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**An odd “foreign policy couple”? Syria and Saudi Arabia 1970-1989**

# **Introduction**

This paper analyses the relations between the Syrian Arab Republic and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the years 1970 to 1989[[1]](#endnote-1). The alliance represented a central feature of regional politics during this period, but it is poorly studied and explained by the existing literature. This paper seeks to answer the following question: what explains the establishment and development of the alliance during the 1970s and 1980s? The two Arab powers throughout the previous decade have had conflict-ridden relations characterised by hostile rhetoric. This pattern changed significantly in the 1970s, with the two countries able to achieve a significant degree of cooperation on key regional issues, in what could be defined as an uneasy alliance.

What makes this topic so interesting yet so difficult to explain is the presence of strong cooperation amid ‘structural’ and ideological differences. The Wahhabi Kingdom and the Ba’athist republic, led by an Alawite president, were on completely opposite ends of the regional spectrum, ideological rivals. Throughout this period Riyadh and Damascus were on antithetical sides of the Cold War divide, the former a close ally of the USA, the latter increasingly more dependent on the support of the USSR. Furthermore, for most of the 1980s Syria and Saudi Arabia were the main allies of Iran and Iraq respectively, as the two neighbours were engulfed in a long and bloody war[[2]](#endnote-2). Despite this, Syria and Saudi Arabia managed to keep a ‘working relationship’ on several regional policies. Riyadh generously bankrolled Syria and its foreign policy and showed willingness to support Damascus’ interests in key scenarios such as Lebanon. Damascus benefited from the Kingdom’s support and reciprocated by stopping the anti-Saudi rhetoric that had been a feature of pre-Assad Ba’athist regimes. The Syrian leadership also strived to keep positive relations amid the strains created by the Iran-Iraq war.

This paper argues that changes in Syrian foreign policy made this uneasy alliance possible, and to some extent necessary, despite the obvious factors dividing Damascus and Riyadh. The different approach to regional politics imposed by the new Ba’th leadership made cooperation between the two Arab powers mutually beneficial despite the significant ideological and political differences. This reshaping in Syrian foreign policy in the early 70s was driven by both international and domestic factors. The 1967 defeat at the hands of Israel showed the real nature of the balance of power between the Jewish state and Damascus, forcing Syrian policy-makers to open to other regional powers to address this gap. Yet it was the change in leadership in Syria that allowed an improvement of relations with Riyadh. For the KSA, Damascus’ new pragmatism and its more central role within the Arab world enhanced Syria’s value as a regional stabiliser, explaining why Riyadh was so willing to finance Damascus’ foreign policy and support Syrian goals in different situations.

# **Syrian-Saudi puzzle and theoretical framework**

## The Middle East “paradox”?

The relations between Syria and Saudi Arabia have been both central to Middle East politics, and paradoxical. This relationship is central to regional politics because the alignment of these two powers has been key to the solution of the region’s most intricate crisis (such as the Lebanese civil war). It is paradoxical because the relations contain all the elements of a rivalry (from ideological differences to alignment to different blocks at regional and international level up to disagreement on key policy issues), yet the two countries '*both conveyed the impression that there existed some kind of alliance, albeit an uneasy one'*[[3]](#endnote-3). This alliance was in many ways an uneven one, for Saudi Arabia provided its fellow Arab state with resources and political and diplomatic support without receiving any material reward. What Riyadh obtained in return was less tangible: Syria played an important role in the KSA’s broader regional strategy, positive relations with an Arab state engaged in direct confrontation with Israel contributed to the regional and domestic legitimacy of the House of Saud.

Despite these mutual benefits, the relations between the two Arab capitals always maintained some aspects of rivalry. Prime example of this are the contacts that the two regimes maintained with the other country’s opposition groups. Particularly relevant (although matter of contrasting opinions in the literature) is Saudi Arabia’s support of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood during the late 70s and early 80s. During those years, the Ba’athist regime was engaged in a struggle of its survival with Syrian Islamist forces. The Ikhwan was at the time the main Islamist group in the country. Whilst there is little trace of official Saudi state support of the Brotherhood, it is understood that the Saudi never clamped down on the flow of private funds to the Syrian Islamist movement[[4]](#endnote-4). Furthermore, the Kingdom welcomed several high-profile members of the Brotherhood that had escaped from Syria. This support can be interpreted as a way of signalling Riyadh displeasure with Damascus for its close alignment with the USSR and Iran, or as an attempt to retain some leverage over its ally. It undoubtedly shows how the relations between the two Arab capitals remained complex and multi-layered.

An extensive literature on foreign policy and alliances in the Middle East addresses cognate issues to the one discussed by this analysis. The existing literature can be divided in two broad approaches, structural/realist and ideological/constructivist. The former include works that emphasise the ‘threat formation’ aspect of alliances. The most influential among these works is Walt’s ‘*The Origins of alliances’*[[5]](#endnote-5). Walt seeks to find out whether balancing or bandwagoning are more common behaviours. Walt argues that states balance against an increase in threat rather than raw power. Seeking to measure threat, he introduces four parameters: geographical proximity, aggressive intentions, aggregate power and offensive capabilities. Stephen David’s omnibalancing[[6]](#endnote-6)seeks to correct structural realist analysis by adding domestic threats. David points out how regimes in most of the world are concerned with domestic threats as much as they are with external ones, and will therefore balance against both. Ideological/constructivist studies of regional foreign policy and alliances emphasise the role of non-material factors and particularly the influence of ideologies such as Pan-Arabism or Islamism. The only work to date addressing specifically the relations between the two Arab powers falls in this category. Sunayama’s[[7]](#endnote-7) study covers the 1978-1990 phase, defined by the author ‘the age of oil’. The author provides an interesting and rich analysis of the topic: Sunayama sees the “related but not identical identities”[[8]](#endnote-8) of the two countries, based on Islam and Arabism, as the factors that prevented the two regimes from clashing. Rubin[[9]](#endnote-9) argues that transnational ideologies represent a biggest factor of threat than changes in the balance of power. Gause[[10]](#endnote-10) seeks to bridge the gap between these two approaches by incorporating ideological threats within a balancing analysis. These approaches undoubtedly contribute to our understanding of alliance formation in the region, yet both are unable to fully explain the puzzle of Saudi-Syrian alliance. Structural elements on their own can hardly explain the rapprochement between the KSA and Syria in 1970. No ‘new threat’ had emerged to justify this change, and the pre-existing ones (particularly Israel) represented more of a threat to Syria than they did to Saudi Arabia. Any study based on ideology or identity on the other hand would struggle to explain the significant changes in the relation between the two Arab powers. Damascus and Riyadh were ideological rivals in the 70s and in the 80s as they were in the previous decade, however the dynamics of their relations changed completely starting from 1970.

