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Preface

OMAR IMADY

We are pleased to present VOL 12, NO 1, *Narratives of Transformation*. This issue of *Syria Studies* includes three articles: “The Digital Party as a Vehicle for Transformational Political Change in Arab Spring Countries: *Opportunities for Syria*” by Dina Ramadan; “Military and Politics in Syria (1946-1963): *Alliances, Conflicts and Purges*” by Khouloud Al Zghayare; and “The Images of Syrian Refugees in the Mainstream Narrative: *A Case Study of Lebanon*” by Ahmad Barakat.

In “The Digital Party as a Vehicle for Transformational Political Change in Arab Spring Countries: *Opportunities for Syria*”, Dina Ramadan notes correctly that “instead of assuming their role in modernizing Syrian society, raising awareness, educating citizens and building a common national identity...” Syria’s political parties chose to follow “narrow ethnic or ideological interests, and sometimes foreign agendas”. A viable and convincing alternative to the current status of political *misrepresentation* is identified by Ramadan: the digital party. The digital party, with “its open, easily accessible, participatory platform allowing for transparent bottom-up policies and decision-making processes” might succeed in reversing the trend of “popular apathy and distrust, and motivate the masses to participate again”.

In “Military and Politics in Syria (1946-1963): *Alliances, Conflicts and Purges*”, Khouloud Al Zghayare shares an extensive and detailed analysis of different stages of Syria’s contemporary history, focusing on the “consistent processes of exclusion and purges between and within the military and politics” which impacted and depleted both institutions. It is as a direct consequence of this struggle and its implications that, over a century after the establishment of modern Syria, there remains "no consensus on an inclusive national identity, and no constitutional government subject to separation of powers".

In "The Images of Syrian Refugees in the Mainstream Narrative: *A Case Study of Lebanon*", Ahmad Barakat documents how mainstream media in countries hosting Syrian refugees, Lebanon in particular, is complicit in "communicating a negative image of Syrian refugees". Through "overreaction, panic, and focus on the most controversial and sensitive problems in the host communities", the media has communicated an image of the Syrian refugee as "ranging between being pitiful and being ISIS affiliates". What this has sadly amounted to, in so far as the majority of Syrian refugees are concerned, is a choice "between the horrific or something worse."

These articles, each in their own distinct way, constitute examples of how a narrative can transform our perception of Syria's politics (Ramadan), history (Al Zghayare), and even suffering (Barakat). The narrative is the 'story' which becomes the basis for the essential point the author is advancing. The field of Syrian studies is replete with narratives that compete with each other to capture our attention, and the articles found in this issue, by virtue of the evidence they provide, significantly challenge contrary narratives.

Over the last seven years, it has been a pleasure and an honour for me to serve as a Managing Editor of *Syria Studies.* As of the end of April 2021, my editorial responsibilities will end. My aim throughout has been to help provide a platform for distinguished, and emerging scholars who sought to deepen our understanding of Syria's history, politics, and economy. The underlying premise of the journal was, and so remains, that to increase our knowledge of Syria, however minimally, is to ultimately advance the processes that will one day create an inclusive and democratic country where respect for human worth, freedom and the rule of law are absolute.

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The Digital Party as a Vehicle for Transformational Political Change in Arab Spring Countries:

Opportunities for Syria

DINA RAMADAN

Abstract

The Ba'ath Party has dominated the political sphere in Syria since the rule of Hafiz Al-Assad. It prevented any kind of social or political practices or organizational experiences at any level, except under the approval and full scrutiny of the regime. This kind of oppression continued after Bashar Al-Assad took over the presidency in 2000, which in turn played a crucial role in the opposition’s evident inexperience after the 2011 Uprising. Supporters of the Uprising were looking for structured, organized leadership to represent and develop their movement, but the opposition formations, official and nonofficial, proved incapable of fulfilling that role.

Opposition political parties, whether longstanding or nascent, Islamist or secularist, have deep organizational problems. None has presented a clear vision, strategy, or project to help the people achieve their demands. In general, parties have been beset by poor institutionalization, with a lack of clear organizational structure, and an absence of lucid decision-making processes. While parties are supposed to be spaces for plural thinking and acting, individualism prevailed, with incoherence and inconsistency existing between parties’ ideologies and their members’ practices, and between members themselves, exacerbating the tribal and confessional loyalties and tendencies that served to undermine collective national identity. Therefore, instead of

taking their role in modernizing Syrian society, raising awareness, educating citizens, and building a common national identity, parties conceded those roles to follow narrow ethnic or ideological interests, and sometimes foreign agendas. As a result, they have been incapable of attracting and mobilizing grassroots, especially the young.

While those shortcomings differed in degree from one party to the other, all of them shared the factor of excluding grassroots whilst taking "cadre-party" form. In doing so, political parties have squandered the momentum of the Uprising and the vital power of organized masses. Not only that, but it also shattered the potential competencies of activists and participants, turning their zeal into total apathy. On the other hand, the mobilizational incapability of those parties was one of the reasons, along with the regime's brutal repression, that led to the Movement's militarization, followed by its radicalization at a later stage. Subsequently, parties lost the trust of the people and thus their legitimacy and representational capacity, which they replaced by seeking legitimacy from regional and international powers.

Syrian opposition parties, who appeared to be preoccupied with their intra- and inter-party struggles, should look for new resources and practices to re-legitimize their role. They need to grow into major players through grassroots engagement, rather than through foreign power endorsements. It is necessary for the Syrian people demanding democratic transition to be part of the discourse about key issues of their political future.

This paper advocates that using internet technologies towards adopting the digital party model might represent the solution to re-engage the masses in the political process, allowing for public participation and inclusiveness in the decision-making process. The format of the digital party could well precisely represent the inclusive tool and innovative solution that is needed with its open, easy membership, participatory platform, allowing for transparent bottom-up policies and decision-making processes. Although using the digital party model will not instantaneously solve all the mounting problems of apathy and distrust, it might yet provide the type of organizational change that will help narrow the gap between the elites and grassroots and affect positively parties' roles and performance.

1. Background: Political Context before 2011 Uprising

1.1. Hafiz al-Assad (1970-2000)

Hafiz al-Assad took power in Syria in 1970 by a military coup. He ruled Syria with an iron fist, prohibiting public freedoms and political activities. The ruling party was the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party. Political regulations were monocratic, restricting all opposition parties and dissident movements, but tolerating the existence of mock parties under a "progressive national front."[1] These rules restricted opposition activities and prevented the establishment of opposition parties, which resulted in Ba'athists dominating the political sphere.

Ba'ath Party apparatus was one of the key instruments – in addition to the army, security services, and state bureaucracy – through which the regime controlled the country. Party members had priority over any other candidates in obtaining jobs or state-related positions. This allowed the party apparatus to take control of all key strategic functions within the state.[2] With more than 2 million members in 2000, and 2.8 million members in 2012, who were organized in a hierarchical structure, and spread all over the country, and nearly all the state institutions, the party controlled all state critical and non-critical occupations.[3] In addition to the hierarchical arrangement of Ba'ath Party members, other citizens were also organized in syndicates, federations, unions and other associations, according to their profession or background. This system of organization operated regardless of whether citizens were members of the Ba'ath Party or not, though with a semi-mandatory condition that Ba'athists presided over those syndicates. The goal was to keep the masses under the full surveillance and dominance of the state and to extend the scope of the Ba'ath party's base.[4]

Indeed, the possibility of forming an institutionalized network independent from the state's control was slim to none. Efforts to create an active civil society, especially an organized one, were halted. Even syndicates, which were supposed to be potential focal points for organizing grassroots initiatives after the revolution, were rendered ineffective. While they were ostensibly created for people to network, organize their endeavours, and represent their interests, the purpose became subverted towards a means for the state to assert hegemony over the society, divide it, and prevent any vital movements or activities.[5]

As for the political opposition, like the conditions of oppositions under repressive regimes, the situation was ominous. Anyone engaged in any action associated with political opposition, or even suspected of being involved in such conduct, was incarcerated, tortured, or expatriated.[6] Hence, the opposition was completely deprived of practicing politics before the Revolution, except for some exiled individuals. This, to some extent, explains the debilitated performance of the opposition after the Uprising.[7]

1.2. Bashar al-Assad (2000 until the 2011 Uprising)

Bashar al-Assad's succession to the presidency in 2000, with his promises of reforms in his inaugural speech, generated optimism that the young president might represent a new era of political and economic improvements. Intellectuals and political activists started establishing political forums as free spaces for raising awareness, holding open discussions, and formulating civil and political demands. The objectives revolved around political freedom, including lifting the 1963 state of emergency, releasing political detainees, instituting regulations for establishing parties and a plural party system amongst others. However, this period, the so-called “Damascus Spring”, did not last long; from July 2000 to February 2001 in fact, after which the regime cracked down on these forums and imprisoned participants.[8]

Another important vigorous surge of the opposition occurred during the years 2005-2006, with the announcement of the “Damascus Declaration for Democratic Change”, signed by several opposition figures and formations. This was an attempt to unite the opposition and, inter alia, recommence the demands of the “Damascus Spring”. The regime ignored the opposition demands of reform, arresting several leaders and members of the coalition, under the allegation that the opposition and its demands were a Western conspiracy aimed at weakening the Syrian state.[9]

The oppression of the opposition continued without any indication of imminent positive changes until the eruption of the 2011 Uprising, after which the regime initiated superficial reforms to quell popular demands.[10] Reforms involved lifting the emergency state and introducing some constitutional reforms, including the re-writing parts of the constitution. Most notably this involved the removal of Article 8 of the former 1973 constitution, which stated that the Ba'ath Party was the leading party of the society and the state, replacing it with an inclusive article which granted political pluralism while discarding Ba'ath Party exclusivity to leadership of the state. Furthermore, it explicitly allowed the establishment of new parties under specific conditions.[11]

1.3. The Syrian Uprising of 2011

At the beginning of 2011, anti-government uprisings erupted in Syria after the Arab Spring swept through several Arab countries including Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. People took to the streets in peaceful demonstrations but were confronted by brutal armed forces of the Syrian regime, resulting in hundreds of killings and arrests.[12]

In late 2011, the peaceful protesting developed into armed conflict as the spiral of the Syrian regime's violence continued unabated. The regime’s viciousness triggered the masses to step-up their demands from general political and legal reforms into regime change.[13] The conflict worsened in the following years and developed into a mixture of civil and proxy wars involving regional and international powers.[14]

The brutality of Assad’s regime forced a substantial part of the opposition, as well as civilians, to leave the country owing to the threat of arbitrary detention, execution, and enforced disappearance. According to the United Nations, there are over five million registered Syrian refugees in the year 2020.[15] While a significant number of those refugees, expatriates and displaced people could be opponents of the current Syrian regime, no official statistics exist on the political preferences of those refugees, despite it being worthy of study, bearing in mind refugees’ relevant security concerns, especially when located in countries with positive bilateral relations with the Syrian regime.

Displaced opposition activists found themselves scattered in different countries, without being able to participate effectively in the political discourse anymore, rendering different social media platforms the only channels for participation. Meanwhile, the political scene had been seized by a few officially nominated opposition coalitions, starting with Syrian National Council (2011),[16] then National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (2012),[17] and more recently the High Negotiations Committee (2016).[18]

Various non-official political opposition formations have been established since the onset of the Uprising, but almost none can be described as “grassroots” organizations, in the sense of taking on the role of organizing the masses, mobilizing them, linking leaders and activists, and benefiting from the potential of opposition activists. Moreover, the opposition – official and non-official – failed to represent grassroots demands and were unable to achieve a framework of cooperation for advancing objectives during critical stages of the Uprising.[19] One could argue that an integrational outline for the opposition with a national agenda would have prevented any struggle over the question of grassroots representation, which many political opposition formations claimed without any established lines. Such an outline could have also reassured the international community, which was wary about the lack of a proper replacement for the current regime, a credible alternative that might have led the country during a critical transitional period.[20]

2. Types of Political Parties after 2011 Uprising

At the onset of the Syrian Revolution of 2011, activists started to organize the popular movement through small coordination bodies (*Tansiqiat*), which acted as secret cells to cope with the organizational needs of the popular movement, especially given the geographical and demographical breadth of the demonstrations. *Tansiqiat* used social media platforms to organize and spread information about gatherings and protesting points, among other activities. These activists, who articulated the demands of the Uprising, emanated from the middle-classes, from diverse professional backgrounds and ethnicities. Demographically, they were spread all over Syria and, in the case of dissident expatriates, also abroad.[21]

However, new sophisticated political configurations replaced these revolutionary-type civil networks and pre-political organizations. This replacement is ascribed to two fundamental reasons. First, the popular movement's demands for an organized political representation and leadership.[22] Second, the international community's pressure for organized and unified opposition. The transformation from grassroots-resistance style groupings into organized political-elite style configurations gave birth to what became termed "opposition". The replacement of a civil-revolutionary act with the organized-political act had the consequence of converting the conflict to revolve around a new power binary of "regime-opposition" instead of the binary "regime-people" as before.[23]

Away from the formal coalitions, unofficial formations were initiated under different designations – party, movement, current – without any clear basis for distinction.[24] In doing so, some of them simply tried to avoid the description "party" as it had negative connotations from the past, while others tried to avoid the entailed accountability.[25]

A party can be defined in numerous ways. According to Sartori, "In general, parties are defined in terms of (i) actors, (ii) actions (activities), (iii) consequences (purposes), and (iv) domain. But parties can also be defined with exclusive respect to their function, to their structure, or to both; or in the light of the input-output scheme; and in still other ways.”[26] For the purpose of this study, parties will include all these formations, except for self-declared civil society or non-political organizations.

Various parties have been founded based on ethnic, national, and religious identities, amongst others. For example, the Kurdish-nationalist formations – formal and informal – have manifested themselves noticeably on the political scene.[27] For the purpose of this paper, parties after the 2011 Uprising will be categorized in two ways. Firstly, chronologically, considering the Uprising as the focal event. Secondly, by the ideologies those parties embraced.

2.1. Parties’ Classification on a Chronological Basis

2.1.1. Longstanding Parties (Initiated before the 2011 Uprising)

Longstanding opposition formations dominated the political sphere after the Uprising. They were comprised of old parties and political figures who were working covertly before the Uprising. Some of those longstanding parties kept their original formation, with some changing their names while keeping the same former structure and practices, while others entered new alliances and coalitions forming new bodies.[28]

However, those parties that retained their pre-Uprising structure found they were unable to interact with the grassroots or to guide them because of their old-fashioned practices and ideologically controlled attitudes towards key national issues. In addition, a legacy of leader-dominated parties frustrated the opportunity to build consensus across parties and political groups, which resulted in polarization among the opposition.

Nevertheless, there was the opportunity that those parties and figures could have served as the starting point for an institutionalized leadership of the masses if they had acted in an inclusive non-partisan manner. They had the basic requirements, such as political experience, rudimentary organizational structure, and wide networks inside and outside Syria however, they failed to act in a non-partisan manner.[29]

2.1.2. Nascent Parties (Initiated after the 2011 Uprising)

A growing number of nascent parties were initiated after the Uprising. Most of these newly established parties imitated older remaining parties with no modernization at any level. The old structures of leadership within the opposition parties had a palpable effect on those parties, to the extent of carrying on the legacy of enmities towards each other, viewing the “other” as a political enemy rather than political opponent. This caused deep polarization and fragmentation within the overall political opposition scene.[30]

Some of these organizations can be termed “couch parties”, in that their membership was so small as to be able to fill only a single couch.[31] Such parties tended to be short-sighted, fragile, with short life spans, and prone to splintering. Notable characteristics included no political experience, vision or plan along with overlapping or similar announcements, initial declarations, objectives and policies.[32]

Not only were these parties characterized by such shortcomings, but many were also established with the support and financing of different regional and other international countries, rendering them mere branches or representatives of those powers and their agendas, rather than the interests of the Syrian people.[33] Consequently, any deficiency in the financial resources of those parties' patrons often led to these parties' transformation or merging into other formations, or even vanishing.[34]

In general, both long-standing and nascent parties were beset by poor institutionalization, with no founding constitution nor bylaw or clear organizational structure, and with no binding statement of party principles or clear decision-making processes. Nevertheless, even when the principles of the founding statements and procedures of some parties were clear, the plans for delivery were absent. While parties are supposed to be spaces for plural thinking and acting, individualism prevailed with incoherence and inconsistency existing between parties' ideologies and their members' practices, and between members themselves. Both types were incapable of attracting and mobilizing the grassroots, especially the young, because of the tribal and confessional loyalties that served to undermine collective national identity. Yet, this did not prevent many of those parties from claiming a representational role without any clear basis.[35]

2.1.3. Parties' Classification on Ideological Bases (Islamist – Secularist)

2.1.3.1. Islamist Parties

The discourse about organized political Islamist formulation can be analysed through the prism of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), a prevailing, global and long-established movement. Although many other Islamist formulations had emerged after the Uprising, the most organized and politically influential one was the MB, which remains one of the most prominent Islamist movements in Syria and most of the Middle East region.[36]

After the crackdown on the MB following the Hama massacre in 1982, most of the movement's members left Syria.[37] However, the movement continued its activities abroad, thereby retaining organizational abilities and gaining experience, which ensured the MB was in primary position vis-à-vis other Islamist formations to return to the Syrian political scene with the onset of the Uprising. Different elements accorded the MB a privileged status in the Syrian context. Amongst others, the MB maintained the discourse of grievances and injustices inflicted on the movement by Hafiz al-Assad's regime, and its concurrent history of struggle to appeal to the public. It also manifested its strategy of being part of the local society through its various not-for-profit organizations, which gave the movement an embedded presence in Syrian society. Indeed, such a code of conduct proved essential to gaining credibility and legitimacy within local communities. Finally, the stable financing of the movement has had a crucial impact on its ability to organize activities.[38]

The MB had the potential to lead the popular movement, but they failed drastically for a number of reasons, notably, prioritizing the regional project of the movement over the Syrian national agenda, and their attempt to enforce that project by manipulating the prevailing chaotic circumstances. The movement's partisan attitude towards other Syrian political components included consistent attempts to have the upper hand on every official opposition coalition by forming the majority using different methods, such as creating more than one formation under different names but with affiliation to the MB.[39]

2.1.3.2. Secularists Parties

On the other side of the ideological spectrum lie secular parties, who differentiated themselves by, theoretically, upholding the

Syrian national agenda, and declaring their sets of values mainly by excluding any religious ideologies – namely Islamic – from influencing the political future of Syria. However, these secular parties were the least capable of leading the popular movement, no matter which label assigned themselves, be it Intellectual Elites, Liberals, Leftists, and Nationalists. They were incapable of gaining people's trust for different reasons. These included leaning towards ideological advocacy instead of practicing politics; and trying to spread their ideologies and terminologies that were, in many ways, associated historically with the West, and the regime who claim secularity although manipulating the Islamic discourse, according to the circumstances, to maintain its structure. Secular parties were not sufficiently alert to the importance and influence of religious ideologies in respect to the people of the region. These parties adopted a subtle struggle against Islam, including both cultural and faith dimensions, despite Islam's authoritative popular appeal. In doing so, they employed Westernization approaches, but these had negative associations and were destined to be ineffective. Their ideologies did not attempt to pragmatically engage with Islam, but rather keep those secularist ideologies pristine through blaming Islam. As a result, those parties missed the opportunity to bring cumulative change to people's social and cultural legacies. Consequently, this caused those parties to turn into closed oligarchies, blaming grassroots and their culture for any complications, including later armament. Thus, instead of upholding popular responsibility and providing competent leadership with a clear project and strategies, these parties sustained their elitist status, losing their leadership role and blaming their failure on the ignorance of the people.[40]

In summary, both secularist and Islamist parties used religion to maintain their respective ideological narratives. Both are "Islam-centred", either for or against, using it as the base for their rivalry, ideology, and practices. However, neither has presented a clear vision, strategy or project to help the people achieve their demands.

