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AN ALLIANCE THAT THREATENS WORLD ORDER

BYLINE: Douglas J. Feith

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HIGHLIGHT: POLICIES of repression at home and militarism abroad tend to reinforce each other. Tyrannical regimes need foreign enemies and they make them. The armies they build to capitalize on their neighbors' weaknesses are also used to crush domestic opposition.

POLICIES of repression at home and militarism abroad tend to reinforce each other. Tyrannical regimes need foreign enemies and they make them. The armies they build to capitalize on their neighbors' weaknesses are also used to crush domestic opposition.

Where the public has no say in electing the officials who set the taxes, states like Syria, Iraq, the Soviet Union or North Korea can make the kind of impoverishing expenditures on arms - entirely disproportionate to GNP and to defensive needs - that are not sustainable politically in a democratic country.

Before the democratization of Eastern Europe, many Westerners believed that new laws - peace accords in the form of arms control treaties - were urgently required to secure peace between East and West. Now that the East Europeans have governments that actually respect law, the urgency is gone and such treaties are widely recognized to be superfluous.

Peace is achieved when governments respect law - that is, respect the rights of other states - not when lawless governments cynically sign peace accords. This is the type of analysis that could help flesh out the Bush administration's concept of a New World Order. But recent U.S. diplomacy toward Syria suggests that the "pragmatists" who make foreign policy in the administration do not see this interconnection linking human rights, limited government, law, peace, order and American interests.

The factors that made Saddam Hussein a threat to world order and U.S. interests and compelled the U.S. to treat him as an outlaw also apply to Hafez al-Assad.

The same considerations argue for condemning, pressuring and isolating Assad. He, too, has launched aggressive wars - against both Lebanon and Israel. He has mobilized his armed forces threateningly against Jordan. He has squeezed out of his country's poor economy enormous sums of money to create an army of over half a million men equipped with over 4,000 tanks, over 500 fighter aircraft, a chemical and biological weapons capability and a variety of ballistic missiles with ranges ample to cover all of Israel and much of Turkey.

ASSAD IS one of the principal supporters of international terrorism. He gives a home to a number of Palestinian terrorist groups, including the PFLP-GC which was responsible for the 1988 bombing of Pan Am 103, and to the PKK and Dev Sol, terrorist groups that operate against Turkey. Terrorists in regions he controls in Lebanon continue to hold

American citizens hostage. The near absence of terrorist attacks against Americans during recent months reflects the degree of control Syria exercises in this field, a fact that should make the West disapproving and wary rather than grateful.

Through military action, assassination and terrorism as ruthless as Iraq's rape of Kuwait, Syria has since 1975 established its dominance throughout most of Lebanon. Only in October 1990 was Assad able to eliminate his last Lebanese challenger, Gen. Michel Aoun, whose forces he crushed while the U.S. and the other Western powers were preoccupied with Desert Shield and intent on fortifying the anti-Saddam coalition that Assad was enlisted to join.

Assad attacks his own domestic opponents as cruelly and fatally as he has eliminated his foes in Lebanon. Like Saddam, Assad has used artillery and tanks against his domestic opposition. In responding to the 1982 uprising in the Syrian city of Hama, Assad's troops are estimated to have killed 5,000 to 10,000 Syrians.

Assad's diplomacy has been powerfully antagonistic to the U.S. and to Israel and, throughout the Cold War years, consistently favorable to the Soviet Union. And Assad continues to refuse to negotiate peace with Israel, in violation of UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.

The U.S administration's conciliatory policies toward Syria, its high-level, high-visibility consultations with Assad, acquiescence in Syrian domination of Lebanon and failure to make an issue of Assad's despotism, support of terrorism and anti-Israel rejectionism - all these send signals that conflict with the most important message that Desert Storm was supposed to convey.

The desire to bring Syria into the Desert Shield coalition can be understood as an attempt to maximize the coalition's political and military strength.

One can argue that the price paid was excessive and that Syria would have cooperated against Saddam anyway for reasons unrelated to Kuwait, but the rationale for teaming with Syria in the operation, even if dubious, was readily comprehensible.

The same cannot be said of the administration's current desire to make friends with Assad. While law enforcement officials frequently enlist the help of criminals against other criminals, they do not work to facilitate the criminal collaborators' commission of future crimes. The Bush administration's policy toward Syria is undermining the New World Order and the safety of the Middle East.

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