

Syria: In Need of Vision

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Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
In
Political Science

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26 April 2019
Blacksburg, VA

Keywords: Syria; Presidential Leadership; Presidential Vision; Vision in Foreign Policy;
American Foreign Policy

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ABSTRACT

Possessing a vision to correct problems is an area of interest for leadership and political studies, as presumably vision provides the goal to orient upon and overcome problems, and should apply at all levels of leadership. The worsening situation in Syria since the end of the Cold War begs the questions of whether any recent U.S. President tried to address the issues in the relationship with Syria, and what was the vision the President sought to achieve. This study reviews Presidential rhetoric from President's News Conferences, major speeches and Executive Orders for a vision to ascertain the intended direction for U.S. policy for Syria. Also, the study reviews the leadership styles of the five Presidents for consistency and effectiveness in conveying a foreign policy message. Broadly, the study concludes that the Presidents need more than a strategy to engage other nation to fix problems. They need an achievable outcome to aim the U.S. government towards and to effectively broadcast their vision to a broad audience. It takes an appreciation for history, realistic expectations and an eye for the future to form a vision for a coherent way forward. Unfortunately, the Presidents in this study did not give the appropriate time or resources to correct the pervasive problems in Syria. Their overall policies ranged from incoherent to stagnant, therefore hampering the U.S. ability to guide progress fixing the situation.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

The pervasive problems within Syria are some of the more important U.S. foreign policy issues that require guidance and direction to overcome. The worsening situation in Syria since the end of the Cold War begs the questions of whether any recent U.S. President tried to address the issues in the relationship with Syria. Broadly, the study concludes that it takes more than a strategy to engage another nation and fix problems. It takes an appreciation for history, realistic expectations and an eye for the future to form a vision for a coherent way forward. Additionally, Presidents require the ability to effectively communicate their vision to a broad audience. Unfortunately, it appears the Presidents in this study did not give the appropriate time or resources to correct the problems, and therefore hampered the U.S. President's ability to guide progress to fix the situation.

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Chapter 1 – INTRODUCTION

As the head of the Executive Branch and with the broad authorities granted to the office, the President of the United States remains largely responsible for directing action and guiding policy in the foreign arena. As a result, he remains the subject of much leadership analysis and constant scrutiny over what actions he intends to take to resolve foreign policy matters. Unfortunately, "the question of the extent to which leaders matter in international politics is as familiar as it is impossible to fully answer" (Jervis 2013, 154). It remains difficult to conclude that any single decision-maker, even the President of the United States, can remain relevant and influence the world in a grand manner, especially a world so tightly connected and influenced by rapidly evolving events. There is simply too much nuance and not enough time for one person to fully comprehend every situation.

The question about Presidential relevancy remains especially prominent as it pertains to the U.S. policies directed at Syria since the end of the Cold War. Though five very different men have held the office as President since the end of the Cold War, very few of their collective policies directed toward Syria progressed toward a resolution of the long-standing issues between the United States and Syria. The stagnation in progress begs the question of whether the U.S. has ever possessed a good vision to improve the relationship between the U.S. and Syria.

As with any good research, "the best way to examine the problems of international political theory is to pose a central question and identify the answers that can be given to it" (Waltz 2001, 12). The primary question this research attempts to answer involves why the President hasn't been able to direct necessary change toward

fixing numerous issues in Syria. In order to answer that question, the research tries to determine what the President wanted to achieve as an outcome with respect to Syria. Since effective leaders portray their intended outcomes through vision, this research focuses on discovering the strategic vision the President outlined for dealing with Syria. Did any of the five Presidents outline a vision or ultimate goal to reach with Syria that could address the negative trend? Subsequently, this research provides insight and understanding on the degree that presidential leadership, through expression of strategic vision, has a role in outlining and enforcing American foreign policy. As it turns out, this research does not conclude that having vision will make the President successful, but it does trend toward the conclusion that without a vision for the future, the President and the foreign policy apparatus will flounder and struggle with consistency. The lack of Presidential vision in Syria hasn't necessarily created poor policies; however, the prolonged stagnation in policy has created an environment where a coherent policy in Syria may not be sufficient. Correcting the pervasive problems has become more difficult because it's difficult to understand the objective that the Presidents sought.

Despite their often-differing perspectives, one thing has remained constant through all five Presidents; none have conveyed a vision for what they wanted to accomplish as it pertains to resolving differences with Syria. The analysis shows, more often than not, that the recent Presidents are too heavily mired in the daily minutia of the issues within Syria to convey their thoughts and vision on where the U.S. should proceed and how their relationship should develop. Outlining a future for these items would enhance the Syrian nation and place them on a more equal footing with the United States and the international community. More importantly, it would offer the opportunity for

the Syrian population to overcome the ravages of war and ceaseless violence. This research presents an incredible opportunity to view vision as a leadership tool that may offer a mechanism to break out of stagnancy and pursue higher goals in Syria, such as economic advancements, trade partnerships and greater diplomatic collaboration on the world stage.

One of the primary reasons why solving the Syria problem is important is because the world needs less nations that sponsor terror and create humanitarian disasters.

Drawing inferences from previous foreign policy blunders, Reveron warns the U.S. that "problems in distant regions of the world with no apparent or immediate connections to the United States could become incubators for threats that, left unchecked and unaddressed, would grow in strength to pose a real challenge to American security" (Reveron 2015, 113). Counter to the level of disinterest generally given to Syria since the end of the Cold War, Syria is the precise scenario Reveron spoke of, thus providing the quintessential case to study how problems become more prolific and prominent, and subsequently more difficult to correct.

Additionally, this research is also important because it provides the opportunity for the U.S. to showcase its leadership and assist Syria out of the problematic cycle of events that trends toward greater reliance on brutal tactics and terrorism. The suffering, innocent population in Syria should not have to live in that manner and the problems have prolonged for long enough. It is well past time to address the issues. In doing so, it is important to understand the dynamics at play so policymakers can assess a way forward to overcome some of the enduring problems. Fixing the overall situation in nations such as Syria and trying to make lives better is a cause the U.S. could use to boost

the impression other nations and people have of the U.S., and could improve many relationships.

Reviewing this research problem in this manner is essential because Presidents, like all leaders, need a better way to convey their goals and drive policy at a higher level to reach higher goals. Presidents have too little time and too much responsibility to have a firm grasp on every minute detail involving every single problem across the globe. Instead, they need to function at a strategic level and give appropriate, long-term policy direction, and they need to motivate their subordinates to achieve goals more efficiently. A President who can achieve this dynamic will seemingly create a more effective foreign policy environment.

This research reviewed a plethora of material to derive the strategic vision as outlined by the President. Ultimately, the evidence confirms that the President's words were at times too incomprehensible, too erratic or too stagnant. The analysis shows the President's ability to affect the long-term problems pervasive in Syria has been limited on his ability to focus on the problem and provide a coherent vision for what should happen. Problems arise because the President's time is scarce, and it is difficult to comprehend every issue fully to provide long-term solutions to seemingly interminable problems. So, while the President attempts to conduct his daily business, too many problems interfere. Meanwhile, a constant barrage of people want to know the President's goals and what direction he plans to lead the nation to demonstrate U.S. leadership in the world. Ultimately, each of the five successive U.S. Presidents during this period failed to concoct a vision, resulting in essentially the same overall approach in Syria despite the

Syrian regime posing increasingly complex, disastrous challenges and despite the varied nature of the man in the Oval Office.

To organize this topic, chapter 2 provides an overview of the Syrian history and context to explain why dealing with these problems in Syria is important. It includes a discussion of recent U.S. policy as it pertains to Syria. Chapter 3 explains why the President is the central figure in this discussion and his role in outlining the national interest. Chapter 4 is the theoretical framework section, which defines vision and why vision is important. Chapter 5 provides the method for acquiring the evidence and the various sources of information used for this research. Chapter 6 provides a robust discussion of the evidence through the written and spoken word of the Presidents. Chapter 7 concludes the research and provides the implications for the outcome.

Chapter 2 –HISTORY AND POSITION OF AFFAIRS IN SYRIA

"With an international consensus lacking and the Syrian opposition fractured, an uprising begun on behalf of democratic values degenerated into one of the major humanitarian disasters of the young twenty-first century and into an imploding regional order" (Kissinger 2014, 128). There is a deep worry of how little has been accomplished with the situation. Graphic images of a young boy, broken, beaten, bloodied, shell-shocked and confused offer a disturbing insight into some of the events that have awed the international public since the start of the 2011 Syrian uprising (Hunt 2016, *TheGuardian.com*). The images show a boy who needs help like many others in Syria, and serves as a call to action to help ameliorate the situation. Unfortunately, Syria has not been a short-lived problem for the world, much less the U.S., as the factors that contribute to the issues at play are as lengthy as they are complex. The U.S. has contended with Syria since the founding of Syria as a nation. While, the majority of those issues arose more recently, highlighted by Syria's placement on the U.S. State Department's list of States Sponsoring Terrorism in 1979, a mark that has existed since the genesis of the list (U.S. State Dept 2017; Fletcher 2008), policymakers cannot discount the history of the relationship when trying to form a way forward.

One of the realities of the policy environment in the United States is that much of the policy community neglects historical context as they develop new policies. Policy makers have viewed history indiscriminately as things that have occurred in the past, without understanding that these frames have consistently derailed policy and contributed to the prolonged poor condition of the U.S. relationship with Syria. Too often, policy makers, including the President are rushing from event to event, tackling the problem of

the moment, and then moving onto the next item. Unfortunately, "even when you think you've reached the end of a problem, you are usually simply at the start of new troubles" (Ramo 2009, 13). Even if the President outlined a strong vision, implementing it would be extremely difficult because it's near impossible to determine how implementation will occur on the ground given the rapidly changing environment and a general lack of understanding on the human dynamic. If the President did have a good vision, events on the ground might have prevented that vision from coming to fruition.

Since the Spring of 2011, the Syrian conflict epitomized the complexities involved in the humanitarian disasters in the world today; however, the problems surrounding present-day Syrian hostilities predate the Arab Spring by several hundred years. Centuries of external conflict and intrusions led by Western societies, dating back to the Crusades, the Seven Years War, and the Napoleonic Wars have brought much discontent toward Western Civilization from various populations throughout the Middle East. More recently, the fall of the Ottoman Empire after World War I and the implementation of the Sykes-Picot Agreement induced additional displeasure toward the West, specifically in Syria as the previously unified and mostly autonomous region was forced to split up and endure Western authority during the Mandate period. The fact that President Woodrow Wilson unsuccessfully lobbied for the sovereignty for all the people who fell under the former Ottoman Empire as the breakup of the Middle East occurred mattered little (Fromkin 1989, 258-59). Counter to his efforts, the French Mandate took control, and soon thereafter the death of President Wilson brought President Warren Harding into office. President Harding changed the focus of efforts and "limited his administration's efforts to the protection of American interests. In the Middle East, that

mostly meant the protection of American commercial interests which were primarily oil interests" (Fromkin 1989, 547). Therefore, when the Syrian population revolted against the French Mandate in 1924, the United States would have very little involvement. With the exception of the insatiable demand for oil, the United States would defer mostly to the French and the British when it came to affairs in the Middle East.

In the years since the end of the Mandate period, the extensive history of Western intentions to dominate the region showed in the approach Middle Easterners began to take with Westerners. Middle Eastern populations grew sensitive and resistant to becoming overwhelmed by Western advances. "For centuries, aliens dominated the Middle East" (Pipes 1998, 290), and now that nations in the Middle East have gained their independence and autonomy, they do not want to give any impression they are sliding backward under the oppressive rule of a foreigner. This was especially the case when it came to Syria which has tried to manifest their version of pan-Arabism in what they termed "as almost a necessity" (Ochsenwald and Fisher 2004, 638).

While the unified Arab state never came to fruition, it wasn't for the lack of trying, particularly in trying to push the Israelis out of the Middle East. Syria's opposition to Israel in the 1948, 1967, and 1973 Arab-Israel Wars combined with the close relationship between the U.S. and Israel has left the U.S. mostly in opposition to Syria. "When the United States strongly supported Israel, as in the 1967 third Arab-Israeli War, American prestige suffered among the Arabs" (Ochsenwald and Fisher 2004, 721). Furthermore, "Syrians blamed the west for their defeats and frustration" in these campaigns (Ochsenwald and Fisher 2004, 639).

Much of that history laid relatively dormant for decades, even while the United States placed Syria on the State Department’s inaugural list of States Sponsoring Terror in 1979, seemingly in an attempt to apply pressure on Syria to give up their support to terrorism (U.S. DOS 2017, *Sponsors*). Presumably, through the act of placing Syria on the list, President Carter implicitly outlined a plan for what he wanted to achieve in relations with Syria, namely to address Syria’s support for terrorism. Unfortunately, placing Syria on the list is not the same as directing the political or military elements at his disposal to take some action to transform the Assad regime’s reliance on the tactic. Neither President Carter nor any President since have overtly taken much action to deter Syrian sponsorship of terrorism.

While there has been a substantial amount of time spent as adversaries, the U.S. has done very little to become militarily involved in Syria. In one instance that could have sparked involvement, the United States turned a blind eye to the February 1982 destruction of the city of Hama, Syria. The event centered around the Assad regime’s crackdown of Syrian dissidents and the Muslim Brotherhood, who had a large population living in Hama. Hafez al-Assad decided to launch an attack on the city, killing tens of thousands of Syrian citizens in the process. The events “attracted little attention at the time,” yet show the proclivity of the Assad regime to use force against his own population in order to achieve acquiescence (Lewis 2004, 108). It should have been an indicator for things to come. Even more troublesome is that “the massacre in Hama did not prevent the United States from subsequently courting Assad” years later in the attempts to build a Middle East peace deal between Syria and Israel (Lewis 2004, 109).

At the end of the Cold War, after the downfall of the Soviet Union, Assad began to test whether he could engage with the West. This was an opportune time for the United States to formally address the relationship issues with Syria. Both the United States and Syria "saw the decline of the Soviet Union as an opportunity to become more involved in the Middle East" (Scheller 2013, 49). As with many ventures, making progress involves all parties to work in concert, and it was especially remarkable that the Syrian President acknowledged the opportunity and appeared willing to cooperate with the U.S. "Hafez al-Assad saw that it needed a profound change to make up for the major loss Syria suffered through the decline of the Soviet Union" (Scheller 2013, 51). It even seemed that the relationship between the U.S. and Syria began to grow together. The initial Syrian cooperation with the U.S.-led coalition in the 1991 Gulf War got the world's attention, particularly due to Assad's typically adversarial stance toward the United States.

Despite the polite overtures, progress was not maintained and the budding relationship fell apart. Subsequently, the Assad government again became a source of frustration for the United States. Numerous abuses and escalations occurred, and it does not appear that any U.S. President wanted to directly intervene against the Assad regime to correct the course of the relationship. Over the course of the 30 years since the Cold War, the Presidents used a relatively short list of soft power actions, such as sanctions and international condemnations used against Syria, none of which stymied Syrian abuses or provided any relief to the suffering Syrian population. In fact, the few soft power actions taken have largely served as the impetus for Syria to grow closer to Russia and Iran. By giving Assad leeway, the United States inadvertently created a more complex

environment and hampered themselves from improving the relationship with Syria or mitigating the Syrian sponsorship for terrorism.

Also interesting was the thought by some people in Syria, who “after seeing what followed Saddam Hussein’s removal from power in Iraq...formed a well-founded fear of who and what might succeed [Assad]” (Freeman 2016, 114). Despite all the brutality and seeming oppression from the Assad family, some people in Syria viewed the idea of a government installed by the West as more troublesome. Freeman also points out that “No one has really made the case to them that they should have an urgent interest in ending the suffering of the Syrian people” (Freeman 2016, 114). Overcoming this dynamic with extensive historical context will not be easy.

Another context that spawns from the long history of setbacks in the Middle East is the conspiratorial nature of some Arab nations. Generations of mistrust brought forth by numerous missteps and the occasional conspiracy have severely eroded the ability of the United States to operate inside the Middle East with freedom of action. Pipes is upfront in his statement that “whoever hopes to understand the Middle East must recognize the distorting lens of conspiracy theories, understand then, make allowance for them, and perhaps even plan around them” (Pipes 1998, 1). A high level of mistrust exists throughout the entire relationship.

In recent years, problems multiplied. Repercussions from poor, earlier decisions and made attempts to fix the nation even more difficult as Syria has become consumed with various terrorist groups. After remaining relatively obscure for a number of years, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) grew quickly and stormed out of Raqqah, Syria to claim large swaths of territory across Eastern Syria and Western Iraq during the

Summer of 2014. They began to outsource their brutal tactics to carry out attacks in places like Sousse, Ankara, and Paris and joined the likes of al-Qaeda and Hezbollah, who have used Syria as a safe haven to launch aggressive attacks against Europe and the United States. Reality of the ISIS brutality struck home for many Americans after ISIS claimed responsibility for the attacks in San Bernardino and Orlando, thus providing greater impetus for the U.S. to show strength and willingness to act in Syria. The attacks highlighted the lesson for the U.S. that action should occur sooner before problems gain momentum and get out of hand, and that action should be oriented on addressing the underlying problem, not just the symptom of terrorism.

As Piazza points out, "the climate of 'unfreedom'" and "the repression, violence, and systematic humiliation" are major contributors to the adversarial nature of the relationship between the U.S. and Syria (Piazza 2007, 522). The Syrian regime abuses their power to the point where the state fringes on complete collapse which will inevitably lead to increased terrorism. Syria remains the only nation with nearly four decades as a bona fide state sponsor of terrorism, and the situation has no foreseeable resolution. Piazza's point is that without attempting to address the root causes of frustration in Syria, and working toward building better governance, then the U.S. will continue to face the Syrian problem for a long while. "State failure is a nearly perfectly consistent positive predictor of terrorism" (Piazza 2007, 536).

However, it is not just their support for terrorism that disturbs the U.S. government. In addition to their support to terrorism, instability in Syria has created a refugee problem, provided an opportunity for Iran and Russia to make gains on the international stage, and prevented democratic progress. This combination has resulted in

a complex environment that will require large amounts of resources and time to make progress. Therefore, it would be beneficial to get the policy right.

The duration of the problems in Syria raise questions on how some people view the importance of Syria in the international community. Quite frankly, Syria's importance as a nation doesn't jump out automatically, particularly because the nation doesn't have the economic horse-power or natural resources to attract much attention. According to Global Finance Magazine, Syria's overall ranking places them at "173 out of 190 countries" for their economic "ease of doing business" (Global Finance 2018, *GFMag.com*). The country's historical main exports tend to be mined natural resources, but the ongoing Syrian Crisis has restricted the government-owned sector "to the production of fuel and industrial minerals" (Taib 2017, *USGS.gov*). Data from Trading Economics claimed that Syria "represents 0.12 percent of the world economy" (Trading Economics 2018, Syria GDP) and possesses the sixth highest inflation rate of 188 national and multinational economies measured (Trading Economics 2018, Inflation Rate). So, while Waltz claims that "national rankings change slowly," none of these statistics show potential for a drastic rising level of importance in the economic sector (Waltz 1979, 177). However, they do provide some contributing variables to understand the longevity of the crisis.

Somewhat contrarily, Lister defines Syria's importance as an active regional member and as a nation that affects numerous decisions within the United States. In his view, "what Syria lacks in population and economic clout it more than makes up for as a regional crossroads" (Lister 2011, *CNN.com*). Regionally, Syria borders numerous nations allied to the United States, yet remains staunchly opposed to U.S. intentions in

the Middle East. Lister continues, "what happens in Syria sends waves, not ripples, far beyond its borders" (Lister 2011, *CNN.com*). Syria's geographic location, regional role and political partners all contribute to raise the level of complexity of the Syrian Conflict, while at the same time provide an impetus to intervene and attempt to resolve the matter.

The most prominent border situation in Syria continues to be the shared border with Israel. Syria claims the border region of the Golan Heights as Syrian territory, and demands its return from Israeli occupation. This border dispute has lasted over 50 years and has been a principle, but not exclusive, reason for a lack of a peace deal between Israel and Syria. Perhaps MacFarquhar illustrated this best as he wrote a portrayal of the life of Hafez al-Assad following Assad's death in 2000. "Among the Arab autocrats who became stock players in the perpetual drama of negotiating Middle East peace, none was more courted, nor more aloof, than the Syrian leader. No lasting peace could hold without him, but none could be negotiated with him either. A treaty remained elusive largely due to his stubborn role in demanding back every inch of Syrian territory" (MacFarquhar 2000, *NYTimes.com*). It was likely this staunch position that contributed most to the non-resolution of the Syrian and Israeli differences. That stubborn characteristic likely passed from father to son and continues to stymie U.S. efforts in Syria to this day.

As for Syria's other borders, they share their northern neighbor of Turkey, which is allied to the U.S. through mutual participation in the North Atlantic Trade Organization; Iraq, which has been on the receiving end of two U.S.-led coalition intrusions in recent decades; Jordan, a current U.S. ally since signing a Middle East Peace deal partially brokered by President Bill Clinton in 1994; and Lebanon, a frequently abused recipient of aggressive actions by the Syrian regime who often sides with the U.S.

as a friend. In all, the four nations of Turkey, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon remain somewhat dependent on the United States in some capacity for economic, diplomatic or military support, which increases due to the unresolved nature of the problems in Syria. Furthermore, none of them can reach their full potential due to the peripheral effects of living adjacent to one of the world's most oppressive regimes.

As a case in point, the overt actions of the Assad regime in Lebanon and Iraq are great examples of the need for U.S. involvement to halt Syrian incursions. "Although Mr. Assad acknowledged that Syria and Lebanon were sovereign nations, Syrians had long viewed Lebanon as a natural part of their country that had been unfairly severed by European colonial meddling" (MacFarquhar 2000, *NYTimes.com*). Syria's partial occupation of Lebanon in the 1990s and willingness to allow transient fighters to enter Iraq to fight against the United States both demonstrate the Syrian regime's desire to disrupt the affairs of other nations, particularly their neighbors.

In addition to their border disputes, Syria's geographic location in the world places it at a crossroads between ethnicities and religions, and remains one of the more diverse and eclectic societies in the Middle East. Syria is known as the home of some of the longest continuously inhabited locations on earth, where people have deep investments in territory and culture. These factors can build a common bond with the people, but can also place a lot of divisions within the society and breed animosity, especially when a minority faction of the population, namely the Alawite community which has ruled Syria since 1970 through the Assad family, maintains a strangle hold on the powerful positions in the government despite Syria possessing a majority Sunni population.

Layered on top of the diverse population, is the foreign influence that seeks to further divide the Syrian population. Hashmi makes this point succinctly. "Syria is the battlefield for two proxy wars between the US and Russia and between Iran and Saudi Arabia" (Hashmi 2014, 11). So, not only are the people fighting their own government and their brutal antics, but the same people are caught in a struggle between international powers vying for influence in the region, as well as deeply antagonistic religious powers contending for supremacy.

Unsurprisingly, Syria's most important influences are not its geographic neighbors, but their political alignment as an authoritarian regime with other authoritarian regimes, and the external friendships and reliance on both Russia and Iran. Internationally, Syria has its strongest relationships and political partnerships with two revisionist nations that remain largely in opposition to U.S. leadership and the U.S. role in the world. The Syrian government has maintained these relationships so much so that "Russia remains an outspoken critic of what it describes as unwarranted external interference aimed at regime change in Syria and elsewhere" (Blanchard, et al. 2015, 11).

For the U.S., this is concerning because these relationships are a catalyst for greater terrorist and subversive activity, as well as a deterrent for almost all types of intervention directed toward Syria. Kagan, founder and President of the Institute for the Study of War, paints a bleak picture of the realities facing the United States in the situation. "The United States faces a real long-term threat from the Iranian-backed and Russian-backed Assad regime...its military capabilities have been propped up by these external powers. And so, there is no such thing as separating Iran or Russia from one another or the Assad regime" (CFR 2017, *CFR.org*). As Lister pointed out, "Putin seeks

to secure a Russian rise at the expense of American power and influence, not in equal partnership with them" (Lister 2016, *ForeignPolicy.com*). The most problematic aspect of these relationships for the U.S. is that neither Russia nor Iran have any incentive to alter their current course.

"It also seems that the Russian intent was not to prevent the collapse of the Assad regime before a political transition could be planned and carried out but to keep the regime in place. There was no attempt to pacify or politically transform the country" (Haass 2017, 99-100). This is sentiment reiterated by Souleimanov and Notte. There was no "fighting the common international jihadist foe" (Souleimanov 2016, 109). Instead, the reason for Russian involvement in the Syrian Crisis altogether was likely to "ensure the survival of his regime and, by extension, Russian security and economic interests in Syria" (Notte 2016, 65).

Russia's friendship with Assad regime in Syria only reinforces the Russia regime's desire to maintain their strategic access at the Tartus Naval Base as that remains their only Mediterranean Sea access (Chance 2016, *CNN.com*; Nordland 2017, *NYTimes.com*; Peck 2017, *NationalInterest.org*). Hashimi claims that the Russians are rather staunch in this desire to maintain possession of Tartus. "Russia is not going to accept a pro-Western regime in Syria...Russians would go to any extent to defend its strategic interests in Syria" (Hashmi 2014, 20). This is not to say that Russia doesn't have legitimate concerns with terrorism emanating from the Middle East. Chance explicitly states: "Kremlin concerns about the spread of Islamist violence are genuine" (Chance 2016, *CNN.com*). However, it seems the Russian desire to protect its national interest in upholding the Assad regime is more important than their fears of ISIS.

Plentiful evidence suggests that the objectives of Russian targeting in Syria are not aligned to ISIS, but instead to threats to the Assad regime, including elements supported by the United States (Friedman G 2016, *GeopoliticalFutures.com*; Notte 2016, 65; Souleimanov 2016, 108). It remains clear that Russian involvement in Syria was meant to serve Russian interests, even if those interests counter U.S. interests.

While Russia seeks to counterbalance against the U.S., they shun United Nations involvement as well. The United Nations Security Council has been unable to break through efforts to bring a true cease-fire in Syria, mostly due to Russia veto power, which they used "11 times to protect the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad" (Morello 2018, *WashingtonPost.com*). However, this is not because Russia doesn't want peace. Robertson confirms that "while the United States has sat on the diplomatic sidelines for the best part of a year, Russia has pushed Syria peace talks on its own terms" (Robertson 2018, *CNN.com*). Russia is interested in bringing peace to Syria, but they want peace under Russian terms.

It seems that Russian diplomatic influence has had an effect on Turkey's willingness to accept Assad as the continuous authority in Syria as well. While Turkey had opposed Assad's continuous rule in Syria, in January 2017, "a Turkish official suggested publicly for the first time that Turkey would accept a peace deal in Syria's six-year-old war that would allow Mr. Assad to stay in power" (Nordland 2017, *NYTimes.com*). This is a considerable deviation of Turkish policy given all the Turkish animosity toward Assad and the Turkish government's continued life support for millions of Syrian refugees who will likely not depart Turkey for their homes in Syria with Assad in power. While much of the rest of the region has not changed, Turkey's suggested

change of heart toward Assad could be problematic going forward, especially for a U.S. president who hasn't completely understood the problem or provided a viable vision for resolving differences with Syria.

Russia and Turkey are not the only nations that want Assad to remain the leader in Syria. Iran has also entered the conflict on the side of Assad and with good reason. Iran "is the Syrian regime's only consistently cooperative relationship with a regional power" (Scheller 2013, 151). "Syria is Iran's main ally in the Arab world, and Tehran entered the conflict fearing that any successor to the Assad regime led by the country's Sunni majority would align with its rival Saudi Arabia" (Laub 2017, *CFR.org*). Iran wants to preserve the Alawite regime in Damascus as a balance against the perpetual confrontation between Sunni and Shia, as they believe they have a fundamental right to support their religious comrades.

Not only does the Iranian government want to keep Assad in power, they also desire to maintain some access to the Mediterranean Sea and Syrian border with Israel. Some reasonable concern resonates from the Iranian support to Assad, mainly due to the potential to escalate Iran's anti-Israel rhetoric to a point of open hostilities, as "the greatest immediate terrorist threat to Israel would be free to point its formidable weapons array toward America's most valued regional ally" (Lister 2016, *ForeignPolicy.com*).