3. The Dilemma of Mass Leadership

After years of mass political passivity, Syria, since the beginning of the Uprising, has developed into a politicized society, which according to Sartori is:

"...a society that both takes part in the operations of the political system and is required for the more effective performance of the system."[41]

This politicized public created the challenge of organizing, representing, and leading in order to utilize this mass power effectively and turn it into an authoritative pressure tool. Usually, parties take on such roles and responsibilities, being the main vehicles for political participation and representation of the people by raising awareness and educating the population, articulating demands, recruiting political leadership and training them.[42]

One of the key predicaments the grassroots had faced since the Uprising was the absence of any kind of institutionalized structure to organize their activities on a large scale. Although local coordination committees tried to play this role at the onset of the Uprising, the increased span of popular participation required a more sophisticated form of organization and representation.[43] Even collective action institutions like syndicates, initiated during Hafiz al-Assad's presidency, which should have played the role of facilitating the organization of the masses, proved useless, if not disruptive, because they were designed to play a different role. Consequently, after the Uprising, people faced a void of any organizational contingent to realize their demands.[44]

The grassroots looked for institutionalized incubators to organize and lead their popular activism and integrate them under unifying goals and a common national umbrella. They expected opposition leaders and formations to fulfil the institutional gap,[45] but these were not prepared to meet the challenge, falling short of popular expectations, subsequently asserting the anti-party sentiment originated by the Ba'ath party legacy. The opposition formations never developed sufficient grassroots organizational and mobilizational capacity. They ignored the fact that the power of the masses was not merely dependent on numbers alone, but also realized through forming an organized and mobilized mass movement aimed at applying constant pressure on the regime and international powers to respond to popular demands.[46]

The marginalization of grassroots, who were at the core of the Syrian Uprising, was exemplified by the total lack of coordination with activists inside and outside Syria, and with other components of Syrian society.[47] Additionally, interaction with civil society organizations was curbed because of the belief that providing humanitarian aid through NGO’s would be sufficient to engage with the masses. This troubled relationship left no chance for grassroots organizations to participate effectively, depriving political parties of the potential power of its members.[48] Without such membership, parties cannot legitimately claim any representational role in deciding the future governmental structure of the country. On a more practical level, marginalization of party memberships weakens lines of financial and labour resources. On the other side, members also need parties in place as institutions for collective action. Only by engaging membership effectively can popular demands be made against a powerful organized regime.[49]

During the critical period of the popular Uprising, and with the prevailing authoritarian practices of the governing monocratic regime, political parties and leaders have increased responsibility to cultivate democratic culture and values in society. The awareness-raising process has to start from within parties through practical adaptation and fostering of these values and practices, such as boosting the participation of all members and tolerating their diverse ideas and suggestions, as well as encouraging new views, coupling this with clear decision-making process and abiding by it. Notwithstanding the importance of a clear socially inclusive strategy aimed at including women and marginalized minorities from different socio-economic backgrounds,[50] which hitherto opposition parties had failed to achieve due to the internal organizational and structural problems from which they suffered.[51]

Previous failings have included using populist speeches without raising grassroots awareness of essential concepts. Similarly, instead of being socially inclusive, parties have further alienated themselves from broader society by demonstrating a discriminatory attitude especially towards women, excluding them from decision-making positions and involving them only to satisfy the requirements and conditions of the international community. This method of conduct was exhibited by political parties across the spectrum, from left to right, which resulted in discouraging women from political participation, who instead turned to civic activism in their search for meaningful participation.[52]

In general, the way the opposition parties dealt with the masses resulted from several factors. First, the historical oppression of traditional opposition parties and political leaders, who were covertly working without any grassroots base or popular networks, resulted in a lack of experience in dealing with popular masses. This, in turn, created the tendency of many political personalities, who were involved in struggling with the regime before the Uprising, to claim leadership positions based on the sole merit of prior activism and struggle, regardless of any other necessary qualifications. Second, there was the inexperience of nascent parties, who were unready, structurally and organizationally, to engage the huge numbers of active masses. Instead, the only interaction these formations had was at the party level, which is characterized by competition and rivalry.[53] Finally, the problematic elitist nature of some formations, who considered themselves progressive elitists, denied any elemental role of the masses in politics. As a result, instead of actively interacting with grassroots and using the power of the organized masses as a tool to realize people's demands, parties sought power in two ways. Firstly, by using the tactic of being part of bigger coalitions and unions, and sometimes even splitting into more than one formation to count for more balloting power in any coalition or international conferences.[54] Secondly, parties tried to overcome inadequate popular representation by establishing relations with regional and international powers. This resulted in maximizing the role of those external powers in the Syrian conflict, additionally creating potential continuity of such influence in the future.[55] Thus, the generation of external-subordination dynamics rather than grassroots-representation was one reason for the failure to reach consensus on national principles in order to form a basis for any resolution of the Syrian conflict. More grassroots representation would have validated party power in any resolution or agreement. Besides, a representational role in the current period would probably have increased parties' chances for future engagement in the transitional period, or even any foreseen democratic elections.

3.1. Consequences of Political Parties Position towards the Masses

The incompetence and attitudes of political opposition formations towards public masses contributed to serious consequences for the popular movement. These formations – formal and informal – are accused of being one of the causes of fragmentation in public opinion towards key issues, betraying grassroots confidence. Moreover, the transformation of the grassroots Uprising into regime-opposition struggle over power led to the prioritization of international and regional support over popular representation. This resulted in underestimating the grassroots and wasting the potential competencies of many activists inside Syria and in the diaspora, who were eager to use their qualifications and skills to participate actively in achieving the democratic transition, which caused the Uprising to lose its momentum. Likewise, those parties could not attract new members, restraining themselves to founding members only, and so they could not represent grassroots interests, aspirations, and expectations, especially those of young people. Not only that, but many also encountered the state of mass resignation of their membership.[56] However, the inability to mobilize and organize grassroots was one of the main reasons that led to one of the most serious consequences of the Uprising, which was the militarization followed by the radicalization of the Uprising.[57]

The militarization of the Syrian Revolution began at the end of 2011, with civilians starting to use light weapons to protect themselves against the regime. In addition, some regular army officers and enlistees defected to the opposition upon refusing their commanders' orders to target civilians.[58] However, this development from peaceful demonstrations to militarization was the result of combined factors, including the increased brutality of the regime against protestors, the use of different kinds of armaments, denying the state of "uprising" in the first place, and declaring that what was happening was an international conspiracy, executed by a group of local terrorists, which implied the futility of any attempts to reach a political solution.[59]

Furthermore, the opposition's political leaders and formations were unable to save people from the regime's practices, and their concurrent incapacity to represent grassroots in the international fora further weakened any potential ability to do so.[60] In addition, there were discordant voices in the opposition, with some indifferent towards arms proliferation while others condemned protesters' resorting to militarism. The latter's denunciation of arming proved weak as they imparted no practical substitute action to those protesters. Armament was thus seen as a solution of sorts with some subsequently arguing that the problem was the chaos of armament rather than armament per se, in that it could have been used as a shield of the people's movement.[61]

At a later stage, with the regime losing control over some areas, and with resultant security vacuums, especially in border regions, radical groups started to rise, finding in those areas the perfect environment to control and expand. People found in those radical groups an alternative to opposition formations, since they provided what those formations could not. The fundamentalist organizations were more experienced in organizing and mobilizing youth, having a clear ideology, long experience gained from their involvement in other countries, generous funding, vast networks, strategic planning, and effective leadership. Those factors qualified them to take the lead in absorbing and using youth energies to achieve their hidden agendas by exploiting the desire of those youth to defeat the regime at any price.[62]

4. The Evolvement of Parties

LaPalombara and Weiner state that, "The creation of parties has been a continuous process. The historical graveyards are cluttered with parties which dominated the political scene, but which subsequently failed to adapt to new circumstances and therefore died, were absorbed by new more active movements, or withered into small marginal parties."[63]

The reasons for the emergence of political parties differ from one region to another, and there are different theories to explain the evolvement of parties.

4.1. Party Evolvement in Developed Countries

Western political scientists have generated a theory of evolution for the political party, with the cadre party of the nineteenth century transforming into the mass party that prevailed in the industrial era, then the catch-all party in the 1960s,[64] followed by the cartel party by 1990.[65] Most recently, we are witnessing the gradual emergence of the digital party.[66]

In the context of this paper, it is important to clarify the differences between cadre and mass parties, since parties in the region have rarely transformed into mass form, or any other party forms, so it is beneficial to consider the defining characteristics as set out below.

4.1.1. Cadre parties

A cadre party can be described as a primordial party structure that consists of a small group of matching social and political elites, exerting their influence over society with total apathy of the masses. With its individualistic tendencies, a cadre party is far from being a collective organization.[67]

4.1.2. Mass parties

Unlike a cadre party, a mass party can be identified as a collective action organization aiming at integrating a large segment of the population into politics by organizing them into a hierarchical structure, occupied by a huge bureaucracy of political professionals. This type dominated the industrial era reflecting the technological, economic, and social structure reflecting the concept of big factories. Mass parties bring together the public through gathering their demands and interests, and they depend on grassroots for their financial and human resources. Hence, they seek to widen their networks by recruiting more members, through whom the mass party derives its legitimacy and power.[68]

It is crucial to associate the legitimacy of a party with its respective roles, a legitimacy that is established on the popular base it develops; a legitimacy by which mass parties emerge both to strengthen and to control the access of the new masses into the political system.[69]

The critical transition from a cadre into a mass party[70] requires new party functions attuned to modernizing society, leading, mobilizing, and organizing masses and articulating their demands, in addition to providing the means through which the government and the people can communicate and connect.[71] The historical theory explaining the development of political parties from a modernization perspective looks at three “crises” as the main reasons driving party evolvement; legitimacy, participation and integration. Legitimacy crises of regimes in power lead to the crisis of participation, parties evolve to be the vehicle for that participation, and through doing so parties play a crucial role in building a joint national identity while integrating different categories into that identity.[72]

In a simple comparison between a cadre and a mass party, we can identify core contrasts. A cadre party has a small number of members, seeking no recruitment. It is not open for membership except by formal nomination. Overall, it does not depend on numerical strength, rather, it counts on the influence of its members, and hence, it appeals to the elites and excludes the masses. A cadre party is reliant on the donations of the elite for its financial resources. The mass party by contrast has an open membership and it is dependent on its membership for financial resources and not a small number of private donors. It is essential for mass parties to raise the awareness of its members and educate them to prepare them for future official positions at both leadership and administration levels.[73]

4.2. The Evolvement of Parties in Underdeveloped Countries

As explained above, the evolution of the party in Western countries has gone through a number of stages; from aristocratic cliques, into a small group of notables, factions, cadre parties and developing into mass-participation parties with the advent of parliament, electoral systems and plebiscitary democracy.[74]

However, this parliamentary theory explanation cannot be applied to the underdeveloped countries, due to the differences in the historical conditions those societies went through. For underdeveloped countries in the Middle East, specifically Arabic countries, these went from being under Ottoman control at the beginning of the twentieth century, into the colonialist era under the control of European countries. This legacy bequeathed no parliamentary existence or democratic institutions, with colonial mandate systems mostly focused on control and subordination, leaving a lack of democratic apparatus post decolonialization.[75]

Nonetheless, even with different historical conditions, both in developed and underdeveloped countries, preliminary formations were similar in that they were compounds of a small number of like-minded men, based on close relationships, common ideologies or common interests. The difference is that, according to Duverger, parties in Western countries continued their development from "cadre parties" into mass party forms.[76] By contrast, parties in underdeveloped countries persisted in the form of a cadre party, with rare exceptional cases. This was due to the conditions of the colonial system, which generally did not allow parliamentary or constitutional experience to exist or develop. One example is what happened in Syria in 1920, when the French bombed Damascus and forced their mandate instead of respecting the Syrian peoples' desire for an independent constitution.[77]

In summary, parties either retained their cadre nature or took the shape of liberation movements against external occupation and sometimes later on against internal post-colonial governments, who were seen as sympathetic allies of previous occupying powers but were deemed to be acting against the will or interests of the majority. Therefore, the legacies of occupation, foreign subsidies, and cultural hegemony are important background factors affecting the modernization of the region's countries in which parties could supposedly play a major role. Hence, political parties, instead of adopting the role of building integration and national identity or developing new systems, are more focussed simply on assuming a position of power.

5. Syrian Opposition Parties Case

Reflecting on and applying what is mentioned above with regard to Syria’s popular uprising, it would be expected that opposition parties would assume the structure of a mass party to facilitate the participation process of the people. Mass parties would have been the most appropriate approach to organize, mobilize, and lead the grassroots. However, opposition parties opted for the cadre style of party, excluding the masses and discarding the importance of integrating them within the political realm. In doing so, parties have kept grassroots in a passive role and have limited their political influence in favour of party elites.[78] Moreover, there is another potential risk on the horizon. In discord with the framework of modernizing theory, in which crisis forms the stimulus by which parties emerge, there is by contrast a high expectancy that parties will fail to evolve and modernize after passing the crises. Thus, the type and track of development of those parties and the roles they may play in future could well remain static.

5.1. Future Prospects of Syrian Parties

Syrian parties, who appear to be preoccupied with their intra- and inter-party struggles, should look for new resources and practices to re-legitimize their role in the ten-year-long conflict. They need to grow into major players by attracting grassroots support, rather than seeking foreign power endorsements. It is necessary for the Syrian people demanding democratic transition not to be led by parties who, cynically, do not take on the burden of listening to their voices or engaging them in the discourse about decisions related to key issues of their political future. The excuses used for excluding masses, such as political turbulence and instability, or the political ignorance of the masses proclaimed by the political elite are unjustified. These kinds of exclusionary policies have not yielded any political progress in a decade.

Syrian parties with their inept performance and abandonment of their role as vehicles of mass mobilization have evacuated more space for civil society organizations to play a more significant role. Unlike parties, those organizations have proved more able to attract young people from different walks of life because of their relative ideological neutrality. Those organizations have deployed youth talents and competences by providing the opportunity for participation, which parties could not offer.[79]

Thus far, parties' performances have proved disappointing to people, and no political formation has been created to fulfil the Syrian peoples' aspirations.[80] With their weak internal organization and the crisis of public confidence reflected in low membership, existing parties are in dire need of reform. It is vital for parties to find new ways to regain the trust of the masses in order to claim their legitimacy.

To begin with, for a political party to be responsive to the needs of society and to deal with its existing complications, it should have a clear perception of the nature of the relationship it will develop with the masses. Different tools to engage people, mobilize followers, and raise awareness should be developed. For example, it is important to have a popular platform, to interact with a wide variety of grassroots segments by addressing different aspects of their lives. In addition, it is essential to keep up with popular trends and the spirit of the times by utilizing available tools and technology. Similarly, political parties should be clear about the kind of relationships intended with other parties, organizations, and regional and international powers, to avoid becoming a tool in the hands of any foreign bodies, especially in times of crisis.[81]

This paper advocates that internet and new technological advances might represent a chance for such reform. Digital technologies can play an effective role in shaping Syrian political parties' activities. Opposition political parties have not used internet technologies to their maximum capacity. Although using those technologies will not instantaneously solve all the mounting problems of apathy and distrust, they might yet provide the type of organizational change that will help narrow the gap between elites and grassroots, and to positively effect parties' roles and performance.

The following section seeks to advance models for digitizing parties in the Syrian context, including how technology might be used as a tool to regain the confidence of the grassroots and develop new possibilities for participation. In addition, it suggests opportunities to assist in challenging the status quo – engaging existing players and influencing their power. The key matter for exploration is therefore: What role can digital parties play in bringing about democratic transition in Syria and other Arab Spring countries?

6. The Internet in Syria

The internet was introduced in Syria when Bashar al-Assad was the head of the Syrian Computer Society before he took over the presidency. The introduction of the internet was done for multiple purposes including economic modernization, legitimization of the regime and the mobilization of its supporters.[82] However, the regime was also vigilant about the political risks and security concerns associated with introducing the internet. Yet, despite significant restrictions to control the usage of the internet in virtual politics,[83] to prevent its use by the political opposition to coordinate or carry out deliberations, the opposition circumvented the limitations through a variety of different technical solutions.[84]

The use of the internet by opposition activists culminated in the era of the Arab Spring. Social media in particular played an important role: first, in transmitting the Uprising contagion to Syria after sweeping other Arab countries, and then by igniting the Uprising inside Syria, which was triggered by spreading news about peaceful demonstrations, mobilizing activists, organizing protests, and exposing the brutality of the regime forces against peaceful protesters.[85] This played a very important role since the regime evacuated all journalists from the country following the inception of the 2011 Uprising.[86]

Activists utilized the internet to its full capacity, unlike opposition political parties, who were unable to exploit the internet to engage people, or even to use it as a marketing tool in their favour. For instance, parties' websites have never been used in the Syrian context as a participatory or organizational tool. While some parties have websites, others settled for creating accounts on different social media platforms. Nevertheless, websites were limited to serve administrative purposes like displaying information about a party's founding members, activities, recent news, promoting the ideas and initiatives of party leaders, and to announce party positions towards political events and developments.[87] Such websites do have the potential to be an interactivity medium instead of limiting the message to one-way communication.[88] However, using the internet to its maximum potential requires, in the first place, a willingness from decision-makers in the party, which has previously been absent for different reasons, as Hague and Uhm argue, "This reluctance no doubt derives from a nexus of psychological, structural, and institutional reasons."[89]

In the Syrian context, the internet has never been used as a tool for building and maintaining relationships with grassroots, and new communication and information technologies have never been used to build inter-party or party-grassroots relationships in a trial to regain their trust. Parties have failed to exploit potential participatory elements of technology. According to statistics, the number of internet users increased by 422,000 (+5.5%) between 2019 and 2020, and by January 2020 there were 8.11 million internet users in Syria. Around six million of these were social media users in February 2020.[90] These numbers are from inside Syria only, but might be substantially more if Syrians living abroad are considered. However, there is very little authoritative research, if any, on the internet usage in refugee camps and amongst internally displaced people, but then again it can be inferred that user levels are likely to be low considering the poor state of telecommunications infrastructure and generally appalling living standards for these people.

6.1. Scenario of Change: Digitizing Parties

The reassertion of Ba'ath party rule continues after more than forty years, and post-Revolution opposition parties' performances have done little to dispel the negative notion of party within Syria, although it should be noted that negativity towards parties is by no means an exclusively Syrian phenomenon.[91] Many studies show that people have increasing doubts about traditional parties and lack faith in them being a reliable representative of their demands, some doubting even the necessity of the party for organizing collective action. This negative notion is reflected by declining membership and decreasing voter turnout in general elections. Consequently, parties are losing essential financial support and sources of volunteers, both on-the-ground supporters and activists.[92]

Moreover, recent distrust in political parties has been capitalised on and encouraged by the different alternatives that hold appeal for people, such as NGOs and social media platforms. Those alternatives experience the dilemma of not being parties, yet nevertheless needing to aggregate the numerous demands and interests of the people in organized programs.[93]

Nonetheless, the historical evolution of parties is a continuous process, and the roles of the party keep changing to fit the conditions of society. Driven by social and political movements requesting the change of current dominant systems,[94] the use of the internet by digital parties in response to the demands of change is a mere reflection of the technological advancement of the current era and a trial experiment to seek to address the prevailing socio-economic conditions of society.[95]

6.2. What is a Digital Party?

In his definition of digital party**,** Gerbaudo mentions that "The term digital party attempts to capture the common essence seen across a number of quite diverse political formations that have risen in recent years and which share the common attempt of using digital technology to devise new forms of political participation and democratic decision-making."[96]

In other words, a digital party is a new political formation that uses digital technologies to facilitate direct democracy instead of a representative one in which people choose their representatives to act on their behalf, and purportedly remain accountable to the people. However, with politicians retaining power in representative democracy, the aim is to devolve monopolistic political power from the hands of politicians to ordinary people through mass participation via digital platforms, while replacing the bureaucracy of traditional parties with direct communication between membership and leadership.

6.3. Digital Party emergence

Digital parties emerged at the beginning of the millennium and were further boosted after the Global Financial Crisis of 2007-08 alongside the growth of social media.[97] By utilizing such technology, digital parties promise to bring back people's control over their own political lives, and to respond to popular needs and aspirations. It involves them in shaping the political sphere through large-scale interactivity and participation in setting-up polices, and joining decision-making processes, while eliminating the huge bureaucracy of traditional parties. Such bureaucracy is seen as being an obstacle to direct contact between members and leadership and an impediment to holding their representatives accountable for political decisions and outcomes.[98]

Mimicking social media platform concepts, digital parties are trying to use the internet to bring about access to participation for a vast membership base. People are encouraged to participate in this direct democracy with zero cost membership. Using digital party platforms in expressing their day-to-day concerns and coming up with initiatives to solve them these platforms engage members to actively discuss problems and suggest solutions. Besides voting on crucial issues and policies, they also include party leadership positions and other details related to party strategy.

There are many parties, movements and campaigns that are described as digital parties, yet these formations differ in their degree of adaptation to digital technology and structure, while they all share the common embrace of the digital democracy agenda to reach the change for which they advocate.

