American Foreign Policy toward the Arab World:

A Perspective on the Syrian Crisis, 2009-2012

A ‘Mémoire’ Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
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By

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ABSTRACT

The United States used such excuses as democracy and freedom to justify its policy of intervention in the Arab World. The unexpected revolutions in 2011 that reached most Arab countries against the ruling systems have shifted the US policy. What the Arab World, particularly the Middle East countries, has seen of instability and dispersion of Arab unity was the outcomes of American policy of intervention in the region’s affairs. This Mémoire investigates American policy toward the Arab World during the first Barack Obama’s administration and Syrian crisis is one case that reveals that policy. The core issue is Obama’s measures toward Syria before and after the revolution of 2011. Based on the analysis of Obama’s speeches and through a historical account of events, the research provides an overview on American-Arab relations and the uprisings that swept the Arab World. Obama’s position was characterized by hesitation and ambiguity; however, earlier than the outbreak of revolutions, policy toward Syria was decided. The George W. Bush administration saw Syria as a state sponsoring terrorism after 9/11 attacks and a supporter of Islamic resistance. With the arrival of Obama, a new phase in US-Syrian relations began and the need to change US strategy has been established. The Mémoire reveals that the coming of the Syrian upheaval in 2011 with its challenges, particularly the growing influence of Russia and China, the lack control of chemical weapons and threat to Israel’s security, has put US policy in confusion. The real American interest in the Syrian conflict was based on protecting self-interests and getting rid of the threat of the major powers to its international status.
Résumé

Les États-Unis utilisées telles excuses que la démocratie et la liberté pour justifier sa politique d’intervention dans le monde arabe. Les révolutions inattendues en 2011 qui ont atteint les pays des arabes contre les systèmes de règle, y compris la Syrie a changé la politique américaine. Le présent mémoire explore la politique américaine à l’égard des demandes arabes principalement la crise Syrienne. Selon l’analyse des discours d’Obama et à travers un récit historique des événements, la recherche donne un aperçu sur les relations Amérique-arabes, les rébellions qui ont balayé le monde arabe, et l’enquête de la politique américaine qui a été adoptée à l’égard de la crise avant et après 2011, énumérant les mesures à l’égard de la crise. En réalité, la position des Etats-Unis a été caractérisée par l’hésitation et l’ambiguïté à l’égard de la crise ; plus tôt que le début de la révolution, l’examen de la politique et des parents envers la Syrie ont été faîtes. L’administration du Bush a vus la Syrie un pays soutenant le terrorisme après le 9/11 et la résistance Islamique. Avec l’arrivée d’Obama, une nouvelle phase dans les Etats-Unis Syrien relations ont commencé et la nécessité de changer de stratégie des Etats-Unis a été mis en place. En conclusion, la venue de la rébellion Syrien en 2011, avec ses défis que l’influence croissante chimiques et la menace de la sécurité d’Israël a mis américaine politique dans la confusion. On souligne que la politique américaine, principalement vers le cas de la Syrie a été caractérisée par l’ambiguïté et où les principaux objectifs ont été de protéger les intérêts nationaux dans la région et de vaincre les ennemies qui menace son statut national au lieu de promouvoir la démocratie.
الديمقراطية والحرية شعوران استمدلا من طرف الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية كذرية لتبرير التدخل السياسي في قضايا الدول العربية. في ظل الثورات العربية التي لم يكن من المتوقع حدوثها، الدول العربية ضد الأنظمة الحاكمة بما في ذلك سوريا ساهمت في تحول سياسة أمريكا. إن ما شهده العالم.

وتشتت الوحدة العربية كانت نتائج السياسة الأمريكية من التدخل في شؤون المنطقة. هذه المذكرة هي تحذير لدراسة وفهم سياسة أمريكا اتجاه القضايا العربية وخاصة الأزمة السورية حيث تسعى إلى تقديم لملحة عن العلاقات الأمريكية العربية إضافة إلى الثورات العربية وإجراءات إدارة أوباما اتجاه الأزمة السورية قبل وبعد 2011. إن الموقف الأمريكي تميز بالتردد والغموض اتجاه سوريا حيث كانت هذه الأخيرة تعتبر من الدول الداعمة للإرهاب خاصة بعد أحداث 9/11. مع وصول أوباما للرئاسة شهدت العلاقات الأمريكية-السورية مرحلة جديدة وكانت الإدارة الأمريكية بصدم تغيير استراتيجيتها. إن اجتياز الربيع العربي لسوريا وتزايد نفوذ الدول كروسيا والصين في المنطقة على حساب التنبؤ الأمريكي الأسلحة الكيميائية وتهديد إسرائيل وضع السياسة الأمريكية في ارتباك. وفي الأخير خلصت المذكرة إلى أن السياسة الأمريكية اتجاه الأزمة السورية استند على حماية أولويتها في المنطقة بدلاً من تحقيق الديمقراطية.
Dedication

First I would like praise Allah for giving me the strength to finish this work and I would like to dedicate this work to my parents for their endless support and encouragement, to my family members, brothers and sisters for their counsel, and to my friends and my husband who supported me spiritually to complete the work.
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<td>AIPAC</td>
<td>American Israel Public Affairs Committee</td>
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<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency</td>
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<td>GCC</td>
<td>Gulf Co-operation Council</td>
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<td>GS</td>
<td>Gulf States</td>
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<td>HRC</td>
<td>Human Right Council</td>
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<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Criminal Court</td>
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<td>MENA</td>
<td>Middle East and North Africa</td>
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<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
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<td>NSS</td>
<td>National Security Strategy</td>
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<td>OHCHR</td>
<td>Office of the High Commissioner for the human Rights</td>
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<td>SAA</td>
<td>Syrian Accountability Act</td>
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<td>SC</td>
<td>Security Council</td>
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<td>SCR</td>
<td>Security Council Resolution</td>
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<td>UNO</td>
<td>United Nations Organization</td>
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<td>UNSC</td>
<td>United Nations Security Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>The United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>WMD</td>
<td>Weapons of Mass Destruction</td>
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**General Introduction**

Freedom, protecting human rights, and democracy promotion in the Arab World were the American foreign policy aspects and intentions to accomplish from George W. Bush to Barack H. Obama administrations. Since the 9/11 events, the invasion of Iraq, and the advent of Obama to the presidency as the first Afro-American president and in the light of the so-called Arab Spring from Tunisian revolution to the ongoing Syrian civil war, the US policy took another turn. The beginning of the Obama administration saw American initiatives to renovate the relations with the Arab countries and the US response toward the Arab events in the 21st century has varied according its interests in the region. The American position in the contemporary circumstances, particularly toward the Syrian crisis, was an important issue to discuss.

American’s role in the Syrian crisis had characterized by instability and the lack of clarity in the Obama’s era. The avoidance of military intervention and reduction of the Syrian chemical weapons appeared initially as sign for the success of the president’s policy toward the conflict. Since George W. Bush, however, America has been concerned with the rights of democracy and freedom. In this context, under the notions of self-determination and freedom in support of Arab democracy, American policy under Obama had based on self-interests, particularly in the direction of the Syrian crisis.

This Mémoire aims to investigate the United States crucial role along with its foreign policy toward the Arab issues, mainly the Syrian conflict during Obama’s first tenure. The shocking images from the Syrian battleground resulted in the possibility of military intervention from the international community, including the United States,
in the early years of rule of the new president. This study looks first into American-Arab relations during the George W. Bush and Obama’s administrations with emphasis on United States interests and foreign policy toward the Arab World. In addition, the research sheds lights on the so-called Arab Spring that affected the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and considers the Obama’s response to revolutions in these countries. The Mémoire focuses particularly on American foreign policy toward Syria before and after 2011. It highlights American-Syrian relations under Obama and Bashar Al-Assad and examines the United States’ role and political decisions toward the Syrian conflict during the period 2009-2012.

The Mémoire seeks to answer the following questions raised about the topic. First, how were American-Arab relationships in Obama’s era? To what extent US did interests and issues, such as the fight against terrorism and the Arab-Israeli conflict, affect the US image in the Arab region? In the light of the Arab revolutions, what were the Obama’s reactions and his policies toward the situation in the region? Finally, considering the Syrian crisis, how was Syria ruled under Al-Assad? Second, to what extent did Al-Assad’s decisions affect American-Syrian relations and what was the US foreign policy toward Syria before and after 2011? Last, what were the true motivations behind the US intervention in the Arab affairs and the Syrian case? Was it a policy for democracy or a policy to protect its self-interests?

The Mémoire uses the analytical and descriptive approaches. It accounts for and analyzes American foreign policy toward the Arab and Syrian issues during Obama’s first tenure, 2009-2013. It investigates the American-Syrian relations and the US political decisions toward the crisis before and after 2011.
In this Mémoire a number of important primary and secondary sources, including speeches, books, and reports are used. In a “Full Speech about Diplomacy in the Middle East and North Africa,” Obama stated his vision for a new chapter in American diplomacy toward the Arab World. He highlighted the US interests in the region including countering terrorism, ensuring security for Israel and stopping weapons of mass destruction. In addition, he stressed the US policy toward the Arab countries in the light of the Arab Spring revolutions, particularly Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Syria. He also put stress on reforms and the promotion of democracy in the region while emphasizing the Syrian conflict.

Kilic Bugra Kanat’s book A Tale of Four Augusts: Obama’s Syria Policy (2015) is a useful source about the US foreign policy toward Syria. Kanat explained the US approach toward Syria from the Bush to the Obama’s presidencies and emphasized Obama’s policy to renovate the relations with Syria at the beginning of his first term. The book focuses also on the Syrian revolution and the US policy toward the crisis since the beginning of the uprising and shows Obama’s position and strategies to resolve the conflict.

In Obama and the Arab World: His Worldview and Foreign Policy Vision (2013), Fawaz A. Gerges tackles Obama’s policy and his agenda to distinct himself from Bush. The report discusses Obama’s views toward the Middle East conflicts, from the Palestinian case to the American-Arab relations during his administration. Besides, the author tackles the Obama’s initiatives to restore relations with Arabs and Muslims around the world.

The Mémoire is divided into two chapters where the focus is on American foreign policy toward the Arab World, mainly the Syrian case, during the Obama’s
first tenure and the American decisions toward the difficult situation in Syria. Chapter one, entitled “American Foreign Policy in the Arab World,” gives a historical overview of American-Arab relations from the George W. Bush to Barack H. Obama’s administrations and the US policy toward the Arab world, which was based on American interests in the region that led ultimately to reshape the relationship. Also, the chapter highlights the United Nations Organization and the US response toward the Arab issues particularly in the light of the revolutions that swept most Arab countries in 2011.

