a military response to the Syrian question per se. It is true that President Trump did campaign on a platform that included a substantial number of references to eliminating ISIS/ISIL. Less than 100 days into his administration, however, no policy announcements regarding Syria have been forthcoming. It therefore remains to be seen whether or not there will be any developments with respect to boots on the ground in Syria in the context of American foreign policy. We cannot conclude that it is neither likely nor unlikely that such a policy shift will emerge in the next several months or years.
The study did examine the potential for Coalition Building as a conflict resolution strategy. On balance, as Charap (2013) has suggested, this particular approach to conflict resolution is applicable in cases where there are multiple parties with vested interests in the outcome of the conflict or disagreement. There are admittedly some stumbling blocks which must be addressed before such a strategy can be fully implemented in hopes of achieving a permanent peace. The talks that are ongoing at Astana have provided unique opportunities for some participants to achieve consensus (Syrian peace talks…, 2017).

However, many of the opposition groups with a strong military presence in Syria have not participated in these talks and have shown no willingness to back down on the demand that Bashar Al Assad be removed from office. Additionally, the Syrian government delegation to Astana, led by Bashar Al Ja’afri, has stated that no discussion of the possibility of a new Syrian constitution was on the table. In light of the fact that there were violations of the ceasefire following the Astana talks of early March 2017, one must question whether or not these talks have been as profitable and productive as participants initially suggested (Syria peace talks…, 2017).

This does not mean, however, that the Coalition Building framework presented above should be abandoned. Iran and Russia have enormous influence over the Al Assad regime and should these two nation-states determine that it is in their best interests that Al Assad stand down, a consensus may ultimately be reached with rebel participation. Perhaps offering key government functionaries amnesty would be a useful strategy for encouraging the Assad government to submit itself to restructuring.

Here, U.S. foreign policy could clearly be supportive of a transformation of the fundamental chains of command in Syria. Syria has found some common ground with
armed rebel groups (Astana talks become…, 2017). Bringing in regional powers as well as European powers could be helpful in pressuring Bashar Al Assad to accept the necessity of standing down.

This is clearly a case in which Russia and Iran and also Turkey are in ideal positions to persuade the Al Assad regime that it is time to go (Roth, 2016). There are those who feel quite strongly that amnesty should not be given to Assad and his inner circle. Roth (2016) has stated that “since the early 1990s, the international community has rightly withheld its imprimatur from amnesties due to mass atrocities” (p.1). That said, it is also possible, according to Roth (2016), that Assad and his inner circle could flee to Moscow or Tehran where they would likely find a safe haven and be able to avoid prosecution at The Hague for war crimes.

The various parties to negotiations in a conflict resolution action will need to determine whether removing Bashar Al Assad at the cost of amnesty is worth it. Creating a coalition government that includes Syria’s Sunni majority and Alawite and other minorities could then become the focus of negotiations between the various Syrian opposition groups. It should also be apparent that if the danger presented by ISIS/ISIL is to be directly eliminated, it will first be necessary to restore order in Syria itself (Russian air force destroys…, 2015).

This is a goal that Russia, Iran, and the United States can agree upon. It is also a goal that should appeal to the various Syrian rebel groups (BBC News, 2013). The UN Special Envoy for Syria can play a vital role in bringing these issues to the table. American policy in the new Trump administration should ideally reflect these particular goals and concerns.
Recommendations

Two sets of recommendations based on this study can be offered. The first set pertains to additional research while the second set pertains to resolving the Syrian crisis and/or shaping American foreign policy going forward. In terms of further academic research, a study that examines the policies of newly elected President Donald Trump would be of value. Whether the United States is/is not likely to, at some point in the future, increase its military presence in Syria is certainly an important issue and one that was beyond the scope of this particular research effort.

Secondly, in-depth research on the interactions between the United States and the three countries that are guarantors for the Astana negotiations would be helpful. At this time, the United States finds itself in the position of being an auxiliary rather than a dominant partner in these negotiations. Any American president would certainly want to position the country more favorably in resolving a crisis that affects an entire region of the world and has destabilized relationships for some time.

Were it possible to obtain access to leaders of the various Syrian opposition groups, interviews and surveys of these individuals would be useful. Information obtained from these groups could be employed to good purpose in ongoing peace negotiations. Similarly, research that is focused on obtaining opinions of the Syrian public could be valuable.