One of the earliest examples are pirate parties in North Europe, the first of which was established in Sweden in 2006 which gained two seats in the European Parliament in the European Parliament election. The Pirate Party International (PPI)[99] was established in Brussels in 2009 and coordinated with several other pirate parties in different North European countries – such as Germany, the Czech Republic and Iceland – with the latter becoming the third largest party in Iceland in the 2017 legislative elections. Nevertheless, some digital parties have achieved electoral results and others have not. Parties which failed include, for instance, the parties initiated in South America using the same pirate party concept but with different names, such as Partido de la Red (Party of the Net) in Argentina, and Wikipartido (Wiki Party) in Mexico.

One of the most successful manifestations of digital formations has been the MoVimento 5 Stelle M5S (Five Star Movement). After its initiation in 2009, with gradual success, it became the first party in the Italian parliament subsequent to the national election of 2018. Another example is Podemos in Spain. In 2014, shortly after its foundation, five members from the party were elected to the European Parliament after receiving eight per cent of the votes in the European elections. Moreover, it came third in the parliamentary elections of 2015-16.[100]

In the Syrian case, the concept of the digital party has the potential to end elite domination over the political process, and to convert grassroots political apathy into active participation by engaging them, and encouraging them to take part in the political future of the country. Arguably, one solution would be that opposition parties transform themselves from their current cadre party form into mass party form. However, there are various obstacles to achieve such transformation. One of which is the geographical and physical barriers. With Syrians scattered all over the world, this represents financial and logistical challenges for any physical gatherings, making it difficult to implement a mass party format. On the other hand, it is important, as well, to reach out to people inside Syria, whether in areas under opposition or under regime control. Therefore, it is crucial to use innovative techniques of utilizing digital technologies, given that significant functions of traditional parties, such as interacting with people, educating them, and raising their awareness, are achievable by utilising the internet.

6.4. Digital Party Features

6.4.1. Membership

Digital parties have redefined and reshaped the political party's membership concept through mimicking the sign-in membership of social media platforms. By doing so, digital parties are ending their financial dependence on membership fees, which is the custom of traditional parties. This new shape of membership can be looked at as a sort of solution for declining party membership over the years.[101] In addition, new networks can be created, based on a relation with members in which communication is easy, efficient and cost-effective.[102]

This new membership aims to involve the greatest possible number of people, regardless of any socio-economic considerations. Hence, the target is to enhance the numerical advantage, which by implication promises the ability to mobilize and organize the masses. Furthermore, the large number of members constitutes an immense base of active volunteers who can be enlisted as sources of free political assistance. This can engage even less active members to spread the word about the party through the minimal digital activity of ‘liking’ or ‘sharing’ a party’s posts. Hence, digital parties evade the need for a paid cadre and bureaucracy by replacing the element of the ‘apparatus’ of traditional parties with a participatory platform, disintermediating the relation between members and leaders of the party.[103]

6.4.2. Platforms

According to Gerbaudo, “Platforms are digital systems that act as execution environments of various programs and applications.”[104] The platform is essential for a digital party; in fact, it replaces the physical address traditional parties used to have. It is a cost-effective way of engaging people, cutting overhead costs like salaries, offices and other related expenses of the traditional party. It is a versatile tool used to promote the party’s values, with the collecting of data constantly allowing for the adjustment of party strategy accordingly. It facilitates interaction between members and leaders by providing two-way communication channels, while offering the ability to control the level of feedback. It also facilitates decision-making processes by eliminating the vertical multi-layered method used by traditional parties, instead relying on more straightforward bottom-up processes. Platforms also create networks of specific structures with different degrees of privacy for members. However, such functions can be limited by the design of the platform which may qualify the extent of influence such platforms can have on promoting the political participation of the members.

Platforms are designated in diverse ways to serve the needs and goals of the party. Some parties would use purpose-built platforms, while others would use different ready-made interactive platforms, including social media platforms. Nevertheless, even with the creation of a customized platform, digital parties should not neglect the importance of social media platforms in spreading their messages and values to the widest audience possible. Different formations use different platforms for involving the masses in politics, such as the Rousseau platform of the Five Star Movement or the pirate parties use of the LiquidFeedback application. The goal of using these platforms is to disintermediate both the relations between different members and also between the members and leaders, thereby dispensing with the usual bureaucracy.[105]

6.4.3. Participation

With the existence of new, easier to use, free-membership interactive platforms, participation is becoming a viable choice for members. Although there is a scarcity of studies – if any – about the correlation between internet use and political activism in politically unstable countries, including Syria, there are some studies in Western countries showing the rise of political participation amongst people who use the internet, even in the absence of political drive.

Digital parties promise direct democracy and open participation, enabling people to express their opinions on key issues about their lives, which is an essential task of the party since, as noted by Sartori "parties are channels of expression".[106] The internet provides a channel of freedom of expression and allows the right of ordinary people to freely exchange information and materials of interest. By using the internet as their main tool of communication, digital parties are enhancing mass participation by reaching out to grassroots wherever located, interacting with them, and building and maintaining relationships with them. This, furthermore, allows various activities to take place, including soliciting people's opinions and receiving their initiatives, crowdsourcing their ideas, deliberating topics, balloting on different issues, enabling mass contribution, and accessing decision-making processes. These activities all contribute towards constituting the major cores of political participation.[107]

This kind of participation is driven by the advancement of internet communication technologies that provide the tools to facilitate these new methods, with social media platforms in particular providing a comparatively easy and inexpensive means of communication to reach the masses easily. However, the dependence on the internet for digital parties will also require them to be agile; to remain relevant they need to rapidly adapt policies to changing environments, especially paying attention to the aspirations of younger generations who are the majority users.

Furthermore, the internet is a tool for communication between the public and their political representatives to achieve democratic aims. This two-way open flow of information shapes the quality of representativeness of such parties. Therefore, reclaiming representation of the grassroots will be an important gain attained by digital parties. Similarly, the transparency of policies and decision-making strategies resulting from digital approaches is a step towards the accountability and good governance of those parties.

Finally, the easy, open, unconditional membership eliminates any discrimination based on gender, religion, ethnicity, or socio-economic conditions. This results in the opportunity for more inclusiveness and equal participation, especially for women who have traditionally been politically underrepresented due to challenges such as domestic responsibilities preventing participation in physical meetings.

6.5. Additional Benefits of Digital Parties in the Syrian Context

The opportunities of wide outreach of digital parties provided by the internet have the potential to facilitate the organizing and mobilizing of grassroots, making it easier for leadership to call people to action and to organize online and offline activities, making the digital party active in the public sphere. This would overcome the declining collective action through traditional representatives. Furthermore, there is the ability to organize online training sessions to spread knowledge and awareness about important issues to the party membership.[108]

There is also the ability to extend political reach via organized channels offered by the methods of digital parties. In Syria, the opposition may have the chance to promote the Uprising ideals throughout the country and around the world through the creative means of discussion groups and emails, to create networks of resistance to authoritarian state power and in support of democratic transition by using the internet as a communication tool to spread their message to build domestic and international support for reform.

Due to the relatively low-cost of the internet, resorting to digital form will enable parties with limited resources to increase their media representation and secure their existence.[109] Parties that previously received little or no coverage in the traditional media will have a platform from which to reach a much larger audience, replacing reliance on traditional media to spread their messages. This will be important given the modest existence of the opposition in traditional (non-social) media channels, and the scarcity of opposition satellite channels, with some failing to continue after their inception,[110] and others prioritizing the private agendas and interests of their owners over any national agenda.

6..6. Challenges of Digital Parties

The challenges of digital parties include internet-related concerns such as cyber-security, lack of privacy, protection of sensitive data from third parties, absence of standards and regulations.[111] Yet, there are other challenges related to the ability of digital parties to commit to their pronounced objectives. One potential risk is that instead of instigating direct democracy**,** it instead shifts into plebiscitary democracy. The latter would be one in which the role of citizenry is limited to accepting or refusing referendums or initiatives proposed by party leaderships, without being part of the process of suggesting, deliberating and forming the policies of the party.[112] To avoid this, digital parties should involve people by interacting with members and providing the options for crowdsourcing, while being open to various ideas rather than trying to use people's votes to implement the vision of the party's leadership. Similarly, they need to use technology to advance participatory qualities that they currently lack and avoid using it simply to empower the party's existing practices.

Another challenge is that digital parties tend to attract a specific group of constituents who are not representative of the population as a whole. Those participants are commonly highly educated, with proficiency in using the internet, typically meaning the active, skilled younger population. This, in turn, would result in excluding people with few digital skills, and with no or little access to internet. To overcome this, digital parties have to come up with new mechanisms for engaging citizens and using offline approaches and innovative solutions. For example, by using complementary non-digital resources this could attract a wider audience while avoiding the risk of nominal membership, turning members into mere spectators with diminished activism or commitment, which is usually associated with adopting social media membership styles.

However, the involvement of the masses in decision-making and the consequent necessity of adapting to the results of their demands and wishes would raise the risk of transforming parties' original principles and values, which could undermine a party's credentials in terms of what it stands for in the first place. Moreover, the open membership with an open platform of discussion and decision-making might expose the party to capture by opponents. In the Syrian case, because of the current conflict, the risk will be higher for anti-regime parties with the existence of the Assad regime's utilization of an electronic army.[113] Moreover, the high tension and sensitivity at this stage of the conflict will present the risk of increasing polarization of opinion among the opposition itself from one side, and all Syrians in general, since people tend to be attracted to others who share their opinions and values.

Finally, applying digital technologies is not the goal per se. Using them will not overcome the popular distrust of existing parties. Rather, they are tools that should be used to organize and combine online and offline activism to engage grassroots and overcome their exclusion from the political sphere. In addition, they offer the prospect of narrowing the gap between masses and elites.

Conclusion

Syrian parties suffer from many internal and external problems, with mass-exclusionary practices being one of the main roots of the difficulties. By marginalizing grassroots elements, the political action of opposition parties appears to have lost direction during the Syrian conflict. Instead of being vehicles for collective action, mass participation, and public representation, they retreated to cadre- or elite-type formations, who only care about their own interests and share of the political scene. Additionally, instead of assuming their role in modernizing Syrian society, raising awareness, educating citizens and building a common national identity, they conceded those roles, instead following narrow ethnic or ideological interests, and sometimes foreign agendas. Consequently, opposition parties lost the trust and representation of the grassroots, and at the same time wasted the potential capacities and qualifications of those masses.

To re-engage the public in the political process, the format of digital party could well precisely represent the inclusive tool and innovative solution that is needed. With its open, easily accessible, participatory platform allowing for transparent bottom-up policies and decision-making processes, this might change popular apathy and distrust, and motivate the masses to participate again, while also holding those parties accountable. While digital parties alone will not be able to tackle pervasive complications of opposition formation, they should be deployed to restore trust and legitimacy in the political landscape.

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2

Military and Politics in Syria (1946-1963):

Alliances, Conflicts and Purges

KHOULOUD AL ZGHAYARE

Introduction

This research[1] seeks to examine the relationship between political and military institutions in Syria from the French evacuation and Syrian independence in 1946 until the 1963 coup d'état when the military seized power. While the coup initially had a civilian front, it immediately became apparent that it was unequivocally militaristic. Furthermore, the research sheds light on the impact of the French mandate on the following period of Syrian history, as most post-independence political parties, as well as the core of the Syrian military, were formed during this period. By taking state formation as a starting point, this research aims to provide a better understanding of the relationship between military and politics in subsequent stages, an issue that is both old and new.

The problematic relationship between the military and politics is underscored by the blurred boundaries between these institutions, where collaboration and interferences are common. The study first examines the pattern of cooperation and overlap, through which politicians built military alliances and collaborated with the army several times to assume power and advance political and partisan interests. Political parties had loyalist military blocs that subscribed to their respective party's ideologies and supported their political goals. This contributed to the transformation of the army into an arena that reflected, as well as reinforced, political conflict. Moreover, political orientations varied within the military, where personnel were both ambitious and held influence over political decisions. The army thus moved beyond its primary role of protecting the country from external aggression and failed to preserve its neutrality towards institutions of civilian rule. As a result, a mutually beneficial relationship materialised, with each institution recruiting followers from the other and expanding its patronage networks. Alliances and interferences ensued, where politicians used their connections in the military to further their interests, and vice versa.

The study then explores the competitive and conflicting relationship between the military and politics, which led to a series of exclusions and purges that exhausted and weakened both institutions. The army often challenged the legitimacy of the political authority, its political, social and economic orientations, as well as its position on international and regional conflicts. The army repeatedly intervened in politics and imposed its views on decision-making institutions, disrupted their work, or staged military coups. In alignment with party interests, some politicians attempted to curtail the power of the military and weaken its blocs, while others saw the army as a tool to wield power, and chose to bring it to their side rather than antagonize it.

There are few studies that explore the relationship between military and politics in Syria during this time period. The most prominent are the works of Torrey (1964), Owen (1978), and Van Dusen (1971) which examine the role of the military in politics, the formulation of the two institutions, the social background of their members and the conflict between them. The remaining the studies fall into two categories. The first either has a solely historic or political approach, as in the study of Kamal Deeb (2011) on the contemporary history of Syria, the works of Uthman (2001) and Ferzat (2019) on political parties in Syria, and Seale (1989) and Van Dam (1995) on the struggle for power in Syria. These studies focus on political events in historical context without analysing the discourses each side used to legitimise its own practices. Furthermore, these studies examine political parties and the military more so than their interactive relationship and structural interests.

The second category, on the other hand, has a socio-historic analytical approach. Some studies are based on a Marxist approach, such as the works of Abdullah Hanna (1973; 2011) on Syrian political parties. Others are based on approaches inspired by Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, as in the works of Batato (2014) and Khoury (1993; 1997) which base their analyses on the narrative history of the elite’s origins and development, and on class and ethno-religious conflict. Moreover, some of these studies focus on a particular elite, including the works of Hinnebush (1990; 2011) and Rabinovich (1972) that examine the Ba’ath Party and Syrian Army during the Ba’athist period.

The study builds on existing informative and analytical works, and introduces a new layer of testimonies from social actors, in both political and military fields, through the use of their memoirs. This forms a link between historical, political, social and personal readings of this period. The study highlights the role of social actors in important events and reviews their speeches in an effort to better understand the choices they made. Furthermore, the research traces the origins of the relationship between political institutions, including parties and leaders in power and in opposition, and military institutions represented by army officers and military blocs, aiming to form a nexus between political and historical studies, memoirs and archives.

The study is composed of three chapters. The first chapter examines the structure of prominent political and military elites that occupied the forefront of Syrian politics post-independence.

It reviews the historical context in which the elite originated, the environments in which they were active, the classes they targeted, and the class, cultural and ideological composition of their leaders, in order to understand their choice of alliances and struggles. Three elites are examined, starting with the traditional ruling elite represented by the National Bloc which later split into two parties, the National Party and the People's Party. Second is the emerging ideological elite and their associated parties that formed following the decline of the traditional elite whose discourse had failed to adapt to societal changes. Parties chosen for the study include the League of Nationalist Action, the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, the Syrian Communist Party, and the Muslim Brotherhood. Third is the military elite that played a pivotal role in Syrian political life during this period. The study categorizes this elite into two generations: the first generation was formed prior to independence within the framework of the French military establishment, and the second was formed after independence within the national military establishment.

The second chapter examines the changing alliances among these three elites. It looks at the grounds for alliance and highlights the role of local affiliations, loyalties and political interests in moulding these alliances. It also examines the divisions and blocs that formed following internal dissent on social and agriculture issues, corruption, wealth distribution, the republican system, and support for the army. There was further disagreement surrounding foreign affairs, most importantly on the nature of Arab unity, Western political involvement and conspiracies, and cooperation with regional and international axes with interests in Syria. The section explores how the emerging ideological and military elites wove their alliances and cemented their legitimacy to challenge the traditional elite based on a discourse that adopted issues of modernity, the social issue and a clear stance towards external aggression. Finally, it examines the impact of internal and external factors on political stability in Syria, the rise of left-wing politics, and the union with Egypt.

The final chapter examines the political deployment of the military, the militaristic deployment of politicians and vice versa, how the military built a discourse that legitimized its intervention in politics, and the backdrop to the accusatory discourse exchanged between civilian politicians and the military. The section sheds light on the role of exclusions and purges that were carried out on a political-partisan basis or with a revenge-interest agenda in the collapse of political and military institutions. The section then examines how these circumstances paved the way for the Ba’ath’s rise to power in the 1960s, as it worked on the integration of military institutions into the party’s cadres and established an ideological army. The party was only able to put an end to the tense relationship between politicians and the military after the civilian wing of the Ba'ath was excluded and the military wing assumed leadership. Finally, the section looks at how and why the formation of blocs and factions within the military took place on a clannist-sectarian basis, after they had previously been on a political-ideological basis. This led to a series of coups and coup attempts that lasted until a new period of rule began in 1970. While the following period was more stable as the government effectively prevented military coups, it did so by suspending political pluralism, thus hindering the creation of a modern democratic state.

The study adopts a socio-political and economic approach to examining the structures, discourses and practices of the elite by linking them to local, regional and international historical contexts. It relies on primary resources including documents, speeches, memoirs and political writings of politicians and the military. It also utilizes secondary resources that examine this period in Syrian history. The study aims to provide answers to the following questions: is the competition and conflict between the military and political elites attributed to social-class factors, political-ideological factors, or is it simply a struggle for power and influence? What made institutions of the Syrian Army vulnerable to factionalism and bloc formation at times on a partisan-political basis, and at others on a clannist-sectarian basis? And finally, did military intervention in politics contribute to the failure of building a state with a pluralistic, democratic, and stable political system, or did the failure to establish such a state contribute to the army's rebellion and intervention in politics?

This study will be published in three parts. The first discusses the sociocultural-ideological composition of the Syrian elites, while the second and third parts discuss subsequent alliances and divisions, the crisis of political instability and military intervention in politics and vice versa.

1. Sociocultural and Ideological Composition of the Syrian Elite

1.1. Traditional Ruling Elite

The traditional elite that led the struggle for independence, and later ruled over Syria, were mainly descended from members of the pan-Arab nationalist faction of landowning bureaucrats; those who entered an ideological struggle, rather than a class struggle, with fellow members of their class as they competed for positions in the Ottoman state following the events of 1860.[2] Conflict arose surrounding the administration and distribution of privileges amongst themselves. Following the coup of 1908,[3] the countercoup of 1909[4]and the ensuing Turkification policies, the elite split up into a pan-Arab nationalist-oriented group that fell short of opportunities in the Ottoman state, and a group that remained loyal to the Ottoman state. The ideologies of the latter subsequently shifted with the changing tides and interests following the arrival of King Faisal bin Hussein's forces[5] in Syria in 1918 to establish the United Arab State and proclaim independence from the Ottoman Empire.

A liberal pan-Arab nationalist elite had begun to take form since the early 20th century. They were influenced by the 19th century rise of European nationalism that was promulgated by foreign schools and missionaries and was supported by the interests of the growing Syrian commercial society and European commercial organisations. This elite was composed of members of the feudal class, large urban and rural families, the new aristocracy from various sects, members of the General Assembly, and independent professionals and students in places such as Istanbul and Paris.[6] Under these circumstances, the new nationalist thought was born, and on its margins, national blocs and independence parties were formed.[7]

Early party formations appeared under the Arab constitutional government (1918-1920), the majority of which advocated for pan-Arab nationalism. These included the Young Arab Society (*Al-Fatat*), the Arab Independence Party, and the Syrian Covenant Society (*Al-'Ahd*) which were composed of Syrians and Arabs from Lebanon, Iraq and Palestine. Others, such as the Syrian Unionist Party and the Syrian National Party, limited their agendas to Syria while advocating for stronger nationalist and cultural ties with Arab peoples, as they believed the new Syrian state to be part of a wider nation. Following French occupation and the granting of freedom of association, the first Syrian political party, the People's Party, was formed. It was founded by Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar and Damascene figures Fakhri al-Baroudi, Ihsan al-Sharif, Nazih Muayyad al-Azm, Faris al-Khoury, Hassan al-Hakim and Saeed Haidar. The political agenda was announced at the founding conference on June 5, 1925, aiming to unite nationalist ranks into a leading political organisation. The National Bloc was created towards the end of 1926 following the declaration of the French High Commissioner for Syria and Lebanon, Henri Ponsot, to discuss France's mandatory role. A conference led by Hashim Al-Atassi was held in Beirut in October 1927, calling for a clarification of the role of French protection.[8] The National Bloc started to expand as nationalist exiles were allowed to return to Syria following the 1928 amnesty.[9] The party laid down its founding principles at the Homs conference in November 1932, demanding unity of Syrian lands.

