NEOCLASSICAL REALISM AND STATE-SPONSORSHIP OF TERRORISM:

THE CASE OF SYRIA

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Abstract

In this article, we demonstrate that the policy of state-sponsorship of terrorism is intimately linked to the material and social structure of international politics. Taking up Stephen Walt's balance of threat theory, we argue that states aiming to increase their security must also conform to domestic and international norms in order to avoid provoking counterbalancing behavior. Building on Walt's theory, we hold that the level of state support for terrorist organizations depends on an intricate cost/benefit assessment of the sponsoring regime, involving both domestic, i.e. enhanced legitimacy, and external concerns, i.e. retaliation.

Walt's Balance of threat theory was developed and used to explain state alliance/alignment behavior, especially in the Middle East. We seek to broaden its scope by incorporating non-state actors into the realist equation. We suggest that alliance building involving non-state actors arises, when open inter-state balancing behavior carries prohibitive material, i.e. retaliation, and/or immaterial costs, i.e. delegitimization. In our comparative study of Syria's alliances with the Palestinian Abu Nidal Organization and Hamas, and the Kurdish PKK in their conflict with three neighboring states - Jordan, Israel and Turkey – we address two questions: 1) How can we explain the emergence of different levels and shapes of support and commitment to the regime's non-state allies? 2) Do prevalent international norms of state sovereignty or retaliatory capacities explain the opaqueness of state-sponsorship of terrorism? Overall, we find strong support for the hypothesis that both domestic and foreign "threat dilemmas" drive a state's recourse to alliances with terrorist groups.

1. Introduction

Many realist scholars have turned recently to subsystemic and immaterial factors to better understand international security and state security policies (Rathbun, 2008, Rose, 1998). The term 'neoclassical realism' describes this new interest which differs from both classical and structural realist approaches to international politics. Neoclassical realism aims at explaining a broad spectrum of national foreign policy behavior while classical realism focused on statesmen and their sense for moderation. Neorealism, in turn, used the relative material positioning of states to explore a few systemic mechanisms – balancing, bandwagoning. By blending both systemic and subsystemic factors, e.g. state governance structure and individual perceptions, neoclassical realism is viewed as an effective supplement to its preceding realist brethren (Lobell et al., 2009, Rathbun, 2008, Schweller, 2003).

And yet, it is unclear whether neoclassical approaches will deliver on that promise. The integration of several new explanatory factors from different analytical levels and theories with diverging ontological and epistemological premises creates new problems, some of which have been highlighted in the past (Lapid and Kratochwil, 1996, Moravcsik and Legro, 1999). New approaches are often critically reviewed and rightly so. The transfer of one set of analytical assumptions and categories may create logical incoherence and an epistemological vortex which may render the approach dysfunctional (Vasquez, 1997) vs. (Waltz, 1997). However well-intentioned supplements may thus spur the demise of a research design.

We are well aware of those limitations but we are also convinced that it is still worth a try. To begin with, we do not share the notion that neoclassical realism performs best when explaining "maladaptive behavior" to structural constraints, thereby vindicating neorealism (Rathbun, 2008, p.297). Instead, we suggest that our case, state sponsorship of terrorism, may be regarded as rational behavior when both domestic and international security dilemmas are taken seriously.

Thus, in this article we seek to advance the neoclassical agenda in two distinct areas: first, we analyze how regime survival in a competitive domestic environment affects alliance behavior (Schweller 2003: 329). We predict that alignment with non-state terrorist groups against foreign threats regularly ensues when regimes suffer from a lack of domestic legitimacy and when facing powerful opponents outside the regime's power base, such as

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ethnic majorities or oppositional military forces. Second, we expect that state sponsorship of terrorism varies substantially as the state jockeys for both material (relative losses of the state's opponents through asymmetrical terrorist activities) and immaterial gains (in domestic status when supporting legitimate claims to fight preponderant illegitimate powers).

> "As though these people are saying to them, 'we are Arab and this is our resistance and those who do not support it are against us'"
> Bashar al-Assad (SANA, 2006).

In order to test state sponsorship of terrorism as a form of statist alignment behaviour, we apply our framework to Syria and its support for sub- and transnationally operating organizations designated as terrorist groups by other states and/or the wider international community: the Abu Nidal Organization (ANO), the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas).

In our view, Syrian balancing behavior with various terrorist groups constitutes a convincing (if easy) case study on the suggested causal mechanism: Firstly, before the 2011 violent crackdown of domestic demands for political reform, Syria had been considered a "renegade state" not only by the United States but also many other members of the international community. Hence, Syrian support for terrorist organizations induces actual real external costs in terms of loss of international reputation and respective sanctions. Secondly, the terrorist groups associated with the secular and Arab nationalist Ba'athist regime range from ethnic to religious and nationalist to transnational. This indicates that there is no clearcut link between the political/religious motives of state sponsors and those groups receiving aid. Thirdly, we contend that Syria's turbulent history of interstate alliances policy makes it an especially rewarding case study on the variance of the dependent variable, alignment behaviour.
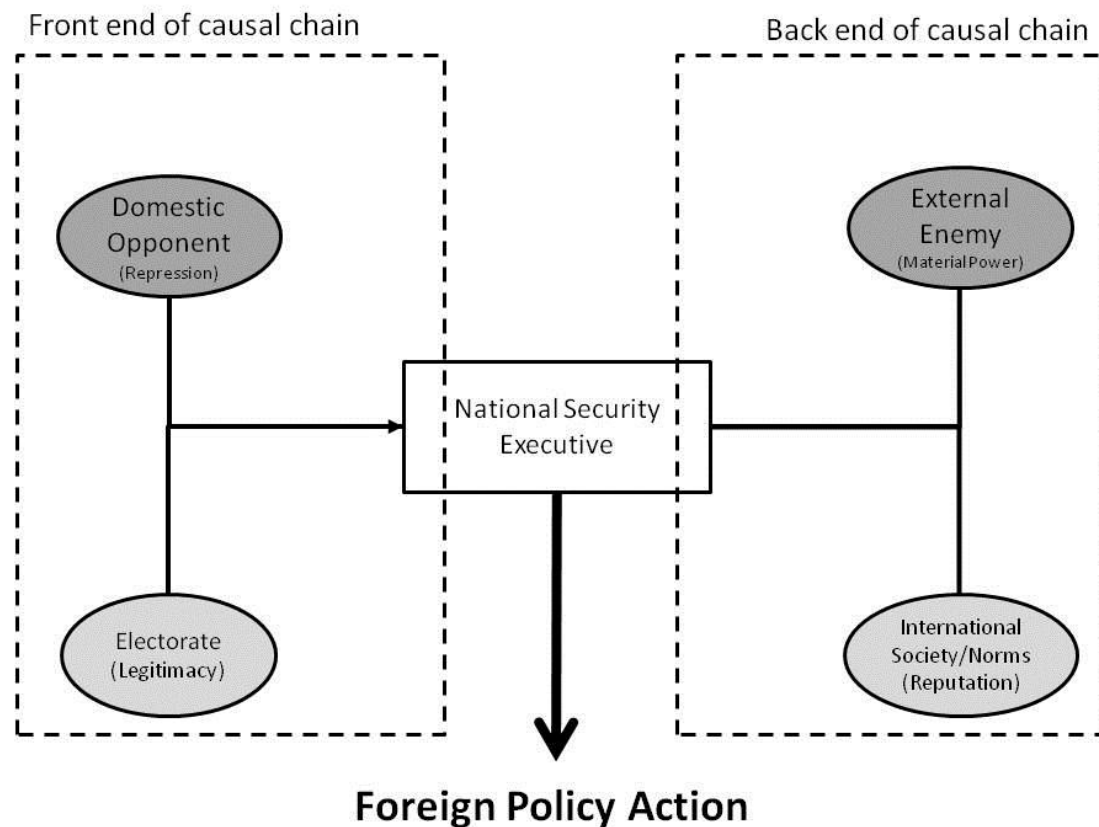
The article proceeds as follows: We first summarize our take on the various causal pathways in current neoclassical realist theory. The second section presents our own neoclassical conceptualization of state sponsorship of terrorism as a product of a two-pronged process in which a challenged regime balances its interest in domestic regime security with the external necessity to face off a foreign threat through alignment with a non-state actor. In the third section we review the empirical evidence with regard to the Syrian

support for ANO, PKK, and Hamas. We expect our conclusions to be limited, because there are several methodological restrictons to contend with. On the one hand, it is not easy to trace the direction of causal pathways because both domestic and external security concerns clearly drive Syrian policy choices. On the other hand, the opaque nature of Syria's intra-regime dynamics is aggravated by the lack of reliable data concerning non-vocal sponsorship. In the conclusion, however, we reflect on how our findings support our theoretical expectations, specifically, how state sponsorship of terrorism correlates with their domestic and external threat assessments.