Some of the studies dealing with the foreign policy of Syria emphasise the interaction of domestic and international factors in shaping the country’s foreign policy. Among these are Hinnebusch’s study of the Ba’thist revolution[[11]](#endnote-11), Perthes’ work on the political economy of Syria[[12]](#endnote-12) and Seale’s biography of Hafiz Al-Assad[[13]](#endnote-13). Hanna Batatu’s work analyses the role of ethnic and social cleavages on regime stability in Syria[[14]](#endnote-14). Works on the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia include Safran[[15]](#endnote-15) and Holden and Johns[[16]](#endnote-16). Both these studies underline the security and stability seeking aim of Saudi’s regional policy. The studies listed here give interesting insights onto the foreign policy of the two Arab powers. None of these works however deals specifically with the relations between Damascus and Riyadh. The contribution that this article seeks to give to the literature is therefore to offer a theoretically informed analysis of this puzzling alliance. By bringing together international and domestic factors this article explains the change in Syrian foreign policy towards Saudi Arabia, the first step towards the formation of the alliance. Furthermore, this study will contribute to outlining the (largely unexplored) potential of neoclassical realism to explain the foreign policy of authoritarian regimes. This theoretical framework has so far mostly been applied to the foreign policy of democratic states, but the integration of intervening domestic variables with a realist framework can shed light on the foreign policy of authoritarian regimes as well as democratic ones.

## Key terms and theoretical framework

This research maintains that Syrian Arab Republic and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the period analysed had an alliance- albeit an uneasy and often complex one. The term alliance has been used in different ways in the literature[[17]](#endnote-17), it is therefore useful to define what alliance means here. This research will adopt the definition given by Stephen Walt[[18]](#endnote-18):

*“..a formal or informal relationship of security cooperation between two or more sovereign states. This definition assumes some level of commitment and an exchange of benefits for both parties; severing the relationship or failing to honour the agreement would presumably cost something...”*

Walt’s definition incorporates both the security/military and the economic aspect of alliance. It also includes “long-term commitments” as well as tactical alliances struck only to counter a threat and abandoned once the danger fades.

To explain the puzzle represented by this alliance this study will use an approach based on neoclassical realism. The use of this framework will specifically allow to explain the change in Syrian foreign policy that led to the formation of the alliance: this change was in fact a result of both international and domestic factors. Neoclassical realism seeks to correct structural realism’s systemic analysis by integrating domestic variables. In line with realist tradition, incentives and constraints coming from the system represent the first factor shaping state’s behaviour. Unlike structural realism, the domestic dimension also plays an important role, as it explains the discrepancy between systemic level and foreign policy outcomes. Most neorealist scholars see states as ‘default revisionists’, concerned only with their security and survival. Alliance formation in their work is therefore mostly understood as balancing against power/threat. This view is however not shared by all realists: classical realists saw foreign policy and alliances as a much more complex issue. Scholars such as Arnold Wolfers[[19]](#endnote-19) or Hans Morgenthau[[20]](#endnote-20) maintain that states can follow different goals, and form alliances according to these goals. Neoclassical realists aim at recovering and systematising these insights offered by Classical realism.

Domestic factors are therefore the main intervening variable used to explain why states respond to incentives and constraints coming from the system in different ways. Several unit-level variables have been used by neoclassical realist scholars. Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell[[21]](#endnote-21) divide the factors used into four categories[[22]](#endnote-22): *“images and perceptions of state leaders, strategic culture, state- society relations, and domestic institutional arrangements”.* The first category refers to how the preferences, ideology or personalities of the foreign policy executive affect foreign policy outcomes. Strategic culture refers to the role of beliefs, ideologies or culture at state or society level. State society relations is a broad category that incorporates all those variables that relate to *“the character of interactions between the central institutions of the state and various economic and or societal groups”*[[23]](#endnote-23). The fourth category, domestic institutions, refers to how state institutions, norms and processes influence foreign policy outcomes. Particularly relevant to this analysis is the focus on the role of those in charge of selecting and implementing foreign policy, usually indicated as policy-makers. Policy-makers in the work of neoclassical realists can “translate” the incentives and constraints coming from the system in different ways. They can misinterpret, underestimate or decide to ignore the signals coming from the system for a broad range of reasons. Leaders can formulate their decisions based on incomplete or wrong information, or can be influenced by their ideological, religious or political beliefs. Furthermore, they can be prevented from implementing optimal foreign policies by competing domestic actors.

The domestic variable incorporated in this analysis is ‘leadership orientation’ and falls within the first category, image and perception of state leaders. The assumption here is that ‘ideological’ leaderships will pursue goals dictated by their political beliefs, sometimes disregarding material elements such as their states’ capabilities or their national interest[[24]](#endnote-24). A Marxist regime committed to ‘exporting the revolution’ will not formulate foreign policies based on a narrow concept of state interest, but rather seek to put into place policies it sees beneficial to its broader goal. A more pragmatic leadership on the other hand will seek to select and implement the policies that it sees as best suited to the country’s national interest. Ideological and pragmatic regimes will therefore react differently to external constraints and incentives. The foreign policy selected by more pragmatic regimes will closely resemble the prediction of realist analysis: policy makers will seek to implement the foreign policy they see more beneficial to their states. Ideological leaders on the other hand will ‘elaborate’ external changes through the prism of their broader goals. Leadership orientation will therefore explain the variation from ‘expected realist’ alliances. These alliances are the ones that rational policy makers will select based on the balance of power and the incentives/constraints coming from the system. Structural realist analysis will expect states to react to an existential threat by balancing against it. This means seeking support and attempting to forge alliances with all available actors (or at least with those that are significant enough to balance and do not constitute a threat themselves). When balancing is not possible (because the threatening state has overwhelming power, there are no potential powers to balance with or any other reason) states will bandwagon with the threatening power. The pursue of goals that go behind national interest on the other hand can explain why states fail to balance or bandwagon despite the pressure coming from the system: leaders that are more interested in pursuing transnational goals based on ideology will be less concerned with the national interest (and the balance of power).

This particular theoretical framework has been chosen because it allows the researcher a high degree of flexibility in the integration of international and domestic factors. This research in particular seeks to integrate an ‘ideology based’ factor such as leadership orientation within a realist framework. The use of ideology to explain foreign policy is a common feature of constructivist works[[25]](#endnote-25). Bringing together structure and ideology holds particular explanatory power when looking at the foreign policy of Middle Eastern states. Since the aftermath of World War II conflict and interstate competition have in fact been frequent in the region. Realism is ideally placed to capture the anarchic nature of inter-state relations in the Middle East. At the same time, the role of transnational ideologies has been prominent in the region. The role of Pan-Arabism and Islamism has strongly influenced inter-state relations. The inclusion of leadership ideology is therefore particularly relevant when analysing the foreign policy of regional states.

