



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

Student Handout – the United States

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). There you will glean information about Syria's relationship with the United States.

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.
2. Click on the link "US-Syrian Relations" and review the written material.
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. Summarize the comments of U.S. officials on Syria's alleged involvement in the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri.
2. What conclusions has Syrian President Bashar Assad drawn from these comments?
3. Describe the two major areas of concern the U.S. has for Syria and evidence it presents that supports these concerns?
4. Describe the different ways Syria and the U.S. see Israel and how this difference has complicated their relationship when it comes to encouraging peace in the Middle East.
5. How has the U.S. characterized Syria as working at cross purposes to its policies in Iraq? How has Syria responded to these accusations and why is there skepticism from the U.S. over Syria's response?
6. What is meant by the comment, "Syria has played this game of being both arsonist and fire department?"

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?