2. Shifting causal pathways in neoclassical realism

After the pathbreaking work on neoclassical realism by Stephen Walt and Gideon Rose in the 1980s and 1990s, there has been a recent resurgence of interest of domestic and ideational factors in realist foreign policy analysis. As Figure 1 demonstrates, quite a few neoclassical realist scholars have focused on the front of the causal chain, i.e. the capacity of a national security apparatus to extract or mobilize resources from society through institutions while maintaining support by key domestic stakeholders (Taliaferro et al., 2009, p.25).

Figure 1: Causal reasoning in current neoclassical realism

Over the course of the past decade, we gather that the emphasis shifted from exploring different schemes to assess "state strength" (Zakaria, 1998) and "extractive capacity" (Taliaferro, 2009) to the analysis of the impact of world views (Dueck, 2009) and national self-conceptions of key decision makers (Sterling-Folker, 2009). And yet, all neoclassical realists maintain that state elites must respond to an anarchical external environment first (and foremost), while the variation in state's domestic autonomy may only affect the respective timeliness and effectiveness (Taliaferro, et al., 2009, p.27). We hold that the trend towards analyzing the back end of the causal chain in recent years is widely prevalent and obvious as Table 1 shows.

Table 1: Shifting causal foci in current neoclassical realism

Researcher	Conceptualization of Int. System	Conceptualization of decision unit	Causal Chain reaction
Zakaria (1998)	Mediated Anarchy	Unitary	Domestic setting limits state capacity
Schweller (2004)	Mediated Anarchy	Differentiated	Underbalancing caused by social + elite cleavages

Taliaferro (2009)	Mediated Anarchy	Unitary	Great Power Emulation is hindered by state-society relations
Lobell (2009)	Mediated Anarchy	Differentiated	Elite dissent causes variant threat assessments
Sterling-Folker (2009)	Mediated Anarchy	Differentiated	Group identity differentiation shapes competitive FP

While we appreciate this current boost in neoclassical scholarship, we suggest there is no easy explanation (or justification) for the apparent research bias outlined above. First, while we take note that there is a substantial and growing number of stable (democratic) regimes with functioning monopolies of legitimate use of force within a given territory, we contend that the number of fragile regimes with dubious domestic legitimacy has not decreased significantly (Diamond, 2008, Giersdorf and Croissant, 2011, p.3). Second, this argument ties in with the fact that the number of inter-state military conflicts has been declining since 1945 whereas the quantum of intra-state military conflagrations has increased. Thus, because domestic environments remain (highly) competitive for many regimes, we posit that a regime's extractive capacity may vary considerably. Third, from a systemic point of view we suggest that the current military preponderance of the United States and lesser democratic powers induces systemic pressure on fragile regimes to use asymmetric and non-attributable force against overwhelming foreign threats (Jervis, 2009, p.204). Fourth, as these weak regimes may seek to preserve repressive resources, they can use enhanced domestic legitimacy as a power substitute. Nationalism, ethnic kinship or pro-Arab solidarity may thus serve as important leverage to form a collective identity and boost a regimes domestic authority.

As a consequence, we are confident that our case of Syrian support for terrorism exemplifies the rise of two related phenomena: 1) the increase of fragile regimes facing a competitive domestic security environment in international politics which 2) therefore align with non-state terrorist groups to balance preponderant external adversaries while abiding by domestic norms of solidarity and international norms of sovereignty and non-intervention.

3. Balancing domestic and foreign regime security concerns: a neoclassical first cut at state sponsorship of terrorism

Neoclassical realism has recently gained attention in Foreign Policy Analysis, specifically as an approach for integrating unit and interaction level factors in a systemic perspective. With roots in classical realism, liberalism and constructivism, neoclassical scholars have identified three common assumptions across their various approaches: a) conflict groups are key actors in world politics; b) power is the fundamental feature of (international) politics; c) the essential nature of (international) politics is conflictual (Schweller, 2003, p.327).

Neoclassical realists have gained little systemic insight into which domestic power situation triggers or enables which behavior despite their interest in domestic power calculations by elites. In his prominent treatment of "unanswered threats" (2004), Randall Schweller argues that elite consensus or disagreement "is the most proximate cause" of a state's response to an external threat.[1] In addition, Schweller names "elite cohesion", the degree to which a central government's political leadership is fragmented by persistent internal divisions (Schweller, 2004, p.180), and social cohesion, i.e. the "relative strength of ties that bind individuals and groups to the core of a given society (Schweller, 2004, p.175) as important factors which determine the costs-benefit analysis of regimes when choosing between policy courses. But neither does Schweller define scope conditions under which these factors may channel policy choices nor does he reflect upon the interaction between the factors themselves. Also, neoclassical realists have apparently not linked their insights about asymmetrical warfare in uneven international power relations to the domestic power context of a given regime.

We seek to begin to fill these two lacunae by addressing the domestic security dilemma of regimes that sponsor terrorism and the interaction of domestic security concerns with the external security dilemma those regimes face. We hold that state sponsorship of terrorism reflects a trend among weak and illegitimate regimes that are hesitant to commit themselves in inter-state alliance because these may challenge their domestic and inter-state power position or legitimacy. We suggest that this effect is especially the case if the

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1   The term „elite consensus" depicts the „degree of shared perception about some facts in the world as being problems of a particular nature […] requiring certain remedies (Schweller 2004: 170).

inter-state alliance is based on common ideologies and thus not only threatens the autonomy of its member states but also the domestic authority of the regime (Mufti, 1996, Walt, 1987, p.35f.).

3.1 Definitions

Any explanation of state sponsorship of terrorism must begin with a definition of the terms "State sponsorship" and "terrorism". As we seek to understand the scope conditions and causal forces behind state sponsorship, our first definition must also be able to detail the variance in support. Thus far, there is, of course, no consensual definition of the term "state sponsorship of terrorism". Respective scholarly debates revolve around the difference between state supported and state terrorism and the fine line between repression/state terrorism (Kirchner, 2011, p.5f.). For our purpose, we posit, that terrorism can be defined as "a specific form of political violence of an organized group that uses symbolic acts of violence for political gains". We assume that terrorism is emerging in a specific social and material structure of international politics in which there is high asymmetry of material power and authority and in which the lesser powers assume they can gather substantial material and immaterial benefits from using terrorism to provoke and deflect reactions by more powerful state actors.

State sponsorship of terrorism, in turn, has been defined as a regime's intentional assistance to a terrorist group to help it use violence and bolster its political activities (c.f. Byman, 2005a, p.10). We follow this definition but we suggest stressing the noncommittal character of an alliance with a non-state actor. Clandestine and noncommittal in character, these alignments allow for substantial opacity and denial in contrast to traditional inter-state alliances (Crenshaw, 2008, p.73). They grant sponsoring governments "custom-made alliance commitments" which limit potential losses from entrapment and abandonment dilemmas. Furthermore, they allow for "rhretocial compliance" by the sponsoring regime with inter-state norms banning state sponsorship of terrorism. Non-state alliances are particularly "useful" in this regard, because, unlike inter-state alliances which require formal commitments often triggering conventional military responses, they leave ample room for exploiting the support of "foreign terrorists" for domestic coalition building purposes while avoiding external repercussions.

3.2 Forms of Sponsorship

Following Walt (1987) we distinguish different levels of commitment within a state-non-state actor alliance. We also surmise that state sponsorship of terrorism comes in different forms. In our case, we identify four state-non-state alliance patterns: first, regimes may actively host terrorist groups on their territory or passively turn a blind eye on safe heavens for those terrorists in areas under their control (*Hosting role*); second, regimes may explicitly and vocally support terrorist organizations by backing their goals diplomatically (*Vocal Promoting role*); third, a regime may offer financial or logistic patronage to a group thereby fostering the organizational capacity of the group (*Financial Patronage role*); fourth, sponsoring governments may actively support terrorist organizations by providing military training, logistics or military equipment thereby directly engaging in unlawful acts of terrorism under national and international law (*Military Supporting role*).

Regimes that sponsor terrorism typically use a mix of these roles, e.g. giving military training on its soil to prepare groups for terrorist attacks abroad while keeping a low profile in vocal support. In some cases former clients were betrayed – after periods of substantial material support - when the strategic goals of the sponsoring regime changed (Batatu, 1999). In assessing different patterns of support we examine the underlying domestic and external security dilemma of the Syrian regime sponsoring the three selected terrorist groups.

3.3 Causal mechanism

Explaining state-sponsorship thus requires the reconstruction of both the power and legitimacy dilemma a sponsoring regime faces. As we know from the structural realist alliance literature, states align with other states in a competitive security environment to improve their relative power position *and* their security (Waltz, 1979, p.166). By aligning with non-state actors, states may address power asymmetries and legitimacy concerns. The latter may arise from the sponsoring regime's non-acceptance of the so-called "rules of state behavior". These regimes thus face the "disadvantages that arise from a failure to conform to successful practices" resulting in a less secure environment (Waltz, 1979, p.218).