With all these items hampering the United States in its efforts to resolve the differences with Syria and work toward solving Syria's many problems, it is imperative that the President preserve the U.S. standing. "The ability of the United States to achieve its foreign policy priorities abroad depends upon the legitimacy of its international reputation and the appeal of its foreign policy, political culture and engagement with the

international community" (Chalk et al. 2010, 100). With the Russian, Iranian, and Syrian governments undermining the U.S. reputation and policy objectives, achieving U.S. foreign policy priorities is inherently more difficult. The intentional eroding of the American influence in the international community greatly affects the U.S. national interest, and it is not something the United States should take lightly when it comes to responding.

Overall, there is no more pressing international humanitarian concern in the world today than the current ongoing crisis originating in Syria. The loss of life has been catastrophic. "The Syrian civil war, which has cost nearly a quarter million lives, has created millions of refugees and emerged as a magnet for jihadis from around the world, including Europe, who will eventually return, made lethal by the experience, to their homelands" (Cohen et al. 2016, 8-9). Millions of refugees fled the conflict and inundated the national systems designed to provide support to displaced persons. Nations like Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan, and some from Western Europe and North America, have struggled to keep up with the humanitarian needs of the fleeing people, and simultaneously struggled to find a solution to the crisis. "The complexity of the situation, with a high number of regional and international interests at stake, has served as a powerful argument against international involvement" (Scheller 2013, 215). Yet, it is that same level of complexity that simultaneously draws international involvement.

The Syrian Conflict provides a prime example of how U.S. neglect for addressing the root causes of tension, namely fear of external takeover of Syria, exacerbates contention and leads to greater challenges. This is the environment the U.S. faces as it pertains to Syria. So, while McKew bluntly argued that "hard power matters" (McKew

2017, *Politico.com*), it is yet to be seen whether those tactics will help the Syrian population or turn the corner to resolve the ongoing crisis. There had been a blatant lack of the use of hard power against the Syrian regime by the United States until April 2017 when President Trump decided that Syrian use of chemical weapons against their population warranted military action. Granted, United States has been bombing ISIS elements inside the Syrian border since the terrorist group began their rampage into Iraq, but those strikes have largely occurred in a territory not controlled by the Syrian regime and against targets not working for the Syrian government. Furthermore, the U.S. military presence in Syria has not deterred the Syrian regime from continuing their aggressive campaign against the Syrian population. Therefore, for the overwhelming majority of the abuses directed by the Assad regime against the Syrian population, the U.S. has done little to assist.

2.1. RECENT U.S. POLICY TOWARDS SYRIA

"The widespread perception that Washington is indifferent to the suffering of Syrian civilians has led ever more members of the Syrian opposition to consider al Qaeda a more willing and more effective protector of their lives and interests than the United States, the supposed 'leader of the free world'" (Lister 2016, *ForeignPolicy.com*). Lister's comment is interesting if one takes a wholistic view of U.S. foreign policy directed at Syria since the end of the Cold War. Some say the policy strategy has been relatively stagnant and unchanged, despite the escalation of violence since 2011 (Glennon 2015, 3; Fingar 2011, 131; Scheller 2013, 63). Given the even greater deterioration of the situation in Syria over the course of the past three decades without considerable U.S.

interactions, it's not hard to conclude that at least some indifference and stagnation have been present. Others perceive nuanced policy changes to remain in balance with the events on ground. It's worthwhile to understand these two dynamics.

When discussing foreign policy since the end of the Cold War, "the continuities throughout this period are striking, and the changes we find are more a product of the situation than the views of the person in office" (Jervis 2013, 154). The implication from Jervis is that stagnation has largely persisted from one administration to the next. McKew believes that the U.S. hasn't had a clear vision of how to counter Russia's resurgent involvement in Syria. She claims the Obama Administration used "last century's diplomatic toolkit" and the Trump administration came into office with "a similar lack of vision" (McKew 2017, *Politico.com*).

Glennon recognized the stagnation in some of the national security policies currently implemented by the U.S. and questioned the role of the President in providing the direction for the change. "Why does national security policy remain constant even when one President is replaced by another, who as a candidate repeatedly, forcefully, and eloquently promised fundamental changes in that policy?" (Glennon 2015, 3). Glennon specifically referred to President Obama's policies and the hope for change; however, the hope appears to have been dashed by the realities of the situation and inability to communicate a way forward. Other scholars have struggled to fully determine whether "the state's policy would have been significantly different had someone of different characteristics been in power" (Jervis 2013, 160).

As an example of the environment changing policy, President Trump's decision to retaliate against Syrian use of chemical weapons "can hardly be seen in tune with the

overall structure of foreign policy maintained by America toward the country" (Roychowdhury 2017, *IndianExpress.com*). President Trump decided that using precision weapons to strike Syrian regime targets was a worthy warning to send Assad. That doesn't mean that the U.S. actions were unwarranted or unwelcomed by those who wish to see Assad pay for his indiscriminate killing of innocent lives. However, it seems that President Trump's choice differed from the choices that many people perceived his predecessors would make, and may reflect a greater willingness to use U.S. power assertively. As an individual leader, President Trump's propensity to show force in Syria stands out. On the surface, his strikes against Syria seem no different than President Clinton's choice to strike targets in Iraq during Operation Desert Fox or in Sudan when targeting al Qa'ida terror cells. The primary difference lies in President Trump's decision to use military force against Syrian targets, which the other Presidents did not do during their terms despite some ostensible justifications to do so. Although, another difference was the hastiness of the decision-making to conduct strikes less than 48 hours after Syria used chemical weapons in Khan Shaykhun and Douma, Syria, as compared to the weeks and months of planning and deliberation used by President Clinton in the previous examples. President Trump's choice raised the well-established question into whether an individual President's can directly affect and influence foreign policy, as the strikes against the Syrian regime are a significant departure away from previous U.S. actions in Syria which have largely steered away from retribution.

With all the various complexities surrounding Syria and with all the layers of factors the President must consider to form a reasonable way forward, it's no wonder

why the policies in Syria have been incoherent for so long. "Altogether, the United States seemed to be without a strategy and vision for Syria" (Scheller 2013, 63).

The chimes of an incoherent policy toward Syria come from many different places. Scheller called the U.S. policies directed at Syria "contradictory" as "Washington alternately accused Damascus of permitting foreign fighters to cross into Iraq, and praised its efforts to improve border security" (Scheller 2013, 192). Separately, "after initially calling for Bashar al Asad to step down, the Obama Administration has actively engaged since 2012 in multilateral efforts to reach a negotiated settlement between the Asad government and many of the opposition groups arrayed against it" (Blanchard, et al. 2015, 15). Another example of the contradictory nature of the policies is the specific drawing of a "red line," only to have that line repeatedly crossed, and subsequently to have the President teeter on whether he should carry out the threat of retaliation (Obama 8/20/2012, President's News Conference).

In a more recent example, "in late March [2017], senior U.S. officials signaled that the United States would prioritize the fight against the Islamic State and said that Syrian President Bashar al-Asad's future would be determined by the Syrian people" (Humud et al. 2017, Summary). Focusing attention in Syria away from the Assad regime and directing the attention toward ISIS at the beginning of President Trump's administration (Trump 1/28/2017, Memo) further confused U.S. policy by discounting President Obama's repeated demands for Assad to step down as President of Syria (Obama 8/18/2011, Statement). While dealing with ISIS was necessary, the transition between President Obama and President Trump showed a considerable difference in the

approach to dealing with the problems in Syria and highlighted the incoherency of the overall approach to Syria.

In a 2017 House Committee on Foreign Affairs hearing on Syria policy options, Representatives from both sides of the aisle bellowed about the lack of coherent strategy. Republican Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen of Florida flatly stated she is "still very concerned about a lack of a comprehensive strategy in Syria" (HCFA 2017, *CQRollCall.com*). Her Democrat counterpart from New York, Representative Gregory W. Meeks, clamored: "I wish that the President of the United States would also tell us, as members of Congress, what should be or what the strategy is next" (HCFA 2017, *CQRollCall.com*). Meeks continued to state "the president has stated basically that he is acting impulsively without clearly articulating a strategy on Syria" (HCFA 2017, *CQRollCall.com*). Altogether the hearing offered a very blunt statement on the complete lack of progress being made toward any goal in Syria.

Overall, largely speaking, U.S. policies since the end of the Cold War have not provided a coherent way forward for how to address the situation in Syria.

Chapter 3 – U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ROLE IN FOREIGN POLICY

Clearly, in the case of Syria, questions linger around the strategic goal as communicated by the U.S. President. While the Constitution assigns the Senate a role in ratifying treaties, the President is primarily responsible for leading the efforts and setting the agenda on foreign policy matters (Neustadt 1991, 8; Oldemeinen 2012, *e-ir.info*; Aberbach and Peterson 2005, 189; Edwards and Wayne 2014, 467). Tower puts the Presidential role in better perspective. "Five hundred and thirty-five Congressmen with different philosophies, regional interests and objectives in mind cannot forge a unified foreign policy that reflects the interests of the United States as a whole" (Tower 1981, 233). It is too difficult to form one opinion and have an entire body of government work toward the same goal if there is not a single vision to guide the way forward. Practically speaking, it becomes responsibility of the President to be the primary individual to guide the way forward.

Since his work pulls him in so many directions, he rarely has enough time to commit to each issue. Ramo, Allison, Moe and Bennis have pointed out that the President does not have much time to seriously think about each and every crisis as they have been ushered along to the next issue that needs his direct attention. Ramo makes the point bluntly. "No president or foreign minister can possibly master the details of each small problem on the global stage" (Ramo 2009, 251). This is especially true as the frequency of crises seems to increase in the age of social media. "Most issues...emerge piecemeal over time, one lump in one context, a second in another. Hundreds of issues compete for player's attention every day. Each player is forced to fix upon his issues for that day, deal with them on their own terms, and rush on to the next. Thus, the character

of emerging issues and the pace at which the game is played converge to yield government 'decisions' and 'actions' as *collages*" (Allison 1999, 256-257). Lending credence to the discussion about time, the analysis showed, more often than not, the Presidents were too heavily mired in the daily minutia of the Syrian Conflict, and every other policy matter, to convey their thoughts and vision on where the U.S. should proceed and how their relationship should develop. "Presidents have many obligations, of which implementing policy is only one" (Edwards and Wayne 2014, 282). "Power pulls the president into mounting commitments, exaggerated promises, and widening distractions--'mission creep,' in its many infectious forms" (Suri 2017, ix). "The combination of knowledge problems and time pressures helps to guarantee that the president will often prefer arrangements not too different from those already in place; he does not have the time to design..., and his reliance upon institutional memory and popular concepts of organizational design encourages the familiar rather than the experimental" (Moe 1985, 243). Large changes in policy and outlook do not really happen from one president to the next, except the trivial policy differences between parties. Because there is so much for the President to do, "routine work drives out nonroutine work and smothers to death all creative planning" (Bennis 1989, 35).

The lack of time has been used as the reason for why the United States has not done much in Syria, and there may be some truth to that piece of the conversation, particularly as it comes to giving enough time to think about events. Weldes highlighted, "for the state to act, it must have some understanding of its surroundings and some specification of its goals" (Weldes 1999, 12). Ramo appeared to agree. "Instead of starting with a view of how we want the world to be and then jamming that view into

place, we start more reasonably with a picture of how the world is" (Ramo 2009, 108).

Both seem to think that regardless of the vision, the President must have a firm understanding of the current situation and the contributing factors for the overall historical situation, so he can provide a vision that is a realistic and prudent way forward. If the President never has the time to think about events as they contribute to the long-term situation, then it seems implausible that he will have enough time to consider the way forward and properly communicate his vision. In a time-constrained environment, success will be hard to locate, and if the U.S. President does not commit the time and effort necessary, then the entire venture could be futile.

"In foreign affairs...[the President] can almost always get support for policies that he believes will protect the nation--but his problem is to find a viable policy" (Wildavsky [1966] 1998, 23). To find this policy, the President needs to "begin with the end in mind" (Covey 1989, 95-144). This involves him putting together the vision for what he seeks to accomplish. Then the President should seek inputs from his secretaries and advisors to find a strategy that could facilitate the vision. "The risk is always that the conclusions will be messier and less satisfactory than anticipated. There may not even be a proper conclusion" (Freedman 2013, 627). Freedman continues to point out, that "even when the desired endpoint is reached, it is not really the end" (Freedman 2013, 628). There will remain be a need to modify and continue to expand the vision to the next milestone. But the start point should always be a good vision.

It is well established that any U.S. action against the Syrian government falls within Presidential responsibilities and authorities. This is the case regardless of the state of the crisis. Even prior to the 2011 Arab Spring, Syria was a nation that required

monitoring by the President due to Syria's status on the list of *State Sponsors of Terrorism* and due to Syria's continuous encroachments on Israel and Lebanon. After the start of the Arab Spring, the situation in Syria gained crisis status. That is important because, "times of crisis, particularly war, offer presidents the opportunity to lead forcefully. The public expects and accepts strong leadership in such times" (Goethals 2005, 567). Since the Presidency offers its incumbent enormous powers, information and resources with the potential to affect any situation, one might think that presidential leadership reigns high when determining and implementing U.S. foreign policy strategies, especially during crises. But, if that was the case, and if the President has identified that Syria matters, why has the office holder not been able to improve the situation in Syria? It seems the President is the primary decision maker, so either he is not as powerful as he might think, or perhaps the collective Presidents have not sought a way forward for the relationship between the U.S. and Syria.

The President of the United States is the central figure in this discussion given the President's authorities granted by the *Constitution of the United States* and the political deference given to the office holder by the U.S. population, government and international community. Generally speaking, as the leader of the world's preeminent democracy, the people obligate the U.S. President to keep them informed as they want to know what he intends to do to affect situations such as the Syrian Crisis. Therefore, Presidents have several mechanisms through which they are expected to inform the public. The people require him to hold press conferences to answer questions and to provide speeches on major issues. Additionally, Congress acknowledges that Executive Orders "are founded on the authority of the President derived from the Constitution or statute, they may have

the force and effect of law..." (U.S. Congress, House 1957, 1). These essentially give the President broad sweeping abilities to outline and enforce laws already passed by Congress. Collectively, these items offer a window to view the President's influence when dealing with various problems. So, when events around the globe do not immediately affect the United States' national security but may affect the U.S. power projection or security in the future, people want to know how the President envisions the U.S. engagement and intends to keep the U.S. in its position as the world's leader. Essentially, the people want to know the President's vision to resolve problems.

3.1. PRESIDENTIAL ROLE IN NATIONAL INTEREST

One problem that blossomed early during the post-Cold War period was the inability to distinguish between vital conflicts and those that posed no immediate threat but could evolve and turn into greater problems. Jervis cautioned that "the Cold War preoccupation with security left us with two harmful intellectual legacies. First, scholars and leaders suffered an atrophy of their skills in dealing with nonvital interests and with conflicts that are significant but do not endanger the state. Second, the Cold War fear of the Soviet Union compounded the inherently difficult problems of maintaining a sense of proportion in the problems we now face" (Jervis 2016, 7). These legacies created an environment which blinded the United States to rising problems because of the portrayal of each random crisis in an inflated manner, while numerous smaller problems went unattended bubbling under the surface. This dynamic hampered the U.S. in identifying smaller problems early enough to address them before they escalated. Jervis explains that it is justifiable and necessary for "the United States to maintain a sense of proportion

about the dangers that remain and to balance important but less than vital interests" (Jervis 2016, 3). Even though he does not specifically name Syria, he points to the crux of the situation in Syria by implying that the U.S. President probably hasn't played much of a role because the problems in Syria did not commence as being problems of vital importance. Instead, they gradually became more important as time passed.

In terms of posing a threat, the Syrian regime does not pose an existential threat to the United States in and of itself. The Syrian regime, while seemingly complicit in growth and development of the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations within their borders, is not known to be exporting their own radical ideology with direct intent to infiltrate the United States and conduct attacks on Americans or their interests. Plus, Syria certainly ranks lower on the list of international problem makers than Russia or Iran. However, both Russia and Iran work together to protect Assad, creating an environment where all three, Russia, Iran and Syria, have joined forces and complicated efforts to find a solution to the Syrian Crisis.

With this dynamic in mind, some have seen non-intervention as a viable policy. Katz concluded that "the Obama administration sees a policy of non-intervention as being very much in America's pragmatic interests" (Katz 2013, 3). In Katz opinion, Obama decided much like his predecessors that intervening in Syria was not worth the political capital and was not in the U.S. interests. Therefore, Syria was not important enough to force U.S. action. George Bush made a similar decision to stay away from Syria, despite labeling Assad as part of the "axis of evil" and possessing evidence that Syria permitted transitory jihadists to use Syria as a safe haven to attack Americans fighting in the Iraq

War (Bush 1/29/2002, SOTU). However, contrary to Katz's opinion, it remains difficult to ignore terrorism, especially with the quantities directed at the U.S. and U.S. interests.

Katz and Jervis might say Syria has not been solved because the President of the United States has been busy solving other more important crises in the world and Syria hasn't been solved yet because it is a lesser priority than other crises. While it may be accurate that Syria is of lesser importance than some other international matters, the assumption that the United States has solved many other crises in the world since the end of the Cold War is worth investigating. One example may be the crisis in Kosovo, as some may view the predicament in Kosovo in 1998 as an example of a crisis of arguably equal proportion to the one currently in Syria, and one that the United States led to a result that trends toward a full resolution. Although, the strategic importance for Kosovo, when compared to Syria, is debatable.

Altogether, these facts demonstrate there is sustained and tremendous U.S. interests in resolving matters with Syria. Regardless of where Syria falls on a list of national priorities, the U.S. has had national interests in solving the several issues throughout Syria. Plus, even if someone could justify that Syria's geographic position in the Middle East is of less than key strategic interest, there is no reason to proclaim that Syria's actions, both those done actively and those they've passively permitted to occur within their borders, are not within the U.S. national interests. Syria is a nation with many problems that affect several layers of U.S. national interests, and solving those problems will undoubtedly improve the lives of millions of people in Syria, as well as provide a positive example of U.S. leadership in times of crisis.

In addition to his constitutional authorities, he is also a leading figure in the identification and development of national interest, and as such, it is incumbent on the President to view problems through a lens of importance for the progression of U.S. national interest. One of the shocking things about Syria is the surprising level of importance the nation carries on a range of topics that generally demand U.S. action. There appears to be clear justification and national interest on the subject of terrorism. "What happens in Syria does not stay in Syria" (Hof 2017, 2). Unfortunately, one of the most dominant exports from Syria recently has been terrorism.

Another "major policy concern of the United States has been the use or loss of control of chemical weapons stocks in Syria during the ongoing civil war" (Blanchard, et al. 2015, 25). The potential loss of control of such dangerous weapons in close proximity to the hotbed of numerous terrorist groups, and the potentially catastrophic loss of life if used, is scary. Furthermore, the risk of accusations of negligence if something catastrophic happens is extremely high.

In addition to terrorism and chemical weapons, general freedoms do not exist for much of the population in Syria. The 1999 Freedom in the World ranks Syria as "one of the region's most repressive regimes" (FITW 1999, 1). Later, the 2017 Freedom in the World rankings gave Syria the lowest score on their freedom scale for the 195 countries rated in the analysis; Syria received the only negative score on a scale from zero to 100 (FITW 2017, 1). These rankings provide clear demonstration of the negative trend as well as clear justification for why the U.S. could be more proactive towards Syria.

Furthermore, Syria has grown into a humanitarian disaster with large segments of the Syrian population suffering under the brutal oppression of the Assad regime, despite

clear legal justification for intervention and more forceful actions. Refugees continue to depart Syria and overwhelm Middle Eastern and European allies, thus continuing to increase the amount of U.S. donations to support allies. As of 2017, the U.S. was "the largest donor of humanitarian assistance to the Syria Crisis" (Humud et al. 2017, Summary). What is confusing is that the U.S. has set a precedent to deal with all of these various problems in other crises; however, has not acted in force to resolve those matters in Syria.

While discussing U.S. involvement across the Middle East, including Syria, Sullivan proclaims "the United States risks a great deal in terms of national security interests if it decides to turn away from these countries" (Sullivan, 2016, 52). It's not difficult to find the rationale for this claim. According to the 2017 National Security Strategy, "the primary transnational threats Americans face are from jihadist terrorists and transnational criminal organizations" (NSS 2017, 10). ISIS, Al Qaeda and several other terrorist organizations operate in and throughout portions of Syria, yet the Syrian government does little to stymie them.

Kimberly Kagan, founder and President of the Institute for the Study of War, claimed "the United States faces a vital national security threat from Syria, which is exporting terror and terror groups from its borders throughout the region and into Europe and beyond" (CFR 2017, *cfr.org*). Her colleague Mona Yacoubian, former Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Bureau of the Middle East at USAID, concurred. Yacoubian stated "the conflict itself, the violence itself, constitutes an enormous strategic threat" (CFR 2017, *cfr.org*). Scores of others agree as well, including Humud who concluded, "after six years of conflict, the challenges posed to U.S. national security by

the situation in Syria have multiplied and evolved" (Humud et al. 2017, 1). The mounting evidence suggests that the United States needs to act to protect their interest.

The United States has too much to lose by sitting on the sidelines, namely their credibility. One of the most convincing reasons that resonates in the national interest is the premise that if another nation deliberately seeks to undermine U.S. foreign policy objectives with the purpose of protracting U.S. actions and draining U.S. resources, then the act should elicit a U.S. response. That doesn't mean the U.S. should jump to military intervention, but those actions would justify some response by the United States. The U.S. cannot just allow other nations to back the U.S. into isolation or dictate U.S. foreign policy. Granted, the U.S. should evaluate any response appropriately, but one can certainly claim that threatening the U.S. warrants activity.

"Broadly speaking, U.S. vital and core interests remain remarkably consistent" (Hooker 2015, 318); however, the environment where we have tried to meet those goals has not maintained the same level of consistency. This dichotomy has created a situation where it's difficult to understand the direction the U.S. intends to take because the national interest and foreign policy no longer appear to match the situation that drove the interest or policy in the first place. President Obama provided a great depiction of the layers of problems and the complexity of the President's job, and clearly shows how difficult it can be to decide where and how to act. From an interview in 2013, he explained: "Every morning...our intelligence and national security teams come in here and they essentially brief me on the events of the previous day...And a big chunk of my day is occupied by news of war, terrorism, ethnic clashes, violence done to innocents. And what I have to constantly wrestle with is where and when can the United States

intervene or act in ways that advance our national interest, advance our security, and speak to our highest ideals and sense of common humanity" (Foer and Hughes 2013, 6). Being the President is not an easy job as the work essentially places the future and fate of the U.S. in the decision-making process of one individual who decides where and when to apply U.S. resources to advance the nation's interests. As President Obama explained in this interview, the challenge he faced as president was to attempt to bring a sense of consistency to the chaotic world where multiple crises all fall under the umbrella of national interests, yet the U.S. cannot act in the same manner for all the incidents. Ultimately, he needed to decide where and when to apply effort and resources.

Obama essentially verified the same conclusion that Bueno de Mesquita reached in 2011. "States don't have interests, people do" and "the prime mover of interests in any state...is the person at the top--the leader" (Bueno de Mesquita 2011, xxiii). Specifically, the national interests of the United States are essentially determined by the person who happens to be the President and that person's perspective on rising problems. Lindsey and Hobbs agreed. "Any personal involvement by the president in diplomacy is inherently a signal of American interests" (Lindsey and Hobbs 2015, 1090).

An interesting dynamic occurs with some people who believe "western governments are unwilling to act because they see no vital interests at stake in Syria; Western publics are leery because they see everything as a replay of Iraq; both are united in the patronizing, orientalist assumption that the stability of a state is more valuable than the rights of its people" (Ahmad 2016, 87). When viewing Ahmad's statement through the Bueno de Mesquita lens, it appears that the U.S. Presidents have no interest in solving the problem. But, the President himself indicated he would act. "America will always

act, alone if necessary, to protect our people and our allies, but on issues of global concern, we will mobilize the world to work with us and make sure other countries pull their own weight " (Obama 1/12/2016, SOTU). At a minimum, Ahmad's point about the Syrian people being less important than the fate of the Assad, who is largely culpable for putting Syria in this predicament, builds frustration with Syrians and the global community alike. Those members of the Syrian population who are deeply frustrated with Assad are not likely to give up quickly.

President Obama stated: "I think that we have both a moral obligation and a national security interest in, A, ending the slaughter in Syria, but, B, also ensuring that we've got a stable Syria that is representative of all the Syrian people and is not creating chaos for its neighbors" (Obama 5/7/2013, President's News Conference with Park). From this perspective, the actions and comments made by each of the Presidents are important to ascertain the national interests. Over the course of time since the Cold War ended, the level of involvement with Syria has changed with each incumbent. President George H.W. Bush was somewhat agnostic to the problems in Syria, thus indicating little national interest; however, his successor President Clinton was very heavily involved with his attempts to build a comprehensive peace. His efforts showed a strong national interest; although, the objectives he tried to reach had little to do with building a better relationship between Syria and the U.S. President George W. Bush refused to address President Assad from Syria, but remained somewhat involved in the overt diplomacy through his public communications, calling for Syria to drop their support for terrorism. President Obama remained outspoken on the problems that exist in Syria and frequently conveyed a need to resolve them, but lacked the commitment to ensure anything would

happen. Both President George W. Bush and President Obama carried forward the strong interest portrayed by President Clinton. When it comes to fully explaining why Syria mattered and required U.S. involvement, President Obama probably said it best. "We may not be directly, imminently threatened by what's taking place..., but our long-term national security will be impacted in a profound way, and our humanity is impacted in a profound way" (Obama 9/4/2013, President's News Conference with Reinfeldt). President Obama explained that the conflict in Syria has broad sweeping international implications and is "a threat to global peace and security" (Obama 9/6/2013, President's News Conference). Conversely, President Trump has been mostly silent about Syria, indicating the nation should be left to its own accords aside from his punishment of Syria for their use of chemical weapons. These fluctuations in presidential involvement in matters pertaining to Syria over this period indicate a frequently changing prioritization of items within the national interest.

It seems presidential involvement does not prioritize where every item falls on the scale of importance for national interest. It becomes complex when situations, particularly like the one in Syria, fall outside the "two central considerations: national security and economic interests" that some people view as the main components of national interest in today's world (Chalk et al. 2010, 5). Spent effort is useless if the President cannot or does not communicate what he believes is in the national interest and what he sees as a purpose for involvement and desired outcome. "The formation of foreign policy is always coupled to a state's national interest as defined by its leaders" (Samhat and Payne 2006, 251). When an item that affects the U.S. national interest

arises it is incumbent on the President to view that item wholistically and communicate how he perceives the outcome of the situation in the foreign policy realm.

Unfortunately, in a world so hyperconnected and reliant on others, "national interests can be jarred and reshaped in an instant" (Ramo 2009, 35). Ramo really means the priority for national interests may change based on the personalities making decision, and various events as they occur. Some events have the potential to immediately affect how the U.S. will prioritize efforts to expend resources. For instance, stopping terrorism didn't just materialize from nowhere on September 12, 2001. The U.S. had a national interest in stopping terrorism long before then, as Presidents inherently know they need to protect their citizens. Yet, at the same time, terrorism wasn't as high a priority on September 10th as it became on September 12th, 2001, after the priority changed. Unfortunately, not every situation has a prominent event to provide a catalyst for change. During these other times, the President must be able to recognize signs, either immediate or gradually escalating situations, that can affect the national interest and his ability to project a vision that will positively affect the U.S. national interest.

It is burdensome to conceive of all the items that might expand the frame of national interest beyond simple items that directly affect the nation. For instance, Ramo reasons that it is important to elevate "to the highest level of grand strategy...the quality of the lives of people who have been largely ignored in mainstream strategic thinking" (Ramo 2009, 243). Ramo argues it is squarely in the national interest of the United States to protect those who cannot protect themselves, and we should see Presidential involvement in these circumstances. Yet, despite numerous pieces of evidence clearly

demonstrating Presidential involvement in similar humanitarian situations, protecting unfortunate people is rarely the single, sole reason for U.S. involvement in some action.