There were several reasons behind the formation of the National Bloc and its prevalence in Syrian politics. The first related to rising concerns over regional conditions of fragmentation, the erection of customs barriers between countries of the Arab Mashreq, subsequent changes in economic relations, and trends of industrial and commercial movements. This drove people of commerce, industry, and agriculture, who hailed from major urban and rural landowning families, to band together in order to preserve their interests against foreign companies that had been granted access to the country by the mandate. The second reason was that the elite were worried about the French creating cadres of employees that would challenge their social and political standing. In order to appease the elite and contain any notions of rebellion, the mandate administration chose to promote Syrian products, the Syrian economy, and the establishment of companies run by the elite. The third reason was that national elite leaders noticed a shift in French policy and perceived an increased possibility that France would sign the treaty of 1936.[10] Finally, the elite leadership had to unite in light of Hashemites and Saudis vying for influence over political streams. They moved to protect Syrian interests, reinforcing their role in domestic politics, as more Arab regions moved towards forming independent states.[11]

Following the 1943 parliamentary elections, opposition to the National Bloc began to form. This opposition was made up of two political streams. Members of the first stream belonged to the same class and intellectual background as the ruling elite, but diverged on internal and external policies. Some were parliamentary candidates, and others were members of parliament aspiring to become ministers. This stream was headed by Nazim al-Qudsi (1905-1998) and Rushdi al-Kikhya (1899-1988), two national figures from the upper bourgeois families of Aleppo. They both began their political careers with the National Bloc and exited the party in 1938-1939 after negotiations with France on the ratification of the 1936 Treaty fell through. Al-Qudsi and Kikhya became the figureheads of parliamentary opposition until 1949. In 1945, they formed the Constitutional Front in parliament, which later became the People's Party in 1948. The Constitutional Bloc represented parliamentary opposition to the pro-government National Bloc. Neither bloc had a clearly defined agenda or an official list of members. It was thus difficult to discern different bloc members unless they provided explicit statements of positionality.[12]

Members of the second stream belonged to the smaller landowning class and were fundamentally opposed to the ideas and policies of the ruling elite. The majority were educated youth with ambitions for power and to make changes to government policies. Most notable among them was Akram al-Hourani (1911-1996), who came from a middle-class landowning family that had squandered its fortune.

Political blocs and parties of the traditional elite developed as well-known figures of social and political status joined. Relationships within the party were built on familial and neighbourhood ties, kinship, marriage, school friendships, and previous participation in national organizations and associations. They lacked party organization and discipline, and remained closed to outsiders. In effect, they were an exclusive circle of elite families who possessed and exercised social, economic, and political power.

The National Bloc, like the People's Party before it, was a homogeneous group. More than 90 percent of its leaders were Sunni residents of inner cities, mainly Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, and Hama. Over 60 percent were either landowning bureaucrats or educated landowners from the traditional upper class. Moreover, 25 percent came from wealthy or middle-class merchant families, while only 10 percent were of the landless employee class.[13]

Members of this elite were highly educated and well-equipped for political and administrative positions. Most of them received a secular education in politics, law, administration, and medicine at universities in Istanbul and Europe, or the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut. They thus obtained considerable cultural capital that reinforced their financial capital, and vice versa. The large income they received from land rent enabled them to dedicate time to studies and travel. Only those with financial capital were able to acquire cultural capital that they would subsequently utilize to reinforce their financial capital, power, and property. It is worth noting that members of these parties were of similar age groups, and therefore of the same generation. As for their diverse origins, which included Arab, Turkish and Kurdish, these notions were overshadowed by the choice of Arabism as both an ideology and an identity. To demonstrate, the National Bloc hailed from early pan-Arab national societies, such as the Young Arab Society, that defended the Arab identity.

These common sociocultural and intellectual environments generated similar interests among the affluent and educated class elite. These included reading, collecting books, poetry, music, art, traveling, fashion, and an affinity for foreign languages.

Following independence in 1946, three main political blocs formed in parliament in 1947. The first was the National Party which grew from the remnants of the National Bloc. Members of the Bloc called for a conference in April 1947 in Damascus, during which the National Party was established. Saad Allah al-Jabiri was chosen for party leadership. He was succeeded upon his death by Nabih al-Azma, who resigned in 1948, with Abd al-Rahman al-Kayyali assuming party leadership. The party had offices in the provinces and primarily included Damascene leaders in addition to a few leaders from Aleppo. The party thereby reflected Damascene politics, culture, and the local social environment in its narrowest form. The party also enjoyed the support of industrialists, big businessmen, and landowners. Its connection to the people was on a personal, rather than a partisan, basis. The party's success in elections was in large part due to a network of patronage stemming from the relations, reputation, position, wealth, and national records of its leaders. Influence was tied to neighbourhood relations, marriages, and kinships among its members. Rather than competing based on political programs and agendas, leaders running for elections relied on the support of *qabadayat* (henchmen). That is, they used their power, prestige, and reputation to rally local influential networks.

The second political bloc to emerge post-independence was the People's Party, founded during the 1948 Constitutional Bloc conference in Lebanon. Its founding members were Nazim al-Qudsi and Rushdi al-Kikhya, two former members of the National Bloc. The party was made up of conservative landowners, wealthy individuals, and a centrist intelligentsia. It represented the commercial and agricultural interests of Aleppo and the northern region,[14] believing agriculture to be critical to economic success. It set provisions for determining future ownership that safeguarded against any retroactive effects. This indicated a clear consideration for the interests of senior party members and provincial supporters.[15] The party gained the support of the enlightened Aleppian liberal and Islamist elite, major landowners and most industrialists in Aleppo, as it encouraged industrial growth in the city.[16] It also received support from the feudal al-Atassi family in Homs, which opposed the rule of Quwatli and Damascene politicians.

The third bloc was formed by Jamil Mardam Bey, a nationalist leader who gathered independent representatives into a parliamentary bloc he called the Republican Bloc. It included around forty representatives of districts and small cities. According to Muhammad Harb Farzat, this clearly demonstrates the prevalence of personal interests over the public interest under critical international circumstances.[17]

Table 1 illustrates the social, cultural, and political composition of members of the traditional Syrian elite in terms of their family and social class, religion and origin, schools and universities they attended, cultural interests, and political affiliations.

Table 1: The social, cultural, and political composition of the traditional ruling elite.[18]

Name	Social Composition	Cultural Composition	

	Family and Class	Religion and Origin	Schools	Universities	Interests	Political Affiliations
Hashim al-Atassi (1875-1960)	Feudal family from Homs; economic, social and religious status.	Sunni Muslim Arab of Turkish origin.	He learned the Quran during his childhood; elementary school in Homs; The Royal School in Beirut.	The Royal Shahania College in Istanbul.	Reading in French; meeting and conversing with people.	He did not participate in the Great Arab Revolt, although he was sympathetic to it. He was an employee and administrator in the institutions of the Ottoman Empire. He was elected president of the Syrian National Congress in

						its first meeting in 1919; National Bloc.
Shukri al-Quwatly (1891-1967)	Feudal family from Damascus; they accumulated wealth and properties through trade; economic and social status.	Sunni Muslim Arab.	He learned the Quran during his Childhood; Al-Azarya School in Damascus; Maktab Anbar.	The Royal School of Political Science in Istanbul.	Arabic language and literature; he founded the Literary Club (*al-Muntada al-Adabi*).	Young Arab Society; the Literary Club; National Bloc.
Ibrahim Hananu	Feudal family from Aleppo;	Sunni Muslim Kurd.	Harem and Aleppo schools.	The Royal School; Faculty of	Public speaking.	Party of Union and Progress;

(1869-1935)	major landowners; local and rural notables.			Law in Istanbul.		National Bloc.
Saadallah al-Jabiri (1894-1946)	Venerable Aleppian family; economic, social and religious status; Aleppo notables.	Sunni Muslim Arab.	Al-Rashidiya School in Aleppo.	The Royal Shahania College in Istanbul; Germany.	Literature, poetry, elegance and fashion.	Young Arab Society; National Bloc.
Abd al-Rahman al-Kayyali (1887-1969)	Upper class Aleppian family; economic, social and religious status.	Sunni Muslim Arab.	The Royal School in Aleppo.	American University of Beirut.	Reading, writing and collecting books pertaining to science and literature.	He was a deputy in the National Congress of 1920; National Bloc.

Jamil Mardam Bey (1893-1960)	Feudal Damascene family; wealth and prestige; upper class notables.	Sunni Muslim Arab of Turkish origin.	Al-Azariya School in Damascus.	The Paris Institute for Political Studies.	Literature, poetry and public speaking.	Young Arab Society; Arab National Congress of 1913 in Paris; the first Arab Club in Damascus in 1918; People's Party (1925); National Bloc.
Fares al-Khoury (1877-1962)	Middle class agricultural family; they are not among the wealthy landowner class.	Christian Protestant of Greek origin.	The village school in Kfeir; The American School in Sidon.	American University of Beirut; Faculty of Law in Damascus.	Reading, foreign languages, poetry and literature.	Party of Union and Progress; People's Party (1925); National Bloc.

Fakhri al-Baroudi (1887-1966)	Wealthy aristocratic family; upper class notables; landowners and bureaucrats.	Sunni Muslim Arab.	The Quranic School (*al-Kuttab*); al-Azariya School; al-Rihaniyya School; al-Yaghushiya School.	He tried to study abroad in Istanbul. He travelled to France in pursuit of higher education, but his father did not permit him to stay.	Poetry, music, theatre, cooking, writing, public speaking, languages, satirical news, and fencing,	People's Party (1925); National Bloc.
Lutfi al-Haffar (1885-1968)	Religious and conservative family; commercial class.	Sunni Muslim Arab.	Private schools in Damascus.	He was privately educated by tutors on religion, Arabic literature, mathematics, natural sciences, and chemistry.	Reading, teaching, poetry, music, theology, natural sciences and languages.	al-Nahda Arab Association; Young Arab Association; People's Party (1925); National Bloc.

Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar (1879-1940)	Middle class family of small merchants; they are not among the feudal landowning class.	Sunni Muslim Arab of Turkmen origin.	Damascene schools.	American University of Beirut.	Public speaking.	Union of Syrian Opposition; People's Party (1925).
Rushdi al-Kikhya (1899-1998)	Wealthy family from the Aleppo notables.	Sunni Muslim Arab of Turkmen origin.	Aleppian schools; The Islamic college in Beirut.	He weas privately educated by distinguished tutors in Aleppo.	-	National Bloc; People's Party (1948).
Nazim al-Qudsi (1905-1998)	Bourgeois Aleppian family.	Sunni Muslim Arab.	The Franciscan School in Aleppo.	Faculty of Law in Damascus; Doctorate in International Law from Geneva, Switzerland.	Music.	National Bloc; People's Party (1948).

Faydi al-Atassi (1898-1982)	Family of notables; large landowners; judges and muftis.	Sunni Muslim Arab of Turkish origin.	Galatsaray Highschool - French division in Istanbul; White Fathers School in Jerusalem.	Faculty of Law in Geneva; Faculty of Law in Damascus; political science in Damascus.	Elegance and style, languages, literature, poetry, reading and writing.	National Bloc; People's Party (1948).

1.2. Emerging Ideological Elite

A new elite emerged after economic and social transformations weakened the traditional ruling elite, with programs and agendas aimed to change the existing social order. It included those from middle class commercial backgrounds, mid-level state bureaucracy, professionals, and nascent industrial bourgeoisie.[19] During their studies abroad, they were influenced by European culture and acquired new methods of political organisation. The political parties they subsequently formed were based on sound ideologies that emphasized social and economic justice for the masses and challenged the National Bloc’s monopoly on politics. This elite that emerged under the French mandate did not form within the framework of a centralized nation-state, nor was it the result of an expanding powerful bourgeois class. Rather, it took advantage of the declining role and influence of the traditional-liberal elite. Knowledge, modernity, and a mission to change the political system were the driving force behind this emerging elite and the source of its legitimacy.

Public outcry against the establishment of a Syrian state under the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and British support for the establishment of the State of Israel in Palestine, played a key role in the emergence and expansion of ideological parties in Syria and the region. These parties were formed by members of the emerging middle class who had studied in Europe and were influenced by ideas of nationalism, Marxism, and national liberation movements that dominated global political and cultural scenes in the early twentieth century. This is evident in the fact that leaders of emerging parties belonged to an elite group of intellectuals that included political theorists. The most prominent of these parties were: The League of Nationalist Action; the Arab Socialist Ba’ath Party; Syrian Social

Nationalist Party; Syrian Communist Party; and the Muslim Brotherhood.

1.2.1. The League of Nationalist Action

This was the first political party with an Arab nationalist orientation. Syria suffered economic depression from 1930 to 1934,[20] and faced problems in marketing, trade and industry resulting from the depreciation of the French franc. The country also suffered from decline in export products intended for Europe and the Americas, a drastic fall in remittances, and the inability of Syrians from all professions to pay their debts. Many commercial and financial institutions went bankrupt.[21] These circumstances negatively impacted the popularity of the National Bloc, who still favoured a strategy of honourable cooperation with France and failed to promote any social or economic reform program to counteract the effects of the crises. Around fifty Arab nationalist intellectuals[22] gathered in the Lebanese village of Qarnayel, near Chtoura, with a mission to organise and coordinate national independence movements in the Arab region. They announced the establishment of the League of Nationalist Action, a new political organisation based in Damascus that would coordinate with similar parties in the region.[23]

The League's stated goal was to achieve Arab sovereignty, independence, and unity. It focused on the importance of economic growth and unification in the struggle against colonialism and feudalism. Philip Khoury argues that the League adopted neither socialism nor Marxism-Leninism. Instead, national struggle replaced class struggle. It was a reformist movement, popular in some respects, and leaned towards centralisation.[24]

Because the League was largely composed of youth and lacked political organisation among urban masses, it failed to challenge the National Bloc. The League thereafter sought to build a political base in Damascus and other cities, particularly among young people frustrated with the honourable cooperation policy of the National Bloc. These included graduates of public high schools, such as al-Tajheez School, where educators predominantly taught Arab nationalism.

The League encompassed the second generation of Syrian nationalists and was influential among the younger intellectual elite of the 1930s, with its members having an average age of 29. Most of its leaders were lawyers[25] who had completed their higher education in Europe, mainly France, or at the Syrian University in Damascus. There was therefore a marked cultural difference between leaders of the League and those of the National Bloc. While the latter were influenced by a combination of Ottoman-Arab and European cultures, the former had a stronger Arab disposition and modern Western influences.

The League leadership was diverse in terms of class and origin. It was composed of middle-class professionals, merchants, and employees. A minority belonged to poor branches of large landowning families or did not own land. They stood in contrast to leaders of the National Bloc who hailed from urban landowning families. The League had a strong presence in Homs due to the support of Hashim al-Atassi. Moreover, it garnered the support of the Greek Orthodox community in Homs who considered itself Syrian Arab.

The League organized itself along the lines of a modern political party. It had a central political council, membership fees, a political program and published a weekly political newspaper called The Nationalist Action. However, it remained distinctly elitist and did not appeal to the masses.

1.2.2. The Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party

The League of Nationalist Action laid the ideological and organisational foundations of radical Arabism, which the Ba'ath built on after independence. The Ba'ath Party did not emerge as a single coherent party but was comprised of four political streams with distinct ideologies.[26] Each stream bolstered the

Ba'ath Party with its supporters and followers from various social backgrounds.

The first political movement formed in the early 1940s, when students and young intellectuals began to rally around Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Din al-Bitar, two educators at al-Tajheez high school in Damascus who had studied at the Sorbonne in Paris. Aflaq studied literature and history, while al-Bitar studied physics. After their return to Damascus, they were active in their local communities and intellectual spheres. By relying on Damascus's teachers, students, and intellectuals, Aflaq's movement had purely intellectual beginnings. In their meetings, they discussed Arabism, decolonisation, and corruption among the ruling elite. Citing the Renaissance in Europe, they stressed the need for an Arab renaissance.[27] Geographically, they primarily relied on the people of al-Midan neighbourhood in Damascus, as both their families were grain merchants in al-Midan. Like most merchants in the neighbourhood, they had trade relations with the southern region that encompassed Horan and Jabal al-Arab. Aflaq's friendship with Druze families contributed to Druze notables joining the Ba'ath leadership, including the al-Atrash family. Furthermore, the majority of Ba'ath Party members were from rural areas, who went to Damascus to continue their education. They belonged to religious minorities including Druze, Alawites, and Ismailis.

Sami al-Jundi, one of the early Ba'athists, asserts that most party affiliates in Damascus were young rural students who attended the university and high schools in the city between 1940-1955. Once they completed their studies, they returned to their hometowns where they continued to be active party members. Rural social conditions facilitated the emergence and expansion of the party in rural settings, while its presence remained weak in cities like Damascus.[28]

The second political movement comprised students of Zaki al-Arsuzi, who hailed from a family of Alawite notables that fled Antioch after the annexation of Alexandretta by Turkey in 1938. He studied philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris. Arsuzi is considered a founding member of the Ba'ath party, and has quarrelled with Aflaq over the title of 'godfather' and the antecedent use of the 'Ba'ath' name. After Arsuzi's influence declined, he was succeeded as party leader by Wahib al-Ghanim, one of his most prominent supporters. Ghanim was also an Alawite from Alexandretta and came from a middle-class family.[29] He studied medicine at the Sorbonne in Paris and opened a private clinic upon his return to Latakia in 1943. He established the Ba'ath Party in the city and found widespread support among poor and educated peasants.[30] This was a left-wing socialist political stream[31] that demanded a secular state.

The third political movement was led by Jalal al-Sayyid, who came from a landowning tribal background.[32] His father was a judge and a leader of the *Khershan*, the largest of the Deir al-Zur tribes.[33] This stream rejected socialism, as it had a pan-Arab nationalist right-wing orientation that supported unity with Iraq, and was sympathetic to the Hashemites. This is attributed to prevalent blood ties and kinships between peoples of the eastern Syrian regions and Iraq, and by the distribution of tribal lands between the two countries.

The fourth political movement joined the Ba'ath Party at a later stage. It was led by Akram al-Hourani who, at the beginning of his political career, had spent a year with the Syrian Social Nationalist Party. However, upon completion of his law degree at the University of Damascus, he returned to Hama in 1938 and joined the Youth Party founded by his cousin, Othman al-Hourani. He was active against the National Bloc and its National Youth group. Hourani successfully mobilized peasants of Hama to end the political control of absentee landowners. His victory in the 1943 elections led to the introduction of the 'social question' in parliament for the first time. In 1951, he founded the left-wing Arab Socialist Party, which merged with the Arab Ba'ath Party in 1952 to form the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party and overthrow Adib al-Shishakli. Following the 5th National Congress of May 1962, Hourani and his loyalists were expelled from the Party due to their nonconforming activities post-secession from the United Arab Republic.[34] Hourani and his party played a pivotal role in expanding the Ba'ath Party's support base among popular classes and establishing strong ties with junior army officers.

The spread of the Ba'ath from Damascus to other parts of Syria happened organically, without an explicit agenda or program of work. The expansion of the Ba'ath was, in large part, due to personal efforts and initiatives of early party members in their hometowns. The party grew in areas of Jabal al-Druze through Mansur al-Atrash, son of Sultan Pasha al-Atrash, leader of the Syrian Revolution in the 1920s, and in Homs through Jamal al-Atassi, a psychiatrist from the venerable Atassi family of Homs.

1.2.3. Syrian Social Nationalist Party

It was founded by Antoun Saadeh (1904-1949).[35] Saadeh sought to establish a regional identity in the Arab Levant that transcended Arab and Islamic identities. He disagreed with the French-backed Maronite Lebanese Phalangist Party (*Kataeb*) who favoured the secession of Lebanon from Syria over Saadeh's call for unity of all Syrian lands. The Syrian Social Nationalist Party found support among many ethnic, religious and sectarian minorities, especially in the Alawite Mountains, and among non-Maronite Christians. Party ideals resonated with Levantine Christians, who saw the Arab Levant as their natural and historic home, based on national, geographic, and heritage ties. Saadeh called for secularism, reconciling sects, a central state, and a strong army, thereby transforming the Syrian idea into the form of a political party. The party was also popular among students, the petty bourgeoisie, and the army. However, Saadeh's disagreement with Arab nationalists and communists weakened his popularity and expansion in cities influenced by Arabism, and later by Marxism, which attracted urban intellectuals and subsequent generations of emerging bourgeoisie.