We hold that the material power and the legitimacy of a regime are crucial resources when accounting for the relative power domestic and international position. We employ Walt's conceptualization of the "Balance-of-Threat" to explain the formation of (inter-state) alliances and their stability. Walt relies here on the "shared perception of a common external threat" by a third party (Walt, 1997, p.157).[2]

The second important claim in the balance-of-threat theory is that states (or regimes) do not balance against the most powerful state but against the most threatening state (Walt, 1997, p.157). While this basic intuition seems plausible to us, we hold that this conceptualization is limited in two important ways. First, Walt and other neoclassical realists do not pay enough attention to the fragility of many states in the current international system. They assume that while state strength is not constant, international socialization nonetheless provides enough incentive for functional similarity in the system (Rathbun, 2008, p.305). Secondly, neoclassical realists have thus far also discounted the role of non-state actors and the interaction among social groups under the nation-state level in sovereign (non-failed) states (Posen, 1993).

To fill these gaps we explain the alignment behavior of weak regimes with non-state actors by referring to the omnibalancing approach by David (1991a, David, 1991b). In this approach, the same structural factors, which characterize international politics, also generate a competitive security environment in domestic politics. "As a result", David contends, "balancing to ensure survival is as critical for groups within states as it is between states" (1991a, p.243). The omnibalancing argument is based on the assumption that the political legitimacy of the regime is weak and the stakes for domestic regime survival are high. Conceptually, omnibalancing thus focuses on the leadership of a state and not the state itself.

Survival considerations, both domestic and external, influence how and to what extent weak governments align with non-state actors. Our general proposition is: The weaker the regime domestically and the more preponderant and direct the external threat, the broader the scope of support for terrorist organizations. A key concept in our omnibal-

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2   Central to Walt's argument is the disaggregation of threat into the following four components: a) the aggregate power of the third party; b) the geographic proximity of the third party; c) the offensive capabilities and d) the aggressive intentions of the third party Walt, Stephen M. (1985) Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power. *International Security* 9 (4):3-43.

ancing approach is the domestic security dilemma. The first intuition here is that domestic groups which benefit from from foreign exchange will disapprove of terrorism which may harm business ties and international reputation. In contrast, security benefits from state sponsored terrorism that leave foreign opponents worse off will be supported by those domestic groups which fear domestic legitimacy losses from external power attrition. Thus, in a world of large external power disparities, the latter groups will strongly call for asymmetrical warfare through supporting terrorist groups. These non-state alliance partners are unlikely challengers in both the domestic and external arena and thus preferable over states as alliance partners. Conversely, in a world of small power disparities, the incentives to support terrorists are much less evident.

Some aspects of this causal chain have been examined before. Davenport (1995) and David (1991a, 1991b) found that autocratic regimes often use repressive strategies when facing domestic opponents who are perceived as a direct threat or contestant for power. They posit that these regimes direct their external alignments towards this domestic competition. Harknett & VanDenBerg (1997) and Miller expanded on the idea that regimes "prioritize domestic considerations in their alignment calculations" (2006, p.15). Miller argued that the regimes use external alignments to ensure political survival by way of co-opting domestic constituencies crucial to their rule. Bueno de Mesquita models the behavior of weak regimes towards different societal groups – especially those constituting the so-called winning coalition. He shows that political leaders are likely to pursue a strategy of cooptation by forging external alignments which promote the state's religious and cultural beliefs (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2005, p.29). Gleditsch et al. (forthcoming) posit that groups with ethnic or ideological constituencies abroad are more likely to receive external support. Focusing on the state rather than overall societal backing, Saideman argues that governments are more likely to support a group in another state if important domestic constituencies identify with its cause (2001). Following the idea of Morgan & Bickers (1992) that a regime aims at meeting the demands of societal key groups, Kirchner suggests to integrate potential material benefits (e.g. arms sales) when exploring a group's transnational constituency (2011, p.13).

No previous treatment, however, has linked domestic security concerns of weak regimes with state sponsorship of terrorism as a specific form of external balancing strategy. As we will demonstrate below, the ability to weaken an external enemy while keeping some
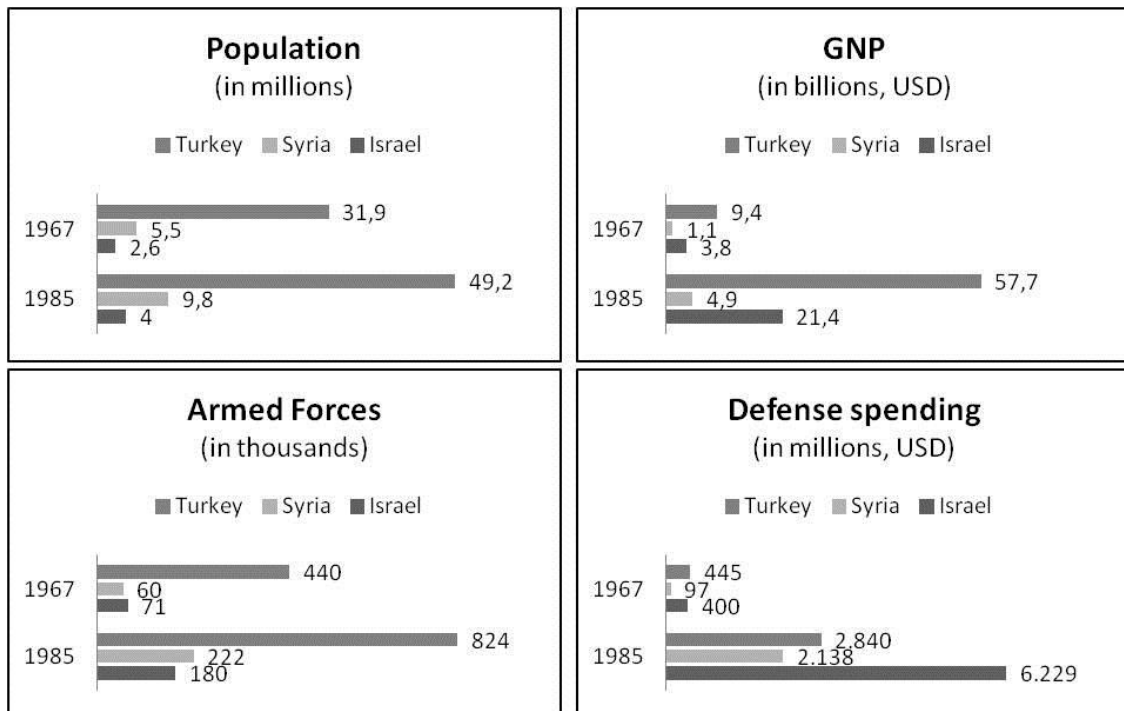
international reputation and reaping domestic legitimacy for supporting a foreign terrorist group produces manifold incentives for weak regimes. Testing these broad hypotheses in the case of Syria, we find that the narrow power base of the Alawite rulers is accompanied by a constant domestic political bargaining process within the regime's winning coalition. We also find that Syrian alignments with terrorist organizations targeting regional rivals have proven quite stable despite international pressure. They vary, however, significantly in magnitude, duration, and publicity over time.

4. Omnibalancing foreign and domestic threats: The case of Syrian state sponsorship of terrorism

Since the formation of the Middle Eastern State system in the aftermath of the Second World War, Syria has been facing two powerful and sometimes even allied neighbours: on the one hand Syria borders Turkey, the successor state of the Ottoman Empire to the north; on the other hand, Syria faces Israel, a nuclear weapon state to the southwest. In terms of territory and population, Syria is stronger than Israel by far but it is (much) weaker when it comes to economic and military power (Figure 2). Previous Syrian attempts to reach a conventional balance with Tel Aviv have not only failed but they became very dangerous when Israel became a de facto nuclear power in the late 1960s. Turkey, in turn, is nearly five times as big as Syria. It is a strong economic and military power as well as a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization since 1952 (and a de-facto ally of Israel).

In contrast to Turkey and Israel, which are both integral part of the United States' alliance network, Damascus' state allies varied significantly over time. Over the years Syria has sought but also abandoned alignments with Egypt, Iraq and the United States (Hinnebusch, 2002). Syria's only constant state ally has been the Islamic Republic of Iran. This is all the more surprising given the lack of ethnic, religious or ideological commonalities (Goodarzi, 2006). In short, Damascus has few conventional means to balance its powerful neighbors or pressure them for concessions if necessary (Makovsky, 1999, Marcus, 2007, p.60; 74).