# **The Syrian-Saudi relations: patterns of conflict and cooperation**

The next sections analyse the factors that led to the formation of the uneasy alliance between Damascus and Riyadh. Section one deals with the change in Syrian-Saudi relationship and the intersection of domestic and international factors that led to it. This section focuses on the changes in Syrian foreign policy towards the KSA, as these represented the main factor behind the formation of the alliance. Section two looks at Riyadh policy towards Damascus. The Lebanese civil war is here used as a case study to show Saudi’s willingness to accommodate Syria foreign policy goals for the sake of pursuing regional stability. Section three looks at the Iran-Iraq war and at how the two countries managed the tensions provoked by the conflict. The fact that the Syrian-Saudi relations survived the war shows that the two countries had developed a strong mutual interest in maintaining the alliance.

## From rivalry to the Cairo-Damascus-Riyadh axis

The history of the relations between Syria and Saudi Arabia is rich, complex and predates the formation of the two modern states. Throughout the 1946-1970 phase Syria had been a weak and fragmented state as several regional actors wrestled to influence and control the country. Not many powers had been as involved and effective in the ‘struggle for Syria’ as the KSA[[26]](#endnote-26). In this first phase Saudi’s main goal had been to maintain Syria’s autonomy against the claims laid on the country by the Hashemites, the traditional rivals of the House of Saud. As the Hashemite’s influence declined and the star of Nasser rose, the KSA maintained its traditional policy of attempting to keep Syria independent and pro-Saudi: the Union with Egypt was a significant debacle for the KSA’s foreign policy. The Saudis were therefore undoubtedly pleased when the Union collapsed, but despite this the following years were characterized by conflict more than cooperation[[27]](#endnote-27). The start of the Yemeni civil war and the involvement of Egypt and Saudi Arabia had the effect of increasing the tension between the Arab progressive republics and the conservative monarchies. The Syrian regime got heavily involved in the conflict, with Syrian pilots reportedly flying planes in support of the Leftist forces[[28]](#endnote-28). Probably more damaging for Saudi Arabia was the incessant propaganda from Radio Damascus calling for the overthrow of the Saudi regime.

Relations between the two Arab capitals were already at an historical low, but the worsened further when the Jadid government came into power in 1966[[29]](#endnote-29). The radical New Ba’th regime openly targeted the conservative monarchies and particularly Riyadh[[30]](#endnote-30). The Jadid regime also increased its support of Saudi opposition groups and signalled his opposition to the conservative faction led by Saudi Arabia by boycotting the 1967 Khartoum meeting[[31]](#endnote-31).It is important to notice how while the two countries were completely at odds and openly supported opposition groups in the other country, the KSA kept subsiding Damascus’ for its efforts against Israel in the aftermath of the 1967 conflict[[32]](#endnote-32). This support however did not modify Damascus hostility towards the KSA, caused mostly by the ideological opposition of the Jadid regime to the Saudi monarchy.

Given the state of relations at the end of the decade, Saudi Arabia could only expect an improvement when Hafez Al-Assad took over in Damascus, particularly as the new Syrian leader moved rapidly to show a new and more pragmatic approach. Several measures were taken to end Syria’s isolation and particularly to appease the Gulf monarchies. Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam was the man in charge of leading the rapprochement with Saudi Arabia. The meeting with his counterpart Umar Saffaq in Kuwait in May 1971 was the first of a series of high profile meetings between the two parties[[33]](#endnote-33). Perthes[[34]](#endnote-34) shows how the economic reforms carried out by the Al-Assad regime also aimed at sending positive signals to Gulf countries.

The changes in the relations between the two Arab powers were in fact swift and led to the formation of the so called ‘Cairo-Damascus-Riyadh axis’. Nasser’s death in 1970 removed what the Saudis saw as the biggest threat to their role in the region[[35]](#endnote-35), as a result the KSA was able to play a more pro-active and less defensive role in the aftermath[[36]](#endnote-36). King Faisal - who had become a central figure in Arab politics[[37]](#endnote-37)- was able to open to Sadat’s Egypt. At the same time, Hafez Al-Assad’s pragmatic approach provided clear openings to other Arab states and particularly the Gulf countries. Within less than a year foreign ministers of Syria and KSA had met to discuss developments in the relations and in early 1972 the new alliance was ‘sealed’ by $200 million of aid offered from Riyadh to Damascus[[38]](#endnote-38). After several years of conflicts and mutual distrusts the regimes of the KSA, Syria and Egypt appeared to be closer than ever.

The 1973 war represented the zenith of the Damascus-Riyadh-Cairo axis. More than the symbolic deployment of a brigade on the Golan Heights, it was the use of the oil weapon and the generous funding of the war efforts that confirmed the KSA’s support of Damascus and Cairo. The putting into practice of an oil embargo on the USA and its Western allies is particularly relevant both because of the effect it had and its great political relevance. Just as important from Damascus’ point of view were the generous loans and grants that Saudi Arabia (together with other Gulf States) conceded to Syria in the aftermath of the war[[39]](#endnote-39). The 1974- early1975 phase saw unprecedented cooperation between the two Arab states: the 1974 Rabat summit was the most visible fruit, but the Saudi attempts to keep a united Arab front by mediating between Cairo and Damascus were just as politically relevant[[40]](#endnote-40). King Faisal’s visit to Damascus in January 1975 was symbolic of the positive relation between the two leaderships (and particularly between the Syrian President and the Saudi King), but also started a practice of meetings between the two countries’ leaderships that continued in the aftermath of the King’s assassination[[41]](#endnote-41).

Despite the alignment among the three Arab powers, in the aftermath of the 1973 war President Sadat was deeply engaged in his parallel diplomacy with the USA. The ‘Geneva process’, snubbed by Syria but supported by Egypt and the KSA, was the official channel used to achieve a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. However, at the same time American Secretary of State Kissinger orchestrated a separate peace initiative that targeted Sadat’s Egypt. The gradual detachment of Egypt from the other Arab powers, culminated in the 1979 Camp David Agreement with Israel, deeply shaped Syrian-Saudi relations.