From a legal perspective, Hedges points out there is precedent to intervene in a case such as Syria. "If an oppressed people is carrying on a revolt there is a feeling against an intervention to restore order, although an intervention in the same case for the suppression of a cruel tyranny would be looked on with little disfavor" (Hedges 1915, 54). Disregard this precedent being over a century old, the fact remains that the international community views it as acceptable to rise up against oppressive governments. One case to demonstrate this point was the 2011 operation led by the U.S. and members of the international community to oust Muammar Gaddafi from Libya. Under the Responsibility to Protect mantra rose the thought that "a state that engages in criminal behavior towards its own people has forfeited not just its moral, but also its legal right to sovereignty" (Reiff 2008, *NYTimes.com*). Syria clearly met the necessary criteria in 2011 to support intervention and several members of the international community likely continue to believe Assad is a tyrant that must be confronted. While meeting these criteria does not equate to possessing Presidential vision, knowing that the option for intervention exists opens the door for additional possibilities for how the President could proceed.

Nevertheless, humanitarian disasters come in several forms, and, "in cases where the direct threats to U.S. vital interests was less clear, overwhelming force was not applied, public and congressional support was not strong or sustained, and the strategic objective was unclear, defeat or stalemate ensued" (Hooker 2015, 327). This is what the U.S. faces. At best, it's difficult to say the U.S. actions toward Syria have resulted in

anything other than a stalemate. Unfortunately, at worst, some could say the U.S. has already accepted defeat and moved along to other issues.

Chapter 4 – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research distinguishes between key terms such as strategy, grand strategy, and vision. While none of the terms are used prolifically by the President, it's important to understand their difference to understand where the President's role should be in foreign policy decision-making.

To start, Clausewitz claimed that strategy "forms the plan of the war, and to this end it links together the series of acts which are to lead to the final decision" (Clausewitz [1832] 2004, 133). Very closely aligned to Clausewitz is Gray, who viewed "strategy is neither policy nor armed conflict; rather it is the bridge between them" (Gray 1999, 4). The common thread is that strategy revolves around the link between current policy and the items that are necessary within that policy to wage and win in a conflict or competition. Strategy underlies the plan for accomplishing a set mission or achieving an idea by outlining how one should proceed to achieve the desired outcome. However, this research is searching for more than the strategy employed to reach the policy objective. Like the military mission itself, something drives the policy objective and sets the marker that the collective U.S. government must achieve.

The concept of grand strategy offered a possibility worth exploring. Friedman and Logan said: "strategy is logic for a choice among options; it prioritizes. Strategy is 'grand' when it aims to guide other foreign policy goals and decisions" (Friedman and Logan 2016, 17). Sir Basil Henry Liddell Hart offered some great insight as well. "While the horizon of strategy is bounded by the war, grand strategy looks beyond the war to the subsequent peace" (Liddell Hart 1991, 322). Looking beyond war is important because the underlying reason for war is to alter the adversarial nation to act in a different

manner, more consistent with one's own nation. Therefore, if peace is the ultimate goal to achieve, grand strategy is the plan for how to reach that state. Grand strategy is therefore a higher form of strategy with the expressed intent to achieve a greater objective than the more localized strategy objectives. The point that Liddell Hart and Friedman and Logan collectively make is that grand strategy pertains to the plan for how one attempts to achieve that outcome. However, grand strategy is not the final outcome itself.

Grand strategy, just like foreign policy, is not just about war. "Fighting power is but one of the instruments of grand strategy--which should take account of and apply the power of financial pressure, of diplomatic pressure, of commercial pressure, and, not least of ethical pressure, to weaken the opponent's will" (Liddell Hart 1991, 322). Grand strategy decisions include portions that are diplomatic, economic, informational, as well as militaristic. For instance, the president can make decisions on how to improve the informational integrity coming from one country, the economic condition with a different country, and how to reprimand another country diplomatically for violating an internationally recognized treaty. None of these decisions are direct leads into a military conflict. Grand strategy, and foreign policy in general, "is about relations among nations, which are usually peaceful rather than conflictual, and involve national leaders in the pursuit and negotiations of all sorts of cooperative arrangements--from economic trade to cultural exchange to military alliance--intended to promote the mutual advantage of participating states" (Moe and Howell 1999, 163). Grand strategy is about the overall focus of the entire government, and how the government works together to meet its desired objectives.

"True grand strategy takes the long view, focusing on American strengths and interests to address the global challenges of the moment in a larger framework of diplomacy, economic strength, military power and global leadership" (Hooker 2015, 329). It centers around the application of the means through which the government intends to meet its ends and is guided by policy, reason, and the steady state bureaucracy at the highest levels of the government. The U.S. applies grand strategy to achieve various goals in the myriad environments around the world. Given that relationships, economic conditions, diplomacy and commercial activity differ from place to place, discrete grand strategies become apparent as some problems affect each nation differently, and other problems encompass entire regions. Unfortunately, "the definition of grand strategy... is elusive, and often operates on a threshold of evidence akin to 'I know it when I see it'" (Sayle 2011, 1). The grand strategy applied in every situation is likely different based on inputs from the environment. The multiple tools and various components of the U.S. government must constantly adjust to reflect changes in the separate regions and functional problems and attempt new ways of achieving the overall goal. Hoffman attempts to force this point. "Strategies must evolve consistent with ever changing contextual factors in the geostrategic environment" (Hoffman 2013, 40). It remains the President's responsibility to drive that plan based on the constant injects, and breadth of information and resources he has at his disposal.

The President's job is to outline the goals the U.S. government should strive to meet, namely why the U.S. government is applying resources and what the outcome should be, and then the President should direct resources to meet those goals. This is how leaders in many organizations achieve success. "For long-term success, such leaders

need a coherent, integrated combination of an inspiring purpose of mission" to accompany their grand strategy (Ellis 2013, 6). Ramo believes that traditional grand strategy "began with a vision of the world as we wanted it to be...and then directed every fiber of national life toward achieving it" (Ramo 2009, 107). Fingar appears to completely agree. "Those charged with the formulation of policy and strategy do have a rich store of historical knowledge and useful theoretical insights. They also know a great deal about how other nations' leaders think, and should begin with a clear vision of what grand strategy is supposed to achieve rather than a minimalist sense of what is possible" (Fingar 2011, 120).

The junction where both Ramo and Fingar specifically agree is the requirement for vision. Leaders need to start with the vision, and the strategy to achieve that vision compiles based on all the implements that can be applied to reach that outcome. Therefore, the leader doesn't necessarily need to be the person with all the answers. He needs to be the person who knows the destination and how to direct the tools at his disposal to reach that destination. Furthermore, the vision doesn't need to be entirely perfect on the first attempt to communicate it, but, in the case of the President, it should provide an idea of what should be accomplished. The U.S. may never reach the overall goal outlined by the President's vision, but the purpose of having it is to give the U.S. a goal to strive for and to unify the efforts to achieve that goal. Besides, "a strategy is only as good as the vision that guides it, which is why purpose and intentions tend to be more powerful than plans in directing organizational behavior" (Nanus 1992, 30).

Providing the vision for what he wants the future to hold for the United States is one of the most critical aspects of the President's job. As a principle itself, "vision is

central to leadership. It is the indispensable tool without which leadership is doomed to failure" (Nanus 1992, 10). Nanus doesn't say that vision will bring success; however, his hypothesis is that if vision is not present, then failure will occur. Conversely, Sinek alludes to greater possibilities for success when the President outlines his vision. "When those in leadership positions are clear about their cause, they can operate on a greater scale" (Sinek 2015, 375).

To be an effective leader, Freud states that the leader "must himself be held in fascination by a strong faith (in an idea) in order to awaken the group's faith...Leaders make themselves felt by means of the ideas in which they themselves are fanatical believers" (Freud 1921, 21). Goethals agrees with Freud's analysis. "Leaders must take risks and sacrifice themselves for their goals, thus demonstrating courage and conviction" (Goethals 2005, 548). People inherently want to know that their leaders have a vested interest in their success, and their success inherently allows the leader to be successful at the same time.

There are few better places to demonstrate this concept than from a role in the government. "Good government has a purpose, a strategy, and ideals" (Suri 2017, 4). It is prudent for the leader of that government to possess and share those qualities. "Leadership requires two things: a vision of the world that does not yet exist and the ability to communicate it" (Sinek 2009, 228). This is required for all leaders, regardless of profession. Even top business professionals, such as those at Forbes, agree that vision is necessary. "Leaders without vision will fail. Leaders who lack vision cannot inspire teams, motivate performance, or create sustainable value...A leader's job is to align the organization around a clear and achievable vision" (Myatt 2012, *Forbes.com*). It would

seem that conveying a vision is important for all people, but most especially for the President.

Nanus spends a long time explaining and defining vision in his book *Visionary Leadership*. Nanus starts off by claiming a vision is "a realistic, credible, attractive future" (Nanus 1992, 8). Separately, in Sinek's book *Start with Why*, Sinek defines the *Why* as "your purpose, cause or belief" (Sinek 2009, 39). Deep inspection of these two terms appear to show that both are seeking the same thing. Sinek essentially seeks to define the same idea with his term *Why* that Nanus defines with the term vision. Nanus's vision and Sinek's *Why* are both terms the writers used to identify an item the writers want to achieve. Both items are conceived in the mind as realistic and credible future objectives. The vision and the *Why* are the driving purpose behind an action. Both items are achievable in practice and with effort. Both are the responsibility of the leader to concoct and together they are the seldom recognized key to success for many ambitions.

Both authors describe in great detail their individual concepts. Sinek succinctly defined purpose as the "cause of action" (Sinek 2009, 7). Nanus was more elaborate in his explanation. "A vision is a mental model of a future state of a process, a group, or an organization. As such, it deals with a world that exists only in the imagination, a world built upon plausible speculations, fabricated from what we hope are reasonable assumptions about the future, and heavily influenced by our own judgments of what is possible and worthwhile" (Nanus 1992, 25-26).

Very few people actually expect to fail and then set off on a path to ensure that failure occurs. Furthermore, very few people would ever join a movement with a plan to fail. People want to succeed; hence, a vision is optimistic because leaders looks for a

brighter future and seek to carve the path to achieve that future. The leader searches for what is within the realm of the possible based of the facts surrounding the current situation. Additionally, the vision answers the question why, as the leader must articulate the principle reasons for his effort and the overall objective he would like to meet. A leader who conveys a vision can see the path to success or the path to victory.

As these explanations indicate, the difference between grand strategy and vision are nuanced. Grand strategy tends to be the path or actions that one takes to reach the objective – it is the how. Whereas the vision or purpose is the intended objective and the reasons for the actions – it is the why. Grand strategy is essentially the path one takes to achieve the vision. The two concepts are inherently tied together because one needs to understand the vision in order to devise the grand strategy. Conversely, one needs the grand strategy in order to traverse the path to achieve the vision. However, having vision is not the same as having a strategy or following a grand strategy. We defined earlier that a strategy underlies the plan for accomplishing a set mission or achieving an idea. A vision is the idea itself. It is the ultimate goal, the objective, the utopian dream world that one conceives and tries to iterate towards in reality. "The purpose of vision transcends that of strategy--it goes to the very core of how organizations function and why leadership is so important" (Nanus 1992, xxiv-xxv). The vision is the reason why someone embarks upon a journey, because that is what they want to achieve. Once communicated, that vision becomes a driving force for people to unify their efforts. "There is no more powerful engine driving an organization toward excellence and long-range success than an attractive, worthwhile, and achievable vision of the future, widely

shared" (Nanus 1992, 3). It is this powerful engine that should be the focus of the President to outline and the main component of his job.

Nanus and Sinek are not the only two scholars to recognize the need for higher purpose and vision. Pink refers to the psychological "source of energy" as the "purpose motive" (Pink 2009, 133). While the terminology used by Nanus and Sinek is more succinct, Pink points out that leaders who prefer effectiveness, should "spend a little less time telling how and a little more time showing why" (Pink 2009, 138). Pink's point aligns nicely with some of the verbiage and most of the leadership principles defined by Sinek.

Hooker, on the other hand, doesn't outright say that the President needs vision or purpose. Instead, he recognizes the need for direction as he says, "coherent and effective political direction is the essential pre-condition to strategic success" (Hooker 2015, 325). He thought that providing direction will encourage people to work together to reach the same goal. The same can be said for the vision. "The vision is the beacon, the sense of destination shared by the people who care most about the organization's future. Once people buy into the vision, they possess the authority, that is, they are empowered, to take actions that advance the vision, knowing that such actions will be highly valued and considered legitimate and productive by all those who share the dream" (Nanus 1992, 18). Hooker's alignment with the same general principle provides some credibility to Nanus's argument.

One slightly contradictory view comes from Ramo, who warns that perhaps we shouldn't be too idealistic and we should deeply focus on the world in its current state. "Instead of starting with a view of how we want the world to be and then jamming that

view into place, we start more reasonably with a picture of how the world is" (Ramo 2009, 108). He makes a great point that in order to define where to go and why it is important to go there, a leader must have a solid comprehension of where they are. The leader must gain an understanding of all the dynamics at play in the environments, so he can make the necessary adjustments to affect the world. Nanus and Sinek urge leaders to give more time thinking about where change should occur and why, because only viewing the world how it is restricts the forward thinking and progressive thought processes on where advancements can occur.

Neglect for seeking a vision created the world that Suri found in his conclusion. He spoke of Presidents being so inundated with items in the present, they had diminishing time to consider much else. "The contemporary president, like other executives, is running ever faster on a policy treadmill, where just keeping up is a form of progress, and changing direction is likely to cause a damaging fall. Instead of imagining something better, presidents just keep running. They often forget why" (Suri 2017, 293). So, from the presidential level, the intent should be to step off the metaphorical treadmill and mount a bicycle to allow the president the freedom to choose the best path and steer the nation in a more effective manner at a more appropriate speed.

But, having vision is not the only criteria to be successful. The leader must also be able to communicate that vision effectively to the broadest audience possible. Simply possessing vision doesn't mean a thing if the President never tells a soul. This is Sinek's point. "Clarity of purpose, cause of belief is important, but it is equally important that people hear you. For a WHY to have the power to move people it must not only be clear, it must be amplified to reach enough people to tip the scale" (Sinek 2009, 146).

Communicating is not a new concept in leadership discussions. Dating back to the 16th century, Machiavelli recognized the importance of communication to convey the purpose and to meet the military objective. "The soldiers, then, are to observe the motions of their ensigns, and the ensigns are to observe the beat of the drum; for when that beat is rightly managed, it is a direction to the whole army which acts and moves in a certain measure and pace according to the different notes and sounds so that the army may know how to keep due time and order...an army properly observing the beat of its drums cannot be easily disordered" (Machiavelli [1521] 2001, 75-76). So critical is the need to effectively communicate, that missteps in relaying the vision can inadvertently squash the vision altogether, just like calling the wrong motions to an army can dismantle a formation and lose a battle.

Overall, the concept of communicating the vision is something that Sinek, Nanus, Pink, Hooker Ramo, and Machiavelli all agree upon as a mandatory, critical piece to being able to achieve one's objectives. Additionally, just like constantly evolving strategy, "the vision-forming process should be a continual one" (Nanus 1992, 164). Leaders need to continually compile information, update their understanding of the situations and broadcast any changes to their vision widely. This is especially relevant in rapidly evolving scenarios such as those in recent Syria.

The real test of this research is to seek out vision communicated by the five presidents with regard to U.S. policies dealing with the Assad regime in Syria since the end of the Cold War. While it would be helpful if the President made statements specifically indicating his vision, that is obviously not the case. The general absence of deliberate statements identifying the President's vision in his rhetoric leads to the

conclusion that vision has been vastly absent from the President's regular routine, but it remains important to digest the Presidential rhetoric to determine if he communicated his vision in other ways. Overall, it is not easy ascertain the President's intent through a single comment or speech. One must look at the President's comments over a longer period to stitch together his intent.

Through the various references, the terms vision, goal and outcome are extremely rare in Presidential rhetoric; however, those are the items researchers need to discover. In this case study, vision looks like an enduring, credible, achievable goal set by the President that encourages and invigorates progress to attain that goal. The goal can be identified in the evidence through the use of terms such as objective, purpose, idea, goal, cause or belief in the proximity to the items that the President specifically identifies that he wants to meet. Therefore, while going through the evidence, keying on those terms will assist in finding the overall desired outcome sought by the President. Once those terms are found in Presidential statements, the statements must be reviewed to determine what the President claims he wants to achieve. Then the item the President claims he wants to achieve must be evaluated for its realistic expectations to be enduring, credible and achievable.

Another way the President could indicate his vision is to proclaim a desire for a situation to morph from its current condition to either a completely new condition, or potentially revert back to previous condition. For instance, the President could say that he wants a certain situation to have a different lasting outcome than the outcome the current situational trajectory would likely bring. Else, the President could say that he would like a situation to return to a previous condition, because he does not believe the

situation is trending in an appropriate direction. Either of these scenarios could portray the President's vision.

If vision is not immediately apparent, one could attempt to piece together the vision through a full understanding of the grand strategy to arrive at destination. Hooker offered this method of looking for grand strategy in his analysis. "One way to understand grand strategy is to look for long-term behavior as defined by enduring, core security interests and how the state secures and advances them over time. In a way, this means that what the state *does* matters more than what the states *says*" (Hooker 2015, 318). Nanus offered a similar technique when he recommended "it is useful to examine the current strategy because of what it may suggest about the underlying vision. Sometimes the vision is not clearly stated but can be inferred from the strategy" (Nanus 1992, 55).

Fortunately, there are also ways to look at these same resources to test whether vision is non-existent. Nanus outlines eight different warning signs to identify whether a vision is absent. He asks, is there "confusion about purpose", is there "insufficient challenge" or lack of enjoyment, is the organization "losing legitimacy" or its reputation, is the organization "out of tune with trends in the environment", are their signs of "decline in pride", is there "excessive risk avoidance", is there an "absence of a shared sense of progress or momentum", or is there a "hyperactive rumor mill" or a loss of trust (Nanus 1992, 19-20)? Each affirmative answer to these questions provides an indicator of absence of vision. While analyzing the material for this research, one can search for terms that could identify the President's vision, while at the same time use Nanus's warning signs to measure these indicators of whether the President is effective in conveying a vision.

Combining the method proposed by Nanus with that proposed by Hooker seemed the most reasonable method to conduct this research. This research looked for vision through the individual segments and statements made by the President. Finding little, the research also reviewed each of the President's long-term rhetoric to ascertain whether they outlined a grand strategy, and possibly drove the strategy with an intended vision.

Analysis of the warning signs, or indicators, offered by Nanus showed multiple affirmative answers. While any single positive answer would be problematic for the future of Syria, multiple positive answers paint a bleaker image of the dire situation in Syria, and the corresponding negative trend in U.S. policy as it pertains to Syria.

Chapter 5 – METHODS AND EVIDENCE

Conducting a case study on the problem which has lasted through five U.S. Presidents offers a unique opportunity for clarity on the subject. This research accepts Rosati's notion that a large quantity of documents is the only way to acquire the information necessary to provide an answer. Rosati identified that there is a "tendency to draw overly simplistic conclusions" regarding foreign policy, partly because much analysis is drawn on the whole outcome of all U.S. government actions in foreign policy, rather than on the specific parts of the whole (Rosati 1984, 313). For this research, there is a need for larger quantities of data on a very specific topic to gain an understanding of the whole problem and potentially gain the ability to improve the outcome. Therefore, rather than looking at the whole government's policy, this research will look to solely understand the President's role in the development and implementation of outcomes.

Waltz agrees with Rosati. "The whole is understood by knowing the attributes and the interactions of its parts" (Waltz 1979, 18). So, while researchers cannot know every part in the production of foreign policy due to the concealed nature of some material and the vast number of sources for foreign policy information, they can study considerable portions of the Presidential aspects with great interest to give a comprehensive approach to understanding a specific portion of the problem. This research aims to strategically study and meticulously review openly available documents that directly convey the President's actual words, both written or spoken, to make a more refined assessment on the Presidential role in foreign policy leadership.

The words of the five successive Presidents since the end of the Cold War offer the perfect specimen to conduct a qualitative analysis of the U.S. strategy taken by the

Presidents to deal with the Assad regime in Syria. The vast array of documents, written, spoken by, or approved by the President, offer information about the President's decisions and imperatives for dealing with Syria, but, more importantly, they offer insight into the President's long-term vision for U.S. interactions with Syria.

A good starting point for this research is the period beginning at the end of the Cold War because that event reduced Russian influence in Syria as a majorly influential factor in Presidential decision making. The end of the Cold War offered the best opportunity for the U.S. to make serious progress in building relationships with nations formerly aligned to the Soviet Union, of which Syria is one. "Russia--as the successor state of the Soviet Union--did not play a central role in Syria's foreign policy between 1990 and 2011" (Scheller 2013, 201). During this period, Russia largely focused on their internal problems and stopped dealing with their foreign interests in an effort to rebuild themselves. However, once the Russian government stabilized in approximately 2000 with the ascension of President Vladimir Putin, their interests stirred a return of their involvement in places outside Russia. Syria was one of those locations thereby closing the window of opportunity for the United States to make considerable progress in Syria.

While the limited period where the U.S. could build a better relationship with Syria before Russia recovered from the Cold War had passed, this research used the Fall of 2018 as the end date to allow for the maturation of President Trump's foreign policies. President Trump, who some people regard as someone willing to split with previous thought processes on myriad subjects, could offer the possibility of radical change and its worth some consideration to ascertain the trajectory of his policies and his overall vision for foreign policy as it pertains to Syria.

This research intends to carefully investigate the Presidents' statements to compile the President's vision and fully understand the desired outcome and intended strategy to approach the Syrian regime.

All the evidence for this research comes from the public communications of the Presidents who occupied the White House since the end of the Cold War. Presidents have many advantages throughout the U.S. government, especially in the development of foreign policy, "because of the expertise they control, and because of the frequent need for secrecy" (Moe and Howell 1999, 162). However, research on this subject remains inherently difficult in two ways. First, it requires the researcher to review a large quantity of documents and material to synthesize an answer to the question. Secondly, the need for secrecy of some information will remain indefinitely; therefore, not every piece of information is available for review. As for gaining insight from classified material, "an accurate representation of them is not possible" (Young 2013, 332). Regardless, access to this material should not hamper this research. These pieces of data, while hidden, should be largely supplemental the President's vision anyways. They should not provide a way forward, or an outcome, of their own. A vision held in secret and not properly communicated to everyone will only introduce more obstacles to reaching the full potential of the vision because not everyone will know the secrets and be able to comply with the plan. A prudent choice of research material involves gathering information readily available for all.

In compiling information, it is important to remember that "both constitutionally and practically, many key foreign policy choices require an explicit decision by the president" (Lindsey and Hobbs 2015, 1091). To understand those decisions, one must

review a myriad of documents, from Executive Orders to informal comments, to find and join together the pieces of the puzzle to create the whole picture of the President's vision and strategy. No single source of information provides the whole picture; therefore, each document must be reviewed and compared to others to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the vision intended by the President. Overall, the policies outlined by Executive Orders, news conferences and speeches are the artifacts that Americans have at their disposal to comprehend that President's vision. These will be the primary sources of data for this analysis.

For this paper, three sections of *The American Presidency Project* serve as the foundation for much of the necessary material for the paper; the State of the Union Addresses and Messages, the Weekly Addresses, and the News Conferences. These sections contained the most relevant data as they each contained documents with direct language, either through written text or transcribed spoken word from the President as he performed his various obligations. For instance, *The American Presidency Project* contains a complete set of transcripts from every *State of the Union* given by a U.S. President, every Weekly Address since President Reagan reconvened the President's Weekly Address in 1982, and a nearly complete data set of transcripts from the President's News Conferences starting in 1929. The documents are easily located on one website, broken into Presidential terms by year. The documents are transcribed and verified for accuracy to ensure they reflect the precise words used by the President.

One of the more insightful sources of information comes from the President's News Conferences because the transcript shows the dialogue between journalists and the U.S. President on topics of interest to the U.S. population. The dialogue offers

researchers a better understanding and can better "reveal the meaning attributed to the U.S. national interest and to U.S. foreign policy" (Weldes 1999, 113). Journalism offers a unique look at the national interest because "Political figures...know their every word will be minutely scrutinized by the press and opponents for evidence of hidden preferences, convictions and values" (Nanus 1992, 139). Insightful inputs and questions from journalists induce the President to reveal his plans to address problems and how he envisions the outcome of various situations in greater detail, thus, he defines his vision, the national interest and his priorities. The President's News Conferences are an integral piece of that puzzle.

Published on the Government Printing Office website, the *Compilation of Presidential Documents* offers a wide array of documents attributed to each president since 1992, including letters, remarks and statements specifically pertaining to Syria. Contained in this database are the annual renewals of the Notice to Continue the National Emergency in Syria and annual speeches given by the President to the United Nations General Assembly. The database gives a fairly comprehensive chronological structure to the various issues facing the Presidents and multitude of requirements the people of the United States levy upon the President on a daily basis. The *Compilation of Presidential Documents* differs from *The American Presidency Project* in that the *Compilation of Presidential Documents* offers a broader array of the publicly releasable publications coming from the White House on a daily and weekly basis.

One other set of data for this research comes from Executive Orders, for which, the complete set resides on the Executive Orders Disposition Tables within the Federal Register's National Archives on the Government Printing Office website (Federal

Register 2018, *archives.gov*). These can be included in the President's repertoire as one form of his action and intent in the foreign policy realm.

Through each of the databases and documents, the use of key word searches for the terms "Syria" and "Assad" reduced the quantity of material to review considerably. From *The American Presidency Project*, the results of this simple search technique from January 1989 to May 2018 include 10 of the 30 *State of the Union* addresses, 28 of the 1295 President's Weekly Radio Addresses, and 186 of 732 President's News Conferences. The simple search of terms Syria and Syrian through the *Compilation of Presidential Documents* website returns 89, of an available 32,000 documents, that are non-duplicative of *The American Presidency Project* documents. Using the same key word search technique on the titles of 1172 Executive Orders that Presidents signed between 1989 and 2018 revealed that only 8 Executive Orders applied to the Syria regime.

Some Executive Orders believed to have potential, peripheral benefit to the research were also reviewed. These were assessed for their potential value in dealing with foreign regimes and broader foreign policy, such as Executive Order 13224, which deals with persons who commit, threaten to commit or support terrorism (E.O. 13224, 9/23/2001), and Executive Order 13818, which deals with persons involved in serious human rights abuses or corruption (E.O. 13818, 12/20/2017). These latter executive orders apply more broadly to foreign policy and do not specify Syrian nationals or anyone in the Syrian regime as a target of these sanctions, therefore making it difficult to discern whether they apply in a more specific discussion on U.S. foreign policy toward Syria.

A myriad of recommendations and analysis of other material, mostly through informal online research and curiosity led to the discovery of all other documentation for this research. The overwhelming preponderance of articles and material are available in the Virginia Tech online library; although, a Google search provided a small quantity of the material. All of these documents offer a first person, presidential perspective on the various issues facing each of the Presidents, as well as provide insight in the decision making, intended strategy, and vision. The single item of importance was to find direct presidential involvement because the best way to analyze the presidential leadership role in foreign policy is through his words and deeds. As a whole, the documents included in this research cover the robust majority of the decisions and discussions that the Presidents had on the topic of Syrian foreign policy over the period between the end of the Cold War and the Fall of 2018.