Figure 2: The Balance of Power between Israel, Syria, and Turkey (1966 – 1985)

Population (in millions)
■ Turkey ■ Syria ■ Israel
1967: 31,9 / 5,5 / 2,6
1985: 49,2 / 9,8 / 4

GNP (in billions, USD)
■ Turkey ■ Syria ■ Israel
1967: 9,4 / 1,1 / 3,8
1985: 57,7 / 4,9 / 21,4

Armed Forces (in thousands)
■ Turkey ■ Syria ■ Israel
1967: 440 / 60 / 71
1985: 824 / 222 / 180

Defense spending (in millions, USD)
■ Turkey ■ Syria ■ Israel
1967: 445 / 97 / 400
1985: 2.840 / 2.138 / 6.229

(U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, 1968, 1986)

Syria's domestic bargain

The Syrian state has been described by Amos Perlmutter as a corporate authoritarian praetorian state in which a coalition of military officers and civilians hold the authority (1981, p.130f.). In such a regime, leadership seeks political support from corporate consortia while it tolerates political institutions, e.g. a civilian parliament. In Syria, the ruling coalition involves an Alawi core with the Assad family at its center, some other minorities and Sunni Muslims from the rural areas. Only recently, the Sunni urban business elites have been partially integrated in the regime's power basis.[3]

Since the mid-1960s, Assad's Kalbibiyya tribe and other Alawi groups have dominated Syria's political system, occupying the most important positions within the party, security apparatus, state and economy (Perthes, 1995, p.182). Accounting for only 10% of the population, this group has been embedded in a larger group of non-Alawi forces which is

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[3] Zisser described the power securing strategies of the regime in 1998 as moving in three orbits: "Alawis provide the inner core of the regime; Syrians from other communities envelope and surround it; and Arab sentiment and identity give it its soul, purpose, and legitimacy" Zisser, Eyal. (1998) Appearance and Reality: Syria's Decisionmaking Structure. *Middle East Review of International Affairs*. http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/1998/issue2/jv2n2a5.html .

systematically integrated into the state's power structure (Zisser, 1998). This wider group consists of some fellow non-Sunni minorities (Christians, Druze, and Ismailis) because their disproportional political and economic influence could not be guaranteed under a predominantly Sunni regime.

Mustafa Tlas, Abd al-Halim Khaddam and Farouq Shara, serving as ministers with important portfolios for decades, represent another power base of the regime: Sunni Muslims from the rural areas. Politically, socially and economically deprived under the rule of the old urban elites, they joined the Ba'ath party and the armed forces, and sided with the Alawi officer corps in 1966 (Quinlivan, 1999, p.140). However, this group was not fully integrated into the state's power center. Although handpicked by Assad, their influence was limited due to the informal and Alawi dominated power structure (Maoz, 1988, p.52).

To explain the cohesiveness of this coalition, the literature has identified two factors: First, the central role of Alawis in the security apparatus who act as "glue" between the coalitions' components (Maoz, 1988, pp.63-66, Nisan, 2002, p.123). Second, the regime's ability to satisfy the respective social and economic needs and coalition's members' demands in terms of political power sharing; as a result, the regime's stabilization efforts have led to a distinct dual structure of the formal political institutions and the Ba'ath Party (Zisser, 1998).

Thus, despite several crises – the conflict with the Muslim Brotherhood 1976-1982, the Syrian involvement in expelling the PLO from Lebanon during the Civil War and Israel's intervention, the coalition remained stable. Indeed, after the regime neutralized all oppositional forces, Zisser posited in 1998 that the "real danger to the future of the regime […] lies within the coalition itself" (Zisser, 1998).

Therefore, we conceptualize the internal security dilemma as a product of the stability of the intra-coalition bargaining situation. As a rough proxy for the stability within the coalition, we examine several critical junctures of the Assad regime.

A first critical juncture occurred in 1983 when President Assad suffered a heart attack: numerous Alawi "barons" in the security apparatus had gained strong influence due to their role in cracking down on the Muslim Brotherhood (1982/83). In this situation, several high-ranking military officials backed Rifat al-Assad, head of the 55.000 troops strong Defense Detachments, in his bid to succeed or even replace his brother. The coup was

challenged by the soon recovered President and rivaling factions in the security appa-ratus, especially the long-serving heads of Military Intelligence and Air Force Intelligence (AFI), General Ali Duba and Muhammad al-Khuly, as well as General Ali Haydar, head of the Special Forces (Maoz, 1988, p.169, Seale, 1988, pp.421-30). As a consequence, Rifat was sent into exile in 1984 and his Defence Detachments were reduced to about 20.000, partly demobilized or transferred to the Special Forces and Republican Guard. Generals who had backed Rifat were either dismissed or put under house arrest (Seale, 1988, p.437). The first critical juncture resulted in a significant shift in the balance of power of the coalition. It shifted from moderate pro-Western forces (advocates of economic liber-alization and emerging business elite) under Rifat to the Military Intelligence and paramil-itary forces, headed by the Alawi "old guards" (Drysdale, 1985, Quinlivan, 1999, p.148).

The second critical juncture occurred as urban Sunni economic elites were integrated into the governing coalition in the late 1980s and early 1990s. After the demise of the UDSSR and the loss of respective financial and military support, the regime initiated an economic liberalization campaign in 1987 from which the emerging business elite benefitted (Dam, 1996, p.71, Perthes, 1994).[4] Pitted against the predominantly Damascene and Sunni busi-ness elite, however, were the traditional pillars of the regime's old power base, the Sunni Muslims from the rural areas and especially the "military officer/party-state official/public sector manager coalition" established in the early 1970s (Lawson, 1994, p.153).[5] In a sub-sequent development, the powerful Air Force Intelligence lost significant influence when al-Khuly was forced to resign because of the Hindawi Affair in late 1986 which triggered painful economic and political sanctions (Eisenstadt, 2000, Seale, 1992, p.311).

Tensions within the Alawi core reemerged for a third critical juncture in the mid- and late 1990s after the surprising death of Basil al-Assad, who had been designated as his father's heir for years. Soon Hafez al-Assad removed several important military leaders from of-fice, including the ambitious Generals Duba and Haydar. He also reinstalled al-Khuly as

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4   In terms of foreign policy, they have a strong interest in improved relations with other and especially Western countries and the state's ongoing efforts to mobilize against Israel contradicts their demands for lesser centralization in the local economy Lawson, Fred H. (1994) Domestic Pressures and the Peace Process: Fillip or Hindrance? In *Contemporary Syria: Liberalization between Cold War and Cold Peace*, edited by Eberhard Kienle, pp. 139-54. London: British Academic Press..

5   Even in 2005, more than 25% of the labor force worked in the agricultural sector and another 30% in predominantly state-owned or state-protected industry Leverett, Flynt Lawrence. (2005) *Inheriting Syria : Bashar's Trial by Fire*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press..

commander of the Air Force, to pave the way to succession for his second son Bashar (Eisenstadt, 2000, Sezgin, 2002, p.58f., Zisser, 1995). Further indications of a faltering power base were the forced handover of the Lebanon portfolio from foreign minister Khaddam to Bashar al-Assad in 1995 and the disempowerment of the President's brothers Rifat and Jamil in the northwestern areas (Gresh, 2000, Ziadeh, 2010, p.45f.).

The fourth critical juncture occurred when then inexperienced Bashar al-Assad succeeded his father in 2000 without a sufficient power base of his own (Lust-Okar, 2008, p.73). He certainly enjoyed support among the broader Syrian population as his youth and Western education raised hopes for further liberalization. But Bashar soon fell short of these expectations when he decided to align with the "old guard" and hard-liners against a yet unorganized and weak opposition in 2003 (Lust-Okar, 2008, p.73). After the Lebanon disaster in 2005, he decided to further narrow his power base by sidelining several members of the old guard, such as his potential rival Khaddam.

In sum, Bashar's succession gave birth to a much more centralized power structure, now consisting of the so-called "Triumvirate": the President's brother, Maher Al-Assad, who became commander of the Republican Guard and the army's elite 4th Armored Division, and his brother-in-law, Asef Shakwat who replaced Hassan Khalil as head of Military Intelligence in 2005 (Lust-Okar, 2008, p.76, Zisser, 2000).

These brief explorations indicate that internal security considerations were constantly on the mind of the regime's central decision makers. At each critical juncture, the regime's capacity to act rested on the stability of the governing coalition which in turn depended on its ability to provide crucial material and immaterial resources for its supporters. Therefore, we suggest that the historical development of Syrian support for terrorist organizations is linked to the evolving bargain within the ruling elite's coalition.

4.1 THE CASE OF SYRIA SUPPORTING THE Abu Nidal Organization (ANO)

We begin our empirical investigation with the Syrian support of the Abu Nidal Organization.[6] We gather that the overall support for ANO increased after 1982 and declined sig-

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6   The ANO is an offshoot of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and emerged after serious internal differences in 1974. Its leader Sabri Chalil al-Banna, called Abu Nidal, has been accused of more than 100 terrorist attacks in some 20 countries, among others the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie.

nificantly between 1984 and 1987. In our reading, the Assad regime pursued a policy of "guarded support" through which it could address its chronic external security dilemma and its volatile domestic balance of power. After the regime started its liberalization campaign in 1987, it withdrew its endorsement for the ANO by responding to respective international demands.

Syria's alignment with the ANO started in the late 1970s after the shift in the regional balance of power after the 1979 Camp David accords, the demise of the Arab "Steadfastness and Confrontation Front" (Syria, Iraq and the PLO) and deteriorating relations with the Iraqi Ba'ath party. The regime's perception of Israel as a threat increased substantially when Israel invaded Lebanon (1982), thereby demonstrating its offensive superiority and upsetting both the Lebanese domestic and the regional balance of power to the detriment of Syria (Batatu, 1999, p.301, Pollack, 2002, pp.523-49). The geographic proximity of the threat further increased when Israeli forces entered Lebanon and indications for a separate peace between Israel and other lesser powers (Jordan, Lebanon and the PLO) occurred, resulting in a further deterioration of the balance of threat for Syria (Seale, 1992, p.160, Seale, 1988, p.346f.).