The second set of recommendations speaks to questions of conflict resolution in general and Coalition Building in particular. The reports on the Astana talks indicate that the participants generally feel positive about their potential for success. Research that secures information as to the specific negotiable and nonnegotiable goals and objectives
of different groups could be conducted under the aegis of the UN Special Envoy on Syria. The negotiations would certainly go more smoothly if they are based on a comprehensive understanding of the requirements of key actors. This would inevitably include members of the Assad regime as well as the various rebel groups. Developing a common cause with respect to ISIS/ISIL is certainly a strategy that should be considered.

Finally, outreach to the Syrian opposition is critical. Under the aegis of the United Nations Special Envoy, talks in both Astana and Geneva must go forward. The Syrian opposition has called for applying pressure to Bashar Al Assad, and Russia and Iran are in an ideal position to do so. Rebel groups must be convinced that if they wish to be viable partners in the resolution of the conflict, they must attend Astana negotiations and must agree to sit down with representatives of the current Syrian regime. The Al Assad regime must maintain the ceasefire and acknowledge that there is a necessity for developing a new constitution.

This study serves as a springboard to additional research. It offers an insight into how American foreign policies have changed over time and how a particular approach to conflict resolution can be used in order to bring about peace and a return to national stability in a country that is essentially a failed state at the present time. Syria has been a hot spot in the Middle East for much too long. Because President Obama failed to acknowledge that the red line in the sand he drew had been crossed, or failed to act when this occurred, it now seems that the countries that are going to be able to broker peace in Syria are Russia and Iran with support from Turkey. Nevertheless, the United States has a place at the table at Astana and should be there. It will be interesting to see what policy initiatives are forthcoming from the Trump administration.
References

Retrieved from https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20141216-on-us-policy-towards-syria/


http://usforeignpolicy.about.com/od/defense/a/The-Bush-Doctrine.htm


Kazakhstan welcomes results of Syria meeting in Astana. (2017). *eureporter.* Retrieved from


No longer available.


www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/22/AR2006062201475.html


U.S. drone air strikes against government forces in Syria to play into hands of Islamic State. (2015, August 3). Interfax: Russia & CIS Military Newswire, 1.


Appendix A: Chronology of Syrian Conflict

2000 June - Assad dies and is succeeded by his second son, Bashar.

2000 November - The new President Assad orders the release of 600 political prisoners.

2001 April - Outlawed Muslim Brotherhood says it will resume political activity, 20 years after its leaders were forced to flee.

2001 5 May - Pope John Paul II pays historic visit.

2001 June - Syrian troops evacuate Beirut, redeploy in other parts of Lebanon, following pressure from Lebanese critics of Syria's presence.

2001 September - Detention of MPs and other pro-reform activists, crushing hopes of a break with the authoritarian past of Hafez al-Assad. Arrest continue, punctuated by occasional amnesties, over the following decade.

2001 November - British PM Tony Blair visits to try shore up support for the campaign against terror. He and President Assad fail to agree on a definition of terrorism.

2002 May - Senior US official includes Syria in a list of states that make-up an "axis of evil", first listed by President Bush in January. Undersecretary for State John Bolton says Damascus is acquiring weapons of mass destruction.

2003 April - US threatens sanctions if Damascus fails to take what Washington calls the "right decisions". Syria denies US allegations that it is developing chemical weapons and helping fugitive Iraqis.

2003 September - President Assad appoints Mohammed Naji al-Otari prime minister.

2003 October - Israeli air strike against Palestinian militant camp near Damascus. Syria says action is "military aggression".

2004 January - President Assad visits Turkey, the first Syrian leader to do so. The trip marks the end of decades of frosty relations, although ties sour again after the popular uprising in 2011.

2004 March - At least 25 killed in clashes between members of the Kurdish minority, police and Arabs in the north-east.

2004 May - US imposes economic sanctions on Syria over what it calls its support for terrorism and failure to stop militants entering Iraq.

2005 February-April- Tensions with the US escalate after the killing of former Lebanese PM Hariri in Beirut. Washington cites Syrian influence in Lebanon. Damascus is urged to withdraw its forces from Lebanon, which it does by April.
2005 October - Interior minister and Syria's former head of intelligence in Lebanon, Ghazi Kanaan, dies in what officials say is suicide. UN inquiry into assassination of former Lebanese PM Rafik Hariri implicates senior Syrian officials.

