



## **LESSON PLAN: SYRIA'S ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST PART III Syria's Relations with its Neighbors and the United States**

### **Student Handout - Iraq**

**Overview:** In this activity, you will work in a group to examine the Newshour Interactive Map on Syria (found at [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle\\_east/syria/map\\_flash.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle_east/syria/map_flash.html)). There you will glean information about Syria's relationship with Iraq.

#### **Directions:**

1. Go to the Newshour's "Syria's Role in the Middle East: [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle\\_east/syria/index.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle_east/syria/index.html).
2. Click your mouse on the map of Iraq and review the written material along the right side of the map.
3. Gather information to complete the content questions below.
4. After reviewing the content questions, review your findings with your group.
5. In large group, review the Discussion Questions at the end of the page.

#### **Content Questions:**

1. Describe the controversy around the relationship between Syria and former Ba'athist leaders in Iraq. What is being alleged and what is Syria saying?
2. What evidence is there that some Syrians are backing Iraqi insurgents in Iraq?
3. Describe how the formation and goals of the Ba'ath party in both Syria and Iraq initially drew them together. For what reasons did their partnership transform into a rivalry by the 1970s?
4. How did Syria's actions during the Iran-Iraq war further distance Syria from Iraq and distance Syria from other Arab League nations?
5. How has Syrian's current president Bashar al-Assad tried to ease tensions with Iraq since he took power in 2000?
6. How might Syria's stand to support Iraq in the months before the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq complicate its relationship with the newly forming Iraqi government?

## Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss the two points of view below surrounding the Syrian role in the Lebanese civil war. Which view seems to be best supported by the evidence?
  - A. Syrian troops were instrumental in quelling the violence of the Lebanese civil war. Their continued presence in Lebanon has kept the peace since the 1990s.
  - B. The continued presence of Syrian troops has caused instability in Lebanese politics and threatens the integrity and success of the Lebanese elections in May.
2. Why did Hezbollah form in Lebanon and what role has this organization served Syrian goals in the Middle East?
3. How has Syria's relationship with the PLO and radical militants like Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah complicated its relationship with the west and made reconciliation with Israel difficult? Why do you think Syria has these relationships with these radical militant groups?
4. Summarize the early relationship between Syria and Jordan. What events caused this relationship to deteriorate? How might improved relations between Syria and Jordan be a benefit to the U.S.?
5. Review the goals of the Ba'ath party in Syria and Iraq. How has the fall of Saddam Hussein made achieving these goals more difficult for Syria? What steps can Syria take to help improve its relationship with Iraq?
6. Briefly summarize the history of disputes along the 837-mile border between Turkey and Syria. Describe circumstances around and evidence against Syria regarding terrorist attacks in Turkey and how these attacks raise the level of tension between the countries. Explain how the free-trade agreement being crafted between Syria and Turkey could lead to better relations between the two countries.
7. Describe the difficult position Syria faces in trying to cooperate with the western countries and its neighbors while upholding its position as a "defender of Arab rights" to many people like the Palestinians.
8. How has keeping its alliances with terrorist groups like Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah threatened Syria's own interests while also threatening the interests of the United States?
9. Why is it in the best interests of both the Syrians and the U.S. to understand each other better? What actions do you think either country should take to make better relations a reality?