To address this expanded security dilemma, Syria's president Assad pursued a strategy of "comprehensive strategic balance", resulting in a substantial conventional military build-up after 1982 (Maoz, 1986, p.74f.). But when US Marine forces had entered Lebanon in August 1982 to monitor the departure of Palestinian fighters, a conventional military confrontation with Israel became even more untenable (Batatu, 1999, p.302). Ina related diplomatic move, President Assad also sought to extend his influence over the Levant, by preventing Jordan, Lebanon and the PLO from seeking separate peace deals with Israel and by seeking a comprehensive Arab-Israeli balance of power (Seale, 1988, pp.346-48). To establish a "loyal PLO-leadership" (Batatu, 1999, p.305), Assad therefore tried to intimidate King Hussein by moving troops to the Jordanian frontier but in the end he refrained from open military action (Seale, 1988, pp.347; 462-64).

When the US and Israel withdrew significant numbers of troops from Lebanon, Syria's campaign to support ANO against the PLO and Jordan started to bear fruits in 1984-1985. From Damascus' perspective, ANO helped to deter both the PLO and Jordan from separate peace agreements and, as a consequence, Syria's external security dilemma improved accordingly (Byman, 2005b, p.144, Seale, 1992, pp.153-62). From our neoclassical

theoretical perspective, we gather that Syria's sponsorship commitment towards ANO was likely to increase after the Israeli 1982 invasion and likely to decrease after the shift in the balance of threat after 1985 (Walt 1997).

International and regional norms

As a rough proxy for the regime's international and regional legitimacy considerations, we examine Syria's international legal obligations and its subsequent compliance behavior. During the period under investigation Syria was party of nine (of 13) international conventions and protocols related to terrorism, several of which requiring states to refrain from supporting or protecting terrorist organizations, especially those targeting civil aviation (Saul, 2006, US Department of State, 2009).

Abu Nidal's Organization first became known publicly in 1973 for its deadly attack on a Pan Am Jet at Rome Airport. As a result, support for ANO, in whatever form, appears inconsistent with Syria's international obligations. More specifically, Article 2(7) of the UN-Charter, which bans member states from intervention in "matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state" (UNO, 1985), and the Arab League Charter's, which states that every member "shall respect the form of government obtaining in the other States of the League" (League of Arab States, 1945), are applicable here.

However, there were competing norms at the time. Inparticular, the norm of Arab unity which stressed the struggle against Israel and the liberation of Palestine resonated strongly with the domestic political doctrines of the Ba'ath party. Thus, the Assad regime appealed to the strong Arab resentment after 1967 war thereby rallying the Syrian public in support of his leadership (Maoz, 1988, pp.43-46, Tétreault, 2008, p.155). Considering that ANO also attacked fellow Arab countries like Jordan and several Gulf monarchies, we suggests, however, that the regime was indeed sensitive towards the potential loss of international and regional reputation. We find that this prevented high levels of vocal support for ANO and resulted in a boost of denials over the years.

International pressure to end the support for ANO increased sharply in 1986. After several abortive and realized attacks in Western Europe and a proven involvement of Syrian Intelligence the US, Canada, and Western European governments imposed political and economic sanctions against Syria (Seale, 1992, pp.308-10). In the years, ANO, the once valuable *gun for hire* had become a *gun that backfired* for the regime. By harming Syria's

international reputation without significant benefit, the terrorist group soon lost its backing.

Domestic constituency of ANO in Syria & regime legitimacy

In its early days, ANO had – under the name "Black June"[7] - a strong anti-Syrian track record. Throughout 1976 it attacked several Syrian travel agencies and embassies abroad, took over the Semiramis Hotel in Damascus and tried to assassinate foreign minister Khaddam (Seale, 1992, p.136f.). Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that Assad himself denounced the group as "criminals" acting against Syria although the ANO claimed to protect the Palestinians (Clarity, 1976).[8] In 1982, Assad's domestic prestige as a "hero of steadfastness" suffered a serious blow when he failed to shield the PLO in Lebanon from Israeli forces (Batatu, 1999, p.304).

It appears that the regime's subsequent perception of ANO was shaped by pragmatic power considerations. First, ANO provided the regime with intelligence on the Muslim brethren's alleged backers in Amman and Bagdad. Second, ANO successfully fought Arafat's forces in Lebanon without dragging Syria into open military confrontation in 1983 (Seale, 1992, pp.152-58). Nevertheless, ANO was not allowed to be politically active during its presence in Syria between 1981 and 1987. Ano was thus not able to establish a constituency comparable to the PLO among Syria-based Palestinians or the Syrian population itself (Seale, 1992, p.154).

Considering the strong pro-PLO sentiment in the Syrian population and ANO's track record of attacking fellow Palestinians, neither the ANO itself nor support for the organization appeared to be popular with Syrians. But despite ambivalent domestic legitimacy gains from publicly backing ANO, key groups within the regime benefitted from ANO's presence in Syria and Lebanon: on the one hand Abu Nidal reportedly generously bribed senior Syrian military and security officials in order to secure the group's freedom of action (1992, pp.158-62). On the other hand, ANO targeted Arafat and more moderate Palestinian forces as well as external supporters of the Syrian Muslim brotherhood. In addi-

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7   Referring to Syria's invasion of Lebanon in June 1976.

8   Assad's image as a friend of the Palestinians, however, was severely damaged in 1976 when he turned against the PLO in Lebanon. The policy "shocked and alienated wide segments of Syrian opinion" Batatu, Hanna. (1999) *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.

tion, ANO gained respect and acceptance of those groups who resolutely protected the Assad regime during the Islamist uprising in 1982 and the coup attempt by his brother Rifat in 1983/84. But when its powerful backer General al-Khuly, head of Air Force Intelligence, was forced to resign after his involvement in ANO operations became publicized in 1986, the group lost its appeal for the regime.

Measuring Syria's support of ANO: the evidence

Hosting and financial patronage

Syria's initial hosting policy of ANO changed significantly after the expulsion of the PLO from Lebanon in 1983. Until then – from 1981 on – ANO was only allowed to purchase office premises in Damascus and Daraa with no permission of overt political activity (Seale, 1992, p.154f.). Between 1983 and 1986 the group was granted significantly more freedom to operate in the Bekaa Valley and northern Lebanon and other privileges which exceeded the rights of other Palestinian groups by far[9] (Seale, 1992, p.167f., US Department of State, 1986). According to Patrick Seale, Damascus saw the provision of a safe haven as a fair payment while it was unwilling to provide any financial backing (1992, pp.158-62). Hosting, however, did never include officially welcoming the group. President Assad not only refused to meet Abu Nidal personally but also prohibited him to contact high-ranking politicians or intelligence agencies other than the Air Force Intelligence (Seale, 1992, p.181f.). In 1986, Syria's regime tightened its grip on ANO considerably and in June 1987 all Members of ANO and their families were expelled from Syria and all offices were closed (Seale, 1992, p.317).

Military training, logistics, military equipment

Until 1982, the Assad regime did not allow the establishment of ANO-training camps in Syria or Lebanon and provided no weaponry or any other military equipment (Seale, 1992, pp.154-58). After the Israeli invasion, however, ANO fighters were free to infiltrate Lebanon and to establish training camps in the Bekaa Valley (Seale, 1992, p.166, US Department of State, 1986). At this time, officers of the Air Force Intelligence provided

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9   E.g. immediate access to Damascus Airport and the possibility to cross the Syrian-Lebanese border without control.

logistics for operations, including technical support in eavesdropping on Fatah radio communication, issuing travel documents and free transit for operatives (Seale, 1992, p.155, US Department of State, 1986).[10] Some sources even claim that members of the AFI helped ANO to transport a bomb to London in April 1986 (Seale, 1992, p.306f., US Department of State, 1986).

Vocal Promotion

In the Syrian case, there was never public or diplomatic backing of the political goals of the ANO. Instead, we find a rather mixed track record of denial: In contrast to its earlier open conventional alignment with Iraq, there were no official political relations between ANO and Damascus. The regime denied public meetings with the President or other Syrian politicians and contacts were limited to the intelligence level – explicitly demanding that the group's presence in Syria should remain below the radar (Seale, 1992, p.181f.;54).

Syria's noncommittal alignment with ANO becomes particularly apparent with regard to ANO's campaign against Jordan from 1983-1985. During the terror campaign, Damascus went to great lengths to not be associated with the attacks, providing ANO neither with schedules nor explicit targets (Seale, 1992, p.160). In 1985, Syria's vocal promotion for ANO hit an all-time low when foreign minister Tlas suggested that Nidal was a CIA Agent (Hoagland and Randal, 1986, Seale, 1992, p.182).