### *Structural changes, domestic changes and the remaking of Syrian foreign policy*

What explain this dramatic change in the Syrian-Saudi relationship? The decisive factor in the formation of the alliance is Damascus’ opening towards the KSA after years of hostile rhetoric. The interaction of international and domestic components is crucial to this foreign policy shift. The most significant ‘systemic’ change took place in 1967, when the Israeli army was able to catch the Arab armies by surprise and inflict a decisive blow to Egypt, Syria and Trans-Jordan (Jordan after the war). The 1967 war resulted in a significant loss of territory for the Arab powers: Nasser’s Egypt lost the Sinai Peninsula and King Hussein saw the territory under its control halved by the loss of the East Bank and Jordanian controlled East Jerusalem. Syria lost the strategically vital Golan Heights. Another important consequence of the war however was the consolidation of the alliance between the state of Israel and the USA[[42]](#endnote-42). Under these conditions, the ambitious goal of return to pre-1948 balance (essentially the complete overthrow of the state of Israel) was completely unrealistic[[43]](#endnote-43). Syria more than any other Arab power was in dire need of finding way to address the strategic gap with Israel. This could be achieved by finding allies to ‘balance against the threat’ represented by Israel, but also meant finding ways to overcome the spending constraints of its small economy to finance a programme of military re-armament.

From a structural/systemic point of view a country faced with an overwhelming threat will seek strategies to counter the threat. In terms of alliance formation, the alternatives are in this sense two: balancing or bandwagoning[[44]](#endnote-44). Balancing means seeking allies to balance against the threat to the country, bandwagoning on the other hand means aligning itself with the state (or states) the represent the threat. In the case of Syria, the former did not represent an option for several reasons. Syria sough to recover the lost Golan Heights, and was more generally embroiled in a broader confrontation with Israel in the Levant sub region that would have made bandwagoning rather difficult (and more akin to a total capitulation to Israel’s predominance in the region). Furthermore, bandwagoning would have hardly been accepted by a public opinion still largely committed to the Palestinian and broader Arab cause. Balancing represented a much more viable alternative based on the geopolitical balance in the region. Despite their long history of disagreement and contrast, Arab states in the Levant and Gulf shared (albeit to different degrees) a concern over Tel Aviv’s growth of power and expansionist behaviour. Several Arab powers (and particularly Iraq and the Gulf monarchies) possessed the wealth and resources that Syria missed, and would have therefore represented good ‘balancing options’.

The immediate aftermath of 1967 however did not see significant changes in Syrian foreign policy. The country was engulfed in a long phase of instability and fighting within the Ba’th party. Disagreements over the course of Syrian foreign policy in the aftermath of the conflict were central to this dispute. The radical faction in power, led by Salah Jadid, sought a continuation of the foreign policy of confrontation with Israel that had led to the 1967 conflict[[45]](#endnote-45). This position of ‘extreme Pan-Arabism’ had also led to difficult relations with fellow Arab states. Damascus challenged the Ba’th credentials of the Iraqi regime (and received the same accusations back in return). It also alienated other Arab states by criticising their lack of commitment to the Arab cause (meant mostly as the Palestinian struggle against Israel). An internal opposition faction led by the Defence Minister Hafiz Al-Assad called for closer cooperation with fellow Arab states and particularly Iraq[[46]](#endnote-46). The different conceptions of foreign policy between the two factions were confirmed by the 1970 events in the nearby Kingdom of Jordan. After years of tension, the contrast between the Jordanian forces and Palestinian militias based in the Kingdom erupted in a full military confrontation. As King Hussein’s troops moved to crush the Palestinian resistance, pressure grew on the Syrian regime to act. Al-Assad, at the time in the process of establishing its control over the country, was faced with strong domestic pressure towards intervening in favour of the Palestinians. Unable to ignore the crisis given its shaky control over Syria, Al-Assad half-heartedly sent a ground division towards Jordan but refused to commit its air forces. Faced with a strong reaction by the Jordanian (supported by Israel and the US) the Syrians were forced into an inglorious retreat. This episode clearly shows the discrepancy between ‘Syrian’ national interest and ‘Pan-Arab’ interest.

The tension between the two conceptions of foreign policy was resolved a few months later, when Al-Assad moved to consolidate his control over the country. Al-Assad soon changed some of the most unpopular policies implemented by the Jadid regime. The *‘corrective movement’* inaugurated at the 1971 National Congress represented a clear break with radical socialist policies of the Jadid era that had alienated most of the Syrian middle class. In foreign policy, the change of regime also resulted in a significant reshaping. The change is what Hinnebusch describes as[[47]](#endnote-47): “*Asad’s realist scaling down of the highly revisionist goals deriving from Syria’s identity to fit the constraints of geopolitics”*. The most stringent constraint of geopolitics in the case of Syria was undoubtedly the strategic gap with the state of Israel, that Al-Assad set out to address. As the president concentrated more power in his own hands, the foreign policy of Syria moved away from the ideological priorities of the Jadid years towards a more Syria-centric view. During the radical Ba’th years the Gulf monarchies, and particularly Saudi Arabia with its conservative and Islamist regime, had been considered ideological rivals. The new Syrian leadership, less concerned with Pan-Arabism and more focused on the threat coming from Israel, saw the oil-rich Gulf states as useful potential allies. It therefore sought to take immediate steps to improve the strained relations.

The opening towards the KSA was motivated by geopolitical calculations, but also brought some domestic benefits to the regime. Al-Assad was able to consolidate its position due to the skilful use of ‘minority politics’. Batatu shows how several of the regime’s key figures were Al-Matawirah Alawites (the tribe or group from which the President hailed) and particularly members of Al’Assad’s larger family. His success in imposing its rule over the country after decades of domestic instability however depended also on his ability to win over support of sectors of society that had been alienated by previous Ba’th regimes. Among these, two key groups had long-established historical links with Saudi Arabia. Sunni bourgeoisie benefited greatly from the halt of the socialist-style reforms imposed by the Jadid regime, and particularly by the (modest) economic openings carried out by the Al-Assad regime. These groups traditionally had strong economic links to the Gulf and particularly to the KSA[[48]](#endnote-48). The second group were the tribes of Eastern Syria. The research carried out on this aspect underlines how some of the tribal groups had close historical links to Saudi Arabia, particularly through related Saudi tribes[[49]](#endnote-49). Some particularly influential tribes had strong links and “privileged access” to the Saudi Royal family members[[50]](#endnote-50).

## Seeking stability? Saudi foreign policy towards Syria

As the new Syrian leadership embarked on the mission to reset its regional relations, it found a willing partner in the KSA. The Saudis were happy to put behind an era of rivalry and build strong links with Egypt and Syria. In the aftermath of Sadat’s separate peace, the relations with Syria became more central to Saudi’s calculations. Riyadh generously bankrolled Syrian foreign policy and (crucially) provided Damascus with political and diplomatic support in several key scenarios such as Lebanon. This support can be explained with the importance that the Saudis attributed to Syria in regional politics. Syria was central to regional and inter-Arab stability. By supporting a ‘Front Arab state’ facing Israel, the KSA also showed its commitment to the Arab (and Palestinian) cause.