Chapter two “U.S. Foreign Policy toward Syria, 2009-2013” is the core part of the Mémoire; it stresses the relationship between the US and Syria and the difficulties that faced both countries in their diplomatic relations. The chapter focuses more specifically on relations during Obama’s government and showsthe latter it strategies and political procedures toward the Syrian government to resolve the conflict. The Mémoire concludes that US policy under Barack H. Obama’s administration was characterized by impulsive and reservation toward the Arab countries where they were used claim of the Arab peoples for democracy and the protection of individual liberties by raising the slogan of toppling the regime to accomplish the priorities in the region. US inner and outer self-interest were preventing the domination of the major communist countries in the region and changing the system in Syria, which threaten the interests of US and its allies due to the Syria’s strong international and regional status and the Syria’s support of the Arab issues.
Chapter One

American Foreign Policy in the Arab World

Introduction

American treatment of the Arab World proceeded according to the interests, which require the imposition of stability in the regions mainly the Middle East. US foreign policy toward the Arab world generally and the Middle East mostly was influenced by the current changes that carried with it new data on the political scene. American-Arab relation was in state of confusion from George W. Bush to President Barack H. Obama. Arabs’ aspiration for change in the region was raised in the Obama era but questions and doubts widen among the Middle East people as the result of Obama’s administration dealing in the context of an integrated strategy based on the face of a number of core issues ranging from the Arab-Israeli conflict, region’s dispute and the Arab Spring. US relation with Arab world was based on American interests; from ensuring oil supplies and combating terrorism to achieving a powerful geostrategic place with its ally Israel. With the advent of the so-called Arab Spring, the US policy and that of international organizations such as the UN differed from one Arab state to another depending on the US and UN priorities.
I. U.S. Foreign Policy in the Arab World

1. American-Arab Relations: From Bush to Obama

The American-Arab relations in the 21st century witnessed crises that resulted in complicated relationships influenced by various aspects. The US interests in the region ruled the relations. The latter based its relation on categorization of the Arab countries to friendly states and ‘rogue states’ that take aggressive attitudes toward the US. Obama declared that, “For decades, the United States has pursued a set of core interests in the region: countering terrorism and stopping the spread of nuclear weapons; securing the free flow of commerce and safe-guarding the security of the region; standing up of on Israel’s security and pursuing Arab-Israeli peace” (“Full Speech about Diplomacy in the Middle East and North Africa”). In fact, American-Arab relationships were based on self-interests of the US. The Arab’s attitudes were changed due to the US ambitions as protecting its national status and security on the expense of Arab regions. In the American-Arab experience, the essential point was the Arab acceptance of Israel’s existence and the peace process.

The decisive moment in the American-Arab relationship was the coming of George W. Bush to the presidency and his bias to Israel. Though Obama’s efforts toward the issue, the peace process was characterized by failed. Spencer asserted that: “For the first months of Obama’s presidency, regional opinion accorded him the necessary leeway to reorient relations with regional leaders towards supporting his new initiatives on Iran and the Israel-Palestinian conflict” (13). US foreign relation with the Arab countries saw struggle over the Palestinians’ case from the Bush administration to Obama’s era. The US use of the term axis of Evil toward the Arab supporters of the Palestinians’ case and of terrorism resulted in US failure in finding a
solution to the case. This resulted in the American-Arab foreign relationships back as step backward despite the Obama’s aspiration to repair the relation with the Arab countries.

Obama had set his first aim to correct American-Arab relations. Obama’s goal was to get rid of the sense of hate and doubt in American-Arab relations that caused by Arab-Israeli conflict, the invasion of Iraq and the 9/11 attacks particularly. Obama declared that: “Given that this mistrust runs both ways as American have been seared by hostage-taking and violent rhetoric and terrorist attacks that have killed thousands of our citizens a failure to change our approach threatens a deepening spiral of division between the Unites States and the Arab world” (“Full Speech about Diplomacy…Africa”). In spite of hatred, particularly as the US attitudes toward the Arab as terrorism and the Arab’s view to the US as racist country, Obama’s administration continued to have a significant number of allies in the Arab world in order to repair American-Arab relations. Obama’s policy in the light of the previous and recent disputes aims to come close to the Arab region with the intention of restoring the relation that was distorted during the Bush presidency.

The Arab image of terrorism in the US judgment and its security measures against Arabs led to the instability in American-Arab relation. Spencer stated that:

So long as the US regional agenda is dominated by short-term security goals –namely, the containment of terrorist networks and forestalling Iran’s nuclear ambitions – then the democracy agenda will suffer. The extra-judicial measures employed by governments in policing against terror are by nature restrictive in context where the police and security forces primarily serve to protect the interests of the existing regimes, rather than those of the broader population. (14)
The 9/11 attacks and the accusation of Arabs of terrorism and Washington’s call for a ‘war on terror’ lead to a radical policy toward the Arab and Islamic world in the light of the accusation to ‘Al-Qaeda’. These resulted in the United States’ view toward Arab Muslim as a threat to its national security.

In the recent years, the Arabs’ significant position was weakened that encouraged the US intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq and complicating the American-Arab relation. Spencer claimed: “The pervasive popular argument is that the United States invaded of Iraq to secure its hold over the regions oil, to preserve its regional and global dominance, to defend Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian territories and to subject Muslims (both Sunni and Shia) to their will” (3). Generally, the US interests were depended on strengthening its position and control over by the Arabs’ region. The Iraq crisis represents the split in American-Arab foreign relations since the invasion by US upset the Arab world especially the Gulf States (GS) as the United States exploited Iraq’s attack on Kuwait, accusing it with the owning weapons and gaining the Arab support against Saddam’s regime. This was workable for US and Israel to accomplish its priorities.

Although Obama was aware of each single predicament, the US damages in the region and the crises took more significant acts to repair. But, following the half of 2009, Obama’s administration activity continued in opposition to the popular resistance to the US in the area. The US administration’s ambition under Obama was achieving concession and collaboration with the Arab region rather than disagreement. However, each obstruction of US diplomacy toward the Middle East, leading to doubts to the intentions of US to improve relations with the Arab countries especially the Middle East states. The oppositions to US policy in the region considered a weak point and a sign of the US inability to improve American-Arab relations (Spencer 37).
Based on fighting terrorism through American-Arab collaborating, US attempted to renovate relations with Arab countries. Migdal has been affirmed that:

Although Obama carefully avoided using the words “terror” or “terrorism” in the speech they were very much in his mind. Instead of terrorist, he spoke of “violent extremists,” but the intent was the same. Implicitly, the president was attacking Huntington’s notion of Islam’s bloody borders, the idea of an American war against Islam generally, and American Islam phobia. His language was aimed at winning over Muslims, but the left no doubt that a key priority of his administration would be thwarting terrorism or, as he put it, violent extremism. (270)

Fighting terrorism was of the Obama’s ambitions in the Arab world; despite of his evaded of utterances as terrorism in his message to the Arab countries to renew the relations, the new administrations implicit hatred of terrorism particularly Muslims was sustained. For Obama, US regional interests were significant more than human rights in the Arab world.

The continuation of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the injustice of the Palestinians were the well-known reasons of the conflict in American-Arab relation. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was seen in the Obama’s top priorities in his first term. It has been stated that, “From day one of his presidency, Obama had hammered home the mantra that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict posed grave threats to American interests and that the United States was in a position finally to solve the problem” (Migdal 271). However, Obama’s efforts to resolve the conflict through recommence direct negotiations and opposing the Israel settlements at the beginning, US failed in achieving it. American-Arab relations were constant based on US interest, and perhaps preserve and persistence of oil flow and energy in the Middle East.
particularly from the Gulf States to industrial states to work on the face of political stresses.

Despite the conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Arab societies keep on its conventional. With coming on of Obama government, most Arab countries craved for balance in global world. With the year of 2009, US policies toward the Middle East look as if to be one face the prevalent crisis from Iraq, Iran and Israel-Palestine. The changes in Obama policy in 2010 would be including people in making reforms. US were the key influential player in the external and internal of the region. It carried on its function as a leader for positive change instead of weakening the crisis (Spencer 46).

After the 9/11 events, Bush’s administration created a new foreign Policy to eradicate the state or non-state threats that menaced the American’s status in the international system. Without unlimited by practical humanitarian check or the menace of prosecution, the US would declare war against real and imagined antagonist. The US ‘freedom agenda’ was tied to the use of unlimited force to protect the state; Bush stated that, “the strategy was realistic because freedom is the most practical way to protect our country in the long run”. Bush left the US in dilemma at economic and diplomatic level; Bush’s policy created a mistrust between US and Muslim peoples and societies. The advent of the president Obama; his administration’s ambition was a new policy toward the Arab World to restore the relations (qtd. in Gerges 2).

Generally, Obama’s desire was to renovate the US foreign relation with the Arab countries and recovery the confidence that was missed in the Bush’s era. Obama declared that, “Recall that earlier generations faced down fascism and communism not just with missiles and tanks, but with sturdy alliances and enduring convictions. They
understood that our power alone cannot protect us nor does it entitles us to do as we please” (qtd. in Gerges 2). In fact, Obama’s policy was aimed to avoid a military intervention as one of the decisions of the US policy. Based on strong foreign relations, mutual interests, and avoid the military force, the new administration aimed to repair the American-Arab relations.

In the light of the so-called Arab Spring, the American-Arab relation was characterized by instability. Generally, the views varied about the Obama’s visit to the Middle East where most people of the world thought improvement in American-Arab relations and progress of the American image in the Arab world. However, frustration returned after the Arab revolution as the United States supported for the dictatorial regimes in the region such as Egypt on the one hand and on the other hand, promoted human rights and ‘reforms in the region’ as in the case of Libya and Syria.

2. U.S. Foreign Policy in the Arab World

The survival of US supremacy and interests in the Arab world was tied to the American foreign policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict, Arab regimes, and other welfare questions as oil supplies and support to democracy in the Arab world. In the last decades, US was considered as a dominant country through establishing itself as a leader of the world. Spencer asserted: “One of the first tasks facing president Obama, therefore, was to promise change: not only in US policy towards the Middle East, but in the manner in which the region itself is perceived and dealt with in American policy circles” (31). In fact, US foreign policy toward the Arab world witnessed a development from Obama to Bush era based on the country priorities in the region. Following the 11/9 attacks, US expansion and policy extended in the Middle East particularly.
After 9/11 events American foreign policy toward the Arabs was complex that effected its relation with some Arab countries as Syria. Kanat stated that, “However, mutual relations grew sour after the U.S. invaded Iraq. Syria opposed the operation, and after it became clear that the U.S. would not go back on its decision” (17-9). The US military intervention as a policy toward the Iraq case resulted in instability in American-Arab relations mainly with the Syrian regime.

Generally, after the 9/11 attacks the US foreign policy changed dramatically toward the Arab World. In fact, US policy was intended to defend the usual Arab systems in return for a stable delivery of oil. Following of the attacks, the Arab countries were considered as a threat to the US security and they demanded to pull up terrorism. The US position was rigid even toward its allies. Indeed, the George W. Bush administration promoted American control in opposition to the so-called rogue states that have connection with terrorism or aimed to have weapons of mass destruction. Thus, the military invasion was the US policy as the case of Iraq and Afghanistan and obliged sanctions on Syria (Halabi 97-9).