The Syrian Social Nationalist Party left its mark on parties that emerged after it, which adopted its method of organization, administration and ideological language. It also played an important role in politics and in the Syrian military establishment until 1955 when the party was accused of assassinating Colonel Adnan al-Malki. The party was consequently purged and outlawed.[36]

1.2.4. Syrian Communist Party

This party was active among high school students, self-employed professionals, and workers in textile factories and railways. The party included many Armenians, Kurds and other minorities.[37] It was led by Khalid Bakdash (1912-1995), who was born in the Kurdish neighbourhood of Damascus, and is of Kurdish origin. After graduating from Maktab Anbar,[38] Bakdash joined the Faculty of Law in Damascus, but was unable to continue his studies due to his persecution.[39] During the early 1930s, he was frequently arrested for his pro-Communist and anti-French activities.[40] He worked at the Ministry of Finance in the tax stamp *bandroll* section, where there were special procedures for cigarettes and tobacco. He also worked as a superintendent in the Sahnawi factory in Bab Sharqi,[41] and wrote and translated articles for *al-Ayyam* and *al-Qabas* newspapers. Bakdash devoted himself to political work after his release from prison in 1931. In 1933, he went to Moscow under party orders to study Marxism-Leninism and political economy at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East. During his two and a half year stay, he learned Russian and received an ideological education. In 1936, Bakdash returned to Syria and became Secretary of the Syrian Communist Party. That same year, he played a positive role in negotiations between the left-wing Popular Front French government and the Syrian delegation in Paris.

The Syrian Communist Party gained legitimacy during World War II, as Bakdash led national liberation activities, including underground resistance against Vichy France between 1940-1941. According to Philip Khoury, Bakdash worked to establish a “pragmatic” relationship with political and financial institutions in Syria. This pragmatic approach brought the party closer to Arab nationalism than to socialism.[42] The party took part in popular unrest during the bread crisis and presented itself as a nationalist organization that defended the poor. Furthermore, the party was tactically pragmatic in its first alliances. Due to the absence of a Syrian working class, Bakdash strengthened relationships with al-Quwatli and other bourgeois leaders of the National Bloc to influence their decisions. He also reinforced ties with and received support from the French Communist Party. The Syrian Communist Party received a decisive blow when the Soviet Union voted at the United Nations in favour of establishing a Jewish state on November 29, 1947 and recognized the State of Israel in May 1948. This was unjustifiable to the Syrian people who, at the onset of the first Arab-Israeli war, accused the party of supporting Soviet partition policy. The party was subsequently dissolved in January 1949 and driven underground following Husni al-Za’im’s coup d’état in March 1949.[43]

1.2.5. The Muslim Brotherhood

The structural changes in Syria during the interwar years led to the creation of a rift in urban popular neighbourhoods. Traditional merchants and craftsmen suffered the brunt of trade expansion with Europe, while workers suffered from poverty due to high inflation levels in the late 1930s. Moreover, drought and accumulated debts to landowners led to the displacement of farmers, who moved to cities in pursuit of work. They all looked to the national leadership for help who, in turn, ignored their problems and focused its efforts to build modern state institutions. According to Philip Khoury, this paved the way for the emergence of a radical political stream that challenged national leadership and called for a revolutionary response to the 'social question'. As the gap widened between traditional and modern sectors of society, popular classes became drawn to religious leaders and institutions that spoke a language they understood.[44] Thereafter, Islamic associations began to emerge with an aim of meeting this class's various needs.

These associations began as religious charities during the French mandate. They were urban associations and most of their founders belonged to middle-class scholars, educators, doctors, lawyers, and judges, with some coming from middle-class merchant backgrounds.[45]

During a conference held in Aleppo, the *Shabab Muhammad* and *Dar al-Shuban al-Muslimeen* societies were reorganized and merged to form the Muslim Brotherhood. A high central committee with a permanent office in Damascus was established, and Mustafa al-Siba'i (1915-1964)[46] was elected general observer of the Brotherhood in Syria and Lebanon.

The Muslim Brotherhood garnered support among students because it had an active presence in education. The Brotherhood established private and religious schools, libraries, scientific missions, and scouts.[47] Furthermore, they extended their influence over trade unions and craftsmen through worker committees that engaged in education, combating illiteracy, and organizing cultural events on Islam and Arabism.[48]

The expansion of the Brotherhood was limited to major Syrian cities and adjacent towns and villages. Due to differing sectarian and ideological compositions, it failed to garner significant support among army ranks. The Brotherhood was restricted to Sunni Arabs, while the army included diverse sects and ethnicities. Moreover, the military was purged of Brotherhood supporters. The Muslim Brotherhood represented class interests of the lower middle classes and reflected their popular disposition.

Table 2 illustrates the social, cultural, and political composition of prominent leaders and founders of emerging political parties.

Table 2: The social, cultural and political composition of the emerging ideological elite.[49]

Name	Social Composition	Cultural Composition	

	Family and Class	Religion and Nationality	Education	Profession	Interests	Political Affiliations
Abd al-Razzaq al-Dandashi (1902-1935)	Landowners; al-Dandashi clan from Talkalakh.	Sunni Muslim Arab.	Al-Wataniyyah al-Ahliyyah College in Homs; Faculty of Law in Brussels.	Lawyer.	Literature; poetry; music.	Founding member and first Secretary of the League of Nationalist Action.
Sabri al-Asali (1903-1976)	Large landowning bureaucrats from Damascus.	Sunni Muslim Arab.	Damascus University - Faculty of Law.	Lawyer; member of parliament; minister; prime minister.	Politics.	League of Nationalist Action; National Bloc; National Party.
Zaki al-Arsuzi (1900-1968)	Medium-size landowners; his father was a lawyer.	Alawite.	Antioch schools; he studied philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris.	School teacher; political theorist.	Literature; poetry; philosophy; history; mathematics.	League of Nationalist Action; theorist of the Arab Ba’ath.

Michel Aflaq (1910-1989)	Commercial upper middle class; his father was a grain merchant in al-Midan neighbourhood in Damascus.	Christian.	Orthodox schools in Damascus; Faculty of Law, University of Damascus; he studied history, literature and comparative theology at the Sorbonne in Paris.	School teacher; political theorist; minister.	Literature; poetry; writing.	Arab Ba'ath Party.
Salah al-Din al-Bitar (1912-1980)	Religious and commercial upper middle class; family of sheikhs and jurists from Damascus; his father was a grain merchant and owned a farm.	Sunni Muslim.	Damascus schools; he studied physics at the Sorbonne in Paris.	School teacher; minister; prime minister.	Writing.	Arab Ba'ath Party.

Jalal al-Sayyid (1914-1992)	Upper middle class landowners; his father was a judge and head of a branch of the Khershan clan in Deir al-Zur.	Sunni Muslim.	Elementary and preparatory education at the Royal School in Deir al-Zur; secondary education in Aleppo; he did not pursue higher education.	Landowner; member of parliament.	Writing; public speaking.	League of Nationalist Action; Arab Ba'ath Party.
Wahib al-Ghanim (1919-2003)	Religious middle class; his father was a religious figure and school principal.	Alawite.	Antioch schools; Faculty of Medicine, Damascus University.	Doctor; member of parliament; minister.	Literature; writing.	Arab Ba'ath Party.
Akram al-Hourani (1911-1996)	Agricultural upper middle class; family of Rifa'i Sufists from Hama; his father was an intellectual and religious figure.	Sunni Muslim.	Hama schools; School House Science and Education; Maktab Anbar; Faculty of Law, Damascus University.	Lawyer; minister; member of parliament; parliamentary leader.	Literature; poetry; history.	Syrian Social Nationalist Party; Youth Party; Arab Socialist Party.

Antoun Saadeh (1904-1949)	Educated middle class; his father was a doctor, writer and patriotic fighter.	Christian Orthodox.	Shweir schools in Lebanon; al-Ghurair Institute in Cairo; Brummana High School in Mount Lebanon; he did not pursue higher education.	Political theorist.	Reading; writing; languages.	Secret societies; Syrian Social Nationalist Party.
Khalid Bakdash (1912-1995)	Middle class; his family was from the Kurdish neighbourhood in Damascus. His father was an Ottoman employee who served in the Ottoman Army, and later in the Arab Army under King Faisal.	Sunni Muslim Kurd.	Damascus schools; Maktab Anbar; he did not complete his studies at the Faculty of Law, Damascus University; Communist University of the Toilers of the East in Moscow.	Employee; journalist; political theorist; Secretary of the Syrian-Lebanese Communist Party; member of parliament.	Literature; languages; writing.	Syrian Communist Party.

Mustafa al-Siba'i (1925-1964)	Religious upper middle class; his father was an imam in a mosque in Homs.	Sunni Muslim Arab.	Secondary education in Homs schools; doctorate from the Faculty of Shari'a and Law at al-Azhar University.	School teacher; university professor; editor in chief; member of parliament; general observer of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria.	Writing; literature; journalism.	Islamic secret societies; Shabab Muhammad Association; The Muslim Brotherhood.
Omar Bahaa al-Din al-Amiri (1916-1992)	Religious upper middle class; local notables; his father was a member of the Aleppo Council under the Ottomans.	Sunni Muslim Arab.	Faculty of Law, Damascus University; he studied literature and history in Paris.	Minister; ambassador; university professor; deputy general observer of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria.	Journalism; writing; poetry.	Islamic secret societies; Dar al-Arqam Association; Shabab Muhammad Centre in Paris; The Muslim Brotherhood.

Mustafa al-Zarqa (1904-1999)	Religious middle class; his father was a jurist and religious scholar.	Sunni Muslim Arab.	Khusruwiya Shari'a School in Aleppo; doctorate from the Faculty of Law at al-Azhar University.	University professor; member of parliament; minister.	Writing; reading.	The Muslim Brotherhood.

2. Military Elite

Two generations of military elite played pivotal roles in Syrian political life between 1946-1963. The first generation formed within military frameworks established by France, then joined nationalist forces after the French attacked the Syrian Parliament on May 29, 1945, and dropped bombs on Damascus. These soldiers formed the core of the armed forces, and became part of the national military institution after independence. Some even managed to seize power following a series of military coups between 1949 and 1954 that overthrew civilian rule. The second generation, on the other hand, appeared after independence within the emergent national military establishment. Leftist and nationalist ideologies spread among them, and their susceptibility to politicisation increased following the 1948 Palestine War and military coups. Loyalties of this generation were divided among the dominant ideologies in the political sphere. The various factions within the military thus became a reflection of political factions. After 1955, second generation officers sought alliances with the emerging ideological elite that would overturn the socioeconomic order to weaken the power of the traditional elite. Their power and influence in the military and in politics became apparent during and after the union with Egypt. Ba'athists allied with Nasserist officers in the 'Military Committee', and then with independent civilians in the coup of March 8, 1963 to resolve the political and military conflict thereby seizing power.

2.1. First Generation (Pre-Independence)

When French forces evacuated Syria, they left the country with an army that was structurally built to serve French interests and hinder the formation of a national state capable of defending itself. The core of the Syrian Army developed from the Special Troops of the Levant (*Troupes Speciales du Levant)*, after the French agreed to handover the armed forces and the gendarmerie on August 12, 1945.[50] The Special Troops were comprised of volunteers from religious and ethnic minorities with a French leadership that was maintained until the end of the mandate.[51] The army was structured as such for two reasons. The French preferred to recruit people from religious minorities and clans distant from the capital, assuming they would not be influenced by sentiments of Arab nationalism. Moreover, the French would ensure their loyalties and use them as a tool of incitement in accordance with colonial French minority-policy.[52] The second reason related to high unemployment rates in mountainous regions and areas far from urban centres. This drove people to enrol in military academies and pursue a military career or seek public employment in order to obtain steady income and escape poverty and poor education. By joining the ranks of these forces these youths were more open to the modern world, learned order and discipline, acquired new ideas, and became familiar with the administration of a modern state, such as France. Some even learned to speak French. This stood in contrast to the attitudes of the upper-class landowning bureaucrats and urban middle classes who despised the military and refused to join under a colonial authority. Kamal Deeb asserts that this was a "historical mistake"[53] committed by urban Sunni commercial families and rural landowners.

Members of this first generation of military elite may have belonged to families of local notables that owned land and worked in agriculture or had prominent religious or social positions. However, their eminence was limited and non-material. Their land and livestock did not provide for a life of luxury or financial well-being, and money was rather short and infrequent.[54] For this generation, joining the 'Army of the Levant' or the Military Academy in Homs during the mandate was not an issue. They were educated in French institutions or in local schools that were under the control of the French mandate and subject to its educational curricula. Some of them received an Ottoman education first, then continued their education under the French system. A considerable part of this elite was educated in schools of sectarian sub-states established by the French mandate, with each sub-state having its own unique curriculum. Table 3 provides an overview of the social, cultural, and political composition of selected members of the first generation of military elite.

Table 3: The social, cultural and political composition of the first generation of military elite.[55]

Name	Social Composition		Cultural Composition		Political Affiliations
	Family and Class	Religion and Ethnicity	Schools	Education and Career	
Husni al-Za'im (1889-1949)	Middle-class merchant family.	Sunni Muslim Kurd.	Aleppo schools.	Ottoman Army; Arab Army under King Faisal; Military Academy in Homs during the French mandate; Officer in the Syrian Arab Army.	He did not belong to any political party or ideology; secular.
Sami al-Hinnawi 1896-1950)	Middle-class.	Sunni Muslim Kurd.	Aleppo schools.	The Teachers School in Aleppo; Ottoman Army; Arab Army under King Faisal; Military Academy in Damascus during the French	He was an old ally of the People's Party. He was an ally of the Hashemite family in Baghdad, and believed in

				mandate; Special Troops of the Levant; Officer in the Syrian Arab Army.	unification with Iraq.
Adib al-Shishakli (1909-1964)	Agricultural family; landowners; local influence and prestige.	Sunni Muslim Arab of Turkmen (paternal) and Kurdish (maternal) origin.	Hama schools; Salamiyyah Agricultural College.	Military Academy in Homs during the French mandate; officer in the Syrian Arab Army.	Syrian Social Nationalist Party; Arab Liberation Movement.
Fadlallah Abu Mansur (1913-?)	Middle-class agricultural family; fighting peasants.	Druze Arab.	Druze Sub-State schools.	He fought alongside the Vichy armed forces against the forces of De Gaulle. He fought for the Allies. Military Academy in	Syrian Social Nationalist Party.

				Homs during the French mandate; officer in the Syrian Arab Army.	
Abdul Karim Zahreddine (1917-2009)	Agricultural family; local notables; fighting peasants.	Druze Arab.	Druze Sub-State schools.	Army of the Levant; Military Academy in Homs during the French mandate; officer in the Syrian Arab Army.	He advocated for the separation of the military and politics.
Amin Abu Assaf (1909-2005)	Agricultural family; local notables; educational interests; fighting peasants.	Druze Arab.	Druze Sub-State schools.	Military Academy in Homs during the French mandate; officer in the Syrian Arab Army.	He advocated for the separation of the military and politics; entered politics during the union with Egypt; member of the National Union for the Northern

					Region committee.
Mohammad Maarouf (1921-2009)	Agricultural family; local religious notables; landowners.	Alawite Arab.	Jableh District schools; high school at the National College in Baniyas.	Military Academy in Homs during the French mandate.	He was initially a supporter of al-Shishakli, then took part in the al-Hinnawi coup. He was a supporter of unification with Iraq. He was an ally to the Syrian Social Nationalist Party.

2.2. Second Generation (Post Independence)

Following independence and the French handover of the army and the gendarmerie forces, the national government implemented a series of extensive reforms. These included dissolving sectarian and ethnic military units left by the French mandate, improving financial support, and recruiting more soldiers in order to create a comprehensive national army. The government thereby regulated the armed forces, established the General Staff, military schools and academies, introduced compulsory service in 1948, and transformed the French Military Academy in Homs into a national military academy for the training of officers.

The second generation of military elites included officers who graduated from the Military Academy in Homs after independence.[56] They were militarily and intellectually moulded in national educational institutions and were ideologically informed.[57] They joined various ideological political parties. This led to the formation of rival ideological groups and factionalism in the military establishment.

Many changes in structure and composition distinguish this generation, which were in large part due to the annual increase in the number of army recruits. This is attributed to the large increase in the number of schools accessible to the lower classes in hundreds of villages and small cities. In the 1950s and 1960s, army recruits numbered in the hundreds, with most coming from lower- and middle-class rural families. This trend indirectly led to an increase in the number of minority officers and former peasants.[58] Hanna Batatu explains that, "… on the level of the officer corps the Alawis, contrary to a widespread impression, were not as important numerically as the Sunnis prior to 1963. They derived much of their real strength from the lower ranks of the army. In an arithmetical sense, they had a plurality among the common soldiers and a clear preponderance among the non-commissioned officers." This situation lasted until 1955.[59] Before the Ba'ath seized power in 1963, the most prominent military groups that held power and influence had been under the leadership of Sunni officers.[60] A further explanation for the superior numbers of rural minorities among rank-and-file draftees, is the matter of the *badal* or 'financial substitute'. Before 1964, Syrians were permitted to buy exemption from military service for 500 Syrian pounds.[61] In the 1950s and 1960s, urban Sunnis, even those from humble backgrounds, could afford the required sum to avoid one-and-a-half to two years of compulsory service. However, for peasants, especially Alawites, 500 pounds represented the value of several seasons of arduous labour. Not to mention, peasants were seldom free from debt.[62]

After defeat in the Palestine War of 1948, the army's resentment towards the ruling political elite increased.

Moreover, recurring coups and the spread of political awareness among the military, due to the expanding influence of emerging ideological parties within the ranks, led to the army's reconfiguration. After al-Shishakli was deposed in the mid-1950s, a younger, more politicized and radical generation of officers emerged, with the left-wing becoming dominant in both politics and the military. In early 1955, the army divided into several factions including the Ba'ath faction, the left-wing faction influenced by the Communist Party, Shishakli, the pro-Iraq faction, the Syrian Nationalist Party faction, and the Damascene *'Shwam'* officers faction that attracted independent officers, and conservative officers influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood. Independent 'professional' officers were also present. However, after the assassination of independent Damascene officer and Ba'ath sympathizer, Colonel Adnan al-Maliki, in April 1955, the Social Nationalist Party faction, led by Ghassan Jadid, was purged from the army. The Damascene officers faction had lost its most important leader, Colonel al-Maliki. Consequently, the army became polarized between two major blocs: The Socialist bloc, which included the prominent al-Hourani, and the Liberation *'Tahrir'* bloc, which included officers of the Shishakli faction. Escalation of conflict between these two blocs in the mid-1950s threatened a schism in the

Syrian army in the midst of disintegration among Syrian political and social elites.[63]

After unification with Egypt, the Damascene officers' faction survived the wave of dissolutions that had swept military factions because it had distanced itself from ideological partisanship. This also gave Abdel Nasser reason to rely on the Damascene officers' faction after relieving partisan officers from their positions of power. On September 28, 1961, a group of officers left the faction and joined Abd al-Karim al-Nahlawi in taking control of Damascus and proclaiming the secession of Syria from the United Arab Republic. They cited a lack of fair practices and sharp inequality between the two countries. After the dissolution, the army and politicians were divided between those loyal to Nasser and unification, and those who were in opposition. The Damascene officers' faction was further weakened following a failed coup attempt that took place between March 28 and April 1, 1962. On March 8, 1963, the Ba'ath faction's Military Committee allied with the Nasserist faction and independent officers, led by Ziad al-Hariri, to seize power. The following chapters will examine these factions and their relationships with each other and with other political parties.

The Military Committee is one of the most prominent groups in the history of the Syrian Army. It is important in terms of its composition, alliances, strategies, and its role and influence on the political history of Syria. This group was formed in secrecy in Egypt towards the end of 1959, during the union. The Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party had announced its dissolution on February 23, 1958, the day after the declaration of unity with Egypt, in accordance with Nasser's conditions. This angered many Ba'athist officers. Daniel Pipes argues that the Military Committee was thus innately rebellious against unity with Egypt and against the traditional leadership that approved party dissolution in return for personal gain and limited positions.[64]

The Military Committee initially consisted of five officers, then grew to include fifteen members. Most of them came for rural middle classes or poor urban neighbourhoods. All of these officers attended public schools with an Arabised curriculum post-independence. Consequently, they acquired an Arab national identity and were not influenced by Western culture nor spoke foreign languages. They all graduated from the Military Academy in Homs after independence and joined the Ba'ath Party.

After coming to power, this group of young officers turned the page on democracy and pluralism in Syria. They established a new system where the army and the party coexisted and formed alliances,[65] and the state took on a new form which combined sectarianism and military rule with Leninist political organization to implement the “revolution from above”.[66] For the structure and composition of the Military Committee officers, see Table 4.