The Lebanese case represents an excellent example of the dynamics in place between the two states, and particularly of the significant leverage the Damascus had over Riyadh. When the civil war erupted in 1975, Riyadh used its influence to mediate a halt in fighting, and initially succeeded. It is worth outlining that throughout the crisis the Saudis focused their diplomatic approach on the regional players rather than on the local actors[[51]](#endnote-51), for it was evident that the KSA saw in the re-establishment of that Damascus-Riyadh-Cairo axis shattered by the Sinai II agreement the key to stability in the region. This was therefore the way to avoid the occurrence (or at least limit the consequences) of potentially devastating crises such as the Lebanese one[[52]](#endnote-52). The Riyadh agreement (October 1976) recognized Syrian role in Lebanon, and gave it an Arab mantle by approving the deployment of an ‘Arab Deterrence Force’ composed nearly entirely of Syrians. The force was also financed by Gulf states[[53]](#endnote-53). This generous concession was the price Riyadh was ready to pay to rebuild the regional stability around the 1973 alliance, but Sadat’s 1977 visit to Jerusalem and the Camp David Accords divided Syria and Egypt for good - nullifying all the Saudi efforts up to that moment. In the aftermath of Israel’s 1978 invasion of Southern Lebanon, the civil war had turned into a continuation of the Syrian-Israeli crisis. Damascus had initially succeeded in using the Arab Deterrent Force for its own political agenda, but it nonetheless remained embroiled in a risky confrontation with Israel. In 1981 the KSA and other Gulf States signalled their unhappiness with Syrian foreign policy over Lebanon by withholding the subsidy to the Arab force in Lebanon[[54]](#endnote-54), but they were forced to re-start them during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. The KSA and other Gulf countries made a show of supporting the Syrians battered by Israel. But despite this support Riyadh and Damascus had conflicting aims over Lebanon’s future. While Syria wanted to maintain and strengthen its control over affairs in Beirut, the KSA favoured a more independent Lebanon (one where the Saudis, with their links and economic power, could have played a central role). The Lebanese scenario had also become more relevant in the Syrian-Saudi relation in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution and even more so after the establishment of pro-Iranian militias in the country (the Hezbollah ‘letter’ was published in 1985). Despite this fundamental disagreement, Hafez Al-Assad was in 1983 able - much to Washington dislike - to prevent the Saudis from supporting the Israeli-Lebanese treaty that would have sanctioned Israeli/American supremacy over the country[[55]](#endnote-55). As his position was boosted by the Israeli retreat, Hafez Al-Assad proceeded to settle the scores with his Arab arch-rival Yasser Arafat, long time protégé of the Saudis[[56]](#endnote-56). Riyadh, despite the relevant economic help given to Syria, was not able to control Damascus’ policy.

The Taif Agreement of 1989 is the event in which the dynamics of Saudi-Syrian relations appear to be more evident. This accord, brokered by Saudi Arabia, led to the end of the 15 years long civil war in Lebanon. The agreement in practice sanctioned Syrian role in the country and legitimized the position of Damascus and its allies on the ground. Sunayama[[57]](#endnote-57) outlines how Damascus struggled to impose a presidential candidate to the Maronite forces backed by Iraq. A new crisis erupted when Hafiz Al-Assad had to face a serious challenge to his authority by General Michel Aoun, directly backed by Saddam Hussein. The support obtained by the Saudis undoubtedly legitimized Syrian military operation to the eyes of the international opinion and the Arab world. At the same time the Accords went along with virtually all of Syria wishes by ‘rebalancing’ the sectarian system in favour of Syria’s allies and suggesting only a loose framework for Syrian withdrawal. In this instance the KSA was central to the establishment of the *Pax Syriana* in Beirut. In key phases such as 1976 and 1989, the KSA therefore proved to be able and willing to support Syrian policy in Lebanon. Despite contrasts over specific aspects of Syrian policy, Saudi Arabia opted to back and help legitimizing Syrian position in Lebanon.

### *Saudi Arabia and its quest for regional stability*

Saudi Arabia’s attitude towards Damascus apparently clashed with its position within the regional and international system. The petro-monarchy in Riyadh had stability and even its survival heavily dependent on its relationship with the USA. This placed Saudi Arabia firmly in the pro-Western camp. The Lebanese case shows how Riyadh was clearly willing to accept and support Syrian policy to achieve some sort of ‘regional stability’. Saudi Arabia was, throughout the period analysed, a status quo power. Its therefore sought to maintain the regional balance against any possible threat/change. Gause states that[[58]](#endnote-58):*‘..the fundamental goals of Saudi foreign policy... to protect the county from foreign domination and/or invasion and to safeguard the domestic stability of the Al Saud regime’*. Menaced by external forces in a hostile and unstable region, the policy-makers in the KSA actively operated to shape an environment that would minimize the threats to the regime. To reach this goal Saudi Arabia:

1. Actively operated to prevent the emergence of a hegemonic power (particularly if potentially hostile to the KSA).
2. Sought to create some sort of ‘Arab consensus’ over key topics (such as the Peace process, the Iran-Iraq war) to keep the region stable, but also to minimize threats to the Kingdom or domestic instability[[59]](#endnote-59).
3. Forge an alliance with one of the superpowers to provide for the kingdom’s safety from potential external threats.

.Syria was fundamental in reaching the first two. In the pre-1970 era, when the country was weak and fragmented, the KSA aimed to prevent it from falling under control of one of the potential regional hegemon. Later, when Syria had become an important regional player, the KSA aimed to make it one of the pillars of regional stability[[60]](#endnote-60) and reconcile this with its alliance with the USA. Furthermore, the importance of Damascus to Saudi foreign policy was given by Syria’ ‘Pan-Arab’ prestige as a steady opponent of Israel- something that countries such as Jordan could not bring to the KSA. Syria’s newly found status in the region made public disagreements with Damascus potentially damaging for Saudi policy makers, increasing this way Syrian leverage in the relationship. Safran underlines the apparent contradiction in Saudi policy, one hand relying on the US for its protection, on the other needing to show distance from Washington particularly in its Israel policy.[[61]](#endnote-61)While the Americans provided the KSA with protection in an unstable and volatile region, Riyadh pro-actively operated to guarantee stability in the region and consensus among Arab states. Syria’s centrality to the achievement of this goal explains the KSA policy towards Damascus described by this research.