The US policy during the Bush administration was built on the view that the conflict was not only around communism but it was between democracy and terrorism. Add to that, the US policy was to ensure Israel’s security in the region through weakening its enemies such as Syria and Iraq. Halabi stated that, “In addition, the policy of Congress toward the Middle East has long been influenced by the pro-Israeli Jewish lobby AIPAC², which has tirelessly sought to block efforts to bolster US-Saudi relations” (100). Israel’s influence on the United States’ policy toward the Arab countries aimed at decreasing the Arab countries’ threat of using oil power to put pressure on US to force Israel to leave Palestine. The Zionists constituted a
fundamental force in the US policy and its decisions toward Arab issues as the Arab-Israeli conflict. Halabi affirmed that:

Even more importantly, US foreign policy has operated under a doubled standard with regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The US supported Israel at the expense of the Palestinians, overlooked Israel’s policy of violating the international law by annexing Arab land, and refrained from condemning Israel’s policy of deporting Palestinians and building illegal settlements on occupied Arab land. (102)

The Arab-Israel conflict around the Palestinian issue was threatening the United States’ interests in the region and it put its foreign policy toward the Arab world in dilemma. The US policy’s ambition was to resolve the Israel-Palestinian Peace Process from Bush until Obama era through negations between the two countries. In fact, Israel and US interests in the region and to protect their national security guided the US decision toward the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Obama’s administration foreign policy toward the Middle East region witnessed a divergence between its strategy and public diplomacy. Spencer affirmed that, “The main objectives of the new administration-namely, to propel Israelis and Palestinians towards peace and put relations with Iran on a new footing-were swiftly met by the intransigence and evasiveness of regional leaders on all sides” (2). Obama’s foreign policy was opposing to some extent the previous Bush policy that depended on the use force and military occupation to impose transformation in the Arab world. The shift in US foreign policy has changed since Bush era and the eagerness of the Obama’s government to repair American-Arab relations through a new policy was seen in Obama’s speeches toward the Arab world.
Obama’s promises to change US policy in the beginning of his term in 2009 were characterized by failures. The Americans’ double standards embodied in the multiple use of military force as in Iraq, the unaccounted Iraqis deaths and the significance of ‘Guantanamo’ and ‘Abu Gharib’ where US assurance its security ignoring the misery that made in the Arab countries by it with its allies. The unsuccessful closing of Guantanamo within a year, the direct relations with Islamist groups and Hamas association in Gaza put US reliability around policy suggestion in Ankara and Cairo speeches in accusation (Spencer 33).

The Obama’s use of his National Security Strategy (NSS) in 2010 was move to express a foreign policy strategy. The NSS goal was to rebalance the American’s global commitments away from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that put the country in confusion since the 21st century challenges in Asia and the Pacific Ocean. Obama’s perception was the World’s pessimistic toward the US advocating democracy; he affirmed that, “We (American) promote our values above all by living them at home”. In fact, Obama’ NSS was difference from Bush’s strategy where Obama strengthened and support of the US ideals that were common and all humans shared and seek to achieve (qtd. in Gerges 3).

In 2011, the US goal was to retain free access and supplies of sources along with military occupation of parts in the Middle East and intervention in Libya confirmed the US ambition for political and economic influence. Political and economic assurance was tied to the military career in the region. In ‘asymmetric warfare’ as in Iraq, military force used in cautiousness. However, security strategy in the Middle East set European allies and US in suspicion; whether armed forces against al-Qaeda will realize aims at the time US economies crisis (Spencer 44).
The Arab-Israeli conflict especially around the Palestinian case was seen as a top priority of the United States’ foreign policy with the coming of the president Obama; however, the issue was left without solution for the reason of the failure of the United States’ policy in the peace process. Over many years, the Arab-Israel clash created a gloom over the region where the Zionists lived in fear and Palestinians suffered humiliation of invasion. Over two years the government’s policy attempted, alongside the international community and parties, to end the conflict, but the policy failed where Israel’s actions persist and Palestinians. The loyalty to Israel’s defense is stable and stands in opposition to those rejecting Israel’s existence (Obama “Full Speech about Diplomacy in the Middle East and North Africa”).

The US foreign policy under Obama tended to achieve equilibrium between its priorities in the region and correct its image among the Arabs’ people. The new president stated that:

Though these countries may be a great distance from our shores, we know that our own future is bound to this region by the force of economies and security by history and by faith… Now already, we have done much to shift our foreign policy following a decade defined by two costly conflicts after years of war in Iraq, we have removed one hundred thousand American troops and ended our combat mission there. (Obama “Full Speech about Diplomacy…Africa”)

The Obama administration is no different from Bush’s government when it comes to protect its priorities in the Arab region, as the Obama’s policies tend to reduce the military intervention in Arab issues in return to seek it ambitions from oil supplies, the war on terror, and promoting democracy.
In the light of the outbreak of revolutions of the so-called Arab Spring in the Arab countries, the US foreign policy was dealt with two-facedness toward the events. In fact, Obama’s policy was seen in a state of confusion between supporting and opposing the regimes. In his Full speech about Diplomacy in the Middle East and North Africa, the president declared that:

The past six months: the United States opposes the use of violence and repression against the people of the region. The United States supports a set of universal rights, the right to choose your own leaders whether you live in Baghdad or Damascus, Sana’a and we support political and economic reform in the Middle East and North Africa that can meet the legitimate aspirations of ordinary people throughout the region. (“Full Speech about Diplomacy…Africa”)

Obama’s policy was based on using and supporting human rights as a tool to pressure on the Arab regimes as the case in Libya where the US used the Libyans’ right for democracy and intervened and its allies in the country. However, in the Egyptian conflict the US policy was based on opposing the transition in Egypt since it is an ally country. But in the Syria crisis, Obama’s policy was characterized by failure to deal with the allies of the Syrian president Bashar al-Assad which obliged him to move back from a military intervention.

In 2012, Obama’s foreign policy was criticized, particularly by nominating Mitt Romney in the presidential campaign. Romany’s position on Obama’s policy toward the Syrian crisis has been a critic due to Obama’s unclear policy and the lack of “more assertive Steps” and the new president was “anxious to employ military action” in order to ended the Syrian regime. Moreover, Obama was charged with tipping Al-Qaeda through declaring the withdrawing of the US forces from
Afghanistan. During his presidency, Obama’s desire was to maintain the status quo and made some improvements; even the US relation with Arabs were polarized and wicked under Bush’ administration, the relations were not changed in Obama’s era due to his unwilling and lack of ability of bring solution especially the Palestine-Israeli conflict (Gerges 4).

The intervention in Iraq, Afghanistan and the financial assistance to Israel has been put the US in complex position that affected its concrete supremacy as well as its relations in the region. Migdal stated that, “And there were no full-blown strategic allies to which Washington could outsource regional responsibilities” (329). The most important point to be considered is the Arab countries’ determination to bring a shift in their political position in order to stay away from the US and to look for new international options as Saudi Arabia. It worked strongly to protect its strategic priorities as standing against Islamic currents to authority as well as prevent any Iranian-American rapprochement. Indeed, the US administration’s desire was come close to Iran at the expense of the Arab’ priorities. This led the Arab friendly countries to reconsider their relations with Washington with the purpose of protecting their national security.

II. The Arab Spring and the US

1. The Arab Uprisings

With the beginning of the year 2011, the Arab region witnessed a political turn that represented the birth of the so-called the Arab Spring. A wave of protests swept the Arab world demanding a change in the political systems and dethroned the ruling regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, and then Libya. The uprisings that swept the Arab region raised questions about the role of some countries as the United States and the international organization particularly the United Nations to maintain peace. Grant
affirmed that, the United Nations’ investigation of the Middle East and North Africa’s economic and social circumstances ended in result that unless economic and social transformations are made, a brutal revolt would over. However, these analyses did not make an effective action toward the situations (2).

In general, the United Nations’ Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon’s reaction was remarkable politically. Ban’s view was the United Nations stood along with the Egyptians protests in Tahrir Square and asked the Egyptian government to consider the people’s demands. Additionally, sequences of reliable and courageous announcements are made for Libya, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain. The United Nations’ response embodied in the Secretary-General’s declaration at Oxford University stresses the responsibility of human security and intervention as well as it is embodied in UN system’s response as in the Human Right Council (HRC) stoppage of Libya. The UN significant decision was the passing of Libya to the International Criminal Court (ICC) by the Security Council and establishing no-fly Zone in Security Council Resolution 1973⁴ (SCR) (Grant 2).

The UN has played a major role in the Libyan uprising compared to its positions in the Tunisian and Egyptian conflict. The Western nations were in charge of the NATO intervention in Libya and divergence take place within the Security Council Resolution in the UN. Grant stated that:

NATO/Coalition military action to implement SCR 1973 proved a divisive issue in the UN Security Council. Russia and China in particular argued that the coalition air attacks went beyond the Security Council mandate, with the objective of regime change, rather than the protection of civilians. Even now, 9 months later, Russia is asking for a UN investigation into civilian casualties caused by NATO. But these
criticisms are unjustified: during the final SC negotiations on 1973, it was made very clear what military measures would be necessary in order to impose a no-fly zone and protect civilians from assault by Qadhafi’s forces. (3)

The UN as an international organization, its bodies’ decisions toward the Arab uprisings as the military intervention of NATO particularly in the Libyan case show hidden objectives behind them. The downfall of President Gaddafi’s regime leaved hegemony over the oil and gas resources and the protection of the Western countries’ priorities in the region instead of the achievement of democracy and the security of civilians. Indeed, UN was seen a reflection of the major powers’ interests especially the US where it played a crucial role in issuing most decisions and controlling the organization and funding it.

In contrast to Libya, the UN decisions toward the Tunisian crisis were not in time and were not accompanied by military decision as in Libya. The sweeping of the protests in support of democracy in most Arab countries, particularly in Tunisia, primarily were unexpected for the international community. In fact, the UN unsuccessful reaction at the moment of the Tunisian government attacks on the activists rose, back to the deficient of political determination among the governments to guarantee not escape from the international impunity. The brutal assaults by the Tunisian government against the protesters led special experts and administrators in the UN branches, the Human Right Council and High Commissioner for Human Rights (HRC), to a pro-active reaction and appropriately against the Tunisian aggressive attacks (“The Arab Spring…Despair” 6).
The UN members contributed in the Arab uprisings as the case of Tunisia where it was taken in consideration. In The “Arab Spring” at the United Nations: Between Hope and Despair, it has been stated that:

These responses by independent UN rights experts to government attacks and repression toward the pro-democracy movement in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere, greatly aided in ensuring that some UN member states approached these situations, at least to some degree, within a legalistic human rights paradigm, and not simply as political phenomena. In so doing, they demonstrated just how important a role that independent rights experts at the UN, free from strong governmental interference, can play to ensure the centrality of human rights within international affairs. (7)

Though the UN response to the Tunisian case was behind schedule and until the uprising of the protests and the government’s hostile procedures, the UN members took a positive act in order to draw the attention of the international public opinion in the direction of the crisis. As soon as the conflict ended and the Tunisian president fled the country, the UN established an Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the country (OHCHR) 5

Libya and Tunisia were not the last Arab sorrow; however, they were seen as models followed by other Arab regimes touched by the winds of change in the region. Syria was another Arab country where calls for reforms came into sight to the country but as usual, the Arab governments did not respond. With the increase of violence against the Syrians, the UN along with OHCHR condemned Assad regime’s attacks. The worsening of the situation in Syria and the extent of human rights abuses against the protests of pro-democracy forced the OHCHR in the UN to take hard decisions.
Yet, a shortage was in the implementation of the resolution as Russia and China opposition using the Veto (“The Arab Spring…Despair” 16).

The UN peace plan for the Syrian case faced failure and was blamed by some countries for not being able to referral the Assad regime to the International Criminal Court (ICC). It has been stated that, “fears within the US government of the HRC potentially making similar requests of the Security Council concerning war crimes or crimes against humanity committed by Israel or the United States in the future” (“The Arab Spring…Despair” 18). Because of the conflict among the major powers for areas of influence, the UN did not succeeded to accomplish the peace process in most part of the world. It has been clear that the American-Russian struggle for world domination represented the failure of the UN to resolve the crisis.

Arab upheavals arrived to Yemen and Bahrain as well in 2011; the protests swept the two countries and led to the escalation of events. Although it was turn off in Bahrain by the authority, it did not end in Yemen. The two countries witnessed arrests and violations of human rights by the ruling regimes and resulted in the UN response to the situations. It has been asserted that, “Only the OHCHR and Special Procedures have strongly addressed rights violations in Bahrain throughout the year. The government of Bahrain, however, has been unwilling to cooperate with the OHCHR or Special Procedures system” (“The Arab Spring… Despair” 21). Bahrain and Yemen events drew much attention to human rights protection resulting in UN High Commissioner Intervention in the countries. Yet, the UN officials were permitted to visit the countries but without examining the situation there.