Chapter 6 – RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

This research into the U.S. Presidents' vision for how to deal with the Syrian government began with material produced by President George H. W. Bush immediately following the Cold War and proceeded into Donald Trump's term. The research compiled and diagnosed Presidential statements and comments to seek each President's vision for what needed to occur with Syria, and also to illustrate key points that effectively hampered progression of a relationship with Syria. Specifically, the research showed how each of the presidents carried out their own individualized approach to dealing with the relationship and developing situations in Syria, and how each of the Presidents tried several layered policies to gain Syrian friendship early in the research period, and compliance later in the period. Nevertheless, deescalating the violence and urging for peace did not work, and none of the policies improved the relationship or resolved problems with Syria over the long term. In fact, many of the problems became much worse over the period since the Cold War ended. While occasionally a president offered a glimpse of what a relationship between the United States and Syria would encompass, or what a future Syrian nation might look like to the Syrian people, most often they failed to provide enough substance or commitment to solve the problems. The policies implemented by the Presidents varied from being non-existent, misaligned and demanding, to lacking ownership and complete abandonment of the problems. None of the Presidents provided a viable way forward for a positive future or an optimistic vision for a better Syria.

6.1. PRESIDENT GEORGE H. W. BUSH

In one of the shorter pieces of this analysis, President George H. W. Bush did not have much involvement with Syria. He only served a four-year term as the initial President during the period for this analysis and most of that time dealt with how to end the Cold War. His time spent to breech a relationship was short-lived and filled with the initial confusion of becoming the world's only superpower. After the downfall of the Soviet Union, he had the opportunity to focus his attention elsewhere, including places like Syria, to attempt swaying nations to become friendlier to the U.S. Unfortunately, Syria shunned much cooperation with Western governments, so steering the nation on a different path would be difficult without consistent involvement and constant effort.

With regard to Syria, President Bush generally undertook a backseat strategy that lacked aggressiveness to fully reach out and communicate with Syrian President Hafez Assad¹. Much like most of the rest of the world, the unexpected end of the Cold War stunned President Bush. Many of the foreign policy experts in the U.S. government built their careers and spent their lives using the policy of containment against the Soviet Union, when Syria was a minor player in the global geopolitical struggle. As the Soviet Union crumbled, many of those experts remained shocked about what to do next and where to focus their efforts. Syria offered one possibility as a location where the U.S. could drive an improvement, particularly because of Syria's status on the U.S. State Department's list of *State Sponsors of Terrorism*, and because of their participation in the 1991 U.S.-led Gulf War. However, President Bush did not seek opportunities to ensure the U.S. and Syria could grow closer. Instead, President Bush nonchalantly approached

¹ The English spelling for the surname Assad varies by author. White House publications use the spelling Asad, whereas many journalists and scholars use the spelling Assad. Both spellings are correct and used in this research to preserve the original spelling in the various texts.

Syria as if the country was not an immediate concern. He seemed disinterested in addressing any issues with Syria, and allowed President Assad to remain in the driver's seat and direct where he wanted to go with the relationship.

Even with the disinterested nature of President Bush's foreign policy directed at Syria, his major involvements with Syria remained three-fold. He had a strong desire for Syria to contribute to the release of U.S. hostages taken during the Lebanon Hostage Crisis. He admired Syria for joining the U.S.-led coalition to oust Saddam Hussein's military from Kuwait in 1991. Lastly, he included Syria in the initiation of Middle East Peace talks with Israel and Israel's neighbors. None of the involvements resulted in any enterprising solutions but each offered a chance to improve on a poor relationship.

In one of his first comments regarding Syria, President Bush chastised Syria for their military involvement in Lebanon and the Syrian role in the hostage events in Lebanon during 1989. One of Bush's more insightful comments during this situation dealt with his perceptions on what life could be like in Lebanon. He said: "I've been to the Lebanon when I was in business, and I recall it as the peaceful oasis in a then-troubled Middle East, and I saw Christians living peacefully with the Moslems. And someday again, I'd like to think that the Lebanon can be restored to that" (Bush 8/15/1989, President's News Conference). In this statement, he addresses what would be a good vision for the future of Lebanon, but neglected Syria as a place to focus attention. He did not reciprocate with a similar idea for Syria. Conversely, he implied that U.S. foreign policy should work toward removing Syrian involvement in Lebanon; although, he denied reports that he wanted "to pressure Syria to back off" (Bush 8/15/1989, President's News Conference). This contrast between seeking a positive outcome in

Lebanon and potentially inducing Syrian compliance cascaded into future interactions. This contrast also showed how the Presidents sought improvement in places other than Syria at the expense of trying to seek improvement within Syria itself.

Later in August 1993, President Bush made comments about the situation brewing in Lebanon, and his desire to quell the hostilities. "I feel a certain frustration...because we have not been able to be a catalyst for peace. We have urged a cease-fire; we have urged a withdrawal of all foreign forces; we are available to consult with the individual parties, and they know that" (Bush 8/23/1989, President's News Conference). President Bush's frustration seemed to come from a lack of cooperation from the adversarial parties and an expectation that they would come to the U.S. for assistance to build a cooperative environment and cessation of hostilities. Unfortunately, as a general rule, it seems unlikely that one can be a catalyst for peace if one does not inject himself into the process. Being available to consult with the individual parties is not the same as declaring that the U.S. demands peace in Lebanon and has prepared to ensure the desired outcome prevails. President Bush showed apprehension toward forcefully interacting with Syria and demonstrating a more positive way forward. This apprehension carried forward to many engagements with the Syrian government, up to and including engagements made during President Trump's tenure.

Interestingly, despite statements that indicated the U.S. did not want to become too involved with Syria, President Bush sent Ambassador John Hubert Kelly back to Damascus in anticipation of discussions with the Syrian regime on the return of U.S. hostages taken during the Lebanon Hostage Crisis. Presumably, President Bush believed that Syrian regime would engage the terrorist groups of the Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah

on behalf of the United States and would seek to return the hostages unharmed.²

President Bush's perspective on the matter is salient for the long-term vision of U.S. interactions with Syria. "We've been disappointed before -- hopes raised only to have them dashed by excessive speculation;" although, "we are grateful to Syria for trying to play a constructive role in what is going on" (Bush 4/19/1990, President's News Conference with Mitterrand). He appeared to temper expectations out of an understanding of the typical reactions provided by the Syrian regime to other U.S. advances, while at the same time, he wanted to portray a positive message of appreciation for any assistance provided by Syria. President Bush's statement and Ambassador Kelly's interaction may have assisted in the release of some American hostages, but there was no public statement by the President following any release showing an appreciation of the Syrian government's role in the process. The lack of a public pronouncement of gratefulness showed a general lack of awareness and unwillingness to view actions through a lens of relationship building.

The second matter that spurned President Bush's involvement with Syria was due to Syria's willingness to participate in the in 1991 U.S.-led coalition to oust the Iraqi military from Kuwait. On this subject, President Bush simply agreed that he was "satisfied" with Syrian participation in the offensive operations against Iraq in 1991 (Bush 1/12/1991, President's News Conference; Bush 3/14/1991, President's News Conference with Mitterand). Despite Syria's small, limited role in the ground war, President Bush understood Syria played a larger role in the region. "They're vital to what happens in the [sic] Lebanon and, of course, they are vital a [sic] little longer-run in what

² The term Hezbollah has various spellings, to include Hisbollah, Hizbollah and Hesbollah. For this research, these terms all reference the same organization, and any spelling differences remain to preserve original texts.

solutions there are to the Palestinian question" (Bush 3/14/1991, President's News Conference with Mitterrand). President Bush implied that gathering support from Syria could provide watershed support from other nations throughout the Middle East, even though the additional support was not necessary. Overall, he did not make many references to Syrian involvement against Iraq and did not convey a vision for future interactions; however, his sentiment of only being satisfied by Syrian involvement left more to be desired. Syrian involvement in the U.S.-led coalition offered tremendous potential for President Bush to improve communications with President Assad, and potentially to supplant Russia as Syria's closest ally. Unfortunately, there are no indications that President Bush intended to engage in any conversation with that intended outcome.

However, there was an attempt to engage in conversations about Middle East peace following the 1991 Gulf War and President Bush wanted to bring Syria into the discussions. From President Bush's perspective, the United States invigorated the peace process with "renewed Western credibility" and that credibility should be used to bring peace in the Middle East (Bush 3/16/1991, President's News Conference with John Major). Unfortunately, no amount of credibility for a third-party can force a peace agreement between other states, particularly if those states do not desire peace for themselves. As the prospects for peace played out, President Bush simply stated that he'd "like to see the process further along," but he provided little urgency or guidance on how to make peace happen (Bush 7/1/1991, President's News Conference). There were no further recommendations or musings by the President and it seemed like he had not given much thought on the situation.

One of the items that became apparent is the lack of options for the United States if Middle East Peace negotiations failed. President Bush commented that "we don't have any fallback position" (Bush 7/20/1991, President's News Conference with Ozal). His comment indicated that he looked for different ways to keep Syria engaged; however, no viable options appeared. Apparently, from his perspective, there was no way to bring Syria to the table, or to induce Syrian negotiators with some potential benefit to help their country. Furthermore, President Bush did not express any intent to engage with Syria on any other topics. Even keeping good relationships and maintaining a sense of optimism appeared to be largely an afterthought.

From President Bush's statements, he deemed success as ensuring both Syria and Israel held discussions on how to reach peace, not necessarily achieving the peace deal. Bush stated: "we're trying to get in here to have people start discussions on their own. And I don't want to give anybody any reason whatsoever to walk away or to make additional demands because of something I have said" (Bush 10/29/1991, President's News Conference with Gorbachev). This approach set the bar for success really low. Unfortunately, it does not appear any significant discussions occurred prior to him leaving office. There are no indications President Bush fully understood degree of willingness to participate in the discussions. The lack of progress toward having discussions was a huge indicator that both sides of the negotiation were still outlining their interests and positions, and therefore not really close to reaching a settlement.

Overall, President Bush's vision for the future with Syria was non-existent. Following the Cold War, President Bush engaged Syria on a small variety of topics, but none of these interactions significantly improved the U.S. relationship with Syria.

Discussions during these topics did not reveal any intent for a better relationship with Syria, and the President outlined no goals to reach within the relationship with Syria. President Bush did not take advantage of the initial opportunity to work with Syria, and his relatively hands-off approach and neglect for future considerations of the U.S. relationship with Syria carried through to his successors who would struggle to make progress with the situation.

6.2. PRESIDENT WILLIAM J. CLINTON

Following the transition to President Clinton, the stylistic differences between the two men showed considerably. While President Bush was hands off, President Clinton was involved. While President Bush was studious and reserved, President Clinton was more off-the-cuff and gregarious. While President Bush was nebulous in what he wanted to achieve, President Clinton was abundantly clear that he wanted a peace agreement between Syria and Israel. But the stylistic differences did not indicate that the outcome of their engagements on the Syrian problems would differ. Of the Presidents since the end of the Cold War, President William J. Clinton made the most obvious efforts to improve the relationship and situation with Syria. His interactions with Syria revolved almost exclusively around attempting to mediate a peace settlement between Syria and Israel and his personal involvement facilitated progress. Additionally, a second matter that spurned President Clinton's engagement was Syria's use of state-sponsored terrorism, including their involvement in the infiltration and subversion of the Lebanese government and openly allowing terrorist groups to reside and remain unscathed inside Syria's borders. President Clinton made much less effort and progress on the terrorism

topic than the peace deal; however, the comments on these topics intertwined during President Clinton's remarks. Occasionally, he referred to both topics in the same sentence, indicating that resolving one problem required simultaneously resolving the other problem.

President Clinton used direct engagement in his approach to Syrian President Assad. He was the only U.S. President since the end of the Cold War to confirm he spoke to the Syrian President. He met with President Assad on one occasion in Geneva in addition to being the only President during this period to travel to Damascus. Even though President Clinton and President Assad communicated on multiple occasions, building a mutually beneficial relationship remained an elusive goal with sporadic efforts. While his direct engagement strategy was effective in getting Syrian and Israel to have discussions, President Clinton's visionary flaw came from his misaligned benefit of helping Israel reach their goal of peace without having an accompanying goal for the U.S.

While the U.S. played a key role during the Clinton presidency to build a comprehensive peace in the Middle East, and while it remained in the U.S. national interest to have a peaceful coexistence between our allies in the Middle East and their neighbors, achieving this settlement does not provide much clarity for what the U.S. intended with their direct relationship with Syria. It is clear that negotiations between Syria and Israel were essential for other Middle East nations to proceed with negotiations, and successful negotiations would directly benefit America's friends in the region. It is also clear that the full complement of negotiations allowed for the possibility for "comprehensive peace" and "a new and different Middle East" (Clinton 12/16/1999, Remarks Following Discussions). Unfortunately, there is little clarity on what a new and

different Middle East would look like, or how the United States might approach their relationships in the Middle East following a peace deal.

President Clinton worked to achieve the peace deal and seemed to value the goal despite only limited efforts toward improving the relationship between the U.S. and Syria. His lack of emphasis on how to address Syria's status on the U.S. State Department list of *State Sponsors of Terrorism* clearly showed his more obvious goal of achieving Middle East Peace. The concern about Syrian support for terrorism loomed behind many discussions and played a very evident lesser supporting role. For the most part, when he commented on Syria's status on the list, he nearly always redirected toward achieving a comprehensive peace deal without truly answering the question.

President Clinton jumped into his role relatively quickly in his Presidency. During his first 100 days, he commented: "the United States believes that the full peace process should resume" (Clinton 3/15/1993, President's News Conference with Rabin). From this point, President Clinton rarely wavered from this commitment. While he specifically mentioned that he was optimistic, President Clinton refrained from providing much in terms of detail on the progress of the discussions or the specific outcome he hoped to achieve (Clinton 4/6/1993, President's News Conference with Mubarak). Instead, he made bland statements claiming "the United States will be prepared to be supportive of their agreements" (Clinton 5/7/1993, President's News Conference). Nearly a year later, President Clinton stated: "the U.S. stands ready to help" (Clinton 3/16/1994, President's News Conference with Rabin). Another two years later, he reiterated a very similar comment. "The United States does not impose timetables on others, nor do we project them. All we try to do is to help the parties make peace. The timetable, like

everything else, is up to them" (Clinton 2/1/1996, President's News Conference with Chirac). Collectively, these comments mimic the comments made by President Bush in 1991. The bar for success remained low, yet five years later the Presidents still had difficulties getting the Syrian government to meet with Israel. This strongly indicated that President Clinton did not have a specific outcome he desired with Syria, aside from Israel's peace deal. This also illustrated that he did not have specific a vision for what he hoped the United States could achieve in their direct relationship with Syria. There was the deal, and nothing else. "I think what I'm committed to doing is to getting this thing on track. Everybody in Israel has got to know in the end there can't be a total peace in the Middle East unless there is some peace with Syria" (Clinton 10/25/1993, President's News Conference with Mubarak).

Unfortunately, comprehensive peace has little direct effect on the United States and it became difficult to apply efforts for this goal if the U.S. received nothing for their efforts. Obviously, obtaining a peace deal would be beneficial for the United States, but any deal would more directly benefit the other parties. Furthermore, while the President of the United States has the clout to insert himself as a mediator in the negotiations, and to encourage the other parties to participate, obtaining a peace deal doesn't necessarily mean that the relationship between the United States and Syria will become completely functional. This is especially true if there is no discussion about additional objectives addressing the bi-lateral relationship. Not once during his tenure did President Clinton demonstrate concern over the bilateral relationship with Syria.

Despite the lack of a direct benefit for the U.S., President Clinton continued to push for the deal, including through face-to-face discussions with Assad. The need to

communicate directly was likely one reason for the January 1994 joint News Conference with President Hafez al-Assad of Syria. This event was the first news conference between the presidents of both nations. For the event to occur at such a high level demonstrated the level of importance both nations placed in achieving the peace deal between Syria and Israel. President Clinton made one key point regarding his vision for the Middle East. He says: "For too long, the Middle East has been denied the benefits of peace. And yet, it is within our power to create the conditions that will enable Israeli and Arab, Muslim, Christian, and Jew to live together in peace" (Clinton 1/16/1994, President's News Conference with al-Asad). President Clinton clearly explained the U.S. desire for involvement in creating conditions for the deal, and presumably he omitted other objectives intentionally to not derail any discussions for peace.

Despite the goals for engagements being small, President Clinton, like his predecessor, recognized Syria's outsize importance in the Middle East. He pointed out "Syria is the key to the achievement of an enduring and comprehensive peace that finally will put an end to the conflict between Israel and her Arab neighbors" (Clinton 1/16/1994, President's News Conference with al-Asad). Years later, President Clinton gave further recognition of Syria's importance when he said: "there will never be a comprehensive peace in the Middle East until we resolve this matter with Syria" (Clinton 1/28/1997, President's News Conference). Unfortunately, while he recognized the importance, he neglected to ever place a higher level of priority on a better relationship with Syria. He provided no additional effort and no goals to reach with Syria.

Aside from one bland statement, President Clinton barely acknowledged the shortfalls that existed between the U.S. and Syria. "President Asad 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" (Clinton 1/16/1994, President's News Conference with al-Asad). While he made this comment, there is no evidence that shows whether President Clinton carried out this specified task of addressing the problems. His statements provided assurance that he knows of the problems, but otherwise, he seldomly considered the idea of improving the relationship.

Interestingly, during the 16 January 1994 News Conference with President Assad, it appeared several of the questions fielded by President Clinton came from journalists who perceived that Clinton was overly focused on the potential for a peace deal with Israel and rather non-committal to any relationship between the U.S. and Syria. The questions forced Clinton to respond directly to friction points inherent to the U.S. and Syrian relationship, namely terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. In responding to both issues, President Clinton redirected the conversation to peace negotiations rather than providing a substantive answer on his vision for overcoming these issues with Syria. "We talked about these differences for about an hour today without any view toward trying to resolve them" (Clinton 1/16/1994, President's News Conference with al-Asad). He possessed a premium opportunity to overcome some issues between the U.S. and Syria by being in the same room as the Syrian President and having a discussion on a topic that could mend some ties between the United States and Syria. Instead of using the opportunity to the advantage of the United States, he chose to have the discussion without trying to resolve differences.

The lack of emphasis on Syria began to become apparent in the last days of July 1994 when President Clinton and the world witnessed the peace agreement between Israel and Jordan. During the corresponding news conference, President Clinton acknowledged that "America will stand by those who take risks for peace. We will support leaders whose boldness and wisdom are creating a new Middle East" (Clinton 7/26/1994, President's News Conference with Hussein and Rabin). He also reaffirmed that "the United States is committed to a comprehensive peace in the Middle East and an end to hostility between Israel and all her Arab neighbors" (Clinton 7/26/1994, President's News Conference with Hussein and Rabin). President Clinton even acknowledged that he spoke directly with President Assad during the announcement of the agreement (Clinton 7/26/1994, President's News Conference with Hussein and Rabin).

With progress being made elsewhere, it provided an opportune time to reinforce the efforts with Syria, with the goal to reach a similar agreement. Unfortunately, President Clinton said nothing about how to achieve a better relationship with Syria. There were no comments on Syria, especially for such a historical moment with two of Syria's neighbors and with hopes that Syria would accompany their neighbors toward realizing peace. He seemed to take for granted that he could directly communicate with Assad anytime he wanted and that Assad would reconsider negotiations now that other nations had their agreements.

For a while, President Clinton believed he was making progress, and that he could secure the peace deal. In October 1994, President Clinton accepted the proposal to travel to Damascus to meet with President Assad. President Clinton felt that visiting Syria

would “further the goal of an ultimate peace agreement between Israel and Syria (Clinton 10/21/1994, President's News Conference). This trip was a Presidential first since placing Syria on the U.S. State Department list of *States Sponsors of Terrorism*.

When questioned about how the visit to Damascus would affect the image of the United States, President Clinton responded: “even though Syria is on the terrorist list, that remains an issue between our two countries...But I do not believe that we can permit it to keep us from pursuing a comprehensive peace as long as nothing in our peace agreements undermines our commitment to end terrorism” (Clinton 10/21/1994, President's News Conference). In this dialogue, President Clinton essentially confirmed that it remains more important for him to meet Israel’s interests of gaining peace ahead of the interests of the United States to reduce the support network for terrorist worldwide. Furthermore, by placing the comprehensive peace deal between Israel and Syria in such a high priority, he failed to provide any expectation for ways to further the U.S. relationship with Syria.

Following the meeting, it became evident there was no intent to confront Assad and retrieve answers on the terrorism question. Without retort, President Clinton allowed President Assad to comment that they “did not discuss terrorism as a separate title,” and that Americans are “not able to mention one single incident in which Syria supported terrorism” (Clinton 10/27/1994, President's News Conference with al-Assad). His lack of direct response to President Assad’s comments while he stood next to him indicated that President Clinton did not have a willingness to confront the Syrian President and potentially resolve a key issue between the U.S. and Syria. Later the same day, President Clinton confirmed “there was absolutely no discussion in our private meeting...about the question of the United States removing Syria from the terrorist list” (Clinton 10/27/1994,

President's News Conference with Rabin). Therefore, even though President Clinton expressed and demonstrated a willingness to be involved in negotiations, he maintained limits on his discussion topics and subsequently limited how much progress the U.S. could make in discussions with Syria.

At one point during the news conference, President Clinton stated that he told President Assad of his "desire to see the relations between our two nations improve" (Clinton 10/27/1994, President's News Conference with al-Asad). Following the comment, President Clinton offered no further insight into how the improvements should occur and asked Assad no questions on how to make things better. When explaining why he thought relations should occur, President Clinton offered: "given Syria's important regional role, it will inevitably broaden the circle of Arab States willing to embrace peace. And it will build confidence throughout the area that peace will endure" (Clinton 10/27/1994, President's News Conference with al-Asad). Although, despite the comments, there was no real attempt by either president to build a closer relationship between the United States and Syria, or to resolve their differences with each other. The fact that neither president presented any commitments made between the two parties provided ample evidence of lack of progress.

The assassination of the Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on November 4, 1995, could have changed the dynamic for the conversation about achieving a comprehensive peace considerably. Following the assassination, the U.S. hosted the new Israeli Prime Minister, Shimon Peres, and reaffirmed the need to work together for peace. "Peace is our mission. And the Prime Minister and I are determined that nothing—nothing—will deter us from this task in the weeks and the months ahead" (Clinton

12/11/1995, President's News Conference with Peres). President Clinton seemed to believe the atrocity permitted him to appeal to the Syrian leader's morality. "As sad as it is to say, I think the Syrian leader and the Syrian people now see the exceptional price that former Prime Minister Rabin and Prime Minister Peres have been willing to pay in their search for peace" (Clinton 12/11/1995, President's News Conference with Peres). But this message failed to impact the situation positively as the negotiating position for President Assad didn't change. The misjudgment of admonishing the Syrian leader and pleading for peace had little effect.

During the same news conference, President Clinton spoke about the importance of Israel's security, but completely neglected to mention any equivalent concern for Syria. Specifically, President Clinton said: "if one thing should be clear to the entire world, it is that the security of Israel is terribly important to the United States. We have made an explicit policy commitment which has been carried through under Presidents of both parties to maintain the qualitative and technological edge that Israel needs to guarantee its security" (Clinton 12/11/1995, President's News Conference with Peres). By making this comment, President Clinton made an unequivocal statement of support to Israel and simultaneously diminished concern for Syria's interest. These comments, when viewed by Syria, portended that the U.S. is more likely to side with Israeli interests than those of Syria. Thus, they eroded the sense of impartiality by the U.S. in the negotiations.

Roughly four months later, President Clinton again demonstrated his full support for Israel with his comments "the United States is committed to support Israel if Israel is involved in negotiations and is taking risks for peace" (Clinton 3/14/1996, President's

News Conference with Peres). While unapologetically supporting Israel and their right to exist has been a core U.S. foreign policy since Israel formed as a nation, being so vocal about the U.S. commitment, especially while attempting negotiations for a peace settlement, placed serious strains on the U.S. ability to broker any arrangement between Syria and Israel. The dialogue itself placed the United States clearly on one side of the negotiation. Besides, the people of Syria, and potentially Assad himself, heard these comments and realized that despite the progress in the Middle East peace talks and visits and discussions with the Americans, that Syria's interests will not match those of Israel in the eyes of the U.S. Presumably, President Clinton did not foresee how his statement of support for Israel in their time of mourning would affect the dynamics of Middle East Peace, but the effect it had was insurmountable. The unraveling of the progress made in building a peace deal began soon thereafter.

President Clinton had very little involvement with terrorist activity Syria until 1996. In April of that year, violent clashes broke out on the Israel-Lebanon border in response to targeted killing of civilians by Hezbollah. Soon, the Israeli Defense Forces commenced Operation Grapes of Wrath. While the conversation about bringing Syria into a peace agreement stalled prior to this event, the combined effects of the operation severed all possibilities to bring any peace agreement between Syria and Israel. President Clinton stated "we're going to do the best we can to get this back on track. We have got to get the cease-fire" (Clinton 4/20/1996, President's News Conference). Efforts by the United States to cease the violence occurred, but President Clinton expressed no message about the need for Syria to cease support for terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah, especially given Syria's long-standing willingness to allow Hezbollah to function within

Syria. Instead, counterintuitively, President Clinton referenced that "the best way to prevent violence from returning is to continue implementing the agreements between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and to secure a comprehensive peace in the region that includes Lebanon and Syria" (Clinton 4/21/1996, President's News Conference with Yeltsin). Interestingly, he placed the emphasis for obtaining a peace deal over stopping the violence or Syria's support for terrorism when, practically speaking, stopping the violence itself should be the prerequisite for obtaining the peace deal.

Following the events in the Spring of 1996, President Clinton finally appeared to understand the need to solve the terrorism situation in Syria prior to advancing the peace negotiations. "The United States is opposed to terrorism as practiced by anybody, anywhere. And our concerns with that have been an impediment in the improvement of our relations with Syria" (Clinton 7/9/1996, President's News Conference with Netanyahu). While obtaining a peace deal had been his primary focus, he realized that Syria needed to give up terrorism altogether for any peace arrangement to withstand scrutiny. Three years later, President Clinton acknowledged this same principle more firmly. "We, too, would like more normal relations with Syria, and we would like Syria to be reconciled to all its neighbors in the region. And I think anything that Syria does to disassociate itself from terrorists is a positive step in the right direction" (Clinton 7/19/1999, President's News Conference with Barak). President Clinton knew that Syria had not taken many positive steps in their willingness to give up support for terrorism; however, he very clearly spelled out his desire for them to do so.

Despite his recognition of the need to address terrorism, President Clinton did not stop searching for a peace deal. In mid-December 1999, President Clinton finally had the

opportunity to showcase his efforts to reach a comprehensive peace deal by having Prime Minister Barak and Foreign Minister Shara come to Washington for the purpose of having peace discussions. In the news conference prior to the discussions, President Clinton praised both men and provided some insight into the importance of the occasion from the American perspective. “A comprehensive peace in the Middle East is vital not only to the region; it is also vital to the world and to the security of the American people, for we have learned from experience that tensions in the region can escalate, and the escalations can lead into diplomatic, financial, and ultimately, military involvement, far more costly than even the costliest peace” (Clinton 12/15/1999, Remarks Prior to Discussions). This statement indicated that part of the reason for President Clinton’s insistence on achieving a comprehensive peace deal was because he did not want to expend U.S. efforts and lives in another war if it was preventable.

Unfortunately, the discussions between Prime Minister Barak and Foreign Minister Shara did not proceed far. They “agreed to make every effort to reach peace between Israel and Syria as part of a just, lasting, and comprehensive Middle East peace” and to reconvene a few weeks later in early January 2000 (Clinton 12/16/1999, Remarks Following Discussions). However, peace talks between Syria and Israel suspended in January 2000 and did not resume. President Clinton did not address the reason for the suspension; although he indicated some frustration with President Assad in March 2000 when he commented that Assad “has the perfect right to take whatever position he believes is in Syria's interests and whatever he thinks is right” (Clinton 3/29/2000, President's News Conference). It seemed like President Clinton resigned to thinking that forcing Syria to have a relationship with Israel was counterproductive.