## Testing Syrian-Saudi relations: the Iran-Iraq war

Syria’s realpolitik twist under Al-Assad therefore created an alignment of interests between the two Arab powers. Syria’s usefulness to Riyadh quest for regional stability was further increased by Al-Assad growing status within the Arab world. The solidity of the Syrian-Saudi entente was however tested by the events that took place in Iran. After weeks of instability, the Iranian revolution erupted in early 1979. Soon the Islamic forces led by Ayatollah Khomeini took control over the whole country. The Islamic revolution was perceived as an immediate threat by Saudi Arabia and other Arab powers such as Iraq. Syria on the other hand welcomed the revolution as an important opportunity to find a new partner in the aftermath of Camp David, and the two countries soon became close allies. Rumours of purges in the military and near collapse of the Iranian state pushed Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, supported by Saudi Arabia, to attack the Islamic republic in September 1980. Despite hopes of a swift victory, Iraqi forces encountered stiff Iranian resistance. The KSA and Syria found themselves on opposite fronts of the regional conflict, the former supporting Saddam Hussein’s Iraq and the latter Khomeini’s Iran in the 8-year long conflict that divided the region. By 1981 the two countries were therefore at odds on nearly all aspects of their foreign policy, with the Iraq-Iran war becoming increasingly central to the Saudi’s strategic calculations[[62]](#endnote-62):

*‘In the last months of 1981, however, a series of new major threats developed that set the Saudis scurrying for means to meet them... Iran won a second major battle in two months, which portended a turn of the war tide in its favour. A few days later, the discovery of a major Iranian plot to destabilise Bahrain and Saudi Arabia brought to a climax a period of propaganda war and drove home to the Saudis to the point that a victorious militant Iran would pursue its revolutionary goals in the Gulf by means of the dreaded combination of external pressure and internal subversion’*

In what was by then a usual pattern, Riyadh responded to the perceived threat by trying to re-create some sort of Arab unity: this included both trying to facilitate reconciliation between Damascus and Baghdad and attempting an opening towards Cairo. The KSA’s attempts to lure Syria away from Iran proved to be unsuccessful. When it became obvious that the tide had turned in Iran’s favour, Damascus found itself in a central mediator role, given its privileged access to Tehran[[63]](#endnote-63). Sunayama outlines how the start of the tanker war in 1984 initially enhanced Damascus’ position, with Syria[[64]](#endnote-64): *‘collecting rewards from both the moderate Arab states on the one hand, and Tehran on the other’*. Unwilling to sever its alliance with Iran but dependent on the aids coming from the Gulf, the Syrian leadership had to juggle to keep an open channel with both. Syrian inability to restrain Iran caused damage to Damascus’ stance in the Arab world, because of Saudi’s tougher anti-Iranian stance after the events of the Hajj 1987. At the Amman Summit that year the KSA and the Gulf states refused to discuss the renewal of the 1978 Baghdad Summit aid commitment[[65]](#endnote-65). Despite this, the Saudis (along with the Jordanians) did not stop their attempts to reconcile Damascus and Baghdad till the end of the Iran-Iraq war the following year[[66]](#endnote-66), confirming that they still saw Syria as an important factor in the regional balance.

### *Stability beyond conflict*

The case of the Iran-Iraq helps explaining the puzzle of Syrian-Saudi relations. The level of cooperation, the ‘open channel’ and the resources that Damascus was able to extract from Riyadh while the two countries were the main allies of the Tehran and Baghdad respectively appears to be hard to explain looking only at ‘structural’ aspects. The attempts to pacify Syria and Iraq during the conflict can be explained by the fact that Riyadh saw its own position and security threatened by divisions within the Arab world. Furthermore, the Kingdom saw, at least from 1979 onwards, Iran as the biggest threat to its security. While Riyadh looked unfavourably to Damascus’ alliance with the Islamic republic, the KSA also hoped that Damascus could play a ‘moderator’ role with its ally. On the other hand, particularly during the second half of the conflict Syria was able to keep an open channel with both Tehran and the Gulf countries, crucially managing to extract resources from both parties.

# **Structure, ideology and Syrian-Saudi relations**

Syrian-Saudi relations during the 1970-1989 years are complex and articulated. Despite the structural and ideological differences between the two Arab powers, Saudi Arabia and Syria built what could be defined as an ‘uneasy alliance’. The relationship was an alliance because it entailed ‘some level of commitment and an exchange of benefits’. Saudi Arabia provided Syria with financing and diplomatic support, both central to Damascus’ attempt to balance against the Israeli threat. In exchange Saudi Arabia benefited from the partnership with a front Arab state as well as counting on Syria’s contribution to regional stability. The pursue of stability was central to the Kingdom’s broader strategy, and it explains why Saudi Arabia was willing to support Syrian ambitions in scenarios such as Lebanon. Yet the alliance was uneasy because the two countries were divided by ideological differences and (most importantly) were ‘structural rivals’, placed on opposite sides of the regional and international alliance division. The start of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980 magnified this tension: the two countries found themselves on different fronts of an all-out war whose outcome would have no doubt had serious consequences for the two parties. A victory for Saddam’s Iraq would have spelt trouble for Syria: an emboldened Iraqi regime would have surely turned its attentions towards the ‘treacherous Syrian regime’ that had sided with Persian Iran during the conflict. On the other hand, an Iranian victory would have given Tehran a position of absolute predominance in the Gulf, something that Saudi Arabia saw a as direct threat to the Kingdom’s very existence. Despite these clash of vital interests, the two countries kept an open channel of communication, the KSA continued to finance Syrian foreign policy and the two powers never returned to the heights of propaganda war of the 60s.

Both international and domestic factors contribute to explain the Syria-Saudi puzzle. Structural factors explain why Syria pursued improved relations with the Kingdom. Oil-rich Saudi Arabia was functional to addressing the unfavourable balance of power with Syria’s main rival Israel. Yet it was only with the ‘realist turn’ in Syrian foreign policy imposed by the Al-Assad regime post-1970 that Syria abandoned its hostile posture towards the Kingdom and sought a rapprochement. On the other side it found a willing partner in Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom’s willingness to support Damascus in both financial and diplomatic terms was a consequence of Riyadh’s regional priorities. As a status quo power, Riyadh sought to maintain regional stability and prevent the formation of a hostile coalition that might threaten the kingdom. Supporting a key Arab power on regional scenarios such as Lebanon was something that Riyadh was willing to do in pursue of its broader regional goals. Furthermore, the relations with Damascus had clear regional and domestic legitimacy benefits. Damascus was a ‘front Arab state’ engaged in the fight against Israel (and in the aftermath of Egypt defection it became the main front state). By supporting Syria, the Kingdom could claim its commitment to the Arab and Palestinian cause, conversely a worsening of the relations might have left Riyadh vulnerable to hostile propaganda from its fellow Arab power.