Table 4: The social, cultural and political composition of the Military Committee officers.[67]

Name	Social Composition		Cultural Composition		Political Affiliations
	Family and Class	Religion and Ethnicity	Schools	Education and Career	
Salah Jadid (1926-1993)	Rural notables; middle size landowners; bureaucratic family; his father was a local leader of the Hadadin clan and a district administrator under the French mandate.	Alawite Arab.	Local public schools under the French mandate; public high school in Damascus.	He discontinued his studies at Damascus University, Faculty of Medicine; Military Academy in Homs (1951).	Syrian Social Nationalist Party; Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party; he was the president of the Military Committee from August 1962 to March 1963. He was a member of the Ba’ath Party's military office from 1965-1968.

Muhammad Umran (1922-1972)	Rural religious notables; small landowners; his father was a religious figure from the Khayatin clan.	Alawite Arab.	Local public schools under the French mandate.	Military Academy in Homs (1950).	Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party; he was head of the Military Committee in August 1962 and March-June 1963.
Hafez al-Assad (1930-2000)	Village notables; small landowners; his father was a peasant from the al-Mtawra clan, who became leader of a neighbourhood.	Alawite Arab.	Village schools founded by the French; public schools in Latakia.	He attempted to enroll at Saint Joseph University, Faculty of Medicine in Lebanon; Military Academy in Homs (1951); he graduated from the Military Aviation Institute in Aleppo (1955).	Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party; he was a member of the Ba'ath Party's military office from 1965-1970; Minister of Defence 1966-1972; President of the Syrian Arab Republic 1971-2000.
Abd al-Karim al-Jundi (1932-1969)	Rural notables; middle size landowners; his father was a landowner and	Sunni Arab of Isma'ili origin.	Local public schools under the French mandate/	Military Academy in Homs (1951)/	Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party; head of the National Security Office at the Regional

	wood merchant for a while; prominent middle-class family.				Command 1966-1969.
Salim Hatum (1928-1967)	Middle size landowners; his father was a statistician and manager.	Druze Arab.	Local public schools under the French mandate.	Military Academy in Homs.	Arab Socialist Ba’ath Party.
Amin al-Hafiz (1921-2009)	Lower class public bureaucrats; his father was a policeman; poor family from the *al-Bayada* neighbourhood in Aleppo.	Sunni Arab.	Local public schools under the French mandate.	Military Academy in Homs (1948).	Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party; he symbolically headed the Military Committee from June 1963 to August 1965. He was a member of the Ba’ath Party's military office from 1965-1966.

Mazyad Hunaydi (1921-1983)	Lower class rural notables; small landowners; his father was a local notable of the Hunaydi clan; fighting peasants.	Druze Arab.	Local public schools under the French mandate.	Military Academy in Homs.	Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party; head of the Military Committee 1959-1960.
Uthman Kanaan (1928-?)	Small landowners; his father was a farmer.	Sunni Arab.	Local public schools under the French mandate.	Military Academy in Homs.	Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party.
Ahmad al-Meer (1922-2007)	His grandfather was Prince Mahmoud, leader of the Masyaf Castle under the Ottomans. His father was Prince Melhem, who was struck by poverty after being removed from his post by the French in 1920.	Isma’ili Arab.	Local public schools under the French mandate.	Military Academy in Homs.	Arab Socialist Ba’ath Party.

Hamad Abed (1928-2005)	Rural notables; middle size landowners; his father was martyred in the Great Syrian Revolt (1925-1927); fighting peasants.	Druze Arab.	Local public schools under the French mandate.	Military Academy in Homs.	Arab Socialist Ba’ath Party; Minister of Defence from September to December 1965; member of the Ba’ath Party's military office 1965.

3. Alliances, Factions and the Crisis of Political Instability

3.1. Struggle Over Legitimacy and the Social Question

The traditional ruling elite broke into factions after Syria’s independence in 1946. While they had banded together against foreign French rule, they became locked in a state of political and social competition over the distribution of national wealth and defining political, social and economic orientations of the newly independent state. This permitted the emergence of a new political and military elite. They were mainly descended from urban and rural middle and lower classes, who were liberated by independence and given strong social, educational and health services. The discourse and activities of this new elite were based on criticizing the ruling elite's corruption and exploitation of state power to further their class and commercial interests.

In 1944, opposition-led parliamentary debates led to the formation of a governmental investigation committee, rather than a parliamentary committee as had been requested by Akram Al-Hourani, to investigate allegations of corruption in the Ministry of Supply. The aim was to expose the corruption of the feudal and capitalist classes, which included members of Parliament, and those with interests linked to the political class. The outcome was the dismissal of the Minister of Supply, Mazhar Raslan, and the resignation of the al-Jabiri government.[68] In his memoirs, Khaled al-Azm talks about how the deal of Sami Saem al-Daher led to a change of government. Al-Daher was a prominent textile and silk merchant from Aleppo who served as a member of Parliament from independence until Husni al-Za'im's coup.[69]

The ruling elite avoided making socio-economic changes, particularly those that would affect agriculture. Since the ruling class was mostly composed of landowners, major families, notables and merchants they were eager to preserve their social status and power. The agrarian question remained a controversial issue after independence. According to estimates made by Samir Makdisi, 82 percent of the rural population before 1958 did not own agricultural land, or owned land with an area less than 10 hectares. In contrast, a very limited group of agricultural landowners (2.5 percent) owned 45 percent of artificially irrigated lands and 30 percent of naturally irrigated lands.[70] There were no major developments in agricultural land ownership in the years following independence beyond some growth in medium-scale agricultural land ownership and the consolidation of land ownership in a “modern” real estate registry.[71] This was despite the economic growth that occurred following an increase in cultivated areas thanks to the mechanization of agriculture and the use of modern water pumps. Such developments required major funding from the urban bourgeoisie, who therefore became at the centre of agricultural activity and the main beneficiaries of this sector.

The structure of the urban ruling class and its policies to secure its position established the city’s control over the countryside. They demanded that the state provide health and transportation services to their regions and jettisoned all political discussions on ownership. Urban political control over legislation became evident when Parliament issued a labour law in 1946 which did not refer to agricultural workers at all, even though they constituted the overwhelming majority of workers. In 1957, when some progressive members of parliament submitted a bill prohibiting landlords from evicting peasants from their homes, only 36 of the 144 members of parliament voted in favour of the bill. However, the one-article law was adopted on March 4, 1957 because the majority opted for absenteeism instead of voting against the bill for fear of backlash.[72]

The agrarian (peasant) issue in Syria remained problematic given the fact that a large portion of the ruling political class were urban agricultural landowners who owned part of the countryside surrounding the cities in which they resided. These landowners were either feudal political figures of Turkish origin, as in Hama, or city merchants who turned to invest in industrial agriculture, especially cotton, as in Aleppo and the Jazira region. Therefore, there was a clear class aspect to the relationship between landowners and peasants, in addition to differences in tribal and local loyalties.[73] In the 1950s, Syria witnessed severe contention between the middle classes (representing the peasants) and major landowners who disagreed over the solution to the peasant problem. Middle class representatives, including members of the Arab Ba'ath Party, the Arab Socialist Party (al-Hourani) and the Muslim Brotherhood, saw that the only solution to this problem was socialist agrarian reform. Landowners were able to use their positions to protect their ownerships only until the union with Egypt, after which agricultural land ceiling laws were enacted and nationalization projects were initiated.

Also contributing to the decline of the traditional elite and the rise of the ideological and military elites was the public's deep rejection of the Syrian state that was drawn up in the Sykes-Picot Agreement, its amendments in San Remo, and the fixing of geopolitical borders in the Treaty of Lausanne. Moreover, the people rejected British policy that supported the establishment of the State of Israel in Palestine. The people disapproved of the way nationalists approached the issue of Palestine. During the Arab revolt in Palestine in the late 1930s, the National Bloc government provided cautious support. While the Palestinian cause was the most popular cause in Syria at the time, the government was wary of jeopardizing negotiations with Paris towards an agreement on independence. Later, during the 1948 Palestine War, the national government failed to provide adequate supplies for the war effort, neither did it seek greater Arab coordination, nor did it adequately prepare the Syrian army for combat.[74]

The defeat in the 1948 Palestine War sparked dispute over whether the ruling class or military negligence were responsible for the defeat. Opposition parties and the army launched a campaign against the government, blaming it for losing the war and holding it accountable.[75] In particular, Defence Minister Ahmad al-Sharabati[76] was accused of failing to arm the military, fragmenting it into competing factions, and reducing its numbers through discharges. He was also accused of involvement in politics and interference in the elections. Conversely, during parliamentary discussions in March 1949 on the causes of defeat, Faisal al-Asali, leader of the Syrian Social Cooperative Party and ally to President Shukri al-Quwatli, demanded that army commander, Husni al-Za'im, be tried for treason and conspiring with King Abdullah. The government subsequently charged al-Za'im with corruption, bribery and misconduct over defective weapons and rotten army provisions.[77] Officer Antoun al-Bustani was also accused of illicit enrichment because of his role in sending rotten food supplies to the army, including spoiled margarine. Prosecution of the army leader caused anger among the officers who considered these accusations to be an encroachment on the military establishment. This prompted a group of officers, led by Husni Al-Za'im, to send a letter of protest[78] to the President calling for al-Asali to be arrested and tried for insulting the army. This was immediately followed by Husni al-Za'im's coup on March 30, 1949.

Anger towards the traditional ruling elite was prevalent in the army. They believed that for a confrontation with Israel to be successful it was necessary to eradicate the ruling elite, change social and economic conditions, eliminate feudalism, and tackle corruption. Akram al-Hourani adopted this viewpoint and so did many young low-ranking officers. The legitimacy of the ruling elite, their corruption and approaches to foreign issues and the social question were points of convergence between the military and the emerging ideological parties. Some party leaders, such as al-Hourani and Khalid al-Azm, defended the army and advocated for increased support and armament. Al-Azm even played an important role in closing arms deals. Moreover, networks of alliances and patronages formulated between ruling political parties and the military, which facilitated cooperation whenever interests converged. Al-Azm described this military-political convergence as “dual power”.[79] He attributed its beginnings to Sami al-Hinnawi’s coup, where al-Atassi, al-Kikhya, al-Qudsi, and al-Hourani approved al-Hinnawi’s appointment of al-Atassi as prime minister. This made it clear that the government no longer made decisions without first consulting with the military. Gordon H. Torrey also refers to the dual power that emerged following al-Hinnawi’s coup, where factions emerged between politicians and military officers aspiring to rule. Division and competition led to the duality of power in government which, in turn, became a point of conflict as neither politicians nor the military had full control. This also led to diminishing loyalties between ambitious members of both groups.[80]

Just as the traditional ruling elite had sought cooperation with the military when their interests converged, so did the emerging ideological parties, who had loyal groups and factions within the military establishment. In their beginnings, these coups were also supported by party and local leaders as well as the people. A new class of capitalist elites cooperated with the military, such as Aleppian businessman Muhammad Said al-Za'im who provided support for Adib al-Shishakli and was subsequently appointed Minister of Finance.

Conversely, the politicization of some officers stemmed from their belief in the propositions of ideological parties that expressed common class and political interests. However, they were soon disillusioned and disappointed by squabbling party leaders. Such was the experience of Muhammad Umran with the Ba'ath Party. He recounts the reasons for his and his fellow officers' involvement with the Ba'ath after graduating from the Military Academy in 1947, "The Ba'ath, at that time, was a movement that aroused a sense of hope among young people and was the practical embodiment of the aspirations of the new generation towards progress, after the traditional political parties had failed to realise the aspirations of this generation…For us, the Ba'ath represented not only hope, but also an expression of what we were looking for with our unbridled nationalist sentiments and our sense of social injustice perpetuated by the classes controlling the country."[81] He also explains how the military believed that supporting civilian party leaders would hasten the achievement of social and economic party goals, strengthen resistance against colonial projects, and bring about an era of Arab unity. However, he goes on to underscore the disappointment of the military in party leaders' contradictory ideas, bad political choices, and the prioritization of their own interests to rule. To illustrate, he describes the disappointment in Ba'ath officers who participated in the coup against al-Shishakli in 1954, "The military expected the party to come to power immediately after the coup. However, after trusting party political leaders to turn the coup in favour of liberal and democratic party ideals, we were shocked by the repudiation of all our expectations during the Homs Conference."[82] Political party leaders met in Homs to discuss the sharing of power, after which traditional parties resumed power.

The military demanded that political elites establish a functional state apparatus, deprioritize their party interests, and adhere to the republican system. After al-Hinnawi's coup and al-Shishakli's first coup, power was left to the politicians, while the military ruled from behind the scenes. However, party and ideological conflicts and ministerial crises prompted the military to stage further coups.

The military saw itself as the only national institution that represented all segments of society and presented itself as a champion of the nation's unity and its goals. Consequently, the military believed it their right to play a political role in the country as the protectors of national security and independence. The military was able to launch a series of coups because of the failure of civilian political authority to contain the military establishment, failure to neutralize it from interfering with politics, and the failure to approach it as one of the state institutions subject to the existing political system. It also launched the coups under the pretence of defending the republican system and saving the country from catastrophic party conflict. It took advantage of political instability caused by external regional factors and internal political factionalism. The strongman government therefore replaced a government of competing parties.

The coups of the 1950s and 1960s were represented under the light of revolutionary movements. The old regimes had been removed, and the economic bases of social classes that had supported their rule were destroyed following policies of agrarian reform and nationalization. Thus, a new type of society developed.[83] After the 1960s, marginalized groups had the opportunity to break out of the existing semi-democratic system. Urbanisation and the expansion of health and educational services after independence enabled the children of these groups to enter schools and military academies and to join radical parties. They were thus given the chance to participate in the political game, and to acquire social status irrespective of their family, regional or tribal origins.

Members of the Military Committee that participated in the 1963 coup and took power after excluding their allies, had rural beginnings and shared similar rural orientations. The majority were medium and small size farmers, and a few belonged to merchant and industrialist classes. The latter were allocated to foreign diplomatic missions.[84] The structure and composition of Military Committee officers impacted Syrian society. Unlike previous years, the peasant class began to expand its influence and rise economically and socially, until it became of equal standing with urban classes, and even asserting control over them in later stages.[85] This socio-economic policy strengthened villagers to become economically self-sufficient and relatively independent from the cities.[86] Consequently, this group came to control state bureaucracy. Batatu remarks that, “Members of this class brought their relatives, acquaintances, and members of their sects to attain employment in state institutions, and thus the rural population (Houran, Hama, Latakia mountains and Idlib) became the most represented segment in state bureaucracy.”[87] This contributed to a population increase in main cities, especially Damascus, following rural-urban migrations. Batatu attributes this to compulsory and professional military service, and the concentration of state agencies and their expanding cadres in Damascus. These new circumstances arising after 1963 prompted the expansion of rural influence and authority over the city, after rural classes had been marginalized and subject to the control of urban leaders and notables prior to and after independence.

The transfer of power from the city to the countryside took place under the banner of socialism, which was adopted by the ruling military elite in 1963 and was the basis for their policies. However, this later resulted in the concentration of wealth in the hands of an oligarchy, and a pattern of wealth distribution that depended on kinship and loyalty to the regime. It also reflected the composition of the military elite and its desire for social ascendancy and access to power.

3.2. Clannism, Chieftaincy, and Interests as the Core of Alliances

The National Bloc benefitted from the two-round electoral system (ballotage)[88] that was adopted in 1943 to attain power. It invested in patronage networks within neighbourhoods and among peasants to guarantee electoral success for its representatives. The two-tier voting system was based on the so-called "secondary voters" to elect "primary voters", then those primary voters would elect members of parliament.[89] This electoral system reinforced regionalism and sectarianism, and helped families dominate political life. This is primarily due to the fact that this system restricted the right to vote to Syrian civilian males over the age of twenty, while granting special seats for minority sects and Bedouins. Bedouin seats are generally not held by elections but are chosen by the tribal sheikhs.[90] Second, the election of primary voters was conducted in smaller districts, that is, the village or neighbourhood. In effect, primary voters did not form an absolute majority to secure the election of members of parliament. They often received sums of money from candidates and were subjected to pressures from large landowners in the countryside and other prominent figures. Furthermore, as primary voters were free to vote and not limited by the wishes of their secondary voters, the influence of the general Syrian population on the Syrian electorate was small and limited.[91]

Therefore, the opposition led by Akram al-Hourani demanded that the election law be changed to direct elections, arguing that indirect elections disproportionately served the interests of the feudal class over those of peasants,[92] and that secondary voters were few in number and easy to influence. These demands were accompanied by demonstrations and student protests that broke out in mid-April 1947, during which a civil strike took place in most major cities including Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo. A number of trade unions also participated in the strike, as well as the General Union of Syrian Women which demanded granting women the right to vote.[93] On the other hand, the National Bloc rejected any change in the electoral system in order to guarantee its seats. However, under increasing popular pressure, parliament approved a new election law providing for direct elections. After the election law was amended in 1947, al-Hourani no longer needed to ally with the National Party, as he had done in 1943, to win the election. He therefore directed his efforts towards establishing a strong electoral base among the peasants.

On the other hand, rivalry and competition among the traditional elite in the 1947 elections prompted a realignment of alliances. Al-Quwatli had failed to secure al-Jabiri’s support to renew his presidency for a second term, had lost support of al-Gharaa Association and had fallen out with sheikhs and the Muslim Brotherhood. Moreover, al-Quwatli projected the advancement of the religious scholars’ ballot in the elections. This prompted him to side with landowners and seek the support of Jamil Mardam, promising him the office of prime minister. Jamil Mardam, in turn, enlisted the help of the military through Minister of Defence, Ahmad al-Sharabati. In an effort to subvert the ascension of Islamists, al-Sharabati rigged the 1947 elections, using the military in civilian attire[94] and army vehicles to transport voters.

The ruling elite was not alone in investing in local affiliations and family and regional clannism to further political interests and expand their influence. At a time when Sunni families dominated traditional party leaderships, such as the National Party and the People's Party, members of minority families either joined the army or progressive parties. They were influenced by the army's and progressive parties' appealing ideas, adoption of the peasant issue and alignment with their class interests. This led to the emergence of politically and militarily powerful families, whose members were dispersed across politics and the military and allied together whenever necessary. Such families include the Druze al-Atrash family,[95] the Alawite Jadid family,[96] and the Christian al-Kallas family.[97] This phenomenon was also present among Sunni families, including the al-Atassi family.

The military elite, especially the first generation, tried to establish a chieftaincy centred on the authority of the military establishment. Since members of the military elite were neither descended from social nor religious leaders, they adopted a discourse that replaced family, class, clan and sect loyalties with loyalty to the military institution. The army thus became a source of influence and *asabiyya* (clannism) that they safeguarded and used to impose their authority in public life. Young officers participated in military coups even though they knew that failure could destroy their military careers. However, they also knew that success would allow them to move up the ranks and bring them closer to the centre of political decision-making.

Division and conflict among and within political parties at the time spread to the military establishment which, by extension, witnessed fragmentation and factionalism on the basis of politics, loyalties and local affiliations. Following al-Shishakli's rule, several factions based on such affiliations formed within the army. These included the al-Shishakli officers' faction, the al-Atassi officers faction, the Druze officers faction, the Christian officers faction, and the Damascene *'Shwam'* officers faction, amongst others. These factions have been named in many texts and literary works of the time. The diverse affiliations of officers and soldiers in the army was rarely a source of balance and stability that safeguarded against military coups. Instead, these diverging affiliations often led to crises, and ultimately caused the formation of a system of military rule.[98]

During the union with Egypt, al-Nahlawi, a Sunni Damascene, assumed a principal military position as Deputy Director of Officer Affairs. Through this central position, he was able to transfer officers that supported him to army units of political and strategic importance. However, this group of officers he had formed quickly collapsed during the secessionist period. This is partly attributed to al-Nahlawi's lack of support from non-Damascenes. On March 28, 1962, he tried unsuccessfully to regain influence over the army and the government through a military coup. After his failed attempt, he was exiled with five of his most prominent Damascene officers. This led to a state of polarization among Syrian officers between Damascenes and non-Damascenes.[99] When the situation reached a stalemate that threatened violent confrontation, a military conference was held in Homs on April 1, 1962 in order to avoid bloodshed. The conference was attended by 41 representatives from all major military regions and units, which made it representative of the identity and common interests of the Syrian officer corps at the time. During the conference, Damascene Brigadier General Mouti' al-Samman asked the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Defence and the representative of the Military Command in Damascus to expel six non-Damascene officers from Syria, irrespective of their involvement, or lack thereof, in the events of March 28, 1962 as compensation for the expulsion of Al-Nahlawi and five of his Damascene officers.[100] However, after the attempted coup and the subsequent failed movement of January 13, 1963[101], al-Nahlawi and his officers were exiled and Damascene officers in units charged with protecting the capital were transferred to distant units and replaced with officers from outside Damascus. In his memoirs, Abdul Karim Zahreddine describes the new officers as “having nothing but hatred for Damascus and its people”.[102]

Until the early 1960s, factionalism in the military was based primarily on political grounds, while sectarian, local and regional loyalties played a secondary role. In the 1960s, however, features of sectarian and regional factionalism surfaced without adequate acknowledgement. According to Azmi Bishara, “for social, class, and partisan-political reasons, the number of Alawites, Druze and Ismailis was prominent in the Ba'ath Military Committee, while the number of Sunni officers was more prominent in the conservative Damascene officers and the Unionist/Nasserist officers’ groups. There was also a considerable number of Christian officers who were in a quasi-alliance with the Damascene officers. As for independent officers, many of them leaned towards a certain faction with varying degrees of volatility and changing alliances. However, no faction leader presented himself (or his entire faction) on a sectarian basis, but on an ideological, political, or professional basis.”[103] At the same time, familial, local and regional kinships, and *ukhwat al-dawra* (class comradery),[104] began to play a role in the advent of sectarianism, factionalism and divisions.