The Syrian public record pointed towards denial: Only after 1983 was ANO allowed to officially announce its presence in Syria. When admitting to this, Assad asserted in 1986 that the group's activity was limited to "cultural and political work among the Palestinians". He further denied any linkages of Syria or Syria-based Palestinians to terrorism – considerably downplaying Damascus' influence over Lebanon. In the same interview he also condemned the terrorist acts of ANO as "cowardly" (Hoagland and Randal, 1986, Seale, 1992, p.167).

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10   Oversight over the other Palestinian groups was provided by the Military Intelligence, headed by General Ali Duba. Seale, Patrick. (1992) *Abu Nidal - Der Händler Des Todes. Die Wahrheit Über Den Palästinensischen Terror*. 1st ed. München: C. Bertelsmann.

4.2 The case of Syria supporting the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK)

Syria's support for the PKK[11] between 1979 and 1998 follows the threat perception pattern we established for the case of ANO. Syria's sponsorship of the PKK involves three significant shifts in the external Balance-of-Threat as perceived by Damascus vis-à-vis regional power broker Turkey in the early and mid-1980s and in the first half of the 1990s.

The Syrian regime perceived level of threat increased significantly for the first time in the early 1980s – paralleling the ongoing pressure and enmity from its eastern and southern neighbors and the fragile situation in Lebanon. In particular, the perceived level of proximity and the level of aggressive intentions increased: Firstly, as in the case of Jordan, Syrian decision-makers believed that Ankara tacitly supported the revolting Muslim Brotherhood in Syria. Secondly, mistrust among Syria's elites reached a hiatus after Turkey initiated the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP) in 1980, substantially limiting Syrian surface water resources (Oktav, 2004). Syria's agricultural sector had become a key economic sector after the decline of oil revenues in the late 1970s which in turn resulted in a growing importance of the Sunni Muslims from rural areas for the regime's power base. A significant decline in the quality of water flows from Turkey would thus severely hurt a key pillar of the ruling coalition and could be considered a direct threat to regime survival (Firro, 1986, p.46).

Syria's external security dilemma improved, however, in 1985 when bilateral relations with Turkey thawed. Prime Minister Özal assured Assad in Damascus to provide substantial and acceptable water resources through the lower Euphrates river in 1987 (Hale, 1987, p.675).

But Syria's threat perception significantly worsened again after 1991, accompanied by Damascus's isolation in the Arab World (Madrid & Oslo Accords). On the one hand Ankara, in 1991, finished the first part of the GAP, enabling it to block 40% of the flow of the Euphrates water to Syria, thereby deciding on the life or death of Syria's agricultural sec-

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11   Formed in 1973, PKK began its campaign against Turkey in the mid-1980s. Its ideology blended Marxism and Kurdish nationalism and sought an independent state for Turkey's Kurdish minority. Most attacks focused on army and security targets, but PKK has also attacked local politicians, tourist sites as well as diplomatic and commercial facilities Byman, Daniel. (2005b) Syria and Palestinian Radical Groups. In *Deadly Connections. States That Sponsor Terrorism*, edited by Daniel Byman, pp. 117-54. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

tor (Klaff, 1993, p.58). On the other hand, US influence in the region increased substantially during the second Gulf War which also involved the US' alignment with the Iraqi Kurds. Moreover, after a peak of attacks in 1992, the PKK's value as a bargaining chip vis-à-vis Turkey decreased significantly after 1993 when Ankara started to carry "the war to the Kurdish regions" (Barkey, 2007, p.345). In particular, Turkey threatened to retaliate militarily against Syria in 1992. In 1996 Ankara even declared to be ready to defend itself against the Syrian aggression with reference to Article 51 of the UN Charter (Sezgin 2002: 49), thereby indicating an end of its patience with Damascus' backing of the PKK. As a result, Syria found itself surrounded by powerful enemies when Ankara forged a military cooperation with Israel in 1996, an alignment which was accompanied by Turkish saber-rattling towards Damascus (Byman, 2005b, p.151, Perthes, 2000, p.158f.).

International and regional norms

Given Syria's self-committment – beyond its obligations as a UN member state and from the mentioned anti-terrorism protocols – to the Charter of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), it had explicitly agreed to "respect the right of self-determination and non-interference in the domestic affairs […], sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of each Member State" (OIC, 1972). In addition, in 1987 Syrian president Assad and former Turkish premier Turgut Özal issued a joint declaration that they would "obstruct groups engaged in destructive activities directed against one another on their own territory and would not turn a blind eye to them in any way" (Hale, 1987, p.675). Reconfirming this declaration in 1992 and 1993, Syrian officials denounced the PKK as a terrorist organization four years before the US State Department classified it as such (Olson, 1996a, p.86). Given these circumstances, it seems appropriate to treat the normative pressure on Syria as strong and the systemic benefits from a policy of denial as significant.

Domestic constituency & regime legitimacy

Underlying Syria's support for the PKK is a long history of Anti-Turkish rhetoric by Syrian officials. Historically, it starts with Damascus' important role in the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman rule (1916-1918), Pan-Arabism (especially vis-à-vis Turkey) has been a crucial part of Syria's self-conception as a leader of the Arab world. In addition, there is "the loss of Hatay", a predominantly Arab province with a significant Alawi population, to Tur-

key in 1939. Among the Syrian elite, this has often been compared to the loss of Palestine to Israel (Öcal, 2005, p.211f.). It is also a crucial event for Ba'athism and constitutive of several severe crises during the 1950s which shaped the enduring resents among Syrian elites towards Ankara (Kushner, 1986, p.85f., Seale, 1988, p.27f.).

Personally, especially the President's younger brothers Rifat and Jamil established a personal relationship with PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan. Jamil al-Assad, who was in charge of Syrian relations with the Kurds, reportedly even visited the PKK's Helwe training camp in 1985 (Gunter, 1997, p.27, Marcus, 2007, p.99). Another powerful backer of the PKK had been General Ali Duba, the chief of Military Intelligence (Gresh, 2000, p.58f., Sezgin, 2002, Zisser, 2000).

The Pro-Kurdish sentiment among the ruling coalition's selectorate was, however, mixed at most. From the regime's domestic point of view the Kurds even posed a potential threat as they formed a socially cohesive group in a compact territory, exhibiting a strong sectarian – non-Alawite – and Kurdish nationalist loyalty (Maoz, 1988, p.64). As a consequence, Kurds were politically, socially and economically marginalized by the regime, although they accounted for about 10% of the Syrian population (Marcus, 2007, p.61). From the regimes perspective, the Kurds did not form an effective power base and so they were unable to elicit a strong support for the PKK as an instrument of Syria's balancing policy towards Turkey.

Measuring Syria's support of PKK: the evidence

Hosting and financial patronage

Syria hosted PKK leader Öcalan and his fellow activists in Damascus and Syrian-controlled areas in Lebanon since 1979 (Barkey, 2009, p.10, Mincheva and Gurr, 2008, p.10). To keep up deniability, Syrian intelligence provided PKK operatives with Arab identity cards (Marcus, 2007, p.59f.). During a short period between 1982 and 1985, Syria's intelligence tightened its grip on Kurdish groups, but allowed them to launch armed attacks on Turkey from these bases (Marcus, 2007, p.74, Yildiz, 2005, p.58). In the early years of PKK's presence in Syria, pro-Syrian Palestinian groups backed the group by covering the expenses for training and allowances for fighters. There are no signs for direct Syrian assistance,

but Palestinian support would not have been granted without Damascus' approval (Marcus, 2007, pp.57-59).

Syrian-PKK contacts became more frequent after 1985, going beyond the intelligence community (Marcus, 2007, p.99). But overall support remained guarded as the regime feared that the PKK could organize Syria's Kurdish minority against the Alawi rulers (Marcus, 2007, p.59). Thus, when it pressed the PKK to recruit thousands of members among Syrian Kurds, especially after 1985 and after the renaissance of Kurdish national-ism in Iraq, the Assad regime specifically sought to divert the Kurdish nationalist struggle towards Turkey (Marcus, 2007, pp.100-09; 255).

While Syrian-Turkish relations thawed in 1987, the Assad regime promised Ankara to put an end to PKK operations from its territory. But Damascus advised the PKK only not to cross the Syrian-Turkish border and to infiltrate Turkey from Iraq or Iran. In addition, Syri-an officials facilitated a meeting between Öcalan and Soviet diplomats in Damascus (Oktav, 2004, p.104), helping the group to gain further international recognition.

Syria's policy of guarded support for the PKK changed in the early 1990s when Öcalan was (briefly) detained after several meetings with Iraqi Kurdish representatives (1991). A bombing close to the PKK's compounds in Damascus (1996) was interpreted by experts as a "warning from Syrian intelligence to ensure Ocalan to stay in line" (Marcus, 2007, p.257). But Syrian officials facilitated at least one more diplomatic meeting of Öcalan, this time with German officials in 1995, which revealed once again a deliberate support of the PKK in its efforts to be recognized as a legitimate political organization by the internation-al community (Oktav, 2004, pp.102-06, Olson, 1996b, p.91).