## From the Second Gulf war to the Syrian civil war: continuity and change Syrian-Saudi relations

A comprehensive analysis of the relationship between the KSA and Syria after 1989 is beyond the scope of this paper. A few trends that directly relate to the analysis carried out so far will however be underlined in this section. The end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1989-1991 years significantly altered regional dynamics. In the case of the Syrian-Saudi alliance, these changes removed two of the most divisive issues among the two partners[[67]](#endnote-67). The change from global bipolarity to unipolarity represented a challenge for Al-Assad’s Syria, that saw its main international ally partially retreating from the region[[68]](#endnote-68). The second Gulf war and the possibility to participate in the American led coalition against Iraq was therefore taken in Damascus as a chance to regain a certain degree of centrality. Saudi Arabia welcomed Damascus involvement as well as Al-Assad commitment to defend the Kingdom from potential threats. The Gulf countries and particularly Saudi Arabia rewarded Syria for its involvement with generous financial contribution[[69]](#endnote-69). The early 90s also saw the full return of Egypt in the Arab fold and a revival of the Damascus-Riyadh-Cairo axis of the early 70s. The ‘repetition’ of these patterns in inter-Arab relations despite a drastically changed international environment confirms the continuity and consistency in the goals pursued by the main regional actors. The peace process with Israel became more prominent in Arab politics and in the relations between Saudi Arabia and Syria. Here again the two Arab capitals seemed to diverge in their diplomatic stances, Riyadh willing to push towards a quick solution of the outstanding issues, Damascus much more careful of the overall consequences of any negotiations[[70]](#endnote-70). Despite this divergence the two Arab powers did pursue an understanding and even some level of cooperation on this topic throughout the 90s, and Saudi Arabia (crucially) opted to support Syrian stance vis-à-vis Israel throughout the process[[71]](#endnote-71).

The 2000s represent an interesting case for the relations. Hafiz Al-Assad died in 2000 and was succeeded by his son Bashar. The new president made a concerted effort to maintain and improve the partnership with Saudi Arabia. The partial opening of the Syrian economy changed the nature of the relations between the two countries. New economic trends started in the late 90s became more prevalent. Saudi private capitals, often connected to Royal family members and their inner circle, favoured the formation of several activities in Syria (in most cases joint Saudi-Syrian enterprises)[[72]](#endnote-72). Against the backdrop of the American invasion of Iraq, the two countries shared concerns over regional instability. The strengthening of the Syrian partnership with Iran and the increased rivalry between Riyadh and Teheran however represented a renewed point of contrast. Hezbollah’s central role in Lebanon represented a problem for Syrian-Saudi relations. The assassination of Rafiq Hariri and the consequent ‘Cedar revolution’ that forced Syrian troops to abandon Lebanon changed the already precarious balance in Lebanon, and created the potential for further contrast between the two Arab capitals.

It was however not the tense situation in Lebanon that spelled the end of the Syrian-Saudi uneasy alliance, but rather the advent of the so called ‘Arab Spring’. When the Syrian regime violently suppressed the protests in the country, the Kingdom decided to break with a long tradition of controlled confrontation with Damascus and threw its weight behind the Syrian opposition. This choice is not inconsistent with the analysis carried out by this research. This study has shown how Syria is useful to the KSA inasmuch it is a strong and ‘legitimate’ actor in inter-Arab politics. The repression against the (largely Sunni) protesters and the perceived weakness of the Syrian regime altered the mutually beneficial nature of the relations. The civil war presented Saudi Arabia with an opportunity to curtail the influence of its main regional rival, Iran. The alliance with Syria, void of the benefits it produced in the previous decade, was worth sacrificing in pursue of this goal.

# **Conclusion**

This paper analysed the relations between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Syrian Arab Republic in the years 1970-1989. During this phase the two countries overcame the contrasts of the previous year and established an alliance. This partnership represents a puzzle for structural realist and constructivist approaches alike. This paper used an approach based on neoclassical realism. This paradigm integrates domestic factors within a realist analysis and uses them to explain diversions from ‘structural’ analysis. In this case the domestic factor of ‘leadership orientation’ has been used to explain the hostility of Damascus towards Riyadh in the pre-1970 years and the sudden change in the following phase.

This paper explained how the change in Syrian foreign policy towards the KSA was driven by both international and domestic factors. The reality of the growth of Israeli power and the unfavourable regional balance emerged clearly in the 1967 war. Given the clear advantage that Israel enjoyed over Syria, the ambitious goals pursued by the Jadid regime were rather unrealistic. A real adjustment of Syrian foreign policy in this sense however did not happen till when Hafiz Al-Assad and the ‘military’ faction took over power from the Jadid faction. Al-Assad immediately proceeded to align Syrian foreign policy to the balance of power on the ground. Central to this policy was an opening to the oil rich Gulf countries. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the other hand welcomed the opening from Damascus as an opportunity to improve its relations with Syria. This policy is consistent with Saudi’s broader search for regional stability as well as with the House of Saud’s attempt to strengthen its domestic and international legitimacy. Saudi Arabia traditionally operated to create an inter-Arab balance that minimised the risks to the Kingdom. Damascus was an important asset, particularly given its status as frontline state. Riyadh’s support of Syria was used as a tool to show Saudi’s commitment to the broader Arab cause. This importance explains why Riyadh was willing to support Damascus’ agenda on scenarios such as Lebanon despite the potential clash with Saudi Arabia’s own specific interests.

The analysis carried out by this paper confirms the potential of neoclassical realism as an approach to analyse and understand foreign policy. Whilst it has been mostly applied to the foreign policy of Western democracies, it has potential to explain the foreign policy of non-Western states. In his 1991 article Stephen David outlined how leaders in Third world countries often balance against domestic rather than international threats. This criticism is particularly pertinent, and neoclassical realism in uniquely placed to illustrate the interaction between international and domestic factors.

**Abstract**

This paper analyses the alliance between Syria and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the years 1970-1989. The relations between the two Arab powers were characterized by cooperation and support amid ideological and ‘structural’ differences. This was a stark contrast with the conflictual relations of the previous decade. The change was driven mainly by a reshaping in Syria’s regional policy. The new ‘realist’ foreign policy imposed by Hafiz Al-Assad created an overlapping of interests between Syria and the KSA. Riyadh valued Syria’s role in the region and used its support of Damascus vis-à-vis Israel as a tool to obtain domestic and regional legitimacy. On the other hand Syria benefited from the KSA’s generous economic and diplomatic help. This study will use an approach based on neoclassical realism to show how domestic and international factors led to these changes.