The US has been accused by civil society institutions and members of the UN for its ambiguous policy toward its ally states as Bahrain and Yemen. The US challenging of the HRC decisions toward the Arab Peninsula have diluted the US
capability to adapt and guarantee crucial acts by the Security Council toward the Syrian crisis. The US has been charged with being allied with the Gulf States and impeding the UN Security Council resolutions on human rights violations committed by the Gulf States (“The Arab Spring… Despair” 21-2).

2. Obama’s Response to the Arab Spring

As for the United States’ reaction to the Arab uprisings, Obama’s policy was under the headline of controlling the uprisings’ aftermath without threatening the United States’ strategic interests. The initial American administration’s reaction was not to support this wave of protests; the US position toward the Arab uprisings formed by Arab countries importance to the US crucial benefits. Though the US cooperation with states as Tunisia in security matters, the latter has no essential importance as Egypt in terms of regional security and challenge to Israel. Cooper notes that, “Egypt is crucial to regional stability in the Middle East. President Hosni Mubarak has been a stalwart ally of the US and benefactor for upholding the deal signed by Anwar al Sadat and Menachem Begin” (3). Thus, the US was eager to preserve American-Egyptian relations. In contrast, the US repressed the opposition in countries as Bahrain and supported the military intervention in Syria.

Accordingly, the US foreign policy was to change due to the Arab uprisings in the region especially the Middle East. In fact, Obama’s policy was forced to adapt policies according to the occurrence of events. The new US president declared that, “so in the months ahead, America must use all our influence to encourage reform in the region…our message is simple, if you take the risks that reform entails, you will have the full support of the United States” (Obama “Full Speech about Diplomacy…Africa”). In short, Obama’s policy promoted the opposition’s rights under an umbrella of democracy. However, beyond that, the US policy was the
protection of its interests in the region and this was reflected in its support for the Egyptian regime and favoring a military government for more security, which is the opposite of what it did in the Libyan and Syrian crises.

The changing of the US position toward the democratic reforms in Egypt was due to the US desire to preserve its strategic interests in the region. Celso affirmed that:

Egypt was especially difficult as the administration waffled from early for Mubarak to paving the way for a stable transition engineered by the Egyptian military. The administration was surprised by the mass protests fearing they could jeopardize the fight against terrorism and disrupt Egypt’s support for the Camp David Accords. Faced with Mubarak’s fall, Obama sought to facilitate a military government while giving lip service to democracy and free elections. (8)

The US priorities in the region required the American contribution to preserve Egypt’s stability to carry on its responsibility to fight terrorism, to preserve the peace treaty with Israel and to prevent the made of nuclear weapons. Thus, the Obama administration favored the military government as a solution for democracy. Even though the Tunisian upheaval was seen as a detached event and doubtful to extend to the neighboring countries en the perspective of the United States administration, the American response was made to Tunisia. Apparently, Obama was admiring the Tunisians in his declaration that the democratic desire is promoted by the United States for all (Cooper 2).

The uprisings extended to the southern Mediterranean Sea as wildfire, including some countries. After the withdrawing of Hosni Mubarak’s regime, the wave of protest invaded Libya in the city of Benghazi. On February 17, 2011, the
Libyan uprising led Obama’s government to military action with Britain, France, UN and the Arab League for intervention. Based on his vision of a ‘post- American world’, Obama’s view was to involve and headed the action regardless of their military inadequacy. Obama’s policy fluctuated due to the awkward of the war where the administration ‘equivocated’ over the “Operation Odyssey Dawn”7 mission and the governments’ involvement in the crisis was reduced. Criticism turned to Obama’s administration for its wariness. Until Muammar Qaddafi’s fall, United States was distrustful (Celso 8).

In fact, the US policy was in support of the Libyan revolution based on promoting democracy and human rights. Obama declared that:

But in Libya we have saw the prospect of imminent massacre. We had a mandate for action and heard the Libyan’s people call for help had we not acted along with our NATO allies and regional coalition partners, thousand would have been killed. The message would have been clear: keep power by killing as many people as it takes now time is working against Qaddafi; he does not have control over his country. The opposition has organized a legitimate and credible interim council, and when Qaddafi inevitably leaves or is forced from power decades of provocation will come to an end and the transition to a democratic Libya can proceed (“Full Speech about Diplomacy… Africa”).

Obama’s support of the Libyan revolution by encouraging democracy, warning the Libyan leader Gaddafi to abide the demands of the UN and intervening in the military alliance along with France and Britain had behind them hidden targets, including the power of controlling sources of gas and oil. These latter advanced the United States to

Indeed Obama’s promoting democratic reform in his Cairo speech resulted in controversy with his government and mounted questions about Obama’s vision toward the revolutions. The United States’ fear of encouraging protests was continued in Yemen, Bahrain and Syria where the counter against ‘Al-Qaeda’ in the Arab Peninsula, the defeating of the fifth fleet on the land and the fear of anarchy in Syria threatened the human rights and democracy (Celso 8). Obama’s foreign policy in these countries was unclear and complicated that may have resulted in changing the United States’ priorities and alliances in the region at the expense of the Arab nation’s stability.

The fluctuation of Obama’s policy in the Middle East was seen in the Arab Spring where it was embodied in its strategy toward Bahrain, Yemen and Syria. Bahrain Sunni regime’s failure to repress the rising resulted in the Saudi Arabia’s troop’s intervention in the state under the security policy Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). In addition, Yemen’s upheaval created a doubt concerning the Obama’s policy toward the crisis. President Ali Abdullah Saleh was seen as the right arm for the United States’ fighting terror. Unlike Bahrain, Obama broke his silence and responded to the Saleh hostility toward his people and promoted with Hillary Clinton and others democracy in the country. The administration’s position toward the crisis embodied in support of GCC Peace Initiatives and Saleh’s resignation from the presidency (Migdal 293-4).

Though the administration’s policies uphold reforms in Egypt and Yemen as well as in Syria, the Obama’s procedures were based on “strategic core interests” permitting suppression in Bahrain. Obama’s government policy toward the Syrian
crisis was characterized by lack of confidence as the fear from confusion in a post-Assad period. With the beginning of Obama’s second term election of 2012, the crisis complicated in the Mideast, region and Obama’s policy failed in the peace process and in dealing with the Syria efforts. The Arab upheaval put in danger the American-Arab relations (Celso 9). In fact, the US position toward the Syrian conflict witnessed conversion during the four years of the revolution where it confused in dealing with the uprising with the new variant.

In fact, Obama’s response to the Syrian uprising did not differ from its precursor toward the previous revolutions where it was characterized by the rhetorical support of the president. Cooper stated that:

Thus far, the U.S. has come out strongly against the Assad regime only in rhetoric. There are many differences between the intervention in Libya and a potential operation in Syria. Libya’s proximity to the U.S. Sixth Fleet made air strikes feasible, and Libya’s oil reserves held a strategic interest that does not exist in Syria. Furthermore Syria’s support from Iran and Hezbollah, Russia and China in the Security Council, and its proximity to Israel are important factors working against intervention. (10)

Obama’s position toward the Damascus government does not compare with the Libyan case. Generally, his decision toward Syria embodied only in rhetorical support where Obama’s call for Assad to resign. However, the arbitrate verbal was not accompanied by any plan to promote the revolution and it has taken a neutral stand.

The Arab Spring found its passageway to Syria, though president Bashar al-Assad’s attempts to ease the tension and the swiftness with which events developed, things took a wrong turn with massacre and destruction of cities and towns. The chaos
that shifted to the country led US to reexamine its foreign relation with the Syrian regime. Unlike what happened in other Arab countries, the Syrian uprisings evolved to a civil war and people fled in masses. In fact, the Syrian conflict opened up many questions about its relations with countries, mainly the US.

American’s relationship with the countries of the Arab world characterized by complexity and instability from Bush era to Obama authority which led the US to pursue multiple policies from Bush to the new administration. In the past decades, American relationship with all Arab governments saw instability particularly after the 9/11 attacks and the invasion of Iraq. With advent of Obama, American-Arab relations has improved to some extent; the new administration’s reforms and policies as the withdrawal from Iraq and restore the US relations with the so-called the rogue states assisted in improving the US image among the Arab world. The Arab states were pinning high hopes on Barack Obama; however, President Obama’s first term has shown a continuation to the preceding policy. Indeed, the so-called of the Arab Spring made a change in the new administration policy; the international particularly the UN along with US new administration reaction was based on its interests in each country. UN and US policy implicitly aimed to secure its interests by economic or diplomatic help and to refrain from straining the situation.
Endnotes

1 Axis of Evil term used by U.S. President George W. Bush in his State of Union Address to describe governments that he accused of helping terrorism and seeking weapons of mass destruction. (Wikipedia)

2 AIPAC American Israel Public Affairs Committee, one of several pro-Israel lobbying organizations in the U.S. It is one of stronger association pressure on the US Congress aimed at achieving US support for Israel putting additional measures on Arab states hostile to is Israel and US and put pressure on Palestinian government.

3 ‘Guantanamo’ and ‘Abu Gharib’, In the aftermath of 9/11 and during the battles against Al-Qaeda many men imprisoned without any legal right in the US Naval Station in Guantanamo in Cuba. Abu Gharib a scandal and is the war crimes committed by American reservists against Iraqi prisoners, men, women and children alike. http://www.opendemocracy.net/

4 ‘no-fly Zone’ in Security Council Resolution, is a decision made by UN as part of the international response to the Libyan crisis through imposing no-fly zone over Libya and made armed attacks against Gaddafí’s air forces.

5 (OHCHR) the Office High Commissioner for Human Rights is the principal UN organization mandate to promote and protect human rights for all. www.unhcr.org/

6 Camp David Accords Treaty signed by Egyptian president Anwar El Sadat and Israel Prime Minister Menachem Begin on 17/9/1978 at the White House. The peace treaty considered the first breach of the Arab position, refusing to deal with Israel.

7 “Operation Odyssey Dawn”, a military operation named by US and made against the Libyan president Gaddafi on 19/3/2011 where several countries prepared to take immediate military action. The operation sustained under NATO.

8 Fifth fleet, it is the United States Navy responsible for naval forces in the Persian Gulf in the territorial water of Bahrain as foundation. It described as the most important American strategic fleet in the Arabia Gulf region. Bahrain is one of the oldest Arab countries that established military cooperation with US.
Chapter Two

U.S. Foreign Policy toward Syria, 2009-2012

Introduction

Syria’s strategic location and peaceful existence was the focus of the attention of many countries of the World and its ambitions since the dawn of history to this days where the US is seen unipolar power, imposing hegemony over most countries of the world. The US-Syrian relations have been witnessed ups and down especially in Bush era and with the advent of the new US governments, which trying to improve the policy toward the state to be friendlier. After years of US attempts to isolate, put pressure on Syria and even exclude it from the so-called peace process in the Middle East discussions, the US perceptive began over the Syrian’s pound to cooperate in recovering the US-Syrian foreign relation. US-Syrian relations saw instability after the 9/11 attacks and the war on Iraq where Syria experienced amount of troubles. In fact, the Syrian uprising stirred up troubles in the Middle East; the flowed of the Arab Spring to Syria made a tragic situation. The US foreign policy toward Syria shifted after 2011. The Arab uprisings have cast their shadows on Arab politics; Syria revolution had taken attentions of the World. The US policy toward the Syrian conflict knew different phases; despite the attempts to resolve the crisis, the US-Syrian relations became more complicated.
I. The Historical Context of American-Syrian Relations

1. The American-Syrian Relations

The American-Syrian relations were complicated under Bush era. Syrian president Bashar Al-Assad experienced predicament in his first term in office after the death of his father Hafez Al-Assad. After the 9/11 attacks, US-Syrian relations took another turn and become complex. Bush’s eagerness was ending terrorism along with countries of axis of evil, subsidizing terrorism spotlight on Syria. On the day of attacks, Bush sent the nation a speech, “the United States will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them”. Syria was under close judgment that led to be on the US list of states supporting terrorism for the reason that it was directly sustaining Hezbollah. However, Syria administration, in the post 9/11 period joined US war on terrorism through giving important ‘intelligences’ over several groups appeared in the Middle East (qtd. in Kanat 17).