Between July 1963 and February 1966, the Ba'ath was the sole ruling party, and conflicts shifted to the military and civilian groups within the Ba'ath. Escalation of conflict between the two groups reinforced factionalism, assembly, and alignment processes, which employed regional, personal, and sectarian factors.[105]

Officers in command positions helped their relatives and those from their sects and regional communities to get into the military, naval and air force academies.[106] This contributed to the increase in the number of minorities in the Syrian officer corps over Sunni officers after the coup of March 8, 1963. Ba'athist military leaders who took part in the coup were quick to summon officers and non-commissioned officers with whom they had familial, tribal or regional ties in order to consolidate their new positions.[107] This method of recruitment was later described in Ba'ath Party internal documents as follows: "The difficult circumstances of the first revolution prompted the summoning of a large number of reserve soldiers (officers and non-commissioned officers) that were party members and loyalists. This was done in order to fill vacancies that arose following the purging of the opposition, and to consolidate and protect the revolution. The urgency to fill these gaps was accompanied by a non-objective and biased recruitment process based on friendships, kinships, and even mere acquaintances. This led to the infiltration of a number of unfamiliar people who did not share the party's ideology and logic. Soon after overcoming the difficult stage in the revolution, this issue was used as a weapon to challenge and question the intentions of some comrades."[108]

3.3. Impact of Regional and International Conflict on Instability and Internal Divisions

After French evacuation in 1946, Syrian politics reflected conflict between Arab axes in two ways. Firstly, the National Bloc divided into the National Party, affiliated with the Saudi Arabia and Egypt axis, and the People's Party, which advocated for unity with Iraq. Secondly, the military was deployed by affiliates of both axes to serve their respective political interests.

Husni al-Za'im's coup served the interests of Saudi Arabia and Egypt, followed by those of France and the United States. Three weeks after his coup, al-Za'im signed the Syrian French monetary agreement in conjunction with a legislative decree. He issued another legislative decree on May 16, 1949 for the approval of the American Tapline Agreement.[109] Conversely, he opposed Hashemite unionist plans, which caused relations between Syria and Iraq to deteriorate and al-Za'im to lose the support of many young unionist soldiers in the army. On the other hand, Britain used the federalist projects of Jordan and Iraq to pressure France, the United States, and the new regime in Damascus to sign an agreement with the Anglo-Iranian Company. According to al-Hourani, this explains the Iraqi and

Jordanian media campaigns and military mobilisations, King Abdullah's determination to see through plans for Greater Syria, and Nuri al-Said's persistent activities and demands for a union between Syria and Iraq.[110] This led to a propaganda and military campaign between the three countries, which ended with an agreement between the United States and Britain to share oil interests in Syria. The council of ministers issued an official communiqué on June 21, 1949 which ratified the agreement between the Syrian government and the Middle East Pipelines Company Ltd. and the agreement to establish refineries. The following day, the Syrian Newspaper published the entire agreement with the Anglo-Iranian Company.[111]

On June 25, al-Za'im stated that he had only ratified the Tapline Agreement and the Anglo-Iranian Agreement in order to provide employment for workers and to protect workers from "destructive communism".[112] On June 28, the Damascene Victory newspaper published a translated article from the French newspaper Le Monde, stating, "Husni al-Za'im was able to garner supporters not only with his stance against the Hashemites, but also with his anti-communist statements. Although he is a supporter of the United States and an opponent of the Hashemite family, the British Foreign Office did not oppose him because it is in the interest of the British government to have control and sovereignty over the oil fields in the Middle

East. Therefore, it was faster than the United States in securing the right to refine its petroleum products on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea”.[113]

Sami al-Hinnawi's coup followed suit, with France and the United States considering it to have been supported by the Iraqi and Jordanian axis as well as the British. This was confirmed when a union with Iraq was proposed in government by Hashim al-Atassi in September 1949, and supported by Rushdi al-Kikhya, and Adel al-Azmeh from the People's Party. Akram Al-Hourani and Khaled Al-Azm opposed unity with Iraq while it was subject to a treaty with Britain. This political division spilled over into the army, which in turn was divided into factions that either supported or opposed unity with Iraq.[114]

This Arab division was clearly evident in the new Constituent Assembly meetings that took place after the coup of al-Hinnawi in December 1949 with the aim of electing a head of state and drawing up an interim constitution and the constitutional oath. Disputes were centred on the clear proclamation of a republican system of government. The opposition that rejected unity with Iraq,[115] which was under monarchic rule at the time, objected to Article 1 of the draft constitution, which stipulates the election of a “head of state”. They demanded that the nomenclature be replaced with “the president of the republic”.

Political disputes over the republican system and unity with Iraq spilled over into the military. Republican officers, led by Adib al-Shishakli, feared they would be purged by al-Hinnawi should the federal project with Iraq succeed. On December 19, 1949, al-Shishakli and his men launched another military coup. It was called the Colonel Movement due to the large number of colonels participating in the coup.

After Shishakli's downfall, Syria was once again a target for Arab interventions. The axis of Saudi Arabia and Egypt supported the return of al-Quwatli, while Iraq backed Sabri al-Asali's government and its supporters from the army and discharged officers. An agreement was reached between the two axes on the return of al-Quwatli to the presidency in 1955. The decision was supported by Iraq, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, who opposed the ascension of Khaled al-Azm, and his leftist and progressive forces, to the presidency. Fearing that Syria would veer towards the left, they all preferred a president who had the approval of the strongest traditional parties, the National Party and the People's Party, and who would be able to control leftist parties and the army.[116] However, after al-Quwatli's ascent to power, regional axes continued to interfere in Syrian politics by preparing for military coups and collaborating with political and military affiliates inside Syria. The Baghdad Pact documents clearly refer to Iraqi intervention in Syria and to meetings that took place between Syrian and Iraqi ministers to create a union between the two countries and to disrupt the situation in Syria.[117] Assassinations were carried out, the most critical of which was the assassination of Colonel Adnan al-Maliki in 1955.

In the second half of the 1950s, Syrian politics were dominated by the left-wing influences of Arab nationalism, which led to unification with Egypt in 1958. Several reasons explain this left-wing orientation. Syria was suffering from sanctions and the withholding of military aid by Western countries, especially Britain and the United States, due to fears over hostile Syrian intentions towards neighbouring countries, especially Israel. This was also because of Syria's rejection of the Baghdad Pact, followed by its policy of "positive neutrality" after the Bandung Conference in April 1955. Furthermore, military spending was increasing while development projects were progressing at a slow pace. This was accompanied by the imposition of Western, Arab and regional pressures on Syria as they fought to gain influence over the country. Israeli aggression on Syrian lands continued with unlimited Western support, Turkey posed a threat to the northern borders, and the Zionist lobby in the United States prevented supplies of weapons and equipment to the Syrian Army. Therefore, the nascent Syrian Republic needed a military force to preserve its borders that extended over five hundred kilometres with Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon, none of whom were on friendly terms with Syria. This pushed Syria towards the Eastern Bloc in an effort to acquire arms and bypass the arms monopoly imposed by France, Britain and the United States on the Middle East.[118] In a pressure move, Turkey mobilized its armies on the Syrian border in March 1955. The Soviet Union, in turn, warned Turkey that it would not remain idle in the event of a Turkish military intervention in Syria. Shortly afterward, an agreement was made to sell Czech weapons to Syria due to the West's continued arms embargo and rising tensions with Israel.[119] Syria further signed a contract with the Soviet Union agreeing to new arms deals following Israeli raids and Turkish threats, the reluctance of Britain and the United States to supply Syria with weapons as it was not party to the Defence Pact, and the refusal of France – Syria's traditional arms provider - to arm the Arabs after the Algerian revolution.[120]

A combination of other factors further contributed to the political and military shift of Syria towards the left. These included the tripartite aggression of Britain, France and Israel against Egypt in 1956, the Iraqi conspiracy[121] in November 1956 followed by the American conspiracy[122] in 1957, the disintegration of the Saudi-Egyptian-Syrian Arab alliance, and the American media campaign to fight the spread of communism in the Middle East and Syria and safeguard Western interests in the region against the Communist threat.[123] Syria bypassed the Western arms monopoly by signing economic and military agreements with the Soviet Union that supplied the Syrian Army with weapons and equipment.[124] Internally, tensions escalated between Saudi and Egyptian-backed Shukri al-Quwatli, and Minister of Defence Khalid al-Azm, who was instrumental in signing these agreements during his trip to the Soviet Union.[125]

The political situation in Syria became increasingly alarming towards the end of 1957 as the country was constantly exposed to external interferences and threats from neighbouring countries. The Communists seemed to be on the verge of seizing power after they allied with al-Azm and garnered support from the Soviet Union. This prompted the Ba'ath Party to propose a federal union with Egypt in December 1957, believing that Nasser would frustrate any plans for Communist Party rule. And while unity was one of the Ba’ath Party’s leading principles, they also believed it would strengthen Syria’s position against Western conspiracy efforts.

Fear and distrust spread among the military elite. After left-wing officers had reclaimed their positions in the army following the insurgency of Qatana on March 17, 1957 aimed at preventing their exclusion from leadership positions in the army, and after the Damascene officers had been accused, without evidence, of being involved in the American conspiracy, it was agreed that a collective leadership termed the 'Command Council'[126] would be formed. It consisted of twenty-three officers, from which a group was chosen to represent the army in political matters. They took part in the Council of Ministers meetings, which were convened by the President of the Republic, from 1957 until unity with Egypt in 1958. The Command Council consisted of the Afif al-Bizri group, who were communist sympathisers and allies of al-Azm, and the Amin al-Nafouri and Ahmad Abd al-Karim group, who were of the al-Shishakli officers' faction. Together, these two groups formed the al-Bizri/al-Nafouri/Abd al-Karim bloc within the Council. They were confronted by the Ba'athist officers' bloc, headed by Mustafa Hamdoun. There was a lack of trust between the two blocs, as Ba'athist officers believed that al-Shishakli and al-Nafuri group had allied with al-Azm and the Communist Party to limit the Ba'ath's influence in the army. The hidden conflict between the two blocs continued until union with Egypt, which most believed was the only way to avoid a political-military conflict and to overcome competing affiliations.

On the other hand, the national group within the government, consisting of the National Party, the Ba'ath Party, independents, and communists, were weakened by their disputes. The military therefore feared that civilian rule would fail and that politicians would fragment the army and exploit it to further their political interests. They also feared that the People's Party would take over if the National Party government collapsed. They secretly decided, without consulting the government, to offer Abdel Nasser a proposal of unity in an effort to avert the impending governance crisis in Damascus, and in search of a strong alliance that would help overcome disintegration and internal and external threats. At the same time, a union with Egypt would meet the demands for Arab unity and socialist social reform.

However, the policies that Nasser pursued in the Northern Province, which began with dismantling political parties as a precondition for unity, left political leaders without any authority in their country. Agrarian reform laws and nationalization decrees followed suit, which greatly harmed the interests of the landowning and bourgeois classes. Nasser's policies further entailed relocating party officers to ministerial positions in order to isolate them from their sphere of influence within the military. This exclusion policy was also applied to the civilian Ba'athists who came to the realisation that Nasser distrusted them, despite their central role in engineering the union. Their ensuing anger was directed at the unilateral system of rule and Egyptian hegemony over the union, as well as the Ba'ath Party leadership for its part in causing their misfortunes.[127] Under these circumstances, the Military Committee was secretly formed in 1959. Although most of its founders were of Alawite, Ismaili and

Druze origins, sectarianism had little to do with military factionalism at the time. Rather, factions were divided along the lines of power and politics in the Cold War era.[128]

4. Military Intervention in Politics and Vice Versa

4.1. Military and Political Overlap

One of the most important factors that contributed to political instability in Syria at the time was military intervention in politics on the one hand, and the political deployment of the military in political disputes on the other.

In practice, the dividing line between civilian-political action and military action in Syria had always been fragile. The National Bloc had a paramilitary group called the Steel Shirts '*al-Qumsan al-Hadidiya*'[129] sponsored by Fakhri al-Baroudi. It was inspired by European fascist forms of organization in terms of dress, salute and activity. The group became popular with youth across the country, as it spread across Syrian cities as a paramilitary wing of the Bloc's branches. The organisation's central command was headed by Munir al-Ajlani (Secretary-General) and Saif al-Din al-Ma'mun (Director of Finance). The National Bloc had also previously set up the Nationalist Youth group in 1929 with encouragement from al-Baroudi, the youth patron in Damascus, and was followed by the scouting Umayyad Troop. Al-Baroudi believed that the National Movement needed its own militia and built the Umayyad Troop as a prototype for the future Syrian National Army.[130]

The League of Nationalist Action also had a paramilitary group of its own, the Lion Cubs of Arabism, which rivalled the Steel Shirts in a manner that mirrored the political rivalry between the Bloc and the League. Likewise, Faisal al-Asali organized the Socialist Cooperative Party in a militaristic manner, training its members to fight, shoot, salute and carry out al-Asali's orders without question.[131] The Muslim Brotherhood also had military factions under the name of the Youth Factions, which were dissolved by the military command in January 1952 during al-Shishakli’s rule.[132] Moreover, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party had a military wing called the National Jihad Forces.

Alliances between political leaders and military groups were commonplace. One of the most important representatives of this overlap between civilian and military activity was Akram al-Hourani. Al-Hourani rubbed shoulders with the army early on when he participated in the Rashid Ali al-Kilani revolt in Iraq in 1941. His relationships within the military expanded during the armed conflict to expel the French from Syrian territories in 1945, and later in 1948 when he led a group of volunteers to fight in Palestine accompanied by a number of army officers, including Adib al-Shishakli. In his study on the Syrian Army, Michel Van Dusen puts forth that al-Hourani's main support base within the army consisted of officers from the Hama region. He classifies them as middle-class fourth generation officers who graduated from the Homs Military Academy between 1946-1952. Some of them politically supported al-Hourani and rallied to his leadership, especially the class of 1948, the majority of which had local orientations.[133] Others merely shared his goal of changing feudal society but were not necessarily his allies.

Al-Hourani saw the army as part of the people and as a national institution, and believed the struggle to liberate Syria from the French mandate was a joint effort between the people and the army.[134] He also championed and supported the army in Parliament, and urged young people to join the Military Academy where al-Hourani, as well as the Ba'ath Party and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, were influential in instilling their ideologies.[135] For this reason, many politicians, soldiers, and researchers in Syrian history, hold al-Hourani responsible for the army's politicization after independence. Numerous testimonies also confirm his involvement in almost all military coups, though he has denied this.[136]

In parallel, the military moved past its role as a state institution that defended the country against external aggression and complied with the government's political decisions. Instead, the military adopted a concept of national security that saw the army as the protector of the nation against external and internal enemies alike. In fact, the absence of external threats, in some instances, caused the military to carry out its national security duties against local political forces it deemed to be a threat to internal security and stability.[137] Whenever military missions became scarce, the army would have surplus capabilities for a non-military role.[138] This paved the way for the military to intervene in politics and control the government whenever it felt that conflict between political factions was headed towards a government deadlock that would threaten internal security and stability.[139] Furthermore, military defeat in the 1948 war also contributed to the political inclination of the military elite, and led to an increase in accusatory discourse between military and political elites. Each side blamed the other for losing the war. When the army felt that it had become a scapegoat, the military decided to overthrow the government, stating that the civilian leadership had betrayed them.[140]

4.2. Mutual Accusatory Discourse

The military elite built its discourse on two pillars. The first was defending the country's independence and security. The second was accusing the political elite of corruption, espionage and incompetence, thereby justifying intervention in politics and military rule as a 'legitimate' alternative.

Statement No.1 of Husni al-Za'im's coup against President Quwatli contains the following, "Driven by our patriotic jealousy and agonized by the slanders of those who call themselves our loyal rulers, we were forced to temporarily take over the reins of power in the country [...] Our job is to create a truly democratic government to replace the current false one."[141] After the coup of March 30, 1949, military planes dropped political pamphlets over the capital and major cities that read, "The valiant Syrian army has seen what the country has come to in terms of chaos, lethargy and betrayals, and has found the current regime plagued with evils and shamefulness, infidelities and thefts, the elimination of democratic freedoms and the violation of the constitution and the law. The army saw all this and was certain that the nation was marching hastily towards death and annihilation. Patriotism, dignity and honour did not allow the army to stand idly by and accept humiliation, slavery and obliteration as the destiny of a great nation worthy of glory and immortality. The army was determined to take an honourable stand, and to intervene to restore matters to their rightful place, including the nation's honour, dignity and freedom."[142]

On participating in the coup to overthrow Husni al-Za'im, Amin Abu Assaf, who was commander of an armoured battalion during preparations for the coup against al-Za'im, stated that, "I felt that eliminating the tyrant was the duty of the army alone. Had we not done it, we would have betrayed our duty and abandoned our country in its most severe internal ordeal."[143] On the coup to overthrow al-Hinnawi, Abu Assaf said, "We [the military] are adopting the goal of not compromising the independence of Syria."[144]

On his second coup, Adib al-Shishakli stated that, "We found before us the country's republican system headed towards abolition, so we saved it. The military only did what they had to when they witnessed the state's trickery. They meant well by the coup and did not intend to cause any harm. Had the army not intervened sooner, the country would have been lost."[145]

In fact, the root cause of the problem goes back to the army being assigned police duties at home and being used by the ruling political elite as a tool to suppress demonstrations and unrest to maintain order and stability. In 1948 demonstrations and protests swept the country denouncing the defeat in the Palestine War and the pervasive corruption in the military and various government ministries. There were clashes between demonstrators, gendarmerie and police forces. As a result, al-Quwatli asked Husni al-Za'im to intervene and put an end to the widespread unrest. The army thereby took over the duty of maintaining public order and security from the police and imposed martial law and curfews.

The military elite was highly confident and believed it had the right to manage its organisation and operations independently. It was wary about anything that would affect its privileges and status.[146] Therefore, transferring the gendarmerie and police forces from the Ministry of Defence to the Ministry of Interior[147] was a great source of provocation for the army, which considered this an attempt by civilians to weaken their influence and authority. Consequently, the gendarmerie remained a source of tension between the army and civilians for a long time, and it was one of the motives for al-Shishakli's coup in 1951.[148]

There was an infamous dispute between the military elite, represented by al-Shishakli, and the civilian elite, represented by the People's Party, over the removal of the gendarmerie from military command and its placement under the control of the Ministry of the Interior, and the amending of the laws to the Military Tribunals in 1951. Al-Shishakli believed that the People's Party wanted to use the gendarmerie to serve their electoral interests upon the dissolution of Parliament. He rejected the appointment of a civilian Defence Minister,[149] thereby refusing the demands of the People's Party that sought to prevent the military from interfering in state policy. However, President Hashim al-Atassi, in agreement with the People's Party, parliamentary parties and independents who supported these demands, tried to force the military to accept the situation and form a Council of Ministers where Maarouf al-Dawalibi would be both Prime Minister and Defence Minister. Al-Atassi also issued a decree linking the gendarmerie with the Ministry of Interior.[150] Al-Shishakli saw this decision as a challenge to himself and the colonels, as it inferred that all commands would report directly to President al-Atassi without referring to al-Shishakli,[151] and would effectively remove power from the military elite and place it in the hands of the political elite. Al-Shishakli warned al-Dawalibi that the ministerial list was not acceptable to the army, and when al-Dawalibi refused to make any changes, the First Brigade marched at dawn on November 29, 1951 to occupy public facilities and government buildings. It then surrounded the Presidential Palace and cut off all communication with President al-Atassi. The Prime Minister, his government ministers, leaders of the People's Party and members of parliament were arrested and taken to Mezzeh Prison. In total, 42 people were detained.[152] Al-Shishakli continued to pressure al-Dawalibi's government in prison and threatened a military dictatorship if the government did not submit its resignation.[153] Subsequent decrees were distinctly repressive and imposed restrictions and censorship.[154]

On the other hand, the military, especially those who participated in coups, were accused of espionage and working with foreign countries by politicians from the ruling traditional elite and the emerging ideological elite. The Communist Party issued a statement on June 25, 1949 urging a boycott of the referendum called by Husni al-Za'im, in which it stated, "The referendum called by Colonel Husni, servant of American and British colonialism, is the biggest travesty in the history of Syria [...] He [Husni al-Za'im] has reinforced the control of American, British and French colonial powers in our country."[155] The Communist Party called the elections that were held under military rule "the fake colonial elections."