Sadly, the death of President Hafez al-Assad in June 2000 put another damper on any continuation of peace negotiations between Syria and Israel. While reaching a peace settlement was the dominant aim for President Clinton, there was not much discussion otherwise of how the U.S. could obtain a better American relationship with Syria. In the few instances where President Clinton provided a glimpse of a potential brighter future for the relationship, he quickly shifted back to the topic of forcing negotiations. He spent the preponderance of his effort attempting to improve the dialogue between Israel and Syria. After the death of Hafez al-Assad, President Clinton did not mention Syria in any news conference he led. This clearly demonstrated that the opportunity for peace settlement and an improved relationship between the U.S. and Syria had passed. The efforts to achieve the settlement were fruitless.

Overall, President Clinton did not offer a completely viable vision for a way forward with Syria as he failed to explain how expending U.S. resources and effort on a peace settlement would help the United States and he misplaced the priority for the peace deal over the need for Syria to cease support for terrorism. 1994 was the year that the United States made the most effort and seemingly came the closest to reaching a peace deal between Israel and Syria. While those efforts were for good cause, there was no goal that the U.S. intended to meet bilaterally with Syria. There was no comment from President Clinton indicating what the U.S. would like to see in their relationship with Syria. The times when an improved relationship was discussed, President Clinton offered no insight on his desires for the relationship. There was no talk about being better economic partners, or better security partners, or serious discussions about removing Syria from the U.S. State Department list of *State Sponsors of Terrorism*. Despite all the

discussions about trying to bring Syria and Israel closer together so they can discuss a comprehensive peace deal, that conversation didn't make much progress either, even after several meetings with President Assad, and President Clinton's travel to Damascus.

While President Clinton and President Assad spoke a number of times on the attempt to achieve peace between Israel and Syria, the reality is that President Clinton sought to broker the relationship between Syria and Israel, not between Syria and the U.S., and this divergence contributed to the lack of emphasis placed on building the relationship. President Clinton maintained a steady course in his comments about Syria, but his engagements produced little progress in the end. While President Clinton achieved the goal of putting representatives from Syria and Israel in a room for peace discussions, they departed empty-handed, and would ultimately cease discussions altogether. Overall, any vision for a better relationship with Syria was misaligned and lacked emphasis, as the overwhelming preponderance of the relevant discussions portrayed what a better relationship would look like for Israel. Much like his predecessor, President Clinton's vision of obtaining a good partner with Syria would not occur.

6.3. PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

Shortly after the Syrian presidency changed hands, so did the American presidency. In Syria, President George W. Bush encountered many of the same problems with President Bashar al-Assad as President Clinton encountered with Bashar's father, Hafez. The major difference was the effect September 11, 2001 had on the global expectations that the United States would act against her adversaries.

President George W. Bush's presidency involved gigantic efforts to cease terrorism through the U.S.-led Global War on Terrorism and two major ground conflicts – one in Afghanistan and one in Iraq. While terrorism in Syria existed long before he ascended to the White House, President Bush was more outspoken about the consequences of non-action as he pushed for increased efforts to prevent terrorists from achieving gains. President Bush viewed Syria as one of the major sponsors for terrorism, especially, because Syrian officials worked to undermine the governments of Iraq and Lebanon and sponsored terrorists crossing their eastern border to fight the United States in Iraq. In contrast to his father who achieved a coalition partner in Syria, the younger President Bush acquired an adversary which directly interfered in U.S. operations in Iraq. President Bush did not restrain himself in his commentary, as many of the issues he witnessed tied back to the pervasive problem with terrorism and the Syrian regime's support for the tactic.

Overall, President Bush invoked a more direct approach to Syria. Where President Clinton attempted to befriend and work with Syria, President Bush rejected the idea and brought a contentious nature to the already nonexistent relationship. President Bush's strategy included constant attempts to convince the international community that geopolitical isolation and forced democracy were appropriate for nations such as Syria. Later in his presidency, President Bush spoke of increasing international political and financial pressure on the Assad regime.

Needless to say, but these strategic policies did not work effectively. The attempts to isolate Syria did not reach their full expectations or potential. Syria did not become more democratic. Many people in the Syrian government felt little pressure from

new sanctions. Despite some successes in pushing Syrian infiltrators out of Lebanon during the Bush presidency, there was an almost complete failure to keep Syrian infiltrators out of Iraq. Furthermore, peace negotiations did not progress at all. Overall, Syria grew bolder in their efforts to undermine U.S. efforts in the Middle East.

In his first months in office, President George W. Bush seemed to pick up where President Clinton left off with a willingness to broach the topic of peace between Israel and Syria; however, his first comments on Syria indicated that he already frustrated by the process. He stated "we will continue to try to convince the parties to become willing to sit down and negotiate a lasting peace. But this country cannot impose a timetable nor settlement on the parties if they're unwilling to accept it" (Bush 3/29/2001, President's News Conference). Just a few months into his term, he was already dismissive of working toward a greater goal with Syria. While there may have been some behind the scenes efforts to bring Syria and Israel together, ultimately, if there ever was the idea in the Bush administration of achieving a peace deal, it appears to have completely evaporated at about this time. For the remainder of the George W. Bush Presidency, a Middle East Peace Deal was a very seldom discussed topic.

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 were partially responsible for the altered perception of the ability to achieve a better relationship with Syria. In one of his most prominent speeches, President Bush spoke before Congress and proclaimed a new war against terrorism. He stated: "Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated" (Bush 9/20/2001, Joint Session of 107th Congress). President Bush did not mention Syria, but he was very clear that he intended to eradicate safe

havens and proclaim nations that support terrorism as adversaries. "From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime" (Bush 9/20/2001, Joint Session of 107th Congress).

President Bush resolved early that there would be no relationship with the Syrian regime and any vision he possessed for improvements with Syria was modest, at best. Part of the difficulties involved Syrian perceptions that the U.S. would target Syria in the short term. When the Syrian government offered to help in the initial stages of the War on Terror, it seemed like a way to stave off any U.S. invasion or military action. However, President Bush agreed the U.S. will "give them an opportunity to do so" (Bush 10/11/2001, President's News Conference). He seemed willing to give everyone a chance, but President Bush was clear in his expectations that he wanted was "results" (Bush 10/11/2001, President's News Conference). For those who did not produce, he seemed likely to turn his back and dismiss their posturing as just talk and no action. For Syria, the chance was relatively short-lived. President Bush took notice that the Syrian actions opposed the U.S. intended actions and began to change his mind on the adversarial nature of the Syrian regime.

Given Syria's long-tenured status as a nation sponsoring terrorism, it seemed inevitable that they would be one of the most impacted nations in the Global War on Terror. Initially, President Bush wanted Syria to make reforms. "Syria must choose the right side in the war on terror by closing terrorist camps and expelling terrorist organizations" (Bush 6/24/2002, Calls for New Palestinian Leadership). However, gaining compliance from President Assad proved difficult. By openly making this call for Syria to adjust, President Bush took a significant step in outlining a way forward for

Syria to take to rejoin the international community. Unfortunately, President Bush did not see the results he expected. Less than a month later, President Bush called out Syria again. "Syria and Iran continue to harbor and assist terrorists. This behavior is completely unacceptable, and states that support terror will be held accountable" (Bush 7/21/2003, President's News Conference with Berlusconi). While no direct U.S. actions had been taken yet, the comment provided substance to Syrian worries of a U.S. invasion.

President Bush's threatening comments and his statements of support for the October 2003 Israeli air strikes in Syria provided ample explanations why Syria remained apprehensive toward giving up terrorism. President Bush's defense of Israel rang reminiscent of previous comments by President Clinton, and demonstrated the special relationship between the U.S. and Israel. "Israel has got a right to defend herself, that Israel must not feel constrained in terms of defending the homeland" (Bush 10/6/2003, President's News Conference with Kibaki). From the Syrian perspective, they could not compete with the U.S. or Israel militarily, but they could make any protracted efforts against Syria cost prohibitive for their adversaries through the use of non-conventional tactics. In order for President Bush to remove Syrian support for terrorism, he would need to understand why they needed to use that tactic; however, it does not appear he ever gained that clarity. Instead, President Bush continued to support Israeli actions, including the Israeli strikes against Syria's "hidden" nuclear program in October 2007 (Bush 4/29/2008, President's New Conference). The combination of these actions and his claim that Syria needed "to be held to account," drove an increasingly wider divide in the U.S. relationship with Syria (Bush 7/13/2006, President's News Conference with Merkel).

Following the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, President Bush authorized the recall of the U.S. Ambassador to Syria back to the United States, specifically stating the relationship between the U.S. and Syria “is not moving forward, that Syria is out of step with the progress being made in a greater Middle East” (Bush 2/17/2005, President’s News Conference). President Bush began to build coalition support for action against Syria in anticipation that Syria would not take American action seriously. He commented that “France and the United States cosponsored a resolution in the United Nations that made it very clear that Syria needs to withdraw her troops from Lebanon” (Bush 2/23/2005, President's News Conference with Schroeder). The passing of UN Security Council Resolution 1559 in March 2005 reinforced the approach and further justified U.S.-led international action if Syria did not comply.

Unsurprisingly, the Assad government did not fully meet U.S. demands. As a result, President Bush felt compelled to provide specific instructions to Syria. "As to Syria, our message to Syria is consistent: Do not undermine the Siniora Government in Lebanon; help us get back the—help Israel get back the prisoner that was captured by Hamas; don't allow Hamas and Hizballah to plot attacks against democracies in the Middle East; help inside of Iraq" (Bush 10/25/2006, President's News Conference). While President Bush repeated the demands in December 2006 to cease Syrian interference in Lebanon and to cease support for terrorist groups, he offered no insight into how to improve in those areas or what the U.S. might do to assist (Bush 12/7/2006, President's News Conference with Blair). Additionally, he provided no realistic vision for how Syria’s future could be better if the Assad government changed their ways. He simply increased demands and expected action.

Through all the harsh rhetoric and support for allied action against Syria, President Bush also initiated sanctions against Syrian leaders for their continued malevolence. As a partial response to Syrian involvement in the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri in Beirut, President Bush signed Executive Order 13399, which blamed Assad and his regime for their attempts to generate upheaval in the governments in the Middle East (E.O. 13399, 4/25/2006). Nearly three years after calling out Syria for their influence in Lebanon in the 2005 *State of the Union* speech, President Bush continued to pressure President Assad and the Syrian government “to stay out of Lebanon” and “let the process in Lebanon work”, as part of the U.S. agenda item in the broader political dynamics in the Middle East (Bush 12/20/2007, President’s News Conference).

As another measure to increase pressure on the Syrian regime, President Bush signed Executive Order 13460, which sanctioned the officers responsible for “undermining efforts to stabilize Iraq” (E.O. 13460, 2/13/2008). These new sanctions offered a glimpse of a changing foreign policy dealing with Syria. President Bush sought to lead the international community in applying pressure on Syria due to Syria's involvement in various forms of state-sponsored terrorism. He directed blame at the Syrian government for providing support to Hezbollah and Hamas whose objectives included “undermining peace” (Bush 4/29/2008, President's News Conference). Applying pressure from the broader international community seemed like a logical progression of U.S. foreign policy.

However, outside of the sanctions, President Bush designed much of the foreign policy directed at Syria to isolate the nation from the international community. This strategy materialized following the assassination of Rafiq Hariri and the passing of

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559, as President Bush tried to remove Syrian influence from Lebanon. He felt certain he would succeed. "I believe we'll be able to convince Syria to fully withdraw, or else she'll be isolated" (Bush 3/16/2005, President's News Conference).

A very similar rhetoric and policy originated from President Bush's comments about Syrian willingness to allow transients to cross into Iraq. President Bush complained: "we've made it very clear from the beginning of my administration that Syria should not use its territory to support international terrorist groups" (Bush 2/17/2005, President's News Conference). Even with these comments, he does not offer any potential solutions to overcome their support for the terrorists aside from working with the international community to "isolate" Syria (Bush 2/17/2005, President's News Conference). Amid reports that Syria's willingness to allow transients to cross their border and attack American's in Iraq, President Bush stated "the Syrian leader must understand, we take his lack of action seriously. And the Government is going to become more and more isolated" (Bush 9/13/2005, President's News Conference with Talabani).

President Bush's response for potentially killing American soldiers was to internationally isolate Syria, which was confusing and atypical of a U.S. President when most Presidents would take an immediate and aggressive stance against any nation responsible for the deaths of any Americans. President Bush's unusual response compounded the lack of a coherent vision for how to deal with Syria. President Bush's strategy to seek international isolation offered little definition on the way forward or any actual substance aside from the desire to apply pressure. Even after he confirmed "[U.S.] forces have killed or captured hundreds of terrorists and insurgents near the Syrian

border," asking for Syria to cease their support for terrorism seemed somewhat of a misplaced request (Bush 5/21/05, President's Radio Address).

Unfortunately, seeking to isolate Syria only worked to reinforce isolation from the Western nations and subsequently forced Syria to grow closer and more dependent on other adversaries of the United States, namely Russia and Iran. As Syria started to become more isolated, they reached out to their ally in Russia for assistance. In one instance in 2005, Russia agreed to provide "short-range missiles to Syria," which prompted President Bush to respond that the U.S. is "working closely with the Russians on the issue of vehicle-mounted weaponry to Syria" (Bush 4/28/2005, President's News Conference). President Bush gives no additional information on the matter, except his obvious displeasure. This statement showed a clear indication for contempt for the perceived Russian interference and material assistance provided to Syria during a time when the U.S. wanted to isolate Syria. Additionally, the incident prompted some frustration knowing that Russian interference undermined the Presidential strategy for dealing with Syria. President Bush did not have many options remaining for how to deal with Syria, and he provided no clear way forward for the remainder of his presidency. His ability to envision a better outcome in Syria appears to have vanished completely at this point, and he resigned to continue seeking increased international pressure and isolation with the coalition of nations friendly to the U.S. Ominously, Russia would continue to inject themselves into the situation in Syria, much to the dismay of President Bush.

In conjunction with isolation and pressure, President Bush also encouraged democratic progress as a broad sweeping strategy in government reform. During his

second inaugural address, President Bush outlined a general framework for how he believed the U.S. should approach their foreign interventions, namely through the outward promotion of democracy and the encouragement of democratic movements. He said: "The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world...So it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world" (Bush 1/20/2005, Inaugural Address). While he initially sounded optimistic in reaching his goal, a few weeks later during his *State of the Union* Address he offered little insight into how to make progress in Syria as he retracted his new promotion of democracy projection and replaced it with application of pressure and expectation of immediate action in response to U.S. demands. "The United States has no right, no desire, and no intention to impose our form of government on anyone else," yet "to promote peace in the broader Middle East, we must confront regimes that continue to harbor terrorists...and we expect the Syrian government to end all support for terror and open the door to freedom" (Bush 2/2/2005, SOTU). These contradictory policy statements induced further confusion in an already complex situation in Syria.

Later, the President tried to illuminate the benefits of democracy to the international community, as well as directly to the Syrian people. He said: "our objective, our policy is to give voice to people through democratic reform...we believe democracy yields peace. And the actions of Hezbollah, through its sponsors of Iran and Syria, are trying to stop that advance of democracy" (Bush 8/7/2006, President's News Conference with Rice). President Bush wanted to install a government that would

welcome more of what the collective citizens in Syria would like, instead of the single-minded nature of the authoritarian dictator. "To the people of Syria..., your rulers have allowed your country to become a crossroad for terrorism...your government must choose a better way forward by ending its support for terror and living in peace with your neighbors and opening the way to a better life for you and your families" " (Bush 9/19/2006, Remarks at the UN).

President Bush continued on this mantra into his last year in office. He claimed: "I will make clear that the only way to ensure true prosperity is to expand political and economic freedom. And I will urge leaders across the region to reject spoilers such as the regimes in Iran and Syria, move past old grievances, and embrace the changes necessary for a day when societies across the Middle East are based on justice, tolerance, and freedom" (Bush 5/17/08, President's Radio Address). President Bush retained a strong belief that democratic societies were superior and the goal of U.S. foreign policy should be to install democracies everywhere. However, throughout his Presidency, he offered very little insight into how he negotiated with world leaders to garner support for such a grandiose idea.

No matter what strategy the presidents applied in their foreign policy, nothing worked to submit Syria to U.S. interests as the relationship between the U.S. and Syria continued to diverge. One of the more prominent problems the U.S. faced from Syria was the regime's complicity in permitting transients to cross their borders as terrorists and fight directly against the U.S. military in Iraq. When asked in October 2003 about his intent to hold Syria accountable for cross-border incursions, President Bush deferred and only provided insight on the efforts being taken to build Iraqi border patrol agents

"so they can enforce their own borders" (Bush 10/28/2003, President's News Conference). The President made no mention of how to hold Syria accountable.

When asked about the "intelligence reports that hundreds if not thousands of foreign fighters are streaming across the border from Syria to take up the fight of the insurgency," President Bush acknowledged the problematic nature of the reported quantities (Bush 9/23/2004, President's News Conference with Allawi). In response, he insisted: "we will adjust strategies on the ground, depending upon the tactics of the enemy, but we're not going to allow the suiciders [sic] to drive us out of Iraq" (Bush 9/23/2004, President's News Conference with Allawi). President Bush did not offer any potential solutions to help solve the problem or any visionary statement on how to steer the U.S. relationship with Syria onto a better path.

President Bush pleaded to Syria that the nation must "become an active participant in the neighborhood for peace" (Bush 7/28/2006, President's News Conference with Blair) and flatly stated that "Syria must end its support for terrorism" (Bush 7/29/06, President's Radio Address). President Bush offered no guidance to help or repercussions for the failure to execute these items. Instead, he suggested it was entirely up to the Syrian government to address and he expected to see action.

Following a Baghdad regional conference in March 2007, President Bush responded to a question of whether he believed in Syria's seriousness in helping Iraq by calling for Syria to act. "If they really want to help stabilize Iraq, there are things for them to do, such as cutting off weapon flows and/or the flow of suicide bombers into Iraq" (Bush 3/11/2007, President's News Conference with Uribe Velez). While he believed these were items that Syria could do to improve the situation, he also seemed

indignant at the slightest suggestion that he should reach out to Syria. He felt that if Syria truly wanted to assist Iraq, then they needed to demonstrate that through doing something more than words. In response to Syrian meddling in Iraqi political process, President Bush's warned the Syrians that he expected them "to honor the political process in Iraq without meddling" (Bush 12/20/2004, President's News Conference).

Throughout his term in office, the one item that President Bush adamantly opposed was communicating directly with the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. He made no references to any direct calls to him, probably because of the complete lack of Syrian action to meet his demands. When questioned about whether the U.S. should directly contact Syria regarding the crisis in Lebanon in 2006, President Bush responded "We have been in touch with Syria" indicating that he never directly called anyone, but members of his administration contacted people who worked for Assad (Bush 8/7/2006 President's News Conference with Rice). He continued: "Syria knows what we think. The problem isn't us telling Syria what's on our mind...The problem is, is that their response hasn't been very positive. As a matter of fact, it hasn't been positive at all" (Bush 8/7/2006, President's News Conference with Rice). When asked whether he would be interested in direct discussions with the Assad government to deal with the situation in Iraq, President Bush retorted "the Iraqi Government is a sovereign government that is capable of handling its own foreign policies" (Bush 11/28/2006, President's News Conference with Ilves). This statement showed that President Bush did not want to insert himself to communicate with Assad, so he shut down the idea of communicating directly with President Assad. Additionally, he showed frustration at the fact the Syria has not

been helpful in resolving the crisis. His reluctance withheld the full measure of U.S. power and perpetuated the status quo.

As time passed, President Bush became more entrenched in his position and less willing to reach out. He also became more rigid in his expectation for Syria to act. Late in 2006, President Bush commented on Syria: "if they're interested in better relations with the United States," then they should "take some concrete, positive steps that promote peace as opposed to instability." (Bush 12/20/2006, President's News Conference). Early the following year, he stated: "my attitude on Syria is they can be a much more constructive partner, and they haven't been. They don't need to be told that in meeting after meeting after meeting. They get told that right here in a press conference like this. They know exactly what they need to do. And it's their choice to make" (Bush 1/4/2007, President's News Conference with Merkel). President Bush felt that he fully understood the relationship dynamic with the Syrian regime, and placing any effort toward improvement was futile.

He partially explains why he held such harsh feelings on Syria in a news conference in April. It was then President Bush referred to President Assad with the statement: "we haven't seen action; in other words, he hasn't responded. It's one thing to send a message, it's another thing to have the person receiving the message actually do something" (Bush 4/3/2007, President's News Conference). President Bush did not want to spend his time trying to negotiate with another nation's president, particularly one as unmovable as President Assad. President Bush's frustration with Syria's lack of action to meet U.S. demands to stop supporting terrorism and undermining regional governments deterred any idea of building a better relationship between the U.S. and Syria.

Overall, President Bush attempted to isolate Syria and encourage democratic reform, but was not able to accomplish much. When President Bush tried to make progress, Russia and Iran stepped up to provide Syria support, thus offsetting any U.S. progress. From a geopolitical perspective, isolating a foreign nation from the first world society would seem to have the effect of driving them closer to other adversarial nations, where more criminal and adversarial conduct is welcome. As President Bush tried to pressure Syrian through sanctions and international resolutions, Russia's veto on the United Nations Security Council stymied the eventual outcome. Efforts to spread the idea of democracy also failed to take root and have an effect. Despite saying that "we have a foreign policy that addresses the root causes of violence and instability," President Bush never adequately addressed one of the most prominent and historical root causes of violence in the Middle East, specifically the Syrian regime, despite the topic of terrorism dominating his presidency (Bush 7/28/2006, President's News Conference with Blair). Given their long history of supporting and exporting the tactic, Syria should have been high on the list of targets to act upon.

The relationship regressed during his tenure. President Bush did not provide a consistent vision or a goal to accomplish with respect to Syria. Instead, his vision consisted of a disciplined and cooperative relationship with Syria, yet his demands for action shunned Syria and hampered any potential progress to improve the situation. Conversely, he wound up putting the U.S. and Syria on adversarial footing for the foreseeable future.

6.4. PRESIDENT BARACK H. OBAMA

In many ways, President Obama dealt with an entirely new array of problems that none of his predecessors faced. Not only was Syria more adversarial toward the U.S. upon the start of President Obama's tenure than they were with his predecessors, He also presided over U.S. foreign policy during the Arab Spring and the initial onslaught of the terrorist group known as ISIS.³ He also assumed control over two ongoing wars – one in Iraq and one in Afghanistan – and the continuous Global War on Terror. Needless to say, the U.S. forward presence and engagement with the world was at its height when he took over. On top of these, some of the same old problems remained as well. Syria remained a country led by a ruthless dictator and Syria's few allies continued to insert themselves and counter many U.S. interests. Immediately, the environment and the rapidly changing situation tested the new president, and like the others before him, he struggled to outline a vision that could improve the situation in Syria or the relationship with the Syrian regime.

As President Obama came to office, there was very little opportunity to build a better relationship between the U.S. government and the government of Syria. The U.S. relationship with Syria soured significantly during President Bush's Administration and making amends is not a quick or easy process. President Obama, despite his rhetoric to unify people, made no comments on how to improve a relationship with President Assad. Falling in on the trend, President Obama neglected to provide an initial vision to resolve some of the lasting issues with Syria. President Obama became reactionary to the myriad

³ The group Islamic State, has been known by several names in the U.S. government, including the Islamic State, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham. They have also been called the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in some documents. These names are frequently abbreviated ISIS or ISIL.

of developing situations, and struggled to accept ownership of some parts of the problems he would face, which further perpetuated some of the problems.

Upfront and foremost, the sheer quantity of issues President Obama faced with regard to Syria made the strategies he used more complicated than that of his predecessors. But it also highlighted the importance of selecting and implementing the right policy to fix the problems to alleviate further negative developments. President Obama's personal involvement directing the foreign policies compounded the complexities as he attempted to discover a more nuanced approach to dealing with each specific problem.

Broadly speaking, his promotion of the idea of democratic governance stands out when compared to that of his predecessors, particularly in his statements of encouragement for the Syrian population to reject the authoritarian nature of the Assad regime. Granted, President Bush also sought democratic action in Syria, but President Obama's promotion of the idea of democracy expanded considerably. He encouraged U.S. involvement in the process to force President Assad to step down and transition the Syrian government to a more civic-minded alternative. President Obama authorized and pushed for a limited U.S. role in Syria by providing training and equipment to the Syrian opposition. He continued efforts from his predecessors to isolate, build pressure and impose sanctions against Syria. While he reduced the quantity of chemical weapons in Syria, President Obama also attempted to lessen the need to apply the U.S. military to solve every problem. Lastly, he sought to build a more cohesive international community to pressure and take actions against adversarial nations.

Overall, President Obama seemed pretty clear in his message to the international community. "There's no great game to be won, nor does America have any interest in Syria beyond the well-being of its people, the stability of its neighbors, the elimination of chemical weapons, and ensuring that it does not become a safe haven for terrorists" (Obama 9/24/2013, Remarks at the UN). It seemed simple and straightforward that he wanted the United States to help make the situation better, despite the fact that some members of the international community did not want the assistance. Unfortunately, the U.S. contributions to the development and support for the Syrian opposition waxed and waned through President Obama's time in office. Complicating factors, such as the increased Russian presence, the use of chemical weapons, and the drawing of a "red line", played a role in the inability to fully meet his intent (Obama 8/20/12, President's News Conference).

President Obama first began to recognize the situation in Syria following the initial phases of the Arab Spring in 2011. After confirmed reports of the atrocities taking place President Obama began to focus much more of his attention on Syria. While much of the Arab world erupted and attempted to uninstall the various authoritarian governments pervasive throughout the Middle East and North Africa at this time, Syria garnered much more attention due to the initial ruthlessness of the unrest and the Syrian regime response. Reacting to the situation on the ground, President Obama responded by condemning "the abhorrent violence committed against peaceful protesters by the Syrian Government" (Obama 4/8/2011, Statement on the Situation). However, condemnations had little effect on the abhorrent violence.

President Obama started off his policy comments by calling for democratic reform. In his first statement he said "it is time for the Syrian Government to stop repressing its citizens and to listen to the voices of the Syrian people calling for meaningful political and economic reforms" (Obama 4/8/2011, Statement on the Situation). A few weeks later was the first time President Obama called out President Assad for his actions. "We call on President Asad to change course now and heed the calls of his own people" (Obama 4/22/2011, Statement on the Situation). He repeated that call for democratic change based on the will of the people throughout the next six years, to no avail. President Obama initially felt that it was not up to the U.S. to decide the fate of the Syrian government. "The United States cannot and will not impose this transition upon Syria. It is up to the Syrian people to choose their own leaders" (Obama 8/18/2011, Statement on Situation). Years later he said: "And we will continue to work with the international community to usher in the future the Syrian people deserve, a future free of dictatorship, terror, and fear" (Obama 1/28/2014, SOTU). At no time did the Syrian population come close to ousting Assad or electing a new president, thus demonstrating a wasted effort.

In conjunction with his calls for democratic reform, President Obama also called to replace President Assad. The first time President Obama specifically called for President Assad to forfeit control over his government was in August 2011. "For the sake of the Syrian people, the time has come for President Asad to step aside" (Obama 8/18/2011, Statement on Situation). It was President Obama's belief that following the brutal crackdown on innocent people in Syria, President Assad was no longer effective as a nation's leader and he should be replaced. Often, when President Obama repeated this

claim that Assad must go, he also mentioned that Assad has lost his legitimacy and his credibility. "A leader who slaughtered his citizens and gassed children to death cannot regain the legitimacy to lead a badly fractured country" (Obama 9/24/2013, Remarks at the UN). "He is not credible in that country" (Obama 11/16/2014, President's News Conference).

When asked whether he was "actively discussing ways to remove [Assad] as a part of that political transition," President Obama flatly stated "No" (Obama 11/16/2014, President's News Conference). Thus, the President affirmed that despite regular statements denying the legitimacy and credibility of President Assad and numerous comments on the need for a political transition, President Obama was not expending effort to actively remove President Assad.

President Obama's concern that the civil war in Syria would continue unabated if President Assad was not removed from power was ever present, "As a practical matter, it is not conceivable that Mr. Asad can regain legitimacy in a country in which a large majority of that country despises Asad and will not stop fighting so long as he's in power, which means that the civil war perpetuates itself." (Obama 11/22/2015, President's News Conference). Hence, he proliferated the idea that to bring a more democratic government to Syria, President Assad cannot stay.