The post 9/11 attacks shed its shadow on the Middle East countries, and Syria was no exclusion. However, in 2002, Syria engaged with US in global war on terrorism, Kanat affirmed that:

According to former American military and diplomatic officials, in early 2002, Syria became one of the CIA’s most effective intelligence allies in the fight against terrorism. Accordingly, the Syrian regime compiled a large amount of intelligence about al-Qaeda fighters, cells and recruiters operating in the Middle East and Europe. (17)

In fact the 9/11 events was an opportunity for US to put states against Israel as Syria into the list of enemies for US. Though the year of 2002 was seen Syria cooperate with US against terrorism through providing information concerning al-Qaeda, the
invasion of Iraq in 2003 shifted the US-Syrian relations due to Syrian opponent of invasion.

The invasion of Iraq shifted the US-Syrian relations; the war on Iraq mixes up the cards against Syria. The mutual relations produce disagreeable for the reason of the Syrian opposition to the US military operation against Iraq and Syria seemed attached to its decision. The US-Syrian collaboration toward terrorism i.e. al-Qaeda ended; Syria’s attempts in UN Security Council (UNSC) embodied in its voting with US for resolution 1441 to bring UN inspectors to Iraq. Damascus saw the support as a try to cut the US-Iraq relatives; it was clearly against any military toward Iraq (Kanat 19).

Syria’s interest was preserving the Iraq unity in the face of US project. Bashar Al-Assad’s first term in presidency office promoted Syrian-Iraqi closer economic relation along with US ambition in the first ninth months in office to impose international sanctions on Saddam’s regime. At the same time as Syrian-Iraqi relations extended, Syria appeared to be a ‘violator’ of UN sanctions on Iraq. Possibly, these dispute referrers to American perception of Syria’s cooperation for Iraq through passing military tools by overland delivering. Damascus violation of sanctions was the focal point of the US-Syrian disputes (Leveret 134).

After the occupation of Iraq in 2003, US-Syrian foreign relation strained though Syria’s opposition to the invasion and vote in UN to avoid the military attack. Kanat stated that, “The immediate aftermath of the Iraq invasion, relations between the two countries deteriorated. First, reports showed that Syria was allowing foreign fighters to transit through its territories into Iraq” (19). Syria became a mortal enemy to the US when US attempts to form opposition against US raid of Iraq. Syrian’s position saw the US proofs about weapons of mass destruction and accusation of
Syria’s collaboration to Iraq used as causes in order to profits after the destruction of the country besides to cut the Syrian-Iraqi relations.

Even with the advent of Obama, the Syrian political key figures were still hopeful for a recovering the relation with the new administration. Imad Mustafa asserted that, “There is much common ground between Syria and the U.S. as to ending the war in Iraq, attaining peace in the Middle East, and restoring the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people; however, there are disagreements about the details and about the methods and mechanisms of implementation” (qtd. in Hinnebusch 25).

Initially, US seemed to carry on the Bush policy toward Syria; despite the disagreement between the two countries over some significant issues, the Syrian officials supported the Obama decisions as the leave from Iraq.

The assassination of the Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri made the US-Syrian relations more complicated than the Iraq case did. Syria was blamed indirectly for the incident by US for the reason of the existence of Syria’s troops in Lebanon. Kanat affirmed that: “For decades, the U.S. and western countries requested that the Syrian regime pull its troops from Lebanese soil; however, with the Iraqi crisis, this pressure reached a new high” (23). The Syrian military and political occupation in Lebanon did not provide security for the country. After the war in Iraq, Syria faced increasing pressure from western players. Syria was affected by US decisions made to weaken its position as imposing economic sanctions on the country.

The Syrian intervention in Lebanese affairs led to the development of the pressure and tension on the US-Syrian foreign relations. Though Syrian consent of withdraw its troops, Bashar’s support of Hezbollah carry on. Kanat asserted that, “Though Syria capitulation on the issue of troop withdrawal demonstrated a modicum of good faith, Assad’s ongoing support of Hezbollah prevented any meaningful
progress on the status of U.S relations” (24). In fact, the death of Hariri assisted US to bring pressure on Syria. Unfortunately, isolating Syria made its relation with US in wrong path worsening.

American-Syrian relation was in embarrassed position in Bush’s administration. Syria was under western pressure that led perfectly isolating it; a situation that requiring analysis and assess its strategy toward Washington. Leveret stated that, “But the absence of positive engagement with Washington remains Bashar’s biggest diplomatic liability. This deficit is a drag on Syria’s regional standing and handicaps any strategy for its internal reforms” (146). Though Syrian president was unsuccessful in dealing with Bush government, the US-Syrian diplomatic relation was not improved well with the advent of Obama to the office.

The advent of Obama and his winning presidential election in 2009 made many connotations in the world, specially the Arab countries, including Syria that was seen as one of the US antagonists in the Middle East. The era of Obama was seen to open a new side to the complex US-Syrian relations. A Syria positive attitude toward Obama was embodied in Al-Assad’s reception of recovering the relation; Kanat stated that: “Syria welcomed the Obama administration in 2009 with an eagerness for engagement unparalleled in the history of the countries’ bilateral ties. In fact, Assad had viewed the 2008 presidential election as an opportunity to change the course of the countries’ relationship” (32). Syrian president Showed hopes in improving Syrian’s relations with US under the Obama era where it was depended on the US motivation whether following a new policy different from the Bush administration or pursue it. Generally, Syrians were satisfied to elect Obama as president, maintained Syrian collaboration to US in fighting terrorism.
During Bush’s era, American-Syrian relation was unfriendly. With the departure of Bush, the Syrian government hoped to renew the relations and to fill the gaps and fix the split. Bashar al-Assad stated to the Guardian that, “We have the impression that this administration will be different, and we have seen the signals. But we have to wait for the reality and the results” (qtd. in Hinnebusch 24). In fact, the Syrian president welcomed with the US new administration under Obama authority. The Syrian government put hope in improving the relations between the two countries and the new US president made efforts to achieve that.

President Obama made a step on the road to recovery the diplomatic relations with Syria. In order to recuperate the US-Syrian relations as first move in the office was by sending a delegation for evaluating the US-Syrian relations in Damascus 2008. The new US president’s foreign policy ambitions in the Middle East from US a soft depart from Iraq, repression of Iran’s goals and Middle East peace process were significant would be critical by Syria. The US-Syrian collaboration would be achieved through direct contact with Syrian government in the US political key figures from secretary of state Hillary Clinton and assistant to the president of national security affaires James Jones. The reestablishing of US-Syrian relations and advancing it based on US desires to ban the passing of fighters in Iraq, to cut the relation with Iran and slice the support of Hamas and Hezbollah so contributing in the Arab-Israel discussions (Kanat 31).

Obama’s candidacy for election in 2008 expanded the Syrian president hopes in improving diplomatic relations. Assad’s view was based on that electing Obama was a vital step in US history and the ending of the Bush’ internal and external policy failure. Assad affirmed that: “we are happy that [Obama] has said that diplomacy-and not war-is the means of conducting international policy” (qtd. in Kanat 32).
Undoubtedly Obama’s victory deceptive Bush administration’s failure; Syrian president emphasized on the US-Syrian dialogue in case that the new administration engaged in a serious discussions. In fact, it was pointed that Obama’s promotion of democracy made Syrian president considered the new government as solution for the complicated issues in the Middle East including the US-Syrian, which has been deteriorated in the recent years.

The indirect discussions between Syria and Israel were a source of embarrassment for the US-Syrian relations. In “Inheriting Syria Bashar’s Trial”, Leveret stated that:

The value of Syria’s ties to anti-Israeli terrorist groups has already decline in ways that Bashar appears to appreciate. In that context, U.S. adoption of either or both of the positions described above would send an important signal to Bashar that giving up Syria’s terrorist cards would not compromise his chances of an acceptable peace agreement down the road. In fact, such a U.S. Position would allow Bashar to argue within the regime and publicly that cooperation with Washington on terrorism would bring Syria closer to its goal of regaining the Golan⁵ (165).

Probably, US-Syrian and Israel tripartite relations did not change even with the coming of Obama administration. However, US attempts to cooperate with Syrian regime to resolve Israel-Syrian conflict, but the collapse was reflected in the indirect negotiations between the two parties particularly in the light of US-Syrian poor relations.

Obama’s quality as anti-Bush runner in ballot vote of 2008, gave the closing stage of US foreign policy military intervention that made international particularly
Syria optimistic. Obama in debate affirmed that: “the notion that somehow not talking to countries is punishment to them which has been the guiding diplomatic principle of this administration is ridiculous”. Obama made a move and declaring to make ties with states as Syria, North Korea and Iran that considered one of the usual exiles countries. So that, US new foreign policy came close to commitment was seen as success and a path for recovered US-Syrian relations (qtd. in Kanat 35).

Generally, after the Obama appointment as US president, Syrian saw upheaval US-Syrian foreign relations took another turn where indictment raised toward the Syrian regime and the US policy misused. Obama acknowledged that, “Most recently, the Syrian regime has chosen the path of murder and the mass arrests of its citizens. The United States has condemned these actions and working with the international community” (Full Speech about Diplomacy in the Middle East and North Africa). With the beginning of revolution, US-Syrian foreign relation has been changed. The Syrian suffering from humiliation and the use of substance weapons by the regime resulted in the Western and American indictment to the ruler regime. Despite of the external support for the Syrian rights, US position toward the crisis commonly was evasion.

Syria made attention more than other countries. The US foreign policy toward Syria before to 2011 and following it has been reserved. Leveret stated that, “To that end, the United States should modify current provisions of its emerging initiatives for promoting economic and political reform in the greater middle east to permit greater engagement with both regime and civil society in Syria” (164). Though Obama is keening to renovate the relations with important nation in the Middle East, US foreign policy was characterized by unparalleled and instability decisions toward the country.
2. Syria under Bashar al-Assad Authority

Events taking in Syria since almost six years and the resulting facts on the regional and international levels put this Middle Eastern country on the facades of headlines. Each one especially in the foreign countries was asking about the Syrian’s national, religious diversity and kind of prevailing governance in the country. Syria has been a scene of many historical events; the small Middle East country was ruled from independence by Hafez al-Assad until the Bashar al-Assad authority who has been introduced reforms to the state. Leveret stated that, “In his early days in office, the new president seemed to want to straddle questions about his basic orientation toward reform, presenting himself as someone seeking to balance change and continuity” (69). Bashar’s ambition was modernizing Syria through persuasive Syrians that he was a modern president, introducing reforms at the economic and political level. In fact, reforms were applied, but after his first year as president, the country faced accusation by the US and suffered from economic sanctions.