Öcalan and his fighters finally left Syria in October 1998 after officials threatened to arrest and turn him over to Turkey. Damascus subsequently announced his departure and the shutdown of PKK camps (Marcus, 2007, p.271, Öcal, 2005, p.219).

Military training, logistics, military equipment

In the early phase, Syria's hosting and financial support turned into material benefits when hundreds of PKK fighters arrived in 1980 and were trained in Palestinian Camps in the Bekaa Valley (Marcus, 2007, p.55f., Mincheva and Gurr, 2008, p.7). From 1985 on, Damascus substantially expanded its relationship and allowed the PKK to formally take over these camps (Marcus, 2007, p.99). And yet, Syria neither provided them with critical

weapon-systems, such as shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) nor did it allow the purchase or use of such weapons against Turkey, obviously fearing a retaliatory strike (Marcus, 2007, p.188).

In September 1992, Syria, however, ordered the closing of the PKK camp "Mahsum Korkmaz Academy" in the Bekaa Valley and its relocation to Damascus (Marcus, 2007, p.203). Indeed, after taking over the Lebanese portfolio in 1995, future President Bashar al-Assad reportedly forced the PKK to reduce its presence there in 1997. In the end, in the summer of 1998, Syrian officials instructed Öcalan to disband all training compounds, close camps and send fighters up north and to Iraq (Gresh, 2000, Marcus, 2007, p.269).

Vocal Promoting

Syrian material support for PKK had been an open secret among experts, but its official rhetoric followed a constant strategy of denial. High-ranking Syrian officials never publicly supported the PKK's cause. Instead they stressed time and again the importance of Turkey's sovereignty and territorial integrity (Sezgin, 2002, p.48, Stäheli, 2001, p.174). Despite this strategy of vocal denial, Hafez al-Assad joined the PKK in a ceremony in the Bekaa Valley soon after Ankara's decision to interrupt the flow of water for 30 days during the impounding of the Atatürk Dam in 1991 (Oktav, 2004, p.102). At the same time, Assad condemned the Iraqi Kurds for their alignment with the United States (Yildiz, 2005, p.63). A new level of denial was reached after 1993 when the Syrians explicitly assured Western officials that there was "no room for any groups perpetrating terrorism and causing trouble for Turkey" (Olson, 1996b, p.86). Indeed, the late President Assad denied accusations of providing assistance to PKK several times while claiming its activity to be an internal issue of Turkey (Mincheva and Gurr, 2008, p.10, Öcal, 2005, p.216).

In sum, we find a significant increase of Syria's sponsorship commitment to the PKK after 1985. Externally, it can be traced back to the groups' success in keeping Turkey's military occupied, to the Israeli and US-withdrawal from Lebanon and to President Assad's successful campaign against Jordan and the PLO. Domestically, despite the fact that the PKK's backers Rifat and Jamil al-Assad lost significant power after the inter-elite rivalry in 1985, the group still enjoyed the protection of General Ali Duba, one of the beneficiaries of this episode.

However, we also find that there was never a public Syrian backing of the PKK or pro-Kurdish goals. The analysis showed clearly that the constant fear of retaliation from Turkey increased when the domestic economic pressure from pro-Western forces ensued in the mid-1980s. The demise of the Cold War added to this and left the Syrian elites in an unfavorable external security situation. This dual pressure obviously resulted in *cheap talk* policy towards Ankara where Damascus rhetorically denied supporting the PKK but actually did substantially help the terror organization. Domestically, the end of this policy of denial can be traced back to Bashar al-Assad's rise to power in the Mid-1990s. Externally it can be traced back to Turkey's material capacity to retaliate and its tacit threats to use the water weapon against Syria. After Bashar took over the Lebanon portfolio, he deprived the three most important backers of the PKK of their power: His uncles Rifat and Jamil and General Ali Duba.

4.3 The case of Syria supporting Hamas

We round off our investigation with the Syrian support of Hamas. We argue that Damascus' symbiotic relationship with Hamas can be explained from an omnibalancing perspective, despite the brutal repression of the Islamist opposition in 1982.

Syria's security outlook worsened considerably in the early 1990s given Israel's conventional military superiority, Israel's forward presence in Southern Lebanon since 1982, its diplomatic successes in Madrid, Oslo (1993, PLO) and Wadi Araba (1994, Jordan). By joining forces with the rejectionist Hamas group, the Assad regime could show its vocal opposition to Yasser Arafat and the PLO (Chehab, 2007, p.147). The Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 decreased Syria's level of threat perception and the removal of Saddam Hussein in 2003 further started to shift the balance in favor of Iran and its allies. Only recently, the Arab rebellion of 2010 turned the tide, resulting in an era of unseen violence and repression by the regime.

International and regional norms

The US State Department classified Hamas as a terrorist organization for the first time in 1993. Up to now, Syria has refrained from calling the group a terrorist organization and it harshly criticizes the group's labeling by other countries (Ziadeh, 2010, p.106). In a similar

vein, Damascus repeatedly claimed that Khalid Mishal[12] was based in Syria for media and political purposes only (Byman, 2005b, p.132, Chehab, 2007, p.147). After September 11, Syria has been under constant and strong diplomatic pressure by Western countries for harboring terrorist organizations and violating international legal obligations (Chehab, 2007, p.147, Hufbauer and Moll, 2007, p.184). Israeli retaliatory strikes hit Syrian radar stations in Lebanon in 2001 and 2003, and an empty Palestinian training camp near Damascus; the first such strike on Syrian territory since the October War 1973 (Byman, 2005b, p.145).[13] The US imposed, following vocal condemnations in 2002, harsher sanctions in December 2003 (Bush, 2002, Hufbauer and Moll, 2007, p.183).

Domestic regime legitimacy and the support of Hamas

The regime's domestic legitimacy is rooted in its "Arab nationalist credentials". These are closely linked to the vocal opposition towards Israel. Thus, giving in to Western and Israeli pressure would "eliminate what little appeal the Baath regime enjoys among the Syrian public" and "any backing down in the face of limited Israeli pressure would be both a strategic and a domestic blow for the Baath regime" (Byman, 2005b, p.147). Externally, Hamas is an important strategic asset in its conflict with Israel for the regime. This is especially true in its struggle to regain the Golan Heights in negotiations with Tel Aviv. Domestically, the alignment promises domestic benefits because the group enjoys considerable and growing support in both, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza. Thus, the regime's legitimacy was boosted when Hamas leader Abd al-Aziz al-Rantisi stated that "Palestine is part of our Greater Syria, and Damascus is our pre-eminent leader" (Chehab, 2007, p.145, Hroub, 2000, p.159).

The Assad regime holds a non-Islamic and nationalist if expansive ideology, so Hamas is an unlikely ally. But the regime's brutal military repression of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood in 1982 did not hinder it to forge ties with the Brethren's other branches. President Assad later defended this "pragmatic" approach by suggesting that forces with "different

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12   Mishal became Hamas' political bureau chief and de facto head of the movement following the assassinations of both Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and his successor Dr. Abdul Aziz Al Rantisi.

13   Direct threats and actual attempts to assassinate Hamas leaders' abound, Israel also turned on the Syrian leadership: Only days after the kidnapping of Gilad Shalit in June 2006, warplanes flew in a low-altitude formation over Assad's Latakia residence. According to Chehab, the jets were part of an "overall Israeli operation aimed to pressure the Syrians to expel Khalid Mishal" Chehab, Zaki. (2007) *Inside Hamas : The Untold Story of the Militant Islamic Movement*. New York, NY: Nations Books.

views" can cooperate "under shared conditions" and he also stressed that unlike other Islamist groups, Hamas fights "against the occupation […] and in defense of their homeland" (Batatu, 1999, p.276).

The regimes' "old guards", most of which were involved in the crackdown on the Muslim brethren and the lost military conflicts with Israel, viewed Hamas positively. The hosting of Hamas was seen innocuous because Hamas refrained from aligning with anti-Assad forces within Syria or challenging the Ba'ath party's legitimacy openly (Byman, 2005b, pp.138-44). In addition, Hamas claims that Palestine – not any other Arab country – is the proper arena to fight Israel, thereby limiting Syrian fears to get drawn into a military confrontation with the latter (Hroub, 2000, pp.152-54).

Despite this benevolence among the old guard, Hamas' presence splits the pro-Western forces in Syria into those who fear the country's economic isolation and those who favor negotiations with Israel on the basis of conventional military equilibrium. Since coming into office Syria's President Bashar holds on to power by not challenging any of these factions while using the struggle against Israel to counter domestic opposition (Byman, 2005b, p.131f., Perthes, 2004, pp.4-6). In this vein, Bashar used the alignment with Hamas,as the regime in Quatar did, to strengthen his domestic credentials while reopening negotiations with Israel in 2008 (Chehab, 2007, p.134).

