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Syria and the Peace Process Is it a partner that Israel should trust?

In order to promote the Middle East peace process the United States and even Israel try to keep Syria and its president Hafez Assad engaged. It is hoped that Syrian collaboration and at least minimal concessions can be obtained. But we must ask ourselves whether Syria is a reliable partner in any peace agreement and whether Israel, from which many "concessions for peace" are being asked, would be wise to entrust its security to Syrian promises.

What are the facts?

A Rogue Country and a Rogue President. Syria is an outlaw country and is classified as a "terrorist state" by the United States. Until the collapse of the Soviet Union, Syria was its principal client and its most trusted ally in the region. Even now, it is the most destabilizing influence in the Middle East. It is in war-like conflict with every one of its neighbors—except Lebanon, which, in violation of solemn agreements, it has occupied and which has become its impotent client state. Terror is the most pervasive aspect of the Syrian regime. Much of that terror is

conducted through "clients", such as the terrorist bands of the PLO, the infamous Hamas, and the Iran-sponsored Hizbullah, to all of which Syria extends protection,

financial support, and warm hospitality. Syria's most ruthless terror, however, is reserved for its internal opposition. In 1982, President Assad put down a rebellion in the town of Hama. By the time he got through he had killed over 20,000 of his own countrymen. The *New York Times* said that Assad "...turned half the town into a parking lot".

President Assad gained the presidency/dictatorship of his country in a military coup after having slaughtered his only slightly less unsavory predecessors. More cunning even than his Iraqi counterpart, President Saddam Hussein, he shares with him utter ruthlessness. Disregard of human life and above all an abiding hatred of the West, which means primarily the "big-devil", the United States and the "little devil", Israel, the perceived outpost of Western culture, Western democratic concepts, and of what he and many other Arabs think of as "American imperialism" in the Middle East.

The conflict between Syria and other Arabs with Israel is not about land—it is about Israel's very existence. No other country in the world would be expected to yield indispensable strategic ground to those who are sworn to destroy it. One may ask why Israeli leaders, among them experienced generals, would wish to consider such a gamble. But leaders do make fatal errors in judgment. We only need to remember British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, who in his quest for peace agreed to the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia and thus brought about the Second World War and its terrible results. Considering that Syria is a rogue country with a rogue president, Israel should not make its survival dependent on Syria's "goodwill". Yes, there must be concessions. But, for Israel to survive, the Golan must stay in Israeli hands. The Golan is the price the Syrians must pay for their aggressions. All things considered, it's a small price.

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Facts and Logic about the Middle East
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A main source of Syria's revenue is the large-scale and officially conducted narcotics trade. A secondary source of income is the massive counterfeiting of American currency. Few doubt that Mr. Assad personally authorized the suicide attack on the Marine barracks in Beirut in which 241 Americans lost their lives and in the explosion of Pan Am Flight #103, in which 270 people died. Even today, Assad gives hospitality to surviving thugs of the Nazi regime, outstanding among them Alois Bruner, Eichman's deputy and main slaughterer. The terror in Israeli cities could not occur if President Assad were to forbid it, because headquarters of the terror organizations are located in Syria or in Syria-dominated Lebanon.

The Obsession with the Golan. Since the founding of Israel in 1948, Syria has attacked it three times, by surprise and without provocation. In the Six-Day

War of 1967, Syria suffered a decisive defeat and lost the Golan Heights, a Queens-sized plateau. Israel has been in possession ever since. The Golan is of vital strategic importance to Israel because it makes a Syrian attack against Israel virtually impossible. On the Golan, Israel is protected by sophisticated electronic surveillance and warning systems and by one of the deepest and most formidable obstacle systems in the world. The Golan is desolate and serves no real purpose, except as a defense post for Israel or as an attack-launching pad for Syria. Syria is obsessed with the Golan and has stated over and over again that it will not make peace with Israel unless and until the Golan is handed back in its entirety. But if such an exchange—the Golan Heights for peace—should come about, Israel's continued existence would depend on the goodwill of the Syrian dictator or his successor. It's a risk that Israel should not be asked to assume.

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