2005 December - Exiled former vice-president Abdul Halim Khaddam alleges that Syrian leaders threatened former Lebanese PM Hariri before his assassination.

2006 February - Danish and Norwegian embassies in Damascus are set on fire during a demonstration against cartoons in a Danish newspaper portraying the Muslim Prophet Muhammad.

2006 September - Attack on the US embassy in Damascus. Four gunmen open fire and throw grenades but fail to detonate a car bomb. Three of them are killed, one is captured.

2006 November - Iraq and Syria restore diplomatic relations after nearly a quarter century.

2007 March - European Union relaunches dialogue with Syria.

2007 April - US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi meets President Assad in Damascus. She is the highest-placed US politician to visit Syria in recent years. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice meets Foreign Minister Walid Muallem the following month in the first contact at this level for two years.

2007 May - Leading dissident Kamal Labwani and prominent political writer Michel Kilo are sentenced to a long jail terms, only weeks after human rights lawyer Anwar al-Bunni is jailed.

2007 September - Israel carries out an aerial strike against a site in northern Syria that it said was a nuclear facility under construction. In 2011 the UN's IAEA nuclear watchdog decides to report Syria to the UN Security Council over its alleged covert nuclear programme reactor programme at the site.

2008 March - Syria hosts Arab League summit. Many pro-Western states send lower-level delegations in protest at Syria's stance on Lebanon.

2008 April - The US accuses North Korea of having helped Syria to build a secret nuclear reactor at the site bombed by Israel in 2007.

2008 July - President Assad meets French President Nicolas Sarkozy in Paris. The visit signals the end of the diplomatic isolation by the West that followed the assassination of former Lebanese PM Rafik Hariri in 2005. While in Paris, President Assad also meets the recently-elected Lebanese president, Michel Suleiman. The two men agree to work towards the establishing of full diplomatic relations between their countries.

2008 September - Damascus hosts four-way summit between Syria, France, Turkey and Qatar, in a bid to boost efforts towards Middle East peace. Explosion kills 17 on the
outskirts of Damascus, the most deadly attack in Syria in several years. Government blames Islamist militants.

2008 October - Syria establishes diplomatic relations with Lebanon for first time since both countries established independence in 1940s.


Trading launches on Syria's stock exchange in a gesture towards liberalising the state-controlled economy.

2009 May - Syrian writer and pro-democracy campaigner Michel Kilo is released from prison after serving three-year sentence.

2009 June - The UN nuclear watchdog, the IAEA, says traces of undeclared man-made uranium have been found at second site in Syria - a reactor in Damascus. The IAEA was investigating US claims that the site destroyed in the 2007 Israeli raid was a nuclear reactor.

2009 July - US special envoy George Mitchell visits for talks with President Assad on Middle East peace.

2009 August - Iraq and Syria recall their envoys in a deepening rift over charges of responsibility for a string of deadly bomb attacks in Baghdad. They restore ties later in 2010.

2010 February - US posts first ambassador to Syria after a five-year break.

2010 May - US renews sanctions against Syria, saying that it supports terrorist groups, seeks weapons of mass destruction and has provided Lebanon's Hezbollah with Scud missiles in violation of UN resolutions.

2011 March - Security forces shoot dead protestors in southern city of Deraa demanding release of political prisoners, triggering violent unrest that steadily spread nationwide over the following months.

2011 May - Army tanks enter Deraa, Banyas, Homs and suburbs of Damascus in an effort to crush anti-regime protests. US and European Union tighten sanctions. President Assad announces amnesty for political prisoners.

2011 June - The government says that 120 members of the security forces have been killed by "armed gangs" in the northwestern town of Jisr al-Shughour. Troops besiege the town and more than 10,000 people flee to Turkey. President Assad pledges to start a "national dialogue" on reform.
2011 June - The IAEA nuclear watchdog decides to report Syria to the UN Security Council over its alleged covert nuclear programme reactor programme. The structure housing the alleged reactor was destroyed in an Israeli air raid in 2007.

2011 July - President Assad sacks the governor of the northern province of Hama after mass demonstration there, eventually sending in troops to restore order at the cost of scores of lives.

2011 October - New Syrian National Council says it has forged a common front of internal and exiled opposition activists.