Measuring Syria's support of Hamas: the evidence

Hosting and financial patronage

The regime provided Hamas with a sanctuary in 1991. This becamse the most important support, allowing Hamas to "coordinate their activities, organize, and otherwise operate with little interference" (Byman, 2005b, p.132, Gambill, 2002). While Syria appears not to be a crucial financial source or arms supplier, US officials suspected Damascus of tolerating Hamas' own fundraising, arms purchases and the smuggling of weapons from Syria to the West Bank and Gaza (Byman, 2005b, p.134, Gambill, 2002).

Syria's support changed in December 1992 when Hamas opened an information office in Damascus and again two years later, the Hamas interior committee followed suit (Chehab, 2007, p.145, Gambill, 2002). Subsequently, high-ranking meetings between Hamas leadership and members of the Syrian government were held and operational head-

quarters of the Qassam brigades (Hamas' military wing) were established in Syria (Gambill, 2002). In this period, the group was allowed to recruit Palestinians in Lebanese refugee camps and to organize demonstrations, even in the capital Beirut. This new policy stood in sharp contrast to the strict limitations for the Yarmouk camp near Damascus, where political mobilization was forbidden (Gambill, 2002).

International pressure in 1996 pressed the regime to arrest several Hamas activists but all of them were released soon after. Furthermore, the Assad regime did not press the group to refrain from any attacks but merely to openly claiming direct responsibility (Gambill, 2002). In May 2003, Bashar al-Assad personally promised Colin Powell to close down Hamas' offices in Damascus and to "constrain their activities" (Wakin, 2003). Indeed, he closed the "media offices" of several Palestinian groups and even urged Hamas to agree to a cease-fire with Israel. However, senior Hamas leaders remained in Syria and did not loose - despite increased control by Syrian intelligence - their freedom of action in the following years (Byman, 2005b, p.149, Chehab, 2007, p.226).

Military training, logistics, military equipment

Hamas directly benefitted from Syria's omnibalancing efforts after the Oslo accords. Not only were operational headquarters of the Qassam brigades established in Damascus in close cooperation with Syrian military intelligence. Hamas was also granted access to Hezbollah and PFLP-GC training camps in the Bekaa Valley. In these camps, hundreds of Hamas recruits reportedly underwent training by Hezbollah and Iranian instructors until 2005 (Byman, 2005b, p.134, Gambill, 2002).

Vocal Promotion

Against the background of a rocky relationship with domestic Islamist forces, Ba'ath Party officials stressed the importance of an alliance between "themselves, as nationalists, and the Islamists, meaning Hamas" in 1996. As a consequence, the regime hailed Hamas as a "legitimate resistance movement against the Israeli occupation" (Chehab, 2007, p.145). Hafez al-Assad even moved one step further by arguing that he owed the support of Hamas to the Palestinians and he refrained from publicly condemning its campaign of suicide bombings in February and March 1996 (Chehab, 2007, p.223). In March 1998, Assad officially received Hamas founder Sheikh Yassin in Damascus, thereby stressing his sup-

port for the movement's cause while condemning any attempt of the region's moderate forces to isolate Hamas (Byman, 2005b, p.134, Hroub, 2000, p.154). Also, Syrian officials publicly supported Hamas attacks in Israel as "martyrdom operations" during the Second Intifada (Gambill, 2002), calling it a legitimate resistance group (Byman, 2005b, p.131). At the time, Hamas contacts involved predominantly Syrian military intelligence. Recently, however, high-level and public meetings with Hamas leaders have been on the rise (Ziadeh, 2010, p.82). The regime's public support for the Palestinian cause may be characterized as a form of "calculated populism" (Perthes, 2004, p.42). It aims at bolstering the president's popularity with the "Arab Street", thereby mitigating his domestic security concerns.

In sum, Syria's support for Hamas reflects cross-cutting international and domestic security pressures: existing international norms and superior conventional capacities effectuate a policy of denial, but the domestic benefits of an alignment with Hamas point into the opposite direction. In comparison with other terror groups, Hamas has no record of anti-Syrian attacks and never cooperated with anti-Assad forces. Also, its appeal to domestic ethnic or political opposition is limited and controllable (e.g. by prohibiting political mobilization on Syrian soil). Furthermore, its ties to the Alawi "barons" and especially those who crushed the Islamic uprising in the early 1980s are weak and contacts with the group are centralized. The support of Hamas is thus an important and easy to use tool of co-opting key groups within Syrian society. Syria's sponsorship of Hamas has become more assertive due to regional and domestic power shifts after 2003. When compared with the support for the Abu-Nidal group and the PKK, it is noteworthy that Syria's responsiveness to external pressure and military retaliation is substantially more limited. Among the three groups, Hamas may be called one of the "weapons of choice" to address the regime's omnibalancing dilemmas.

5. Conclusion

Our analysis has established a clear and discernible relationship between the omnibalancing concerns of an autocratic regime and its sponsorship of non-state terrorism. In the three cases the confluence of domestic and external security concerns produces distinct patterns of state support across the four different categories of support. While we did not

explicitly seek to advance our theoretical approach, we find that our analysis has some theoretical implications as well. We thus close our analysis with some (suggestive) remarks on the interaction between the domestic/external security dilemma, the state sponsorship of terrorism as a specific form of omnibalancing behavior and theoretical reflections:

1) Conventional external security dilemmas increase the probability of state sponsorship under scope conditions of weak regime legitimacy. All three cases point to the fact that Syria's omnibalancing occurred or grew stronger after Israel's conventional victory in 1973 (nuclear coming out) and the Muslim Brotherhood challenge in 1982.

2) Regime divisions and legitimacy concerns which should produce strong domestic security dilemmas have the expected effect on the rise and fall and the pattern of state sponsorship. Domestic security interests clearly drove the guarded support for PKK and Hamas, focusing on internal neutrality of the group, external deniability and central control of the groups' contacts with regime constituencies.

3) External legitimacy and accountability considerations which should produce denial strategies have clearly shaped a detectable mix of official denial, open hosting and limited direct military assistance which is characteristic of all three cases. Strong anti-terrorism norms and credible threats to implement them through use of force thus may breed counter strategies that lead to "opaque compliance" and "cheap talk".

4) Internal political regime dynamics, differentiated into economic liberalization and stability considerations, offer to shed light on competing interests within an autocratic regime sponsoring terrorism. International reputation looms larger in external security considerations when key groups within the domestic realm prefer economic liberalization and foreign trade.[14] Under these scope conditions state sponsorship appears to decline as a viable balancing strategy and efforts to restore interstate alignments are likely to increase. In turn, state sponsorship serves as an "effective" instrument of interstate balancing to extort political concessions from more powerful state actors in

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[14]   This result ties in nicely with the findings of Etel Solingen (1994; 2007, 2010) who found that proliferating behavior of a regime depends on the ruling coalition's policy vis-à-vis integration into the world economy: whereas integrationist elites restrain themselves or even reverse a proliferation decision, ruling coalitions without stakes in external trade and integration do proliferate more often.

order to satisfy material and immaterial demands of societal key groups threatening to withdraw their support from the regime.

5) More specifically, in the case of the Abu Nidal group we find a tailor-made offensive alignment. The alignment with ANO helped the Assad regime to address (perceived) external threats, but it served only a few (mostly negative) domestic security functions. This rather limited mix of external and internal security dilemma concerns resulted in a specific alignment pattern which has been described in the literature as a "gun for hire" (Seale 1992).

6) In comparison, the alignment pattern with the PKK resembles more our general omnibalancing expectations. Both external and domestic security concerns clearly shaped the Assad's regime support of that group. In particular, unfavorable shifts in the external balance-of-threat through Turkey's GPA project (aggressive intentions), the outcome of the Persian Gulf War (proximity + aggressive intentions) and the cooptation of Syrian Kurds by the PKK were clearly discernible factors when explaining the regime's alignment behavior with the PKK.

7) In contrast with the other two cases, the Hamas case reveals, however, the inherent trade-off between external and internal balancing functions of an alignment with a terror group. This tension can be managed but not resolved. In the Syrian case, Hamas serves the important domestic function of co-opting a pro-Palestinian sentiment in the Syrian public so that the Assad regime is prone to resist international pressure to abandon the group. However, if Hamas acts autonomously, thereby triggering forceful action against its hosting state Syria, the domestic benefits from the alignment have to be weighed against the external costs.

Our desiderata suggest that the omnibalancing approach offers a more plausible explanation for state sponsorship of terrorism. But we recognize that it is not satisfying to treat domestic and external security dilemmas entirely independent from each other. Rather, we obviously would like to know under which scope conditions specific terror groups are viewed as beneficial on both, the domestic and external level, of the omnibalancing game or which mix of support is rooted in which specific dilemma constellation. We hold that such questions are clearly beyond the scope of this study. We may, nonetheless, speculate that a minority regime, such as the Alawi clan in Syria, faces a considerably more

complex domestic security dilemma than for example the Hashemite rulers in Jordan. In turn, although the conventional and nuclear security dilemma in the region continued to expand – due to Israel's (and the US') unchallenged superiority – this effect maybe offset by shifting domestic security dynamics, e.g. in Iraq, Egypt or Saudi-Arabia.

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