In contrast to Hafez’s era where Syria has witnessed significant improvements that came with political dictatorship and violence, al-Assad junior’s desire was to “maintain” his father’s advance but developed it. In “Inheriting Syria Bashar’s Trial by Fire”, Bashar emphasized his interest in alteration stated that:

It is not possible to start any political development in Syria except despite the historical position of the country. I said in my inaugural speech that we are not coming to over throw the reality but to develop it, and the word ‘development’ means that you are basing yourself on something and moving from it forward and not moving into a vacuum” (qtd. in Leveret 69).
The political, social and economic reforms were seen in the al-Assad’s priorities in transforming Syria since the beginning of his term in order to renew its relation with the West particularly the US. In fact, Assad younger was able to transforming the country; however, his reforms faced the possibility of either his exclusion from the office or the fall of the order.

After his first tenure in the office, Syria under al-Assad authority has faced external pressure and indictments particularly from the US. Syria was in charge of cooperation with Iraq and Lebanon’s wars against US and Israel. Accusations toward Syria were an obstacle against Bashar’s regime. Darraj affirmed that, “Now, however, Syria’s president Bashar al-Assad, who had only been in power for a short time, suddenly had reason to worry that his country had been placed on an informal list of enemies of the United States” (13). In fact, the indictment was tied to the US ambition to subdue the Syrian decision to the command of the US, to cut its ties with Islamic resistances and isolating the country. Though accusations choked the Syrian president and resulted in economic sanctions and being placed on the “enemies list”, the advent of Obama administration Syria’s isolation have fallen and opened direct contacts with al-Assad.

Syrian government was under Washington’s threat and charge; the “Syrian Accountability Act,”6 passed by the US congress to bring to an end of Syrian support for terrorism, Islamic resistance, and to stop its production of weapon of mass destruction. The introducing of the bill commanded Syria loyalty to the US demands or imposed sanction on the country. Bashar’s economic transformations that he resisted to put them into service in order to restore the Syrian economy were threatened by the Act. Even so, the US stacked with the view of prevention the Syrian’s hand-outs and activities to the international threat of terrorism (Darraj 104-5).
Along with the economic sanctions posed on Syria, the economic instability was threatening Bashar’s permanence in the office; disturbances and dissatisfaction were warning his presidency. In “Bashar Al-Assad” Major World Leaders, it has been stated that, “Arguably the greatest challenge facing Syria today is the alleviation of poverty and the state’s introduction to the world economy” (qtd. in Darraj 15). The external pressures and sanctions imposed on Syria by the West, particularly the US resulted in the deterioration of social conditions and the widespread of poverty in the country. The US has been succeeded in isolating Syria and inciting Syrians to demand the so-called reforms even with the coming of Obama as president.

Overall, the Syrian foreign relations with the Western countries knew some kind of changeability in recent decades particularly US and Israel. The war and peace case between Syria and Israel has been considered a basic point determine the future of the Middle East in general. Israel occupations of Golan Heights were the tension point in the Syria-Israeli struggle; usually Syrian president disappointment toward the possibility of peace with Israel. Darraj stated that, “Most of Bashar’s advisors and members of his inner circle were men who had served and advised his father; they, like most Syrians still rejected the idea of peace with Israel” (97). As long as Golan Heights still occupied by Israel, peace would not be. The Syrian’s height was a key factor in its confrontation with Israel especially the authority has been faced economic and political challenges. In fact, Syrian president did not aim to peace with Israel as much as to restore the US-Syrian foreign relations.

At the international and regional level, Syria’s foreign relations were affected by the political changes in the US and Israel. Leveret affirmed that, “The elevated importance of terror and “rogue regimes” in U.S. foreign policy would heighten tensions between Damascus and Washington over Syria’s status as a state sponsor of
terrorism that was also pursuing weapons of mass destruction” (102). Syria’s supports of Islamic resistance groups in Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon has made the country in the subject of accusations by the West mainly the U.S. and Israel and complicated their relations. Even if the Syrian isolations have fallen, since the Obama’s administration has opened direct contact in his first tenure, the Syrian crisis has played role in retention the relations.

Concerning Bashar al-Assad’s attempts to pursue the social and political improvements, the successor president’s effort has been emphasized on the Syria civil society’s progress. The appearance of forceful civil society was a contradictory to the achievement of decreasing the various sectarian identities in the country that was considered the focus of Bashar’s schema for the social reform. The president’s ambitions to more progressive civil society through commercial private sector resulted in the intensification of the Syrian civil society. On the economic side, the Syrian president’s aspiration was the steady progress of the civil society contrasting to the quick political liberalization. In the vein of the Syrian president manners for the economic transformations, his measures approach were a sign of his preference and consideration of the necessity for strengthening his position as president (Leveret 88).

At the political and social level, the unsolved dilemma of sectarianism among the Syrian society between the Sunni popular and the various ethnic and religious groups in the country was the most important domestic challenge left by the elder al-Assad to the younger Bashar. Syrian president descendant al-Assad sectarianism was seen the significant challenge that was referred to grounds as the commonly alternative apparent of the system. Generally, al-Assad regime has been the ability of gaining the religious minorities’ support away from his ‘Alawi’ base. The Sunnis who benefited from Ba’thist policies as the land reform, their submissive support was
gained by the regime. Syrian regime’s efforts were to diminish the Sunnis’ opposition to the system through accommodate their interests and appoint key figures in the Sunni society. Nevertheless, the Syrian regime’s efforts to resolve the dilemma; al-Assad regime failed in the sectarian division in the Syrian society (Leveret 35).

Generally, sectarianism has considered a part from the policy pursued by some forces especially in the countries who ruled by communist regimes as Syria. Though Syrian president Bashar was an Alawi, he was established as the leader of the country. Darraj stated that, “Furthermore, Bashar al-Assad belong to the religious Alawite minority, a sect of Shiite Islam, even though the majority of Syrians are Sunni Muslims; in the eyes of many, this made him (and his father before him) an illegitimate ruler” (14). From al-Assad elder to the younger descendant Bashar, Syria was threaten by the sectarianism in the country. However, Syrian regime’s attempts to combat the extremists groups that were seen in the depraved repression of the uprising in the city of Hama almost two decades earlier, the sectarian struggle re-emerged in Bashar’s authority 2011 where it confirmed the increase of the radical religious groups toward Syria.

Syria’s sufferance from the difficult economic sanctions, spread of poverty and along with sectarian plurality in the society has resulted in isolating the country and the formation of groups with religious cover opposing the Syrian regime. Initially, Syrians demanded the reforms in the first instance; however, the circumstances escalated and resulted in the outbreak of anti-regime revolt demanded for freedom and justice except it turned into civil war in the mid of March 2011. Before and after the beginning of the revolution, the international position was unclear particularly the US foreign policy toward Syria before and after 2011. With the advent of Obama to the office, US policy toward Syria was shifted during the four years of the uprising.
II. Barack Obama and U.S. Foreign Policy toward Syria

1. The United States and Syria before 2011

Both in the months previously, then afterwards as much election, Obama saw the Middle East as numerous smoldering, going from the continuous wars of the political uncertainties furthermore change in Lebanon, on renewed relations with Syria, to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Obama as nomination or as president after the election was unambiguously struggling for the examination over how to demand necessities around those furious crises and how related to each other (Migdal 260).

In his first tenure 2009, the president Obama pledged that his future policy in the Middle East will contain persisted dialogue with Syria. The US president has declared openly to recommence contacts constant and in high level. Obama asserted that, “I am in charge of U.S. foreign policy. I can engage Syria if and when I want” (qtd. in Kanat 42). Though Obama’s desire was to renovate US-Syrian relations, US policy toward Syria was under indictment by the administration and its allies Israel. The US policy to rectify the situation with Syria and the Obama’s challenge to turn his back to the legacy of Bush has been faced pressure the administration’s interests in the region.

At the beginning of Obama’s first term, Syria was on the list of the US foreign policy priorities. For as long as the strong Syrian- Iranian relations and their development of nuclear weapons was the subject of the tension and cutting the diplomatic ties with US; Migdal stated that, “Once he took office, Obama immediately battled the Mideast crises on multiple fronts. He quickly moved toward a U.S. drawdown of troops in Iraq; his aides’ dangled carrots in front of Iran and Syria” (251). Although Obama’s aspiration aimed to repair the US image in the Middle East and reforming its relations with the Arab states that seen in the withdrawal of US
army from Iraq, this matter was seen by the US administration was serving the Arab major countries as Syria. In fact, the US foreign policy was based on its interests in the region; the US opposition to the Syria’s ties with Iran in order to prevent arming Syria who threats the US and Israel security in the region.

Obama’s initial attempts and policy to renew the foreign relations with Syria was embodied in his rhetoric invitation to the opposition of both sides to accept convention. Instantly, the US-Syrian collaborations have been established after the Obama’s inaugural ceremony in 2009; the new president demanded the US antagonists together with Syrians to “unclench their fists” and initiating the US-Syrian discussions. The efforts was seen an achievement of the proposal of renovating the US-Syrian diplomatic relations along with the beginning the discussion with the rogue systems of the international system. While the Secretary Clinton’s policy emphasized on the Asia pacific instead of the key policy issues in the Middle East addressed by the white house and the department of defense, the first new African-American president Obama’s assessment was starting the US-Syrian discussions through make use of some resources of the state department and promoting Syria for engagement (Kanat 37).

Generally, the new administrations’ policy under Obama was aiming to deal with the confused region of the Middle East as the Syrian’ dispute; Obama’s efforts was based on the engagement and promoting partnerships. In “Shifting Sands: The United States in the Middle East”, Migdal asserted that:

In short, president Obama early on identified his toolkits for dealing with the turbulent region of the Middle East. His stress was on diplomacy, negotiations, and regional partnerships. He chose a team of high profile figures with wide-ranging diplomatic experience, who
were well equipped to employ the presidents’ toolkit to best advantage.

(258)

Obama’s character as an anti-Bush policy and pursuing dialogue rather than military intervention as solution for the conflicts led to a possible rise in the US picture in the region. The new administration’s policy was based on promoting international relations, discussions and partnerships with the sates through appointing key political figures prepared for the best representation of the president’s attentions toward the region. The fact that, Obama’s goal of setting experienced figures in the field of international relations was aiming to reinforce the US position and protect its interests in the region.

Even if the circumstances that surrounded the American-Syrian relations, and the Syrian regime thought that the US policy toward the country will be beneficial for the new government, Syria had much to get from constructing the relation. Assad’s ambition was to get free from the economic sanctions in the US officials’ point of view. Due to that, Obama’s intended to transform the Syrian policy along with reduction of the economic sanctions gave the new administration with some weight to make ties with Assad’s regime representatives particularly in the field of industry where high-tech, the information revolution and commercial aviation were punched. Since the emerging of the financial crisis, these sanctions were threaten the economic sectors of the country leading to possibility of instability for Assad’s regime (Kanat 34).

Although, Obama’s administration resisted in his path for renovating the relations with Syria due to the pressure from the policymakers in the Washington along with the American community, the new government foreign policy toward the country was building initially on strengthening the relations through a series of visits
made by the US delegations to Damascus. In “A Tale of four Augusts: Obama’s Syria Policy”, it has been stated that, “For president Obama and his administration, this first step would have to be resuming diplomatic relations at a time where they were at their frostiest” (Kanat 31). The end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009 have improved US-Syrian relation where the US realized that the policy of isolating was counterproductive. Obama’s policy was seeking for a peace deal with Syria in the framework of a comprehensive peace agreement in the Middle East. This was embodied in appointing a US ambassador Robert Stephen Ford in Syria after a series of visits by the US diplomatic to the country.