While initially President Obama believed the reform must come from within Syria, he seemed to alter he optic slightly following the Syrian assault on Homs on 4 February 2012. He began to realize that the current actions were not sufficient, and the U.S. would be required to do more to achieve success in Syria. President Obama stated: "We must work with the Syrian people toward building a brighter future for Syria"

(Obama 2/4/2012, Statement on Situation). He recognized the need for a closer relationship with the Syrian people to provide them necessary training and support. Despite the recognition, President Obama and his administration struggled to muster the support to build that relationship and failed to accept their role in building an equitable partner.

One major progression would have been full recognition provided to the Syrian opposition in late 2012. President Obama provided a partial recognition in his statement: "We consider them a legitimate representative of the aspirations of the Syrian people. We're not yet prepared to recognize them as some sort of government-in-exile, but we do think that it is a broad-based representative group" (Obama 11/14/2012, President's News Conference). By not providing them full recognition at that time, President Obama missed an opportunity to coalesce a replacement government for President Assad and delayed meeting his intent. There was some warranted apprehension due to the background of the individuals involved in the Syrian opposition, and the belief that some of the opposition included extremists. "We have seen extremist elements insinuate themselves into the opposition, and one of the things that we have to be on guard about...is that we're not indirectly putting arms in the hands of folks who would do Americans harm...or otherwise engage in actions that are detrimental to our national security" (Obama 11/14/2012, President's News Conference). President Obama wanted to ensure that vetting of the opposition group leadership occurred and that the United States was not solving one problem to replace it with a bigger problem. However, failure to take ownership by fully recognizing the opposition perpetuated and prolonged the

vetting process, making the entire segment of the operation less successful than it could have been.

Later, as the vetting increased and the U.S. increased the support provided to the Syrian opposition, it seemed the initial stagnation had been addressed, President Obama stated: "we are providing not just advice, not just words, but we're providing resources, training, capacity, in order for that political opposition to maintain links within Syria and to be able to provide direct services to people inside of Syria" (Obama 3/22/2013, President's News Conference With Abdullah II). President Obama felt certain that "in the absence of a credible political opposition, it will be impossible for us to transition to a more peaceful and more representative and legitimate government structure inside of Syria" (Obama 3/22/2013, President's News Conference with Abdullah II). Through this comment, President Obama placed a lot of emphasis on the ability of the Syrian opposition to form and provide a viable replacement for President Assad without taking a more assertive role. President Obama seemingly provided his commitment to the opposition as what appeared to be the best mechanism to expel Bashar Assad and carve a new path for Syria's future.

In September 2013, President Obama removed restrictions from the Defense Department and the State Department, therefore allowing the U.S. to provide "defense articles and defense services to vetted members of the Syrian opposition" (Obama 9/16/2013, Memo on Provisions to Syrian Opposition). That this change of policy came on the heels of the agreement with Russia and Syria to remove the chemical weapons stockpiles from Syria is not surprising. President Obama assumed the risk to U.S. forces in Syria would be less with the removal of their chemical weapons. The approval

indicated that President Obama wanted to push for greater strides and success to reach the goal of ousting Assad. President Obama had been saying that the world must act. These actions aligned with the strategy to increase pressure on the Assad regime and offered the realistic possibility of making progress in Syria.

Early the following year, President Obama called "on the international community to stem the flow of foreign fighters into Syria" (Obama 2/11/2014, President's News Conference with Hollande). This was seemingly an impossible task. Regardless, any effort that could potentially assist the opposition would also help President Obama to meet his intent to remove Assad in Syria. Unfortunately, the support was inconsequential to significantly bolster the opposition and overcome the Assad regime and the support they acquired from Russia and Iran.

As a complimentary action to working in conjunction with his calls for Assad to step down, President Obama orchestrated the release of three Executive Orders and international sanctions as a mechanism to impose higher costs for the Syrian regime to continue their crackdown. Executive Order 13572 placed sanctions against those "responsible for...human rights abuses in Syria" (E.O. 13572, 4/29/2011). Executive Order 13573 blocked "the property and interests" of anyone deemed "a senior official of the Government of Syria" or deemed "an agency or instrumentality of the Government of Syria" (E.O. 13573, 5/18/2011). Later, Executive Order 13582 expanded the previous sanctions to include all persons in the Government of Syria, and any person known to assist or support the government of Syria (E.O. 13582, 8/17/2011). Internationally, President Obama lobbied for and applauded "the EU's decision to impose sanctions on President Asad" (Obama 5/25/2011, President's News Conference with Cameron). It

seems like the goal for President Obama at this time was to place as many legal and financial burdens on the members of the Government of Syria as possible, therefore placing them at a disadvantage and potentially allowing for their removal from office. In all, these sanctions placed a much heavier financial burden on the Syrian regime and attempted to limit the amount of abuse the Assad regime could inflict on the Syrian population. Sadly, the sanctions did not work as effectively as intended, as Syria continued to perform heinous acts of savagery against their own population.

As mentioned previously with George W. Bush's attempts to isolate Syria, isolationist policies only tended to isolate Syria from the West, and they did not isolate from those nations already hostile toward the U.S. President Obama confirmed that point. "President Asad is blaming outsiders, while seeking Iranian assistance in repressing Syria's citizens through the same brutal tactics that have been used by his Iranian allies" (Obama 4/22/2011, Statement on the Situation). So, while the U.S. sought isolation, Syria found a strong ally that would support their actions and allow President Assad to prolong his strangle hold on the Syrian Government. President Obama claimed "the United States will continue to increase our pressure on the Syrian regime and work with others around the world to isolate the Asad Government and stand with the Syrian people" (Obama 7/31/2011, Statement on the Situation). However, any willingness to impose more effective sanctions on Syria never materialized as greater sanctions were rarely discussed for the remained of President Obama's tenure in the White House. The lack of ownership to find other ways to impose further sanctions on Syria exacerbated other problems as Syria continuously found ways to circumvent U.S. restrictions.

In another example, President Obama sought to continue President Bush's policy of isolating the Syrian regime through international sanctions. Much of President Obama's 2011 statement to the United Nations was about seeking unity with the members of the United Nations; however, his statement also sought to compel the group to act and isolate the Assad regime. "There's no excuse for inaction. Now is the time for the United Nations Security Council to sanction the Syrian regime, and to stand with the Syrian people" (Obama 9/21/2011, Remarks at the UN). Over the course of the next few years, President Obama pressed the international community for further action.

"International pressure...is the right position to take" (Obama 12/12/2011, President's News Conference with al-Maliki). While discussions occurred several times since, the United Nations Security Council did not approve any resolutions against Syria, which signified President Obama's struggle to win international support through the United Nations. Unfortunately, none of the sanctions proposed or imposed by the U.S. or the international community worked to impose difficulties on the Syrian regime's activities.

President Obama provided insight into the struggles that arose by working with the international community to enforce an isolation policy on Syria. The primary reason for the struggles within the international community was the staunch Russian opposition to any U.S. proposal. President Obama specifically referenced "lingering suspicions" due to the historic relationship between the U.S. and Russia (Obama 5/13/2013, President's News Conference with Cameron). "It has been very difficult to get Russia—working through the Security Council—to acknowledge some of the terrible behavior of the Assad regime and to try to push towards the kind of political transition that's needed in order to stabilize Syria" (Obama 9/4/2013, President's News Conference with Reinfeldt). Without

Russian support, using the United Nations to impose isolation would remain a difficult task.

Later, President Obama said: "I do agree that we're not going to solve the problems in Syria unless there's buy-in from the Russians, the Iranians, the Turks, our Gulf partners. It's too chaotic" (Obama 7/15/2015, President's News Conference). In some regards, Syria was like a perfect storm in that the U.S. needed the support of Syria's allies and neighbors in order to gain traction with the international community. President Obama eventually began to understand this dynamic, as he discovered that simply imposing the will of the U.S. government on the Assad regime would not work. If he wanted to be successful in imposing an isolationist agenda, he would need Russian support, and he began to change his mind in September 2015.

"The United States is prepared to work with any nation, including Russia and Iran, to resolve the conflict. But we must recognize that there cannot be, after so much bloodshed, so much carnage, a return to the prewar status quo" (Obama 9/28/2015, Remarks at the UN). With this statement, he was not placing boundaries on his willingness to work through diplomatic means, with the exception that President Obama remained resolute that President Assad was at fault, and should be removed. President Obama stated, "we're very clear in sticking to our belief and our policy that the problem here is Asad and the brutality that he has inflicted on the Syrian people...we are not going to cooperate with a Russian campaign to simply try to destroy anybody who is disgusted and fed up with Mr. Asad's behavior" (Obama 10/2/2015, President's News Conference). President Obama clearly preferred a diplomatic solution, but demonstrated a firmness in his belief that Assad should go. He seemed exasperated at the overall lack

of progress in resolving the conflict and appeared to grasp some control of the outward message as a reaction to the continued stagnation.

However, Russia's resistance continued to prove problematic for President Obama. President Obama was "not confident" in trusting the relationship with the Russians and Vladimir Putin (Obama 8/4/2016, President's News Conference). At times, it seemed the U.S. and Russia could not agree on anything. "We reject Russia's theory that everybody opposed to Asad is a terrorist. We think that is self-defeating" (Obama 10/2/2015, President's News Conference). Although, at the same time there was tremendous benefit in working with Russia "given Russia's military capabilities and given the influence they have on the Asad regime, them cooperating would be enormously helpful in bringing about a resolution of the civil war in Syria and allow us all to refocus our attention on ISIL" (Obama 11/24/2015, President's News Conference with Hollande). President Obama obviously wanted Russian support because working together to defeat the common adversary could have expedited the process. "Russia is a major military. Obviously, a bunch of rebels are not going to be able to compete with the hardware of the second most powerful military in the world" (Obama 2/16/2016, President's News Conference). Unfortunately, after nearly three years of Russian military involvement in Syria, it appeared President Obama placed sole blame for the lack of progress to fully isolate Syrian on Russia, without accepting that the U.S could have contributed more through more effective sanctions or military involvement. His vision suffered from his unwillingness to contribute more effort earlier during the situation.

One of the most important policy developments that occurred during President Obama's term was the drawing of a "red line" by President Obama in August 2012 and

the subsequent use and confiscation of Syria's chemical weapons (Obama 8/20/12, President's News Conference). He made the infamous red line comment in response to questions about the security of the chemical and biological weapons stockpiles in Syria, particularly as the competing factions in Syria irreversibly destroyed the security situation. President Obama shared concern that uncontrolled weapons of mass destruction could bring catastrophic results. "We cannot have a situation where chemical or biological weapons are falling into the hands of the wrong people. We have been very clear to the Asad regime, 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" (Obama 8/20/2012, President's News Conference). Additionally, he stated: "there would be enormous consequences if we start seeing movement on the chemical weapons front or the use of chemical weapons. That would change my calculations significantly" (Obama 8/20/2012, President's News Conference). President Obama did not specify what the consequences would be, but his comments were clear that Syria could expect U.S. actions if the Syrian regime used or lost any chemical weapons. Over the course of the following years, President Obama rejected stating those words and staunchly claimed that he "didn't set a red line" (Obama 9/4/2013, President's News Conference with Reinfeldt). His refusal to accept ownership for making the comments and his unwillingness to follow through on the threat of consequences proved extremely problematic for the U.S ability to affect the situation in Syria thereafter.

When asked about the U.S. response to Syria's suspected use of chemical weapons in March 2013, President Obama deferred on whether the U.S. should contribute military personnel to the problem, because it is "a world problem" and claimed

to have ordered an investigation “to make sure that we know exactly what happened” (Obama 3/20/2013, President's News Conference with Netanyahu). Logically, the President wanted to verify before committing any U.S. forces into a conflict that involved the potential use of chemical weapons. However, regardless of whether the Syrian regime used the chemical weapons or whether someone else stole them and detonated them, the issue was concerning because either Syria used the weapons or Syria can't protect their own weapons. Both of those scenarios fall within the criteria President Obama outlined when we initially drew the red line. Regardless, President Obama provided no guidance into what actions he would decide to execute other than saying that “the international community has to act on that additional information” (Obama 3/20/2013, President's News Conference with Netanyahu).

President Obama attempted to broaden the aperture on how to respond to the use of chemical weapons. “The use of chemical weapons would be a game changer, not simply for the United States, but for the international community” (Obama 4/30/2013, President's News Conference). Upon receipt of positive evidence of systemic use, President Obama claimed “this is, again, not just an American problem, this is a world problem...when it comes to using chemical weapons, the entire world should be concerned” (Obama 5/3/2013, President's News Conference with Miranda). It seemed like President Obama did not want to take responsibility for making the initial red line statement and he remained non-committal in the use of the military. His awkwardness in his response led some journalists to question the credibility of the United States if President Obama does not order military action in response to Syria crossing the red line.

August 2013 turned out to be a critical month in the Syrian Crisis because of the use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime on his own population, but also because of the U.S. response. The confirmed use of chemical weapons in August 2013 was the tipping point for President Obama, as this was the first instance where President Obama agreed the use of the U.S. military in response to Syrian actions was appropriate. He finally appeared to accept some ownership of the problem as he decided to react to a continued Syrian malevolence. Although, he still placed restrictions on the military. "This would not be an open-ended intervention. We would not put boots on the ground" (Obama 8/31/2013, Remarks on the Situation). His stated intent for the military action was to "hold the Asad regime accountable for their use of chemical weapons, deter this kind of behavior, and degrade their capacity to carry it out" (Obama 8/31/2013, Remarks on the Situation). He wanted to ensure that he could prevent this type of activity; however, problems arose with the manner in which he believed the U.S. military would deter the Syrian activity. President Obama changed his mind, yet he still did not want to fully commit.

In the aftermath of the Ghouta chemical weapons attack on 21 August 2013, President Obama searched for the answer of what should be done and tried to compel the international community to act. President Obama called the tragedy "murder" and questioned what would happen if the weapons "fall into the hands of terrorists who might use them against us" (Obama 9/7/13, President's Weekly Address). While the Syrians and the Russians rebuffed his attempts to pin responsibility on the Syrian regime with their own distorted perspective of the events, President Obama fought back. "We cannot turn a blind eye to images like the ones we've seen out of Syria. Failing to respond to this

outrageous attack would increase the risk that chemical weapons could be used again...and it would send a horrible signal to other nations that there would be no consequences for their use of these weapons, all of which would pose a serious threat to our national security" (Obama 9/7/13, President's Weekly Address). Very clearly, President Obama stated that something must be done and he is no longer willing to sit idle and allow this to occur. He made a compelling case and seemed determined to act.

As he laid out his case against Assad, President Obama acknowledged that he anticipated taking the next step in using military force, a measure he had attempted to prevent previously. "I determined that it is in the national security interests of the United States to respond to the Asad regime's use of chemical weapons through a targeted military strike. The purpose of this strike would be to deter Asad from using chemical weapons, to degrade his regime's ability to use them, and to make clear to the world that we will not tolerate their use" (Obama 9/10/2013, Address to the Nation). All indications showed that President Obama would finally act toward his vision in Syria and the initial stages of regime change would occur.

However, at the time he acknowledged that he planned to use military force, the United States also learned of a proposal from Russia to completely and jointly dismantle Syria's chemical weapons program. President Obama jumped at the chance to work the agreement because it allowed him to not use military force, which he anguished over extensively, and because he could meet the same endstate. President Obama claimed the threat of U.S. military action profoundly changed the Syrian perspective and forced Syria to reconsider their actions. The Assad regime "admitted that it has these weapons" and "said they'd join the Chemical Weapons Convention, which prohibits their use" (Obama

9/10/2013, Address to the Nation). President Obama appeared clear-eyed on the prospects of the success of this deal. "It's too early to tell whether this offer will succeed, and any agreement must verify that the Asad regime keeps its commitments. But this initiative has the potential to remove the threat of chemical weapons without the use of force" (Obama 9/10/2013, Address to the Nation). President Obama relished getting his first choice of a diplomatic solution, as he repeatedly stated up to this point that he would prefer to not use force if alternative means were available.

President Obama sought to keep the pressure on Assad, following the arrangement to withdraw and dismantle Syria's chemical weapons. He knew this was a critical junction in the ability to resolve the Syrian Crisis and removing the chemical weapons meant progress could be made towards his ultimate goal, which was the replacement of Assad as President of Syria. "We're making it clear that this can't be a stalling tactic. Any agreement needs to verify that the Asad regime and Russia are keeping their commitments" (Obama 9/14/13, President's Weekly Address). He called for actions by the international community to "enforce the ban on chemical weapons" (Obama 9/24/2013, Remarks at the UN). Later, President Obama proclaimed: "Syria must meet its commitments, and Russia has a responsibility to ensure that Syria complies" (Obama 2/11/2014, President's News Conference with Hollande). He did not want the international community to view the problems in Syria as resolved. The use of chemical weapons was one problem, but it was not the only problem that required ensuring attention to improve. Therefore, "we will maintain our military posture in the region to keep the pressure on the Asad regime. And if diplomacy fails, the United States

and the international community must remain prepared to act" (Obama 9/14/13, President's Weekly Address).

Until the Ghouta chemical attack occurred, it did not appear that the U.S. would take any unilateral action to combat the increasingly hostile Syrian regime. Syria's confirmed use of chemical weapons changed the dynamic and introduced the potential for the U.S. military involvement. Even though no U.S. forces did not deploy to Syria, the credible threat existed and potentially offered the break-through for the reduction of chemical weapons. President Obama made this precise point later in his *State of the Union* address. "American diplomacy, backed by the threat of force, is why Syria's chemical weapons are being eliminated" (Obama 1/28/2014, SOTU).

President Obama repeatedly claimed the full dismantling all of Syria's declared chemical weapons as a victory and the manner by which the U.S. and Russia conducted the operation as "a success" (Obama 4/24/2014, President's News Conference with Abe). Despite his concern that "serious questions remain with respect to the omissions and discrepancies in Syria's declaration to the OPCW and about continued allegations of use," President Obama believed the removal and destruction of the chemical weapons sent "a clear message that the use of these abhorrent weapons has consequences and will not be tolerated by the international community" (Obama 8/18/2014, Statement). Yet, what remained unclear was the message sent by the hasty agreement with Russia to fully remove weapons. The U.S. did not achieve anything in their relationship with Syria, and the Syrian dictator continued to brutalize his people. Removing one tool from President Assad did not affect the pervasive problems throughout Syria because the United States did not impose any further consequences on Syria for their possession and use of

chemical weapons. Syria gave up their chemical weapons to forgo the potential military action by the United States, but otherwise Syria appeared to have suffered very little in the exchange. Additionally, President Obama no longer possessed a way to actively assist in the removal of Assad. His initial lack of ownership over drawing a red line forced him into a situation that required his action to retain U.S. and presidential credibility. By hastily reacting to the offer to remove the chemical weapons, President Obama lost some leverage to assist him in meeting his vision and the Syrian people continued to suffer through a prolonged crisis.

One of the other biproducts of the hasty reaction to agree to the dismantling of chemical weapons in Syria was President Obama's indecisiveness on whether to deploy the military to Syria. In the immediate aftermath of the Ghouta attack, President Obama supported military involvement due to the severity of the attack and to eliminate credibility concerns that arose from previous comments. This was a drastic change from his earlier decisions where he opposed using the U.S. military. When the time eventually came and when the magnitude of the developments in Syria were critical enough to deploy the U.S. military, President Obama limited himself and the military in their ability to respond to further developments. He said: "the military plan that has been developed by our Joint Chiefs—and that I believe is appropriate—is proportional. It is limited. It does not involve boots on the ground" (Obama 9/3/2013, Remarks Prior to Meeting with Congress). President Obama called the U.S. response to Syrian use of chemical weapons "proportional" and "meaningful" (Obama 9/6/2013, President's News Conference), but also "limited, both in time and scope, designed to deter the Syrian Government from

gassing its own people again and degrade its ability to do so" (Obama 9/7/13, President's Weekly Address).

The response seemed tailored to ameliorate a weary American public, it also raised considerable questions about how to achieve such a broad objective in such a limited capacity. The quantifiers in this statement seem contradictory in that they are limited in time yet enduring, while also limited in scope yet omnipotent in effect. Furthermore, the President did not provide the military an objective to achieve aside from being limited in time and scope. Obviously, President Obama did not want to provide an open-ended commitment to deploy large units to Syria. However, seemingly any operation would require the use of military personnel on the ground to gain security over existing stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons and manufacturing facilities, and to dismantle those weapons. An aerial campaign could not perform this role.

There was a need for large numbers of military personnel. He even admitted this himself. "Unless the international community is willing to put massive numbers of troops on the ground...we're not going to get a long-term military solution for the country" (Obama 9/6/2013, President's News Conference). His perspective was that if the U.S. military working with an international coalition could not quickly and efficiently meet the objective required to resolve the Syrian Crisis, so, he would rather not participate at all.

President Obama struggled with the decision to deploy military forces, as he seemed to oppose military action as a general rule. "I do not believe that military action—by those within Syria, or by external powers—can achieve a lasting peace" (Obama 9/24/2013, Remarks at the UN). Contradictorily, while he made the statement

that military action will not work, he simultaneously indicated that any Syrian neglect to fully commit to the removal of their chemical weapons stockpiles must be dealt with.

"There must be consequences if they fail to do so" (Obama 9/24/2013, Remarks at the UN). President Obama didn't want the U.S. to be responsible for enforcing those consequences. He abdicated the leadership role to the international community for their desired level of participation, and subsequently reduced the possibility of meeting his intent in Syria.

President Obama also contradicts himself in the national interest aspect of the use of chemical weapons. As President Obama made the case that actions against Syria remain in the national interest, he simultaneously made statements that the actions are not a direct threat to the United States. As he presented the material before Congress, President Obama stated: "I put it before Congress because I could not honestly claim that the threat posed by Asad's use of chemical weapons on innocent civilians and women and children posed a [sic] imminent, direct threat to the United States" (Obama 9/6/2013, President's News Conference). The very next day, President Obama stated: "This was not only a direct attack on human dignity: It's a serious threat to our national security" (Obama 9/7/13, President's Weekly Address). While there is certainly a difference in their being a direct threat to the United States, and what constitutes as being in the national interest of the United States, President Obama's confusion and indecisiveness proved problematic when it came time to achieve results. Plus, it should be immediately recognized that a Syrian act of using chemical weapons is a direct threat to the allies of the United States in the Middle East, particularly Israel, Jordan and Turkey, and those threats themselves are inherently in the national interest of the United States.

Over time, President Obama continued to oppose U.S. military involvement. He could no conceive of a situation that would alter his perception. "I will not send our troops into harm's way unless it is truly necessary, nor will I allow our sons and daughters to be mired in open-ended conflicts. We must fight the battles that need to be fought, not those that terrorists prefer from us: large-scale deployments that drain our strength and may ultimately feed extremism" (Obama 1/28/2014, SOTU). President Obama's based at least some of his decision on whether to deploy U.S. forces on the thought that constant deployments to the Middle East have increased the hostility toward the U.S.

Instead of applying military force, President Obama claimed the U.S. and her allies were "focused on getting humanitarian aid to those in need. We agreed to keep increasing the pressure on the regime: mobilizing the international community, tightening sanctions, cutting the regime's revenues, isolating it politically, diplomatically, and economically" (Obama 3/14/2012, President's News Conference with Cameron). While he could claim efforts in all these areas, the effectiveness of the combination of efforts prove less than sufficient as there were no effective initiatives that worked to stop the Syrian Crisis or the brutality of the Assad regime. Case in point, in one of his most common refrains, President Obama liked to acknowledge that the U.S. is "the largest single donor of humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people" (Obama 1/29/2013, Videotaped Remarks). While the monetary amount provided might have been significant and increased over time, the situation in Syria continued to deteriorate and the conflict only worsened.

One of the impediments for President Obama appears to be his uncertainty that the military could achieve outcome of he intended. He does not convey that he believed

the outcome was achievable through military action. "Unless we can get the parties on the ground to agree to live together in some fashion, then no amount of U.S. military engagement will solve the problem. And we will find ourselves either doing just a little bit and not making a difference and losing credibility that way or drawing our—finding ourselves drawn in deeper and deeper into a situation that we can't sustain" (Obama 10/2/2015, President's News Conference). No external actor, not even the United States, is able to force neighbors to cooperate. The Syrian population needs to resolve their conflicts internally and arrive at their own resolution. Implicit within this statement is the thought that the U.S. should not overly commit to any actions in Syria unless there can be an assurance of success. Unfortunately, guarantees are hard to come by in international politics.

He distraughtly commented, "we have to find a political solution" and "right now we don't think that there is a military solution, per se, to the problem" (Obama 2/11/2014, President's News Conference with Hollande). "Unless we were all in and willing to take over Syria, we were going to have problems" (Obama 12/16/2016, President's News Conference). He did not want to take over Syria, because he viewed the military actions in Iraq under President Bush so negatively, and did not want to take ownership over a similar issue in Syria during his tenure.

In yet another series of events that arose in Syria during President Obama's term was the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham in the summer of 2014.⁴ The fact that ISIS formed within and mobilized to take and hold the terrain spanning central Syria

⁴ The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) has been also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and simply as the Islamic State. The most popular reference has been ISIS; however, some of the references used the term ISIL, which will remain in this paper due to original content.

to western Iraq is not surprising given the lawless nature of the boundary region between these two nations and the unwillingness to rid the area of religious extremists who sought to use terrorism as a method to dominate. President Obama called this expanse the “vacuum of Syria” (Obama 9/3/2014, President's News Conference with Ilves). He believed that the vacuum facilitated and perpetuated the growth of ISIS. They were “able to move into Raqqa in part because of a thorough rejection on the part of many Syrians of the Asad regime” (Obama 11/24/2015, President's News Conference with Hollande). While at first, President Obama balked at the ISIS expertise, the rise of ISIS served as a distractor for the international community as they took their brutality center stage and broadcasted for the world to see.

The introduction of ISIS caused a major reorientation of the goals the U.S. President set for actions in Syria. Until the introduction of ISIS as a major player in Syria, the Syrian opposition had gained support as an overarching conglomerate of forces intended to oppose the Syrian regime. However, President Obama re-purposed the opposition as a counterterrorist force by stating “we must strengthen the opposition as the best counterweight to extremists like ISIL, while pursuing the political solution necessary to solve Syria's crisis once and for all” (Obama 9/10/2014, Address to the Nation). President Obama significantly altered the fundamental purpose for the Syrian opposition and never reinforced efforts to continue any progress against the Syrian regime.

Almost immediately, all the focus and actions that had been directed toward the Syrian regime redirected to ISIS to the detriment of any progress against the Assad regime. So, while the international community expected the United States to lead the international community in a solution for the Syrian Crisis, the U.S. now faced a more

pressing concern with an extremely brutal and unforgiving terrorist organization that clearly demonstrated a willingness to kill those who disagreed with their philosophy. The newly required focus to stop the ISIS advance worked to help President Assad improve Syrian relationships with Russia and Iran and served as another impediment to achieving success in Syria. This was problematic, even as President Obama knew that ISIS must be dealt with, but he also knew "the only way to deal ISIL a lasting defeat is to end the civil war and chaos in Syria upon which ISIL thrives " (Obama 2/27/16, President's Weekly Address). "Defeating ISIL and Al Qaida requires an end to the civil war and the Asad regime's brutality against the Syrian people, which pushes people into the arms of extremists" (Obama 8/4/2016, President's News Conference). Therefore, fighting ISIS was akin to treating the symptom rather than the disease. President Obama again reacted to the situation as it developed with ISIS rather than proactively removing the fundamental problem which lie with the Assad regime.

Smartly, President Obama did not leave out the possibility that the Syrian opposition could continue to apply pressure against Assad to encourage Assad's transition or removal. He claimed to be "working with Congress to expand our efforts to train and equip the Syrian opposition" (Obama 9/13/14, President's Weekly Address). He wanted the Syrian opposition to be the fighting force working towards all U.S. interests in Syria. In his mind, "these Syrian opposition forces are fighting both the brutality of ISIL terrorists and the tyranny of the Asad regime" (Obama 9/18/2014, Remarks on Legislation). However, the advances made by ISIS into Iraq to derail the U.S. installed government in Baghdad, and the highly publicized murder of several U.S. citizens

immediately moved the ISIS problem into the immediate priority and took the focus of the entire Syrian opposition force.