2011 November - Arab League votes to suspend Syria, accusing it of failing to implement an Arab peace plan, and imposes sanctions.

2011 December - Twin suicide bombs outside security buildings in Damascus kill 44, the first in a series of large blasts in the capital that continue into the following summer.

2012 February - Government steps up the bombardment of Homs and other cities.

**International pressure**

2012 March - UN Security Council endorses non-binding peace plan drafted by UN envoy Kofi Annan. China and Russia agree to support the plan after an earlier, tougher draft is modified.

2012 May - France, UK, Germany, Italy, Spain, Canada and Australia expel senior Syrian diplomats in protest at killing of more than a hundred civilians in Houla, near Homs.

2012 June - Turkey changes rules of engagement after Syria shoots down a Turkish plane, declaring that if Syrian troops approach Turkey's borders they will be seen as a military threat.

2012 July - Free Syria Army blows up three security chiefs in Damascus and seizes Aleppo in the north.

2012 August - Prime Minister Riad Hijab defects, US President Obama warns that use of chemical weapons would tilt the US towards intervention.

2012 October - Syria-Turkish tension rises when Syrian mortar fire on a Turkish border town kills five civilians. Turkey returns fire and intercepts a Syrian plane allegedly carrying arms from Russia.

Fire in Aleppo destroys much of the historic market as fighting and bomb attacks continue in various cities.

Israeli military fire on Syrian artillery units after several months of occasional shelling from Syrian positions across the Golan Heights, the first such return of fire since the Yom Kippur War of 1973.

2013 January - Syria accuses Israeli jets of attacking a military research centre near Damascus, but denies reports that lorries carrying weapons bound for Lebanon were hit. Unverified reports say Israel had targeted an Iranian commander charged with moving weapons of mass destruction to Lebanon.

International donors pledge more than $1.5bn (£950m) to help civilians affected by the conflict in Syria.

2013 March - Syrian warplanes bomb the northern city of Raqqa after rebels seize control. US and Britain pledge non-military aid to rebels.

2013 April - Government forces have faced - and denied - repeated allegations of chemical weapons use.

2013 June - Government and allied Lebanese Hezbollah forces recapture strategically-important town of Qusair between Homs and Lebanese border.

2013 July - Saudi-backed Ahmed Jarba becomes leader of opposition National Coalition, defeating Qatar-backed rival.

2013 September - UN weapons inspectors conclude that chemical weapons were used in an attack on the Ghouta area of Damascus in August that killed about 300 people, but do not explicitly allocate responsibility.

2013 October - President Assad allows international inspectors to begin destroying Syria's chemical weapons on the basis of a US-Russian agreement.

2013 December - US and Britain suspend "non-lethal" support for rebels in northern Syria after reports that Islamist rebels seized bases of Western-backed Free Syrian Army.

2014 January-February - UN-brokered peace talks in Geneva fail, largely because Syrian authorities refuse to discuss a transitional government.

2014 March - Syrian Army and Hezbollah forces recapture Yabroud, the last rebel stronghold near the Lebanese border.

2014 May - Hundreds of rebels are evacuated from their last stronghold in the central city of Homs. The withdrawal marks the end of three years of resistance in the city.

2014 June - UN announces removal of Syria's chemical weapons material complete.

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria militants declare "caliphate" in territory from Aleppo to eastern Iraqi province of Diyala.
2014 August - Tabqa airbase, near the northern city of Raqqa, falls to Islamic State militants, who now control all of Raqqa province.

2014 September - US and five Arab countries launch air strikes against Islamic State around Aleppo and Raqqa.

2015 January - Kurdish forces push Islamic State out of Kobane on Turkish border after four months of fighting.

2015 March - Opposition offensives push back government forces. New Jaish al-Fatah (Army of Conquest) Islamist rebel alliance, backed by Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, captures provincial capital of Idlib.

2015 May - Islamic State fighters seize the ancient city of Palmyra in central Syria and proceed to destroy many monuments at pre-Islamic World Heritage site.

Jaish al-Fatah takes control of Idlib Province, putting pressure on government's coastal stronghold of Latakia.

2015 June - Kurds take Ain Issa and border town of Tal Abyad, Islamic State attacks Kobane and seizes part of Hassakeh, the main city in north-eastern Syria.