Indeed, Obama’s policy firstly was seen a continuation of the Bush’s policy in its orders and conditions exposed to the Syrian regime. The conflict issues as the Syrian support of terrorism, the involvement in Lebanese’s affaires, its attempts to acquire nuclear weapons and the worsening human rights situation in Syria were focal points in the conference gathered the Syrian foreign minister Walid al-Mouallem and the US assistant secretary of state Jeffery Feltman. In 15 February 2009, US failed in reaching the final agreement on these issues stated by Mouallem (Hinnebusch et al. 24).

After a break of four years, the US president decision was to restore the US ambassador to Syria after the speeding up of the discussions between the two countries. The return of the US ambassador Robert Stephen Ford was seen a crucial step of the new administration’s policy along with various steps to repair the relation. Kanat affirmed that:

In addition to the return of the U.S. ambassador to Damascus, among the Syrian public. During this period of transition, a group of congressmen from the Armed Service Committee also visited
Damascus and met with Bashar al-Assad. The main topic was again the future of the relations between the U.S. and Syria. Assad shared his optimism during the meeting, with high expectations for the future of bilateral relations between the two countries. (37)

Obama wanted to confirm the new administration’s ambition for new US-Syrian relations through the return of the US ambassador to Damascus as well as the most important diplomatic and military visits of the US delegations to the country. Obama was aiming that Washington played a crucial role in the region in addition to repair the ties with the Arab countries.

Indeed, Obama replenished assents once Syria for another quite a while on the fact that ascensions needed not been arrived at ahead managing “terrorism” Syria might have been particularly denounced to re-opening those routes for militants under Iraq. On the different hand, US Middle East envoy, George Mitchell visited Damascus like a prelude to beginning dependent upon the Syrian-Israeli transactions track. To as much, group included masters in Syrian-Israeli negotiations with a status of notoriety to careful even handedness toward the issue, a huge change over the predominance of the US group under Clinton along with Israeli friends. Despite the fact that writing the appointment of US ambassador For Syria was not happened, broadly it was reported the possibility of US engagement with Damascus (Hinnebusch 26).

Kilik Bugra Kanat reported that Syrian economic instability due to the sanctions of Bush’s administration created a threat to the government. As a support for the diplomatic ties between the two countries, in 2009 US administration permitted the economic exchange such as allowing the Syria airline by the US Department of Commerce for acquiring the export license for avion’s spare parts. Due to the economic sanctions, the Syrian aviation sector was damaged that lead to reduce the
Syrians’ confidence and the Syrian government. Concerning, illustration such, the conclusion of these endorses gave an immense mitigate for those Syrian legislature. Right away thereafter, Hillary Clinton exchanged a couple expressions with Syrian outside clergyman Walid Muallem clinched alongside Egypt throughout those outside clerical meeting, organizing to future examinations between Syria and the US that including Syrian envoy of the US Imad Moustapha. In the Verwoerd beginning, it might have been accounted for that Feltman’s incorporation in the talks dampened Syria’s energy for rapprochement. As the previous US minister on Beirut, he required produced numerous enemies on Damascus to as much sharp feedback about Syria’s part in Lebanese politics, especially then afterward the Hariri death. Reportedly, February meeting, Feltman brought up topics that antagonized Syrian officials, including Syria’s backing for Hamas also Hezbollah impedence done Lebanon, its Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and humanity’s privileges issues. Thus, Feltman’s appointment and the February meeting aggravated to a rough start for warming relations (38).

Various issues were standing against the improvement of the diplomatic ties between the two countries. Despite the fact, that Syria’s arming Hezbollah issue with SCUD\(^8\) was the focal point in of the probability of the decline of the US policy toward Syria to improve the relation particularly after the accusation by Israel; the new administration continued its closer to Syria. Clinton and Feltman emphasized on the rebuilding the relations for the region’s stability and to clarify issues directly to the Syrian regime. Although the congress’ threat to postponement the confirmation of the ambassador Ford, Obama made a move through appointing US ambassador to Damascus in January 2010 and saw the persistence of political relations between the two countries (Kanat 61-2).
After nominating Mr. Ford as an ambassador to Syria in 2010, as an expert in the Middle East and already worked in Iraq, the next year saw the outbreak of the Syrian revolution that came as no shock to the world due to it’s the emergence the protests in other Arab countries. Kanat asserted that, “On the eve of the revolutions in the Middle East, Obama worked within his administrations’ centralized structure of decision-making while still engaging in a deliberative process with his cabinet and national security staff in order to craft U.S. policy on Syria” (62-3). US policy toward Syria protests in the beginning was characterized by reservation. In the US view, Syria engagement with US was to reduce sanctions and to gain international status. However, the Syrian upheaval was the focal point in turning the US policy toward Syria.

2. The United States and Syria after 2011

Unlike other protests in different squares in the Arab World, March 2011 the Syria revolution was seen an exception of the Arab uprisings where Syrians demanded reforms then freedoms and democracy through the departure of the junior al-Assad from the presidency office. The US policy response to the Syrian crisis was initially embodied in Obama’s speeches encouraging democracy and dialogue in the country. The US president in 2011 declared that: “It must allow human rights monitors to have access to cities like Dara ’a and start a serious dialogue to advance a democratic transition otherwise, President Assad and his regime will continue to be isolated abroad” (Obama’s Full Speech about Diplomacy in the Middle East and North Africa). As the upheaval rose like wildfire from city of Dara ‘a, Assad regime’s aggressive attitude has grown resulted in US change in its policy toward the country. At first, Obama was promoting ties with the country, however, following the crisis he was threatening for more sanctions on the regime.
Since the struggle between the Syrian regime and the oppositions in 2011, Obama’s foreign decision toward the conflict has been criticized. The US opposition toward the allies’ support for Assad regime was seen little whereas the other saw the strongest allied of Russian, Iranian, and Hezbollah to the regime and the US disability to prevent the Alawite regime’s control over the Sunni majority. The US opposition to help the Syrian opponents was to support the radical jihadist, therefore limiting the predictions for a cooperative government to arise when the Assad regime go down (Katz 1).

Kilik Bugra Kanat accounted that since president Obama’s inauguration for 2009, US remote approach over Syria has been formed by as deliberative and unified structure choice making. Despite the organization showed solidarity previously its Syria arrangement in the beginning for Obama to begin with term, occasions since the episode of the clash clinched alongside 2011 need fashioned a cleavage the middle between the interagency bureaucracy and the White House over the suitable level of the US inclusion. Ultimately, president Obama furthermore as much closer advisories chased toward those apparitions of Iraq what’s more rise above the perusing domestic political weights sought, after their arrangement basic clinched alongside figuring out the United States stance on the clash. Concerning illustration and result, US approach need lacked cohesion, technique and effect. Due to that, experts for Washington, DC furthermore previous parts claiming Obama’s government believe that nothing will progress over US remote strategy to Syria until another organization moves in the White House in 2016 (145).

Obama’s policy toward the Syrian crisis was marked by inconsistency; on the one hand, the new president claimed the regime and the opposition for a dialogue and resolving the conflict and in the other hand, accusing the regime for anti-
human crimes. Obama affirmed that, “The only way forward is for the government and
the opposition to engage in a dialogue and we can’t have a dialogue when parts of the
peaceful opposition are in jail” (Full Speech about Diplomacy in Middle East and
North Africa). Despite the US support of the Syrian decision for their self-
determination and for peace negotiations with the system, this reflected the US policy
instability and Washington neglecting the ouster of the Syrian president.

Since the starting of the Syrian conflict that returned to a civil war, Obama’s
policy has been changed. Instability and variegated were the US features toward the
crisis; US decision for military intervention in Syria was controlled by several factors.
Al-Baidhani asserted that, “The United States took its intention to use military force
and a military strike against Syria, and there was of the opinion that the U.S. Military
strike against Syria, the United States achieved a number of goals” (165). In fact, US
armed forces in Syria was to achieve the US ambitions to get ride beginning with the
Syria authority and scratching its ties with Shiite groups as Iran and Hezbollah, though
US explicit support of the Syrians’ freedom and human rights through accusing the
regime for the use of chemical weapons.

As response to the Syrian government use of chemical weapons against the
Syrian civilians, military intervention was the US solution. It has been said that,
“President Obama abruptly changed course on Saturday and postponed a military
strike against the Syrian government in retaliation for a chemical weapons attack so he
could seek authorization first from a deeply skeptical Congress” (Baker and
Weisman). In fact, under the slogan of protection of human rights, the Syrian
government use of substance missiles against the civilians was seen for Obama a cross
of the red line. The use of chemical weapons was regarded in the eyes of the US
government a threat to its security and the security of its major ally Israel in the region.

Obama’s ambition was the Congress, Americans, and the outer allies’ approval for military strike against the current Syrian government, or permitting al-Assad to continue his operation murder against the Syrians. Obama’s decision was an attempt to break out the isolation through sharing the decision with the US government. Obama declared that, “I’m prepared to give that order”. Though the US government hailed the assessment, the House of Republicans opposed the president. From this, it seems that the new administration suffered from the lack of consensus decisions on the situation in Syria (qtd. in Baker and Weisman n.p.).

Nevertheless, US military interference in the Syrian conflict was failed due to the several reasons as the Russian and Iranian’s diplomatic and military assistant to the regime. Al-Baidhani affirmed that:

Russia launched its initiative to disarm the Syrian chemical weapons and that the Syrian government has taken the initiative to support, and this is another chance to open the Iranian file through reach major countries and Iran to the initial agreement and progress to resolve the nuclear crisis, Syria and thus was able, thanks to the harmonious and collaborating with the Russia policy of success in the face of the most dangerous challenge is a military solution, U.S. diplomacy. (168)

Though the US accusation and the UN proof of the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime where it considered as a crime toward the Syrian and a red line for military intervention, Al-Assad junior was able to relieve due to its allies support. Russia and Iran sustain of Al-Assad has showed the decline of Obama’s policy and obliged the US for new strategy toward the region.
Russia and China’s veto to cancel the UN decision against the Syrian government actions resulted in the US strong opposition to al-Assad system and this demonstrated in the US Secretary of State Clinton’s call for the unit against the current system. Clinton affirmed that, “What happened yesterday at the United Nations was a travesty”. For the US Secretary of State, ending the violence and encouraging the democracy transition in Syria were the international responsibility and “the Syrian friends” must cooperate to accomplish the goal (qtd. in Syal n.p.).

The support of Russia and China to the Syrian regime strengthened al-Assad’s position. Clinton declared that, “Faced with a neutered Security Council, we have to redouble our efforts outside of the United Nations with those allies and partners who support the Syrian people right to have a better future” (Syal n.p.). In fact, the goal of American alliance with Russia, for example, was to force the allies’ countries to change their position toward the Syrian system and to avoid the escalation of the dominance of socialism in the region.