President Obama later acknowledged that the progression of the Train and Equip Program was simply to fight ISIS, and he removed the detail that he initially intended for the program to be used as part of the Syrian opposition to President Assad. "The training-and-equip program was a specific initiative by the Defense Department to see if we could get some of that moderate opposition to focus attention on ISIL in the eastern portion of the country" (Obama 10/2/2015, President's News Conference). The progression of the comments on the Syrian opposition showed that as time passed, President Obama became much less interested in combatting the Syrian regime. So, instead of treating the root cause of the problem pervasive to Syria, President Obama slid down the path of treating the symptom of ISIS and leaving the actual problem of the Syrian regime unattended. To further illustrate this response, President Obama wasted little time to authorize the deployment of U.S. military advisors in the fight against ISIS. Despite his extreme reluctance to employ the U.S. military in any capacity against the Syrian regime, he quickly ordered forces "to Iraq will help Iraqi and Kurdish forces with the training, intelligence, and equipment they need to take the fight to these terrorists on the ground" (Obama 9/13/14, President's Weekly Address). President Obama succumbed to reality that the ISIS problem superseded any actions directed against Assad, despite the national interest in Syria and the brutal tactics employed by the Assad regime.

Shortly after directing U.S. military actions to counter ISIS, President Obama muddied the waters of his foreign policy objectives even further. He claimed to "have made it clear that America will not base our entire foreign policy on reacting to terrorism.

Instead, we've waged a focused campaign against Al Qaida and its associated forces: taking out their leaders, denying them the safe havens they rely on" (Obama 9/24/2014, Remarks at the UN). This statement was as confusing as it was contradictory. Not only was President Obama focusing more on counterterrorism efforts, he was doing so deliberately at the expense of addressing other legitimate foreign policy concerns. He continued to react to rapidly developing issues with ISIS and al-Qa'ida, and take little ownership in trying to resolve the Syrian Crisis.

After years of statements announcing that President Assad must go, and the only viable future for Syria did not involve Assad, President Obama changed course and stated: "Our focus in Syria is not to solve the entire Syria situation, but rather to isolate the areas in which ISIL can operate" (Obama 11/5/2014, President's News Conference). President Obama stated the U.S. will focus elsewhere beyond the Assad regime, and not focus their efforts directly against Assad. He expanded his comments to state that "no changes have taken place with respect to our attitude towards Bashar al-Assad...For us to then make common cause with him against ISIL would only turn more Sunnis in Syria in the direction of supporting ISIL and would weaken our coalition" (Obama 11/16/2014, President's News Conference). President Obama seemed to resign any attempt to remove Assad. He maintained his belief that military action would not achieve a political transition in Syria, therefore the military forces could be positioned to work almost exclusively against the ISIS and al-Qa'ida problem.

"The only lasting solution to Syria's civil war is political: an inclusive political transition that responds to the legitimate aspirations of all Syrian citizens, regardless of ethnicity, regardless of creed" (Obama 9/24/2014, Remarks at the UN). "The magnet that

the civil war there is serving in bringing in foreign fighters and recruiting people to this extremist cause will only go away if we're able to get a political track and a legitimate, inclusive Government inside of Syria." (Obama 10/16/2015, President's News Conference with Park). While President Obama remained firm and constantly spoke on the idea that a political outcome is the only viable way to keep the Syrian state whole. The Vienna talks were "the first time that all the key countries" came together, "and reached a common understanding" (Obama 11/16/2015, President's News Conference). He felt strongly that the U.S. and the international community should work through the Vienna process to determine the best outcome. "It is our best opportunity" (Obama 11/24/2015, President's News Conference with Hollande). President Obama remained committed to working with the international community to resolve the situation in Syria; although, his level of commitment left something to be desired.

President Obama saw a glimmer of hope in December 2015, as comments materialized about the progress made in the Vienna talks, particularly about the possibility of "pockets of cease-fires in and around Syria" (Obama 12/1/2015, President's News Conference). President Obama tried to bring the international community together and pressed to cease the relentless bombing of the opposition groups to provide the opportunity to have political discussions (Obama 12/1/2015, President's News Conference). He knew success in gaining a plan for a political transition during the Vienna talks was not entirely up to the U.S. as he required "active Russian support for a cease-fire and a political transition away from Asad to a democratically elected government that can unite the Syrian people against terrorism" (Obama 11/24/2015, President's News Conference with Hollande).

In fact, President Obama knew he needed more than just Russian support. "We cannot end the crisis in Syria without political negotiations and without getting all the parties around the table to craft a transition plan. And that, by necessity, means that there are going to be some people on one side of the table who I deeply disagree with and whose actions I deeply abhor" (Obama 4/22/2016, President's News Conference with Cameron). What remained unclear is how much effort President Obama put into the Vienna talks as it seemed that he did not pursue a leadership role to ensure all parties came and made an agreement. He knew "there are a bunch of stakeholders inside of Syria," but whether they arrived and participated in the discussions was another matter (Obama 12/18/2015, President's News Conference). He did not indicate that he wanted to take a leadership role to encourage the gathering into an agreement. Once again, the lack of ownership of the potential solution hampered President Obama in any pursuit to bring a close to the Syrian Conflict.

Near the end of his tenure, President Obama recognized his attempts to improve the situations in Syria had failed. "The regime and its allies continue to violate the cessation of hostilities, including with vicious attacks on defenseless civilians, medieval sieges against cities like Aleppo, and blocking food from reaching families that are starving. It is deplorable. And the depravity of the Syrian regime has rightly earned the condemnation of the world" (Obama 8/4/2016, President's News Conference). However, he showed little desire to do more.

After the 7-week cessation of hostilities, and the burst of violence in April 2016, President Obama expressed his concern and wanted to "reinstate the cessation of hostilities and make sure that the political process does not unwind" (Obama 4/24/2016,

President's News Conference with Merkel). At the same time, he rejected the idea of building safe zones in Syria on the practical principle that there had been very little discussions of how to conduct such an activity (Obama 4/24/2016, President's News Conference with Merkel). He remained reluctant to approve the military footprint that the U.S. Department of Defense recommended. "If you're setting up those zones on Syrian territory, then that requires some force that is willing to maintain that territory in the absence of consent from the Syrian Government and, now, the Russians or the Iranians" (Obama 12/16/2016, President's News Conference). He felt the complexity of the environment remained high, and initiating new U.S. military involvement only complicated matters more. So, President Obama resorted to trying to solve the problem diplomatically.

In some regards, President Obama knew what he wanted to achieve. He wanted "a genuine cessation of hostilities that prevents indiscriminate bombing, that protects civilians, that allows humanitarian access and creates some sort of pathway to begin the hard work of political negotiations inside of Syria" (Obama 8/4/2016, President's News Conference). However, his implementation of these ideas remained ineffective, especially if he did not commit the necessary resources in terms of money, time and personnel. If President Obama was not going to assume an oversize load and contribute tremendous effort, no progress would be made. He admitted, "there is a military component" to ending the Syrian crisis; however, President Obama compartmentalized that component to the fight against ISIS (Obama 9/20/2016, Remarks at the UN). With the problems derived from the Syrian regime, "where there's no ultimate military victory to be won, we're going to have to pursue the hard work of diplomacy that aims to stop the

violence and deliver aid to those in need and support those who pursue a political settlement and can see those who are not like themselves as worthy of dignity and respect" (Obama 9/20/2016, Remarks at the UN).

In terms of providing a vision for the U.S. and international community to work towards, President Obama was explicit with his intentions during his 2012 address to the United Nations General Assembly. "We must stand with those Syrians who believe in a different vision -- a Syria that is united and inclusive, where children don't need to fear their own government, and all Syrians have a say in how they are governed ... That is the outcome that we will work for -- with sanctions and consequences for those who persecute, and assistance and support for those who work for this common good" (Obama 9/25/2012, Remarks at the UN). His comments were broad and provided a goal to work towards. They combined the underpinning of democratic reform that existed since the President George W. Bush presidency as well as the pervasive altruism that remained a critical piece of most of President Obama's communications. However, while the President claimed the U.S. "will work for" this goal, his actions contradicted that statement, as many times he neglected to take full ownership of the response and commit the U.S. to a leadership role (Obama 9/25/2012, Remarks at the UN).

Without a doubt, President Obama's policy objectives are definitely the most complex in this analysis. Case in point, on one occasion President Obama stated: "we have had a steady, consistent policy, which is, we want a Syria that is peaceful, nonsectarian, democratic, legitimate, tolerant. And that is our overriding goal" (Obama 6/19/2013, President's News Conference with Merkel). The complexity inherently revolved around how to achieve those five items, because achieving them required

reaching and influencing the will of the people on multiple levels for a sustained period. The single requirement of influencing the will of a population likely required a massive presence over a multi-generational period. In simplistic terms, it required commitment, which is not something President Obama seemed willing to provide.

Knowing meeting those five items was a massive undertaking, President Obama wanted to bring the international community into the problem solving, so the collective community could derive a wholistic, democratic solution. Unlike some who might develop plans in isolation, and then force everyone to implement, President Obama provided an alternative perspective on leadership in foreign policy as he attempted to gain support internationally through combined problem-solving. "Leadership means a wise application of military power and rallying the world behind causes that are right" (Obama 1/12/2016, SOTU). From his optic, rallying the international community to solve a problem is leadership, even at the expense of the U.S. not interfering and not taking direct action where possible to quickly resolve a small issue before it escalates into something larger.

President Obama provided a very accurate portrayal of the situation in Syria relatively early during the crisis, although the same statement can be said two years after his transition from office. He said: "our response has not matched the scale of the challenge. Aid cannot keep pace with the suffering of the wounded and displaced. A peace process is stillborn. America and others have worked to bolster the moderate opposition, but extremist groups have still taken root to exploit the crisis. Asad's traditional allies have propped him up, citing principles of sovereignty to shield his regime" (Obama 9/24/2013, Remarks at the UN). He essentially pointed out that he did

not do enough to address the problems and that lack of early effort likely contributed to the continued dismal outlook for Syria. During the latter months of his tenure, President Obama, who came into the office so hopeful and optimistic, portrayed a very pessimistic outlook.

With respect to his overall policy directed at Syria, President Obama stated: "I recognize that that has not worked. And it is something that I continue to think about every day, and we continue to try to find some formula that would allow us to see that suffering end" (Obama 11/14/2016, President's News Conference). "I cannot claim that we've been successful" (Obama 12/16/2016, President's News Conference).

President Obama's foreign policy maintained a strong foundation in his belief that the United States "can't try to take over and rebuild every country that falls into crisis, even if it's done with the best of intentions" (Obama 1/12/2016, SOTU). In his mind, the United States cannot do everything for everyone. "I do think it is important for the President of the United States and the administration to think through what they're doing so that they can achieve the objectives that are the priorities of the American people... We don't just throw some military action at it without having thought it through and making sure that it's effective." (Obama 3/23/2016, President's News Conference with Macri). "We have to make sure that whatever it is that we say we're going to do we can deliver" (Obama 4/24/2016, President's News Conference with Merkel).

Overall, President Obama did not come into office to bring a new government to Syria. Events drove him to that conclusion. Although, he did hope to transform the U.S. image in the Middle East into one of a more positive nature. Unfortunately, his continued lack of ownership and reactionary nature to the varied challenges created a

more pessimistic outlook for the outcome of Syria. President Obama ultimately failed to reach his vision in Syria and, like his predecessor, departed office with the overall relationship with Syria worse than when he began his time as President.

6.5. PRESIDENT DONALD J. TRUMP

President Trump's involvement with the Syria was much more pointed and succinct than the broad all-encompassing involvement of President Obama. President Trump acquired all the issues left by his predecessor. The Assad regime remained problematic and continued to use brutal tactics and chemical weapons on their own people. The Syrian population continued to depart their homes and seek refugee status outside of Syria. They overcrowded refugee centers and created giant humanitarian issues. Syria remained close allies with Russia and Iran, both of which used their friendships to disrupt U.S. efforts and to posture military equipment in Syria to bolster the Syrian regime. Also, the terrorist group ISIS retained possession of large areas of Syria.

The primary difference between presidents was that President Trump chose to address only a few of the pervasive problems. In his assessment, the problems did not need, and therefore did not receive, much attention. Needless to say, his view of what the United States needed to do was drastically different than that of President Obama. Instead of trying to replace the Assad regime, President Trump believed that President Assad could retain his position as long as he remained compliant, and then President Trump would have no justification for any actions.

Overall, President Trump's strategy for dealing with the Syrian regime seemed to be sporadic and disorienting. He did not provide much context when he spoke or replied to questions. Often, in his news conferences, he seemed caught off guard by questions and resorted to saying something akin to: "I don't like to say where I'm going and what I'm doing" (Trump 4/5/2017, President's News Conference with Abdullah II). At times, he employed an action-oriented strategy against the Syrian regime, particularly following their use of chemical weapons, as a way to enforce compliance to U.S. demands and to deter Syria. Secondly, he tried to ensure that refugees would remain close to their homes, so they could easily return to Syria upon any potential cessation of hostilities. Aside from these two efforts, President Trump took very little action against issues in Syria. For the most part, he seemed unconcerned about the situations and events occurring in Syria.

President Trump's vision for dealing with Syria was one of power projection to enforce compliance with international norms on chemical weapon use. Outside of chemical weapons use, he seemed completely willing to look the other direction and allow the Assad regime to conduct any activities they wanted without question. As he said in one of his first public addresses as President: "America respects the right of all nations to chart their own path" (Trump 2/28/2017, Address Before Joint Session Congress). From the beginning of his term, he indicated that he will not interfere in the decision-making process of any nation's leader, so long as it did not affect U.S. national security directly. While he did not mention Syria specifically, President Trump certainly implied Assad in that discussion. This change of position from the Obama Administration seemed to permit Syria to conduct whatever actions they wanted,

including the indiscriminate killing of their citizens, so long as it posed no threat to the U.S. Despite the occasional comment that Assad was a “butcher” (Trump 4/12/2017, President's News Conference with Stoltenberg) who conducted the “crimes of a monster” (Trump 4/13/2018, Remarks on Military Operations), and President Trump’s self-affirmation that he is “not somebody that will stand by and let [Assad] get away with what he tried to do” (Trump 7/25/2017, President's News Conference With al-Hariri), President Trump has trended away from involvement within Syria as time passed and the fight against ISIS progressed.

In one of the first actions of the Trump Administration, he published the *Memorandum on the Plan to Defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria*. Right from the beginning, the new administration viewed the problem with ISIS in complete isolation from the pervasive problems that encompassed all of Syria highlighted by the previous administrations. The document made no mention of how the United States will encounter the Syrian regime following the defeat of ISIS, or work with the Syrian regime to assist in the defeat of ISIS (Trump 1/28/2017, Memorandum). The Trump administration indicates that the U.S. had no other reasons to expend efforts and resources in Syria, and should not take any actions against Syria following the defeat of ISIS.

Then, on 4 April 2017, in what seemed to be a direct challenge to President Trump’s foreign policy, the Syrian military launched an airstrike that included chemical weapons on the village of Khan Shaykhun in Idlib Province, Syria. The event itself did not directly affect U.S. national security, yet President Trump responded to the barbarity of the act and the loss of life. "Their deaths was an affront to humanity. These heinous actions by the Asad regime cannot be tolerated. The United States stands with our allies

across the globe to condemn this horrific attack and all other horrific attacks" (Trump 4/5/2017, President's News Conference with Abdullah II). Later, in a reference to President Obama's red line, President Trump was very clear that the Syrian actions "crossed a lot of lines for me...many, many lines, beyond a red line. Many, many lines." (Trump 4/5/2017, President's News Conference with Abdullah II). Even though the Syrian government supposedly turned in all their chemical weapons during the President Obama Administration, obviously some remained, and their use against Syrian civilians was an affront and a challenge to the U.S. that created a dilemma for President Trump. Furthermore, the lack of focus on Syria, and the abandonment of previous policies to keep pressing the Assad regime, perpetuated the potential for Syria to use chemical weapons.

The President stated that his "attitude toward Syria and Asad has changed very much" and "what happened yesterday is unacceptable" (Trump 4/5/2017, President's News Conference with Abdullah II). Almost immediately, President Trump set an expectation for action as he responded to the Khan Shaykhun attack with military force. Two days after the attack, he "ordered a targeted military strike on the airfield in Syria from where the chemical attack was launched" (Trump 4/6/2017, Remarks on Military Operations). President Trump's decision came as a surprise, and offered a glimpse of what he believed was the appropriate use of U.S. power to drive compliance from the Syrian government.

President Trump proclaimed "it is in this vital national security interest of the United States to prevent and deter the spread and use of deadly chemical weapons. There can be no dispute that Syria used banned chemical weapons, violated its obligations

under the Chemical Weapons Convention, and ignored the urging of the U.N. Security Council" (Trump 4/6/2017, Remarks on Military Operations). Later President Trump stated the goals of conducting the strikes against the Assad military were "to degrade the Syrian military's ability to conduct further chemical weapons attacks and to dissuade the Syrian regime from using or proliferating chemical weapons, thereby promoting the stability of the region and averting a worsening of the region's current humanitarian catastrophe" and remained in accordance with "the vital national security and foreign policy interests of the United States" (Trump 4/8/2017, Letter to Congressional Leaders).

As part of the dialogue explaining his actions, President Trump recognized that "years of previous attempts at changing Asad's behavior have all failed and failed very dramatically" (Trump 4/6/2017, Remarks on Military Operations). As this research has shown, years of Presidential rhetoric calling for greater action against Assad failed dismally in gaining strength and substance. President Trump believed that his actions demonstrated the strongest response to Syrian malevolence and they would immediately solve the problem. Curiously, despite failures to coalesce the international community and bring the world to bear on the Syria problem, President Trump called on the international community to act. "The vicious slaughter of innocent civilians with chemical weapons, including the barbaric killing of small and helpless children and babies, must be forcefully rejected by any nation that values human life. It is time to end this brutal civil war, defeat terrorists, and allow refugees to return home." (Trump 4/12/2017, President's News Conference with Stoltenberg). He thought the combination of his tough rhetoric and military strikes would reinforce the U.S. action and leadership and begin to unite the international community to bring resolution to the Syrian Crisis.

Unfortunately, President Trump did not follow up his tough talk and military action. Instead, he moved on to praising intermittent cease-fire agreements that occurred in Syria. “One of the great things that came out of that meeting...was the fact that we got a cease-fire that now has lasted for...almost 5 days” (Trump 7/13/2017, President's News Conference with Macron). For President Trump, this was great news, because it showed him that events in Syria had slowed down and the end could be near. Additionally, the cease-fire offered the possibility that his decision to strike Syrian military targets in April 2017 worked to subdue the Assad regime. During a period of optimism, President Trump stated: “we're working on a second cease-fire in a very rough part of Syria. And if we get that and a few more, all of a sudden, you're going to have no bullets being fired in Syria. And that would be a wonderful thing” (Trump 7/13/2017, President's News Conference with Macron).

While it seemed that progress was going well in Syria, President Trump offered stark confusion on his understanding of the problem and the way forward in Syria. During his *Remarks to the UN* in 2017, he primarily focused on problems elsewhere, on places other than Syria, and indicated that North Korea and Iran are more important (Trump 9/19/2017, Remarks at the UN). These calculations likely considered that Syria had rarely been a direct threat to the U.S.; however, it remained a one of the more serious “threats to sovereignty” for several U.S. allies (Trump 9/19/2017, Remarks at the UN). Additionally, the overall problems in Syria were not resolved as the Syrian Conflict persisted as a contributor to various other problems in the Middle East, namely transregional terrorism and an unresolved refugee crisis. President Trump appeared to abandon the Syrian Crisis as a real problem and decided to focus his efforts elsewhere.

In another contradiction President Trump conveyed: "it is time to expose and hold responsible those countries who support and finance terror groups like Al Qaida, Hizballah, the Taliban, and others that slaughter innocent people" (Trump 9/19/2017, Remarks at the UN). Syria certainly fell into the category of nations that both supported terrorist groups and slaughtered their own people, therefore, Syria met President Trump's criteria to be held responsible. Later in the same speech, President Trump muddled his intent further by stating: "We seek the deescalation of the Syrian conflict and a political solution that honors the will of the Syrian people" (Trump 9/19/2017, Remarks at UN). Hence, there was confusion on which direction he would take U.S. foreign policy as it pertained to Syria. In the same speech, President Trump wanted to hold Syria accountable and seek a de-escalation of violence. Presumably, conducting both actions simultaneously created problems for the entire policy directed toward Syria. President Trump might have proceeded in either direction, but without clarity and unity of purpose, it was bound to fail.

As it turned out, President Trump elected to pursue a path of de-escalation with Syria. "We will soon transition into a new phase in which we will support local security forces, deescalate violence across Syria, and advance the conditions for lasting peace so that the terrorists cannot return to threaten our collective security again" (Trump 10/21/2017, Statement). President Trump wanted nothing to do with pursuing any further actions against the Syrian regime. "As far as Syria is concerned, we have very little to do with Syria other than killing ISIS" (Trump 9/7/2017, President's News Conference with Sabah). All the comments from previous Presidents about confronting rogue regimes and removing safe havens for terrorism meant very little as President Trump determined he

would proceed in a different direction. He would abandon the previous policies in favor of his isolated opinion. It seemed as if the previous insistence of the brutality of Assad regime completely washed away and President Trump chose to view the problem differently. This change seemed strange considering that President Trump was also the only President to order a military action directed at the Syrian regime.

President Trump's dealings with Syria flip-flopped between torridly pointed accusations following the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons and one where he could focus elsewhere and pretend the Assad regime was not important. He knew of the atrocities that occurred in Syria and would articulate them whenever it seemed the Assad regime became defiant toward the U.S., particularly when they flaunted their chemical weapons use, yet, other times, his lack of substantive comment looked like a full-throated denial of the problem. When Syria appeared to comply with President Trump's desires to subdue their activity, President Trump responded that the U.S. remained in Syria "to get ISIS and get rid of ISIS and go home" (Trump 2/23/2018, President's News Conference with Turnbull). It was during these times when President Trump demonstrated he had no intentions to expend any further U.S. resources against the Assad regime.

A little over a year after the first U.S. strikes against Syrian military targets, the Syrian regime tempted fate again by using chemical agents in an attack in Douma, Syria. On 13 April 2018, President Trump "ordered the United States Armed Forces to launch precision strikes on targets associated with the chemical weapons capabilities of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad" (Trump 4/13/2018, Remarks on Military Operations). After the strikes, President Trump acknowledged the purpose of the strikes was "to degrade the Syrian military's ability to conduct further chemical weapons attacks and to dissuade the

Syrian government from using or proliferating chemical weapons" (Trump 4/15/2018, Letter to Congressional Leaders). This seemed nearly identical to the purpose for the strikes in 2017, particularly as President Trump reaffirmed the "the vital national security and foreign policy interests of the United States to promote the stability of the region, to deter the use and proliferation of chemical weapons, and to avert a worsening of the region's current humanitarian catastrophe" (Trump 4/15/2018, Letter to Congressional Leaders). His first attempt to deter President Assad from using chemical weapons in 2017 did not deter President Assad from using chemical agents again in 2018. President Trump's neglect for carrying out continued actions to verify whether he met his intent the year prior likely influenced Syria's willingness to use chemical weapons again. Unfortunately, President Trump again did not follow up his calls for greater action. Despite the bluster that the U.S. was "prepared to sustain this response until the Syrian regime stops its use of prohibited chemical agents," no further strikes against the Assad regime as of the writing of this research (Trump 4/13/2018, Remarks on Military Operations).

In further acknowledgement that he did not intend to pursue any efforts aimed at the full removal of the Assad regime, President Trump claimed the U.S. "cannot purge the world of evil or act everywhere there is tyranny...the fate of the region lies in the hands of its own people" (Trump 4/13/2018, Remarks on Military Operations). This statement illustrated a sense of reluctance to expend more military effort, as if President Trump had reached the same conclusion as President Obama.

Separately, on the topic of President Trump's strategy to resolve the refugee situation caused by the Syrian regime, he presented a plan to assist the nations closest to

Syria in their efforts to keep Syrian refugees from fleeing further. President Trump claimed: "The only long-term solution for these humanitarian disasters, in many cases, is to create the conditions where displaced persons can safely return home and begin the long, long process of rebuilding" (Trump 2/28/2017, Address Before Joint Session Congress). In April 2017, President Trump announced "that the United States will contribute additional funds to Jordan for humanitarian assistance. This aid will help countries like Jordan host refugees until it is safe for them to return home" (Trump 4/5/2017, President's News Conference with Abdullah II). He reiterated this refrain in 2018. "The most compassionate policy is to place refugees as close to their homes as possible to ease their eventual return to be part of the rebuilding process" (Trump 9/25/2018, Remarks at the UN). President Trump also highlighted the efforts to support the Lebanese government. "Since the start of the Syrian crisis, the United States has helped Lebanon support Syrian refugees with clean water, food, shelter, and health care" (Trump 7/25/2017, President's News Conference With al-Hariri).

President Trump took credit for providing financial assistance to the Syrian neighbors and the outcome of that humanitarian assistance. Unfortunately, the plan neglected to halt to the Syrian Conflict, which was a principle reason why the refugee crisis began in the first place. Despite the efforts and the much-needed assistance, it seemed implausible that refugees would want to return to their homes in Syria to face the hostile regime that forced them to leave. So, while the additional expenditures may have assisted several allies during the international refugee crisis, the financial assistance did not assist in resolving the situation in Syria.

In addition to the humanitarian aid, President Trump also took personal responsibility for potentially stopping a joint invasion by Russia, Iran, and Syria into Idlib Province in Syria. He claimed the event would “perhaps kill millions of people in order to get 35,000 terrorists” (Trump 9/26/2018, President's News Conference in NYC). While President Trump intended his response to make it look that he was a deeply involved and concerned President, the wholistic view painted a different picture. If Idlib Province really possessed 35,000 terrorists in that single province, his ambition to leave Syria to the whims of the Russians and Syrians seemed misaligned with the U.S. national interest, especially with Syria’s track record of supporting terrorist organizations. Furthermore, President Trump claimed: "Cooperation between our two countries has the potential to save hundreds of thousands of lives" (Trump 7/16/2018, President's News Conference with Putin). However, if true cooperation existed, then President Trump would have known about the invasion much further in advance, and would not have needed to stop it with such haste.

Overall, when compared to his predecessors, one stark difference in the use of Presidential power and authority was Trump’s willingness to use force as a mechanism to ensure compliance. His orders to use military force stood out in contrast to his predecessors who did little to respond to continued Syrian hostility. Although, President Trump still did not use U.S. boots on the ground to take any action against the Syrian regime. He certainly indicated that if no one else in the world will do anything, then he is willing to use force.

Unfortunately, President Trump’s actions as they pertained to Syria do not lend themselves to highlight a vision for the future of the U.S. and Syria relationship.

Furthermore, it appears that perhaps President Trump does not have a vision in mind for Syria. Overall, President Trump seemed unconcerned with Syria, as if the Assad regime was inconsequential and he could abandon all regard for Syria and it would not affect the outcome of the crisis or the relationship. President Trump felt that he could force the Assad regime into a more obedient role through the use of the stand-off weapons, but Syria has violated these international chemical weapons norms repeatedly, even after President Trump's first decision to strike Syria. So, it remains to be seen whether the use of force can credibly bring Syria into compliance.

Chapter 7 – CONCLUSIONS

This research discovered how neglect in forming and broadcasting a strategic vision for resolving problems in Syria perpetuated and exacerbated the problem for the past 30 years. The research focused on the U.S. relationship with the Syrian regime since the end of the Cold War, and demonstrated that none of the U.S. Presidents during the period attempted to address the underlying differences between the U.S. and Syria, and none possessed a vision that outlined an appropriate way forward to improve the relationship with Syria or resolve the ongoing Syrian crisis.