2015 September - Russia carries out its first air strikes in Syria, saying they target the Islamic State group, but the West and Syrian opposition say it overwhelmingly targets anti-Assad rebels.


Syrian Army allows rebels to evacuate remaining area of Homs, returning Syria's third-largest city to government control after four years.

2016 February - A US-Russian-brokered partial ceasefire between government and major rebel forces comes into effect, after a major pro-government drive to capture Aleppo. Islamic State is not included.

2016 March - Syrian government forces retake Palmyra from Islamic State, with Russian air assistance.

2016 May - The US-Russian-brokered ceasefire is extended to Aleppo after an upsurge in fighting there (BBC News, Syrian Conflict, 2016, pp. 1 – 3).
Appendix B: Primary Parties/Coalitions/Groups in Syria

**Free Syrian Army** (FSA) is the main secular armed opposition group in Syria. The FSA wants to overthrow the regime and replace it with a secular, democratic government. Membership is composed of various factions, each with their own command structure and internal politics. Some of the more moderate FSA factions receive support - money, training and weapons - from Western and Gulf states. The FSA is composed of defected Syrian Armed Forces personnel and volunteers.

The **Syrian Military Council** (SMC) is the military arm of the Syrian Opposition Coalition, which is the main political representative of the Syrian opposition. The SMC is led by Abdul-Ilah al-Bashir, and is based in Turkey.

**Jabhat al-Nusra** is a jihadist opposition group that wants to overthrow the regime and replace it with an Islamic state. Nusra is al-Qaeda’s franchise in Syria and Lebanon, and fighters claim allegiance to Ayman al-Zawahiri, the leader of al-Qaeda. As the US has designated it a terrorist organisation, Nusra receives no Western backing, but it is allegedly supported by some Gulf actors. Nusra is known to have a significant membership of foreign fighters, from Chechnya, Afghanistan, North Africa, Europe and beyond.
The Islamic Front is a coalition of opposition Islamist fighting groups that differ from Nusra on account of being less extremist. The Islamic Front recently declared its goal was to bring about a revolution that was religious, but not fundamentalist or radical. The Islamic Front’s ideology includes Salafism. It relies heavily on Saudi Arabian funding.

The Syrian government is headed by President Bashar al-Assad. The regime’s military might is provided by the Syrian Arab Army and the Syrian Air Force. The regime has declared those fighting its rule to be armed terrorists, and it relies heavily on backing from its allies Russia (weapons, money) and Iran (weapons, Hezbollah fighters), as well as Shiite fighters from Iraq. (A Guide to Syria’s Key Opposition groups,” 2016, pp. 1 – 2. http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/guide-syrias-key-factions-2062980927.
Appendix C: Syrian Opposition: Organization

Appendix D: Chronology of US Foreign Policy Shifts Toward Syria

2004-2015

- In May 2004, the US imposed economic sanctions on Syria, charging Syria with supporting terrorism and failing to stop militants entering Iraq.
- Responding to the killing of former Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri in 2005, Washington urged Syria to withdraw from Lebanon which it does in April of 2005.
- In September of 2006, four gunmen attacked the US embassy in Damascus and three are killed while one was captured.
- In April of 2007, US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi meets Assad in Damascus and in May, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice meets Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem.
- In March of 2009, US officials from the Department of State and the White House held meetings in Damascus with their Syrian counterparts.
- In July of 2009, US special envoy George Mitchell confers with Assad on Middle East peace.
- In 2010, US posts its first ambassador in five years, but in May of that year renews sanctions against Syria and charges that it supported terrorist groups, was developing weapons of mass destruction, and was supporting Hezbollah with Scud missiles and other weaponry.
- In December 2012, the US, Great Britain, France, Turkey, and the Gulf States formally recognize Syria’s opposition National Coalition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people.
- In April of 2013, US and Britain demand investigations into reports that Assad used chemical weapons against his own people.
- In 2013, the U.S. and Britain suspend nonlethal support for Northern Syrian rebels after reports that Islamist rebels had taken control of bases of the Western backed Free Syrian Army.
- In September 2014, President Barack Obama said he will not hesitate to take action against ISIS in Syria and Iraq and US forces joined by five Arab countries launch air strikes against militants in Aleppo and Raqqa.
- In 2015, Jordan increases its participation in American led air strikes on ISIS held positions in Syria.

(BBC News, 2015, p. 1).