**Keywords:** Middle East; Syria; Saudi Arabia; Foreign policy

1. The period analyzed goes roughly from the take-over of Hafiz Al-Assad to the end of the Cold War. One section will be dedicated to the phase before 1970 as to show the changes in Syrian foreign policy imposed by the new regime. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The relation is a puzzle if one looks at structural (regional or international alignments) or ideological (the two leaderships’ political and religious stances) factors only. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. MECS, 1984-1985, p.602 quoted in Sunayama. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. R.R. Lefevre, *Ashes of Hama,*Oxford:Oxford University Press, 2013. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. S. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances,* Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. S. David, ‘Explaining Third World Alignment’, *World Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Jan. 1991), pp. 233-256 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. S.Sunayama, *Syria and Saudi Arabia. Collaboration and Conflict in the Oil Era,* London, I.B.Tauris, 2007. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. I bid p.9. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. L. Rubin, Islam in the Balance: Ideational Threats in Arab Politics, Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. G. Gause, ‘Balancing What? Threat Perception and Alliance Choice In The Gulf’, *Security Studies,* Vol.13, N.2 2003, pp. 273-305. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. R. Hinnebusch, *Revolution from Above,* London: Routledge, 2001. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. V. Perthes, *The Political Economy of Syria Under Assad ,* London: I.B. Tauris, 1995. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. P. Seale, *Asad of Syria. The Struggle for the Middle East* , London: I.B. Tauris, 1988. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. H. Batatu, Some Observations on the social roots of Syria’s ruling, military groups and the causes for its dominance, *Middle East Journal,* Vol. 35, No. 3 (Summer, 1981), pp. 331-344. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. N. Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The ceaseless quest for security,* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. D. Holden and R. Johns, *The House of Saud ,* London: Pan MacMillan, 1982. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. G. Snyder in *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1997)includes in his analysis only “formal” agreement, differentiating between alignments and alliances. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. S. Walt, *The Origin of Alliances.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press,1987, p.1. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. A. Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration. Essays in International Politics,* New York: John Hopkins University Press, 1962.  [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. H. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace,* New York: Alfred Knopf, 1948.  [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. N. Ripsman, J. Taliaferro and S. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist theory of International Politics,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, Ch. III.  [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid, p. 58. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid. p.71. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. It is important to stress how this statement is not in contrast with realist logic, only with structural realist one. Structural realists see state’s policy choices as a direct product of incentives and constraints coming from the system. Classical realism on the other contained elements that could be defined as ‘normative’: leaders can decide to ignore systemic imperatives, but in doing so they act against ‘national interest’. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. For instance Michael Barnett in *Dialogues in Arab Politics* shows how Arab leaders were constrained by but also competed over the norms of Pan-Arabism. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. P. Seale, *The Struggle for Syria. A study of Post-War Arab Politics 1945-1958* (2nd ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press,1965. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Sunayama, op. cit*,* p.30 [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. N Safran, op.cit. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. M. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War. Gamel Abdel Nasser and his rivals*  (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p.127. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Times, Our Middle East Correspondent. Arab feuding resumed by Syrian leader, 24 Apr. 1968 (The Times DigitalArchive, Web. 12 Jan. 2017). [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Sunayama, op. cit, p.31. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Ibid, p.33. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Holden and Johns, op. Cit. p.298. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Perthes, op.cit., p.50. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. That had already been significantly diminished by Nasser’s humbling at the end of the Israelis in 1967. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Sunayama, op.cit.p.34. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. J. Piscatori, *Islamic Values and National Interest: the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia* in *Islam in foreign policy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1983. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Holden and Johns, op.cit. p.299 [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Seale, op.cit*,* p.255. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Safran, op.cit. p.241-245. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Meeting between the leaders of the two countries within and outside of the traditional Arab for a became a regular occurrence. For a detailed list of these see Sunayama (2010). [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Ibrahim I. Ibrahim, ‘The American-Israeli Alliance: Raison d’état Revisited’ *Journal of Palestine Studies*

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43. Hinnebusch, *Revolution from Above,* op.cit. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Walt, op.cit., Ch. II. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Hinnebusch, *Revolution from Above,*  pp.141-142 [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Ibid. p.141-142. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Ibid. p. 146. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Volker Perthes, *The Political economy of Syria under Asad,* London: I.B. Tauris, 1995. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Al-Rasheed, *Politics in an Arabian Oasis*,1997. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Torsten Schoel, “The Hasna’s Revenge: Syrian Tribes and Politics in their Shaykh’s Story,” *Nomadic People* (Vol: 15 Issue: 1, 2011 pp: 96 – 113). [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Sunayama, *Syria and Saudi Arabia*, pp.43-47. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. G. Bannerman, *Saudi Arabia* in *Lebanon in crisis: participants and issues,* Syracuse:Syracuse University Press,1979, pp. 113-131. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. A. Dawisha, *Syria and the Lebanese Crisis,* New York: St. Martins’ Press, 1980, pp.145-150. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Sunayama, op.cit. *,* p.103 [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. J.Muir, ‘Assad plays a strong but cautious hand’, *Middle East International*, 14th October 1980. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. On this aspect see Seale (1988) and Fisk (1993) [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. Sunayama, op.cit*,* p. 211. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. Gause, op.cit., p.193 [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. Shows of support for the Arab/Palestinian cause have traditionally been a key component of the Saud family’s regime survival strategy-a way to regain the domestic legitimacy threatened by the alliance with the USA. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. Hafez Al-Assad’s rejection of a ‘revisionist’ stance that had threatened Saudi Arabia and the other conservative monarchies undoubtedly played a role here. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. Safran, op.cit.*,* p.453. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. E. Kienle, *Ba'th versus Ba'th. The Conflict between Syria and Iraq 1968-1989 ,*London: I.B. Tauris, 1990, ,p.376 [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. A. Ehteshami and R. Hinnebusch, *Syria and Iran*. *Middle Size power in a Penetrated System,* Abingdon: Routledge, 1997, p.96. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. Sunayama, op.cit.*,* p.176. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. *Ibid.* [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. D. Moffett, W. Richey, Arab leaders seek elusive unity against Iran in first summit on Gulf, *The Christian Science Monitor* ,Boston, 06 Nov 1987). [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. Sunayama, op.cit.*.* [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. Hinnebusch, *Revolution from Above, op.cit.* pp.150-154. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. A. Drysdale, *Syria since 1988: From Crisis to Opportunity* in *The Middle East after Iraq’s Invasion of Kuwait*, Gainsville: University Press of Florida, 1993. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. A. Drysdale and R. Hinnebusch, *Syria and the Middle East Process,* Council on Foreign Relation Press: New York, 1991. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. P. Seale, ‘Asad regional strategy and the challenge from Netanyahu’, *Journal of Palestine Studies,* N.26 vol 1. 1996, pp.27-45. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
72. Sunayama,op.cit.*,* p. 222. [↑](#endnote-ref-72)