This research sought to obtain the U.S. President's vision to fix the problems in Syria through a comprehensive review of the Presidents' rhetoric and communications. The goal was to determine what each President intended to achieve when dealing with the Syrian regime. Identifying the overall goal that each of the Presidents intended to meet could potentially illuminate a better way forward to the Syrian conflict, and presumably others like it. As it turned out, this research did not conclude that providing a vision will make the President successful. This was Jervis's point. "Although actors may know that they seek a common goal, they may not be able to reach it" (Jervis 1978, 168). But it does confirm that without a vision, the President and the U.S. foreign policy apparatus will flounder and struggle with consistency. While there are likely other factors that contribute to the lack of progress in solving the Syrian Crisis and dealing with Assad regime, the argument presented here is that without a vision for what to achieve as a lasting goal, then it is more likely that the crisis will not be solved, and the next President may not be able to alter course to an entirely different direction. As a subsidiary contributor is the thought that the President has not contributed as much time as

necessary to fully understand that problem and the role of Syria in the world.

Additionally, it showed that even with a vision, the Presidents must openly broadcast what they would like to accomplish and that the Presidents needed to contribute the appropriate resources to meet their intended outcome.

Ultimately, the research showed that five sequential Presidents, each from alternating political parties, took a similar non-invasive strategy of how to interact with Syria, despite considerably different U.S. approaches on how to deal with the Syrian regime, and a constantly standoffish Syrian regime during the same period. The strategy taken against Syria has been non-invasive because none of the Presidents took direct, deliberate actions against the Syrian regime for the purposes of changing the broad manner in which the Syrian regime acted. While there have been some actions taken to support a change in Syrian leadership by President Obama, those actions were indirect, and only affected the Syrian government through proxies. President Obama's actions were largely under-resourced and unsupported by other elements of the U.S. government, and therefore largely ineffective. Additionally, while President Trump directed military action against the Syrian regime, he did not intend to alter the way Syria acted in a broad sense, only in the sliver of actions as it pertained to the use of chemical weapons. This conclusion likely seems welcome to some, including Democratic Representative Eliot L. Engel from New York, who believes "there seems to be no strategy" (HCFA 2017, *CQRollCall.com*). Unfortunately, despite the differences in their approaches, none of the Presidents offered a true vision or framework for a way forward with Syria.

Throughout this analysis, Nanus's warning signs for a lack of vision offered the possibility to test whether an absence of vision exists. The research verified that we met

several of Nanus's warning signs and that Presidential vision and foresight to resolve foreign policy problems involving Syria were non-existent.

Since vision was not immediately apparent, understanding the grand strategy became the secondary option to seek a comprehension of the vision, as the implementation of the grand strategy should reflect the goals outlined in the vision. Hooker offered this method of looking for grand strategy in his conclusion that "what the state *does* matters more than what the states *says*" (Hooker 2015, 318). That said, the discussion about identifying a vision must initially include an understanding of what the leader says he wants to achieve, and compare that statement to what he does to achieve that goal. In the case of presidentially-directed foreign policy, each of the presidents had different intentions with their relationship with the Assad regime. President George H.W. Bush was rather agnostic on the need for a relationship. He expressed some moderately positive comments toward Syria following their involvement in the 1991 Gulf War, but otherwise he tended to dislike dealing with Syria due to their involvement with terrorism. Therefore, he had no strategy for the relationship. President Clinton had a separate, distinct desire for his relationship with Syria. Ultimately, he wanted a to gain their acquiescence in a comprehensive peace agreement between Syria and Israel and he took considerable strides to make that happen. Unfortunately, his engagements were not intended to bring benefit back to the U.S. and therefore perpetuated the absence of strategy further. Following the years of frustration that failed to bring a peace deal, President George W. Bush approached the situation differently, and refused to directly communicate with President Assad. He wanted a disciplined and cooperative relationship, and remained uncompromising on his position. His strategy was to ignore

the problem and hope it improves, which is obviously ineffective. President Obama presided during a period of increased tension with the Syrian regime, and constantly called for a new regime in Damascus to bring a resolution to the developing situation in Syria. His strategy to involve the international community was ineffective due to Russian opposition and his unilateral attempts were not resourced adequately. President Trump, on the other hand, took a completely different approach with his tolerance for Assad to stay in power while he demanded for compliance and obedience. He would use force to an attempt to achieve compliance on the use of chemical weapons, but would otherwise remain uninvolved with the Syrian regime, therefore allowing Assad tremendous leeway. Ultimately, the strategies when existent, were ineffective and compounded the lack of vision writ large because the strategies had no objective to meet.

Unfortunately, none of the Presidents achieved what they looked for. In fact, most of the Presidents during this period left the office with the situation worse than when they started. None of the Presidents retained a positive vision for the future of Syria when they left office. At best, President George H.W. Bush and President Clinton were mildly neutral at times, but otherwise the opinions of the U.S. Presidents were categorically negative on the prospects of a progressive U.S. relationship with Syria.

Perhaps the reason why these five presidents could not outwardly express a good vision for Syria was because all they could see was failure. This may be true given all their combined efforts provided them with no tangible, substantive success toward making Syria a better nation. Most of their relatively nascent efforts resulted in a worsening crisis. With each seeming opportunity the success actually diminished and resulted in a completely shattered relationship with the U.S. The expectation that the

humanitarian crisis that resulted from Syrian government hostilities would improve is gone. There is no real expectation the Assad regime in Syria will willingly give up its ties to terrorist organizations or support a global effort to counter terrorism as a general practice. There is no expectation that Syria will ever sign a peace deal with Israel or make amends with its other neighbors.

In this discussion, it seemed relevant to demonstrate how Syria mattered on the global and regional scale. Broadly speaking, the research showed that Syria plays a critical role in the Middle East, and is viewed as an essential component if the U.S. ever seeks to bring peace to the Middle East or to end the prevalent use of terrorism throughout the region. It also seemed clear that Syria falls on a list of national priorities, and the U.S. has had national interests in solving the several issues throughout Syria. After analyzing the data and reviewing the research, the answers remain elusive to many of the questions involving why the U.S. did not achieve a better relationship with Syria. Productive efforts were made with other nations, yet similar actions taken to improve the situation in Syria seem less effective.

Eventually, the efforts in the seemingly herculean task to alter the course of events in Syria in favor of the U.S. grew tiring and repetitive. Without significant improvements to the situation in Syria during their individual tenures, several of the Presidents began to redirect efforts elsewhere, and forgo any chance of lifting Syrian into greater partnership with the U.S. For instance, President Clinton went through long periods where he would make no comments on the situation involving the comprehensive peace deal, mostly due to his inability to coax Israel and Syria to meet. As a result, he began to focus his foreign policy efforts elsewhere, such as the Balkans in Europe.

President Obama learned the difficulties behind convincing another population to seek a new regime, and after the rise of ISIS and the lengthy battle with the terrorist organization, he softened his perspective on whether Assad should step down.

Fingar, says "the United States does not have a grand strategy...There is no consensus, inside or outside the government, with respect to overarching objectives, priorities, prerequisites, or strategies to achieve them" (Fingar 2011, 124). The Presidents themselves pushed Syria aside and pretended Syria lacks importance, while it has become increasingly obvious that Syria is a key player in the stability of the Middle East and for the longevity of the fight against terrorism. Syria has become a focal point for the contention between the United States and Russia, therefore escalating the pressure to resolve the situation favorably for the U.S. However, neglecting Syria's importance proved problematic if the U.S. ever intended to overcome the pervasive problems in Syria.

In addition to inconsistent messaging internal to each individual President, the larger messaging problem across the span of the five Presidents also proved troublesome, as none of the Presidents completely agreed with how to approach the rapidly-developing situations. President George H.W. Bush did not seem overly enthused about Syria, and chose not to speak to highly or too harshly about Syria. He certainly didn't present any material that seemed like a vision for how the U.S. should interact with Syria. President Clinton, on the other hand, spoke directly with President Assad on numerous occasions; however, in those communications, he did not focus on being a good partner with Syria. Instead, President Clinton focused on how to make Syria a better partner with Israel. While spending very little time trying to breech a better relationship between the U.S. and

Syria. President Bush was abrasive towards Syria almost from the very beginning of his Presidency. He seemed to carry forward the frustration from President Clinton about not achieving a comprehensive Middle East peace deal. In many of the comments made by President George W. Bush, he accused Syria of wrong doing and demanded Syria address the problems. He took very little ownership to try to fix the problems himself. President Obama called for the removal of the Assad regime, and did not supply enough resources or commitment to ensure he could achieve that goal. President Trump was demanding towards Syria as well, but he chose to use military force to pressure and gain compliance by Syria. His belief was that Syria would bend to the will of the U.S. pressure only through aggressive action.

In one of the most coherent examples of how the Presidents differed in opinion, President Trump came into office and immediately declared ISIS as his number one priority, despite knowledge that "the underlying conflict in Syria and associated counterterrorism, humanitarian, and international systemic challenges that vexed the Obama Administration have persisted" (Humud et al. 2017, 26). Trump basically steered himself clear of any protracted discussion on dealing with Assad in Syria. "Trump says he wants to focus on destroying the Islamic State. The main effect of the policies he describes, however, would be to eliminate the moderate opposition to the Assad regime and to empower extremism" (Lister 2016, *ForeignPolicy.com*). This change comes in stark contrast to the policies of the Obama administration, where dealing with the Assad regime and staving off the feeder for terrorism seemed to be the most important issue. This is not to say that President Trump's plan to defeat ISIS is not important, but to defeat ISIS in isolation from one of the primary feeders for extremism seemed like a

contradictory plan and demonstrated the inconsistencies in the U.S. policies to deal with ISIS.

The confusion that surrounded the implementation of the policies writ large has been one of the primary indicators that a lack of vision has existed since the Cold War. Also evident from Cohen is how the U.S. is losing its reputation as the dominant power and freedom-seeking nation of the world, at least partially through its inability to provide enough leadership and to navigate the complexities to solve the ongoing crises around the world, to include the Syrian Crisis. "U.S. foreign policy today is failing every test by which a great power's foreign policy can be judged. America is not feared by her enemies, nor trusted by her friends" (Cohen et al. 2016, 7). "Frustrated allies have long complained that the United States has abandoned its regional responsibilities and, as a result, have become difficult to work with on matters far beyond Syria" (Campanis 2016, *ForeignPolicy.com*). The result is a broadening confusion on the purpose for U.S. involvement in Syria altogether. The inconsistent and incoherent message resonating from the past five presidents is sufficient evidence that much of the United States foreign policy directed toward Syria has been in shambles.

In addition to the mass confusion on the direction of foreign policy, losing trust and confidence in senior decision makers is another of the warning signs to determine if an organization has lost its vision. Losing trust in senior leaders, in this case the U.S. President, is not easily recoverable. It takes time and a lot of hard work to earn trust. President Clinton lost his confidence on his ability to influence the issue when he failed to deliver on comprehensive peace negotiations on multiple instances. President Obama lost trust after he drew his red line, and then defected responsibility for making the

statement and failed to reinforce his words with actions (Obama 8/20/2012, President's News Conference).

Risk aversion is another of Nanus's warning signs. Goldberg saw this warning sign in President Obama as he claimed, "Obama generally does not believe a president should place American soldiers at great risk in order to prevent humanitarian disasters, unless those disasters pose a direct security threat to the United States" (Goldberg 2016, 4). The message the international community received based on lack of action was that "a dictator dropping barrel bombs, although horrific, was better than the risk of intervention of that chaos resulting from Assad's overthrow" (Sanger 2016, 348). While some of the Presidents accepted some small risks – namely President Clinton accepted some risks by traveling to Damascus to meet with Assad and President Trump took some risks by conducting strikes against Syrian regime targets – these acceptances stand in contrast to the risk avoidance taken by President George W. Bush by not dealing with the Syrian incursion into Iraq in the mid-2000s and the genuine lack of risk accepted by President Obama by not employing the U.S. military as a deterrent to multiple blatant violations of international law by the Syrian regime.

Nanus also spoke of losing one's credibility as a potential warning sign that could identify whether vision is absent in the organization. In the Syria case, "the reality is, the U.S. has not put its credibility on the line" (Zakaria 2013, *fareedzakaria.com*). Scheller explains this very well. In one example, during the 1991 expulsion of Iraq from Kuwait, Syria supported the U.S.-led actions, despite itself having infiltrated and occupied one of their own smaller neighbors in Lebanon. "In recognition of Syria's support in the war against Iraq, the United States turned a blind-eye to the fact that Syria was establishing its

hegemony in Lebanon" (Scheller 2013, 52). Despite several UN mandates opposing the Syrian occupation, the United States' somewhat preferential treatment of the Baath-aligned Syrian regime as opposed to the Baath-aligned regime in Iraq resulted in a loss of credibility and partially demonstrated a floundering of purpose in U.S. actions in the Middle East.

A second more recent example that eroded credibility of the U.S. occurred following 9/11 when "Syria offered intelligence and helped foil several planned attacks on America citizens," yet maintained their support for Hamas and Hezbollah and their regional actions in the Middle East (Scheller 2013, 57). In return, the U.S. again applied a double-standard by allowing Syria's duplicity in dealing with terrorist organizations, such as speaking out against al-Qaeda yet supporting Hezbollah and Hamas. The result was "an ambiguous and somewhat incomprehensible US. policy toward the country" and less credibility for President Bush (Scheller 2013, 57).

Unfortunately, the lack of a coherent vision for the relationship between the United States and Syria is causing greater turmoil and confusion in the Syrian Crisis and a degradation of U.S. effectiveness and credibility overseas. Haass provides a synopsis of the deterioration of foreign policy processes as he claims "Informality again became the order of the day, the most notorious example being the decision not to make good on the threat to Syria if it used chemical weapons" (Haass 2017, 177).

Obvious contradictory policy through the words and actions of the president's themselves are an easy indicator of where vision has been lost. One example of the contradiction comes from the 2002 *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, in which President Bush declared "America will hold to account nations that are

compromised by terror, including those who harbor terrorists" (NSS 2002, Intro). Yet, despite the words, there had been a total lack of action on actually dealing with the Assad regime during President Bush's tenure. The words ring hollow when not backed up by action.

In another interesting dynamic to the conversation about foreign policy decision making, President Trump's choice to use force against the Syrian regime raises the question of whether an individual President's can directly affect and influence foreign policy, as the strikes against the Syrian regime are a significant departure away from previous U.S. actions in Syria. Also important to this discussion is how President Trump's choice raises the question of whether his neglect in broadcasting a vision for Syria can be overcome simply by the use of force. He has not said that he wants to have a better relationship with Syria or that he would like to solve the compounding problems in Syria. In fact, President Trump seems completely willing to allow Syria to carve their own path in their own way, with the sole exception that Syria should not use chemical weapons on their own people. In his own words, the reason why he conducted the strikes against Syria was due to their use of chemical weapons. He wanted "to degrade the Syrian military's ability to conduct further chemical weapons attacks and to dissuade the Syrian government from using or proliferating chemical weapons" (Trump 4/15/2018, Letter to Congressional Leaders). His other actions indicated that he cared little about Syria. While the full situation is ongoing and unable to fully assess, the choices made by President Trump thus far have had little effect against deterring Assad from any other malevolent activity, including the prolific use of terrorism inside the borders of Syria. While President Trump thought he could affect foreign policy through his various actions

without consistently broadcast vision, it appears he has not turned the tide in favor of correcting the foreign policy issues rampant throughout Syria without a solid vision. The whole government approach seemed unlikely to change without consistency in message and actions.

7.1. IMPLICATIONS

The problem highlighted by this research is undoubtedly only one issue facing the U.S. government and the U.S. President. There are dozens, if not hundreds, of other matters that require a determination on what is the best path forward. However, resolving them requires leadership with the ability to view Presidential outcomes and communicate the vision for the way forward. As has become evident through this research, solving the crises requires the leader to provide reinforcement to his vision by providing permission and authority to subordinates to pursue items that will assist in achieving that goal. In the case of the President's policies directed at the Assad regime, this means the President must provide the diplomatic, economic, and military resources necessary to assist in achieving his goal.

When asked what was the strategic vision each President outlined for dealing with the Assad regime in Syria since the end of the Cold War it appears the answer doesn't exist because none of the Presidents outlined any realistic strategic goal they wanted to meet. For the purposes of meeting our national interest, this is one item that needed to happen. Syria matters in a geopolitical realm, and the problem will continue to be one where the U.S. must be involved.

This research reviewed a plethora of material to derive the strategic vision as outlined by the President. Ultimately, the analysis shows that the President's vision was at times too incomprehensible, too erratic or too stagnant. Starting with the question of what was the vision each of the Presidents, the analysis shows the President's ability to affect the long-term problems pervasive in Syria has been limited on his inability to focus on the problem and provide a coherent vision for what should happen.

Staying involved in Syria is going to be difficult, and that is the reason the U.S. must stay. The U.S. needs to stay involved in Syria to demonstrate to the world the consistency and determination of the world's superpower, and to lead the world to understand the level of commitment necessary to remain the world's superpower. At the same time, the U.S. cannot aimlessly wander around the countryside with no goal in mind. The U.S. must have a strategy, purpose, and vision to attain its desired goals. A successful U.S. policy for Syria involved condemnations of proxies in Syria and calls for a UN-monitored democratic election that allows all Syrians (in and out) of the country to vote. U.S. support to the inclusion of all Syrians is mandatory for those people who steer away from extremist tactics, specifically terrorism. The United States would do well to support the fact that people can change their minds, although there can be no tolerance for hard-liner extremists who continue to spew hatred of the U.S and Western civilization. What Syria needs is for someone to be more altruistic and consider the Syrian people and the Syrian nation before their own interests.

President Obama stated: "the United States cannot and will not impose this transition upon Syria. It is up to the Syrian people to choose their own leaders" (Obama 8/18/2011, Statement on Situation). This is also very similar to comments made by

President Clinton in his aspiration to reach a peace deal, and President Bush in his first comments on Syria (Clinton 3/16/1994, President's News Conference; Clinton 2/1/1996, President's News Conference; Bush 3/29/2001, President's News Conference). While it is understood that the Presidents cannot force change in another country without military intervention, they can encourage change. However, none of the Presidents wanted to force Syria into doing anything they did not desire. None of the presidencies asserted U.S. leadership or dominance to impose a change on Syria. This leisurely approach to policy placed the U.S. in a bind and perpetuated problems for long periods.

One of the primary implications for this research is that Presidents need to have more foresight into these decisions and to seek a greater leadership role in solving crises. Solving crises will do two things. First, it provides a greater leadership position for the U.S. going forward. Helping to resolve crises in other countries is a demonstration of leadership as it shows an authority figure addressing the situation and seeking to bring a peaceful conclusion to meet the interests of all the involved parties. Conversely, the real recipe for quagmire is claiming that you are going to help, but placing your own interests above the interests of the nation in crisis, as has been done in the current Syrian Crisis. This type of involvement creates confusion and causes greater problems.

Secondly, solving crises provides for greater security for the U.S. by eliminating problems that could pose security concerns later. This was the point made by Reveron as he spoke about "incubators" and the challenge they pose for "American security" (Reveron 2015, 113). One way of preventing these incubators is to cease them from becoming full-blown issues. Paradoxically, President Trump's own comments about rogue regimes remains extremely relevant to the persistent problems with Syria. "The

scourge of our planet today is a small group of rogue regimes that violate every principle on which the United Nations is based. They respect neither their own citizens nor the sovereign rights of their countries. If the righteous many do not confront the wicked few, then evil will triumph. When decent people and nations become bystanders to history, the forces of destruction only gather power and strength" (Trump 9/19/2017, Remarks at the UN). Had President Trump followed his own words, he might have had the opportunity to lay the foundation to bring a resolution to the Syrian crisis. Except, his disinterested nature on the Syria problem likely only contributed to the very problem he addressed to the UN.

Of the presidents in the analysis, President Obama came closest to outlining, fully implementing, and achieving a vision. Specifically, this refers to President Obama's desire to see Assad removed from his role as the President of Syria. President Obama failed to achieve this vision for several reasons. First, he wanted the Syrians to be responsible for removing Assad, when it wasn't the Syrian's goal to achieve. Granted, some Syrians probably wanted Assad gone, but there were many others who presumably wanted him to stay in power. Secondly, President Obama did not apply all the resources at his disposal to assist with achieving this goal. He restricted the U.S. ability to achieve this goal. He could have applied additional diplomatic pressure from the international community, he could have projected more support to the Syrian opposition, and he could have used the U.S. military to achieve this goal. President Clinton came second closest because he personally contributed his time to breeding a better relationship. President George W. Bush came the furthest from reaching his vision for Syria, as his demanding requirement might have been endearing to the U.S., but it simultaneously put the Assad

regime on a more confrontational footing. It remains too early to conclude whether Trump's use of force worked to produce an obedient Syria.

Another implication from this study, is that the President must accept there is a role for the United States to play in the world, and that he must be willing to use U.S. resources to achieve its goals. President Clinton had an issue with accepting a role for the U.S. as he attempted to breach a relationship between Syria and Israel, without trying to build a direct relationship between the U.S. and Syria. He could have, and probably should have, used his communications with Assad, and travels to meet Assad, as a means to build a better a better relationship with Syria, potentially offering U.S. resources to fight terrorism and build economic strength for Syria.

Yet another implication from this study is that when a President commits to a vision, he must approve the mechanisms necessary to achieve that vision. Regardless of the president's decision and justification, the United States must be committed to that course of action over the long term. Granted, the President must outline the problem in a logical manner, and provide a vision for the way forward that gives the goal that needs to be accomplished. However, he must also reinforce his vision with the items that could be used to achieve that goal. President Obama dealt with this as he attempted to convince the Syrian population that they should seek removal of Assad. President Obama clearly stated this was his intent, but neglected to bring sufficient U.S. resources to bear to make this happen. He could have committed more U.S. military assistance to protecting the Syrian population from inhumane acts perpetrated by the Assad regime, while simultaneously lobbying the international community to increase the size of a coalition. Granted, it seems unlikely he could have acquired a UN mandate to conduct actions

against Syria given Russia's continuous vetoes for actions targeting the Syrian regime, but given the economic burden placed on NATO from the fallout of the humanitarian crisis other paths existed to build a coalition. Regardless, both President Clinton and President Obama needed to accept that successful foreign policy will often require a measurable U.S. contribution to fixing the problem. The Syria conflict is not a conflict that will resolve itself and will involve a much longer-term intervention than many people realize. By not approving the necessary materials for the implementation of the vision, the President hampers himself. It also shows that the President has not truly bought into the vision himself, because if he was truly bought into the end state, he would approve any mechanism that could assist in achieving that vision.

Unfortunately, infringements on those warning signs became obvious, thus reinforcing the conclusion that the U.S. Presidents did not possess a vision for how to deal with the pervasive problems in Syria. The stagnation that has resulted in U.S. foreign policy directed at Syria over the past three decades seems to be a bi-product of the lack of a good vision to improve the relationship between the U.S. and Syria. The argument presented here is that without a vision for what to achieve as a lasting goal, then it is more likely that the crisis will not be solved, and the next President may not be able to alter course to an entirely different direction. The complex dynamics that inherently surround Syria as well as the political dynamics, encouraged the U.S. President to teeter on many of their policies in an effort to garner support for U.S. initiatives. This implies that Presidents need to stop thinking as much about politics or short-term gains, and more about how to achieve success over the long term. They need

to start planning for what they want the end result to look like. They need to start outlining their vision for what they want to achieve.

If each of the Presidents sought a slightly different relationship with Syria, and none of the five Presidents achieved what they desired, it broadly indicates that there could be limits to Presidential power in foreign policy. Those limitations could be derived because either the Presidents were limited in their thought processes and they wanted either very limited gains or, alternatively, impossible outcomes. But more realistically, the Presidents didn't contribute enough time and energy to seriously consider the problems, and upon determining the best way forward they did not effectively communicate their vision in a manner necessary to achieve significant success. In general, the time spent by the President on these matters was certainly not enough.

With all the other obligations that require Presidential attention, possessing the time to consider potential options is only one of those limitations. He needs the time to consider various options and to conceive of a viable vision for the future. Additionally, he is limited in his effectiveness and ability to achieve his goals if he does a poor job of conveying or broadcasting his ideas. Furthermore, if the President's endstate requires military or financial intervention, then leaders need to apply those resources in a manner that will support the vision. Similarly, if the idea requires diplomatic intervention, the U.S. President must demonstrate leadership across the diplomatic spectrum by engaging with world leaders and being clear about his intent. He cannot tell allies one thing and hold a double standard for adversaries. Overall, the President limits his own

effectiveness by not contributing enough time to consider various futures, by being unclear and by restricting the message he wishes to convey.

Furthermore, as Posen adroitly comments, "vague humanitarian commitments will not make vulnerable groups feel safe and will probably not deter those who wish to repress them" (Posen 1993, 44). The U.S. President needs to provide something more concrete than vague commitments because the lack of a coherent goal to accomplish only buys adversaries more time, which is exactly what the Syrian government has done. "The Syrian regime, based on its awareness that US priorities can change, has often chosen to push Washington to the limits, and despite moments of massive US pressure, it has not really needed to give in" (Scheller 2013, 64-65).

"The absence of even an incomplete grand strategy means that all foreign and security policy issues are treated in virtually an ad hoc fashion" (Fingar 2011, 124). When matters are viewed ad hoc, decision makers do not give proper respect to historical factors or long-term implications. They make decisions based on the immediate factors contributing to the foreign policy issue, and they move along to the next item of importance on their daily agenda. And the problem with ad hoc policies is that the historical context for the situation is rarely ever considered and the long-term, second-hand consequences for the decisions are usually an afterthought. In reality, the neglect to include historical context in the decision making is as much a contributor to the lack of progress as any other factor. Therefore, another implication of this research is that the President must consider the historical context when developing the vision necessary for the way forward.

Representative Eliot L. Engel warned of a problematic way to approach U.S. interactions on the world Stage when he said, "you can't fly by the seat of your pants when it comes to foreign policy. On the global stage, policy by improvisation confuses our friends and tees (ph) up opportunities for our adversaries" (HCFA 2017, *CQRollCall.com*). Nevermind the fact that it's hard to keep friends, if you keep changing your mind on who your friends should be. Therefore, continuing to improvise and neglect long term considerations for foreign policy problems will only exacerbate those problems, and provide more problems, that are also more complex, to address later.

"It is...extremely difficult to devise good policies or to predict their consequences accurately. Nor is it easy to convince others that a given policy is superior to other alternatives" (Wildavsky [1966] 1998, 31). However, it is certainly more difficult to make progress if the President doesn't fully understand they goal he would like to meet, because it begins to question the rationality and the desired long-term outcome, and wears on the trust the international community places in the United States. One of the objectives of having a foreign policy vision means looking for what the relationship should look like in an ideal situation. Morgenthau explains that relationships have a "stable peace, founded upon a stable balance of power" and are "predicated upon a common moral framework that expresses the commitment of all the nations concerned to certain basic moral principles" (Morgenthau 1974, *NYTimes.com*). These are the objectives that the U.S. should strive to accomplish with Syria, and throughout the Middle East.

The ultimate conclusion of this research is that there appears to be a broad lack of understanding of the importance of the Syrian Crisis as well as an inability to outline any

consistent or coherent goal for Syria. None of the U.S. Presidents since the end of the Cold War devised or communicated an effective vision for improving the situation with Syria, and without a vision for the way forward, it appears the Syrian Crisis will continue for the indefinite future. No matter how one looks at the problem, "the failure of the United States to articulate a coherent vision and global strategy impedes regional arrangements, exacerbates hedging against uncertainty, and erodes the ability of the United States to provide global leadership in a time of rapid change" (Fingar 2011, 124). If there will ever be a solution in Syria, the President needs to start the change for the positive by devising his vision. While there are many factors at play in making relationships stable and prosperous, the ultimate conclusion of this research is that the U.S. President needs to devise and communicate an effective vision for improving the situation with Syria. Additionally, he must resource that vision to meet his objectives.

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