As the Syrian regime use of substance missiles against its citizens, Obama’s administration announced the possibility of military intervention in August 2013 to stop the regime massacres. The Russian’s suggestion to put the Syrian’s chemical weapons under the international control and the US embrace of the decision was perplexed those who saw the Syrian system’s hesitant to implement and the Russian disability to force the Damascus to do so. The new administration’s policy under Obama was seen failed in preventing the Syrian regime’s annihilation against the Syrian citizens and promoting the other tyrant authorities of their ability to soundless their interior oppositions (Katz 1). Owing to the Syrian’s allies Iran and Hezbollah, Syrian-Israeli relation was unfriendly since the rule of both Hafez and Bashar who has reserved the Syrian-Israeli
border quite since the Arab-Israeli war 1973. To guarantee the Israel’s security, the non-military intervention in Syria was seen a path for Obama to do so. Israel, from the one head appreciated disarm Syria’s decision, on the other hand the fall of the Syrian regime and the possibility of establishing a new one more antagonistic to the Jewish community and may resulted in re-emerge of the Syrian-Israeli conflict; a matter that shared by the US administration (Katz 2).

The new administration’s assist to the Syrian opposition was reflected in the issue of arming the opposition to topple the regime in 2012. Arming the Syrian opposition’s program was seen as move to show a new US policy toward the crisis. The White House stated that, “The U.S. is committed to building the capacity of the moderate opposition, including through the provision of assistance to the vetted members of the moderate armed opposition” (qtd. in Kanat 138). Arming the opposition was considered as a sign of the US major policy change in the region; though Obama’s opposition to the White House decision, the decision was stayed just as deal did not executed.

In fact, the new administration’s efforts to supply the Syrian opposition with missiles and training fighters to topple the Assad regime and to evade formation of radical groups as ISIS organization and to put force the regime for negotiation. Al-Baidhani asserted that, “Therefore, arming the Syrian opposition is one of the means of pressure to force the Syrian government to negotiate” (175). Generally, arming the opposition was seen a step by the US to persuade the supporter to the effectiveness of the policy. The US ambition from this policy was to provoke the opposition against the regime through providing them with military arms as the US air defense and to demands the regime along with its allies, Russia and Iran for serious dialogue.
Generally, the failure of Obama’s policy toward the Syrian conflict resulted in imposing sanctions, changing the country’s attitude toward al-Assad and creating the sense that the crisis threatened the US interests in the region. Obama declared that: “We have stepped up our sanctions on the Syrian regime including sanctions on the Syrian regime announced yesterday on President Assad and those around him” (Full Speech about Diplomacy in the Middle East and North Africa). The malfunction of Obama’s policy to subjugate the Syrian regime due to the international support of the socialist and communist countries resulted in the continuation of Bush policy of imposing sanctions on the country in order to get ride from the regime.

The return of the American ambassador Ford to Syria as a step by the president Obama to improve the relations was welcomed.

His return demonstrates our continued solidarity with the Syrian people and the value we place on Ford’s efforts to engage Syrians on their efforts to achieve a peaceful and democratic transition. We believe his presence in the country is among the most effective ways to send a message to the Syrian people that the United States stands in solidarity with them. (“Statement by Press Secretary on the Return of Ambassador Ford to Syria”)

Despite the return and the appointment of US ambassador to Syria as a step by Obama to improve the relations and his efforts to show the US support to the Syrians and listening to their sufferance, the year of 2012 witnessed the pull out of the US ambassador and the close of the embassy of the US in Syria.

As result of the crisis that turned to a civil war, millions of Syrian refugees escaped to the other countries; Syrians had displaced from one place to another in order to avoid the areas of the struggle between the oppositions and the regime.
Unlike other countries, the US government position toward the issue was controlled. Al-Baidhani stated that:

And the United States’ position on the issue of Syrian refugees, they were imposing restrictions on the entry of immigrants, fear of entering the elements supporting terrorism to U.S. territory, as Washington refused requests for about 135,000 Syrian restoring to, and did not give, but only for about 31 people. So, the U.S. Congress called on the U.S. administration to grant more Syrians fleeing truly armed conflict to restore the United States. (164)

The US policy in regards to the issue of Syrian refugees contrasted with the apparent support of human rights and denouncing the persecution that practiced by the Syrian regime. Unlike the neighboring countries that received the refugees, US have put hard conditions to enter the country due to the fear from terrorist attacks against the country.

Accordingly, US arrangement to Syria need taken on show that there may be decay in the policy, the United States felt that this emergency does not only harm its vital hobbies in the region, and additionally the substitute of Assad administration was seen incident of victim to religious currents. This concern provoked the United States should refrain from supposing regarding the supply the Syrian resistance with weapons beside to agreement with Russia to back off from military decision toward the Syrian substance missiles. The hardline discourse against the Syrian system was transformed and not to stick to the removal of the Syrian president resulted on peaceful agreement for the conflict in Geneva 2 whereas others saw it a reason to the US to decrease its obligation and alleviation of the burden in the Middle East (Al-Baidhani 170).
Despite, John Kerry’s efforts the new secretary of state to send message to the World in relation to a new US approaches, the US foreign policy was in huge confusion, particularly toward Syria, however, the restricted opportunities in front of him. Concerning the issue of increasing the financial support to the Syrian opposition, the help not be guard. Except that, historically Syria has created a complex political dilemma for the US besides the Syrian president Bashar al-Assad was accused for deflation American welfares in Lebanon and Israel. Nevertheless, he was seen a key element in fighting the extremist groups and prevent them from extending (Al-Baidhani 176-7).

Since Bush era to the Obama presidency, American-Syrian relations knew different phases with Bashar al-Assad. US tried for many years to isolate Syria and put it under pressure and excluded it from the so-called the peace process in the Middle East discussion. The US-Syrian foreign relation was undergoing the operations push and pulls related to several chronic issues in the region; the relation has been controlled by matters from the 9/11 attacks, the Iraq invasion, assassination of al-Hariri, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Syria under al-Assad junior saw many difficulties; even with the coming of Obama, the relation did not improved. Imposing sanctions, isolating Syria by the US administration and the sectarian dilemma were obstacles faced Bashar al-Assad’s efforts to reform the country and resulted in the Syrian uprising. Since the coming of Obama to the presidency and after 2011, US policy toward Syria took another turn and has been changed.
Endnotes

1 Hafez Al-Assad He was a Syrian statesman, politician and general who were president of Syria from 1971 to 2000. Assad de-radicalized the Ba’ath government when he took power, by giving more space to private property and strengthening the country’s foreign relations with countries that his predecessor had deemed reactionary. (Wikipedia)

2 Hezbollah Is a Shi’a Islamist militant group and political party based in Lebanon. The militant group has a strong tie with the Syrian regime; the ongoing support of al-Assad for the party resulted in US-Syrian complicated relationship.

3 Resolution 1441 is a United Nations Security Council Resolution adopted unanimously by the United Nations Security Council on 8 November 2002, offering Iraq under Saddam Hussein a final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations that had been set out in several previous resolutions. (Wikipedia)

4 Rafik al-Hariri He was the former prime minister of Lebanon. His assassination in Beirut put Syria under indictment, which led to the complexity of Syrian-Lebanese relations as well as the US relation with Syria.

5 Golan The area was part of extreme Southwestern Syria until 1967, when it came under Israeli military occupation. (Encyclopedia Britannica)

6 “Syrian Accountability Act” On December 12, 2003, President Bush signed into law the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003, a law designed to pressure Syrian President Bashar Assad’s government to work more aggressively in fighting terrorism at home and abroad. Implementation of the new measures, which combine punitive economic sanctions with diplomatic pressure, threatens to escalate into a new conflict in the Middle East. The Syrian Accountability Act: Taking the Wrong Road to Damascus. www.cato.org/


8 SCUD is a series of tactical missiles developed during the Cold War; the term derived from the NATO reporting name “Scud” which was attached to the missiles by Western intelligence agencies. Despite accusing Syria of supplying Hezbollah with SCUD, US, carry on its ties with Syria.
General Conclusion

With the advent of Barack H. Obama to the presidency, most Arab countries pondered the change of American policy and relations with the Arab World. American foreign policy toward the Arab World, particularly in the Middle East, was contradictory. In general, the US policy was based on the theories derived from geo-strategic and vital interests in the region. Indeed, it relied on regional and local allies in securing its welfares and tricked them when they had become a burden.

Oil supplying, combating terrorism and ensuring national security for its ally Israel were the significant issues that controlled American-Arab relations from Bush to Obama. The American intervention in the Arab affairs under the umbrella of democracy was behind its hidden desires of protecting its priorities in the region. In fact, the American invasion of Iraq, the support of Israel’s existence, the 9/11 events and the contemporary US position toward the Arab uprisings as the intervention in Libya and the arming of the Syrian opposition were excuses used by the US administration to achieve its aims in the region.

Since the presidency of George W. Bush, America has been concerned with promoting democracy and freedom in the Arab World. However, the fact was that America has sought to preserve self-interests in the region. The US position on the Arab Springs shows a lack of clarity as it appears in the different reactions of the Obama government toward the revolutionary countries. In contrast to the US position on the revolution in Egypt where the contradiction and difference in attitudes were filling the government from opposing the system to supporting it, in Libya the US
policy was stable which was embodied in a military intervention in the country against former president Gaddafi.

In foreign policy, America looked for securing its sole interests, principally those related to its national security and priorities. Obama’s political agenda toward the Middle East faced several challenges. Middle East issues that caught the new administration’s attention started in Iraq with an opposition to the continued existence of permanent US military bases there. However, Obama’s initial support for transition toward democracy and the need for openness on the Arab political system, the new president’s ambitions faced the unexpected revolutions in the Arab World.

American with its international weight was not only care to the country’s sole interests without paying attention to foreign policy issues, principally those related to its national security and priorities. Obama’s policy agenda has faced toward the Middle East several challenges. Middle East issues caught the new administration’s attention started in Iraq and opposition to the survival of permanent US military bases on the territory of Iraq. Though Obama’s initial support for transition toward democracy and the need for openness of the Arab political system, the new president’s ambitions were faced the unexpected revolutions in the Arab World.

The Arab uprisings reached Syria gradually in 2011 where the tensions between Al-Assad and his opponents resulted in a massive civil war. Syria has witnessed a number of challenges and the inflexibility of Al-Assad to deal with pressures has affected the country as well as American-Syrian relations. The decisions taken by the Obama administration before and after the revolt were contradictory. Though Obama made steps to renew relations, the massive civil war obliged the US to change its strategy. Despite international efforts to solve the conflict and the US policies of
arming the opposition, the downfall of Al-Assad was not reached. The US attempts to isolate Syria through indictment of sponsoring terrorism and imposing economic sanctions stood as obstacles in renewing the relations between the two countries. Despite Obama’s efforts to restore political relations with Syria, the gradual sweeping of the country by the revolution changed Obama’s strategies. Following 2011, US Policy took a different way in dealing with the Syrian conflict; Obama’s initial initiatives to make relations friendly were challenged by the Syrian government position toward the conflict.

Accordingly, US foreign policy toward Syrian particularly described as a hesitant policy, a policy without a decision and, the policy of status of a permanent change. Obama’s policy emphasized more on runs from the defensive side; US procedures toward Syria mainly was the policy of the things want to avoid them, instead of the things that would like to achieve. In fact, Obama’s administration characterized by the inability to change the regime in Syrian to meet with the interests of the overthrow of Al-Assad regime and its allies, instead of protecting the Syrians’ rights and spread of freedom and democracy in the Arab countries.

Generally, American intervention in Syria has inner and outer priorities even if interests contrast with ethics. Obama’s speeches promoted the US vision toward the Syrian revolution, particularly the right for self-determination. Indeed, the US opposition to the current Syrian government was seemingly based on supporting human rights and opposing dictatorial regimes. The reality, however, is that the American opposition to Al-Assad is motivated by hidden desires for hegemony in the region, preservation of its self-interests, extension of its influence and toppling the Syrian government and its allies who threaten US security.
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