Despite al-Hourani's relationship with the military and his frequent role in coups, he accused the military, saying, "The military coup of Husni al-Za'im was encouraged by foreign actors."[156] He later accused al-Hinnawi and al-Shishakli of the same thing. Khalid al-Azm also described the military elite that pursued power as "the manic officers, seekers of command and control over the country."[157] He accused them of being a tool in the hands of the coloniser, and even described them as "slaves", stating, "Thus came Husni Al-Za'im, followed by al-Hinnawi and then al-Shishakli. They were each paid for by a foreign country to overturn the current situation and establish a new regime it could exploit."[158] In his memoirs, al-Azm expressed his remorse for accepting the military's offer to rule several times. His justification for cooperating with the officers in 1950 and 1951 was that he did so not for personal benefit, but to spare the country from military rule. As for 1955 and 1957, he says that the officers supported him to spite the People's Party.[159]

Not only did al-Azm criticise the officers contending for power for their political weakness in government, but he also mocked their weak education and cultural levels, calling them, “those officers who dropped out of public schools because they could not attain their degrees.”[160] He also says, “The majority of students who failed in preparatory schools scurried to the military school. It was attended by every lazy student who wanted to evade the long years of study at preparatory schools and universities.”[161] Thus illustrating that conflict between the military and politicians had a class dimension as well.

The middle-class and poor social backgrounds of the Syrian officers led them to adopt a socio-political discourse that protected the interests of the social groups to which they belonged. They presented themselves as “progressives” in the face of “reactionary” class rule. In his book, Hani al-Khair states that Adib al-Shishakli “while preparing for Husni al-Zai’m’s coup against al-Quwatli, was happy with his mission to take over public facilities and government buildings in Damascus, and arresting the President of the Republic, that quiet aristocrat.”[162]

The military elite presented itself as “progressive” based on two factors. The first was proclaiming that the coup was “progressive”, since it was a revolution against a system of “conspirators” and reactionaries”. The second was describing the modernist constitutional and legal amendments it approved in the face of traditional society as the true embodiment of “progressive” thought.

On the fifth day after his coup, Husni al-Zai’m delivered his first speech to the people, thanking them for their support, and promising to establish a “new progressive regime”[163] that draws from the people's desires and hopes. He did not mention anything, however, about restoring democracy or constitutional order. Furthermore, the statement from the military that was presented to the people to explain the reasons for the three coups in 1949, contained expressions such as “spreading a progressive spirit” and “the progressive idea”.[164]

The Turkish and Egyptian models of military rule served as inspirations for coup leaders. The military, therefore, did not view their coups as an attack on authority. Rather, they saw them as modernising and progressive movements aimed at reforming laws and building a modern state. Under their regimes, religion clauses were removed from identity cards, nomadic Bedouins were settled, and a central bank was established.[165]

Husni Al-Za’im modernized school education and updated the curricula of Damascus University. He banned the use of titles such as ‘Pasha’ and ‘Bey’ and began the process of removing religious endowments and replacing Islamic Sharia law with modern civil, criminal, and commercial laws. He also appointed new governors who enjoyed both civil and military authority. Al-Za'im confronted the traditional Damascene community and made away with its extreme and strict religious traditions. He publicly declared his indignation at the traditional Arab dress, keffiyeh and agal, after which the streets were filled with old collections of foreign European hats. Moreover, women emerged and participated more freely in public life.[166] After Al-Hinnawi's coup, the government ratified a new electoral law on November 11, 1949, in which the voting age was reduced from 21 to 18, and women were given the right to vote. The economy developed remarkably under al-Shishakli, with notable growth in agriculture, industry, and services. Furthermore, Legislative Decree No. 87, issued on March 28, 1953, set up the basic monetary system and established the Central Bank of Syria.[167]

During the 1950s and 1960s, the military considered itself the most modern group in society. In principle, the army adopted a modern approach and followed modern disciplinary orders. They were interested in economic and social reform and adopted nationalization policies. Moreover, they fought against 'regression' and 'imperialism', according to the jargon used at the time.[168]Thus, it is safe to say that the 'progressivism' adopted by the military was more concerned with social freedoms than political freedoms. This was the basis on which they criticized the ‘reactionary’ ruling class that allowed political freedoms but did not adopt radical economic and social reform in order to preserve its class interests.

4.3. Exclusions and Purges

The political history of Syria, from independence to the present day, has been characterized by practices of exclusion, elimination, and purges among political parties, within the ranks of each party, and between politicians and the military. The assassination of Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar, leader of the People's Party, in 1940 constituted the first political purge.[169] Between 1946 and 1963, Syrian political parties were purged and disbanded four times.[170]

After independence in 1946, the Syrian government, headed by al-Quwatli, took over the ‘Special Troops of the Levant’ from France, which numbered approximately thirty thousand fighters.[171] The Syrian army experienced its first bout of factionalism after independence, with rivalry between senior officers and young officers. Defence Minister Ahmad al-Sharabati and his successor al-Quwatli, both supported the young officers and sought to discharge the senior officers. This was due to the fact that a small number of commanding officers had joined the revolution in 1945 against the French, while the rest were subsequently handed over to the Syrian government.

On the other hand, most of the young officers had joined the revolution. Sharabati and Quwatli sought to win the loyalty of these young officers, and to discharge the old officers. However, the opposition, headed by Akram al-Hourani, believed that with the decisive battle for Palestine fast approaching, it was necessary to strengthen the army, rather than purge it, by reassembling the old guard and introducing conscription laws which would provide the army with tens of thousands of young soldiers. The opposition's weakness at the time meant that al-Quwatli's decisions would be implemented. Indeed, the mass military discharge and weakening of the army cannot be overlooked when discussing causes for the 1948 Palestinian Nakba and the first coup d'état as well. The military institutions, whose pride and dignity were wounded in the 1948 Palestinian Nakba, were outraged at the ruling elite and their policies towards the army.

Husni Al-Zai'm explains the reasons behind his coup, stating that, "the primary reason was the reprehensible attack on the army by Parliament."[172] However, after taking power, al-Za'im arbitrarily discharged a large number of officers and soldiers, dissolved parties and closed down their offices, and arrested political leaders and forced them to issue statements that he dictated. Most notable was the letter Michel Aflaq was forced to write in prison in which he renounced the Ba'ath Party. Later on, al-Hinnawi's attempts to exclude his fellow officers caused them to turn against him and stage a coup. When al-Shishakli came to power, he issued Decree No. 1349 on December 27, 1952, effective on January 1, 1953, in which he dismissed forty officers and commanding officers. He then issued a series of decrees restricting the activities of political parties.[173]

On the other hand, and driven by the devastation of the Palestine War, al-Shishakli focused his efforts on strengthening the army and consolidated his relations with the young officers to increase his popularity.[174] He influenced appointments within the army, and placed officers loyal to him in key positions, strengthening his control over the security services.[175] Al-Shishakli and his colonels became the nexus of power and influence in the country. He removed Chief-of-Staff Anwar Bannud, an officer from Aleppo and a relative of Nazim al-Qudsi, in order to weaken the influence of the People's Party. On April 23, 1951, al-Shishakli became Chief-of-Staff, while Bannud was appointed military attaché in Ankara, and Fawzi Selu was forced to retire after many years of service.

During al-Shishakli’s rule, policies of exclusion affected the Circassian officers Mahmoud Shawkat, who was forced to retire and was accused of plotting against the country, and Khalid Jada, who was sent into exile with al-Hinnawi to Lebanon in 1950. These policies of exclusion were also applied to a number of

Christian officers, including Armenian officer Lieutenant General Aram Karamanoukian, who was dismissed from the artillery regiment after the December 1950 coup, and his colleague, officer Bahij al-Kallas, who was tried on charges of an attempted military coup. As for Alawite officers, Mohammad Maarouf was sent into exile in Lebanon after being imprisoned following the coup against al-Hinnawi, Ghassan Jadid was removed as head of the Military Police, and Aziz Abdel Karim was marginalized. Colonel Mohammad Nasser, Commander of the Syrian Air Force, was assassinated on August 1, 1950 by unknown persons. On October 30, 1950, Major General al-Hinnawi was shot in Beirut by Hersho al-Barazi in revenge for the death of his cousin, Muhsin al-Barazi. Purges had thus expanded beyond political rivalries on Syrian soil, as officers increasingly sought to eliminate their opponents abroad.[176] Al-Shishakli's fiercest confrontation, however, was with the Druze, where the military was deployed. Mansur al-Atrash, a Druze Ba'athist and son of Sultan Pasha al-Atrash, leader of the Syrian revolution in 1925, distributed anti-Shishkali leaflets in Sweida in late January 1954 following arrests at anti-Shishakli student and party demonstrations. He was thereby arrested, which caused protests to erupt in Sweida and shootings took place. Al-Shishakli sent military reinforcements along with Hajjana forces from the Arabs of the Lajat, who were firmly hostile and vengeful towards Jabal al-Druze. The army entered Sweida where bloody confrontations took place, and the Druze delegation in Damascus which included Prince Hasan al-Atrash was arrested. A special force was also sent to arrest Sultan Pasha al-Atrash, forcing him and his comrades to seek refuge in Jordan after attempting to resist.[177] This explains the strong presence of Druze politicians and officers in the subsequent coup against al-Shishakli.

Al-Shishakli was not overthrown by a pure civil revolution that broke with the military approach and its violation of the field of politics, but rather by a joint military-political movement that allowed the military to maintain its influence in politics. Al-Shishakli's rule ended on February 25, 1954 and was followed by a period of instability that lasted nearly four years. The intense struggle between political parties hindered the formation of ministries several times. Several political parties were purged, including the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, which was dissolved on April 22, 1955, after being accused of assassinating Colonel Adnan al-Maliki. The National Party was also dissolved in the fall of 1956, after accusations of involvement in the Iraqi-British conspiracy, which aimed at establishing a union between Syria and Iraq.[178]

The political diversity and pluralism of the 1950s in Syria was reflected in the military through its the various factions and divisions. The army was no longer divided along sectarian lines as it had been before independence. Divisions, rather, became governed by internal political rivalries and external interferences, as Syria had become the epicentre for regional and international conflicts between axes and their intelligence services. As a result of this partisanship and rivalry, the military elite has endured massive exterminations since independence and until this day, and has witnessed discharges and forced retirements, imprisonment, exile, and assassinations. Al-Azm refers to this issue in his memoirs, saying, “Thus, no more than twelve years had passed until the number of discharged officers exceeded that of officers in active duty. If we examine the upper class, that is, the colonels and above, we find that it has been purged, leaving only the junior officers who do not yet possess the experience necessary to take over command of the army and its units.”[179]

Each coup leader eliminated senior officers that had been instated prior to their coup. This practice continued even during civilian rule in an effort to consolidate command positions in the army. Alliances between the military and party leaders contributed to these practices, as did relations with conflicting foreign axes over Syria.

The assassination of Adnan al-Maliki in 1955 was a turning point in Syrian politics that impacted the military and political elites. In November 1956, a year after al-Maliki's assassination, a coup attempt was made by a group of Syrian officers in cooperation with Iraq. Eight members of Parliament, a number of army officers and members of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party were accused of conspiring with Iraq to stage a military coup and overthrow left-wing rule.[180] These two events, the assassination of al-Maliki and the 'Iraqi conspiracy', contributed to the strengthening of the position of Ba'athist officers and their left-wing allies who objected to the reduction of death sentences issued against those accused of the Iraqi conspiracy.

In an effort to diffuse tensions within the army, Shukri al-Quwatli and Chief-of-Staff Tawfiq Nizam al-Din moved more than a hundred left-wing officers away from their support base in the army. Moreover, new appointments were made that reinforced the support base of Damascene officers loyal to al-Quwatli and al-Shishakli and weakened the left. These measures prompted Ba'athist officers to coordinate with the party leadership (Aflaq, al-Bitar and al-Hourani), to launch the Qatana insurrection on March 17, 1957.[181]

In August 1957, Radio Damascus announced the discovery of a plot designed by the CIA to overthrow the government in Syria. As a result, the American diplomatic mission was expelled from Damascus,[182] and Afif al-Bizri, a Soviet sympathizer, was appointed as Chief- of-Staff. He discharged high-ranking

Damascene officers and formed a command council consisting of Ba’athists and al-Shishakli officers, despite the lack of trust between the two groups. This mistrust became further entrenched after the al-Bizri and al-Shishakali factions allied with the Khalid al-Azm parliamentary bloc and the Communist Party to diminish Ba’athist influence in the army.[183]

In late 1957 and early 1958, Syrian politicians found themselves either subjected to or allied with military factions whose differences reflected the raging political and ideological rivalry. The Damascene Officers faction, led by Suheil al-Ashi, was affiliated with al-Quwatli and hostile to al-Hourani, the Ba'ath Party, and the left-wing and progressives in general. The faction of Amin al-Nafuri, Ahmad Abd al-Karim, Ahmad Hanidi, and Touma Awadallah was affiliated with al-Shishakli faction and hostile to al-Hourani and the Ba’ath, although some of them developed left-wing tendencies later on. The Afif al-Bizri and Communist Officers faction was mainly composed of Palestinians. The last faction consisted of Mustafa Hamdoun, Abdul Ghani Qanoot, and Ba’ath officers loyal to Akram al-Hourani. It was apparent that the political-military struggle would lead Syria into a bloody conflict. The military believed that the only solution was unity with Egypt, as it would put an end to these partisanships and protect Syria from the increasing foreign threats at its borders.

During the union with Egypt, both politicians and the military experienced the largest number relocations, exclusions, and discharges. After first dissolving political parties, Abdel Nasser then turned his attention to the military institution, the more dangerous of the two, in his opinion, as it had been the source of coups. He relocated senior officers to political positions of ministers, advisors and ambassadors to distance them from military command. The rest were sent on diplomatic and exchange missions. Egyptian officers thus ruled Syria, while Syrian officers fell prey to disguised unemployment in Egypt. Abdel Nasser excluded most Ba'athist and Communist officers. He dismissed al-Bizri one month into the union and discharged or relocated minority officers to Egypt or other civilian jobs, sparing only the Damascene Officers faction which would later turn against him and overthrow the union. Research into the history of the Syrian military institution shows that one of the many reasons that incited the coup against Abdel Nasser was his dismissal of a large number of officers.

After secession from the union, a new phase of factionalism and conflict began between those loyal to Nasser and the union, and those opposed to it. Political instability driven by intermittent coup attempts led to a constant change in government and the suspension of Parliament. Such was the case on March 28 - April 1, 1962, when the Damascene Officers

(officers of the September 28 Movement) overthrew the civilian government they had initially instated. This subsequently weakened their influence and that of many Christian officers, especially after the Homs conference on April 10, 1962, which exiled Damascene officers leading the coup. Under these circumstances, the army divided once again into several factions along partisan lines: Arab Nationalists, Ba'athist Officers, the September 28 Officers, and Nasserist Officers.[184]

On January 11, 1963, al-Nahlawi secretly returned with his comrades from exile to stage a coup in liaison with the Nasserists. On January 13, an insurgency took place in the Qatana, Qaboun and al-Kiswah[185] military camps in support of al-Nahlawi, prompting Colonel Ziad al-Hariri to move his forces on the Golan front towards Damascus, which was about to fall into a state of chaos brought on by these rival factions. When politicians tried to mediate a solution to the conflict, al-Nahlawi presented his demands which included the reinstatement of him and his comrades in the army, the trial of those involved in the Aleppo insurgency of April 1962, and the call for immediate and conditional unity with Egypt. President Nazim al-Qudsi met with al-Nahlawi and his comrades and reached an amicable agreement with them to leave Syria, while the Army Command issued a decision on March 1 to appoint al-Hariri military attaché in Baghdad. The failure of the remaining Damascene Officers cleared the stage for the Ba'athist and Nasserist factions and their independent allies. This prompted Colonel Ziad Hariri, allied with Nasserist officers and the Military Committee, to seize power on March 8, 1963. Afterward, failure of the tripartite unity pact between Egypt, Syria and Iraq in April 1963, accelerated the conflict between Ba'athists and Nasserists over power. This culminated in a bloody clash on July 18, 1963, following the failed coup attempt of Nasserist officer Jasim Alwan.[186] The Ba'ath Party and Military Committee thereby pursued a bloody path to monopolize power.

4.4. From Political to Sectarian Factionalism

After the coup of March 8, 1963, the military fell into a web of partisan and sectarian divides and witnessed unprecedented campaigns of eliminations and discharges on charges of separatism, bourgeoisie sympathies, populism, and subservience to al-Hourani. A few days after the coup, 500 officers from trained and professional army cadres were discharged, to be replaced by reserve officers who were party members, teachers and employees. Luay al-Atassi and Fahd al-Shaer point out that in the tripartite unity talks held on March 3, 1963,[187] discharges and purges targeted those affiliated with the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, the Communist Party, Kurds, Circassians, security officers in the Ministry of Interior and students at the

Military Academy, where an entire class was dismissed on the pretext that its students were secessionists. The Lebanese newspaper, Al-Hayat, published a list of discharges and reported on figures, “104 senior Syrian officers have been discharged, while 400 other officers are at their homes awaiting a decision.”[188]

Nasserist officers also faced discharges, which caused demonstrations to break out. The offices and newspaper of the Arab Nationalists were closed down, and its members either fled or were arrested and subsequently given long prison sentences.[189] The public sector was purged of Nasserists and their loyalists, who were, in turn, replaced by Ba’athists.

The Military Committee purged the civilian political wing of the Ba’ath, political rivals such as Nasserists, and a group of independent officers affiliated with Major General Ziad Hariri, relocating 25 of his supporters. It was then consumed by internal struggles for power among its factions at the expense of what was left of the Syrian Army, which was divided in 1964 into four blocs along sectarian, regional and clannist lines:

- Major General Salah Jadid's bloc consisted of Alawite officers, some officers of the Masyaf and Salamiyah districts, including Abdul Karim al-Jundi, and the left-wing civilian Ba’athists of the Regional Command.

- Major General Muhammad Umran’s bloc competed against Salah Jadid and Amin Al-Hafiz for the presidency, garnering support from Alawite officers, and semi-Nasserist civilians. Umran simultaneously approached the Damascene right-wing and Gamal Abdel Nasser.
- Officer Salim Hatum's bloc constituted a small centre of power in the army with the support of Jabal al-Druze officers.
- Amin al-Hafiz’s bloc comprised of Sunni officers.[190]

The first conflict between these rivalling blocs arose between Salah Jadid and Muhammad Umran. Despite their common sectarian background, their orientations and alliances were different. Umran allied with Salah al-Bitar, the prime minister and member of the National Command, who sought to cooperate with the merchants of Damascus, the Syrian right, the Ba’athists, and the Nasserists, and to garner Arab support for his government. They stood against the coalition of Major General Salah Jadid, the Regional Command and the left-wing military. Umran lost his military base after Salah Jadid took control of the 70th Brigade in Qatana. He submitted his resignation and was appointed Syria's ambassador to Spain in December 1964. Umran’s loyal officers were transferred away from various command branches, and some were dispatched on a military mission to Moscow. Umran was later assassinated in Lebanon on March 14, 1972. The second conflict was the coup against Amin al-Hafez and the National Command on February 2, 1966, which was followed by the exile of twelve officers and the purge of over ninety officers of various ranks, less than a year and a half before the June War, on charges of collusion with Amin al-Hafez. A number of officers were also discharged on account of belonging to the bourgeoisie. A popular class background became a condition for joining the army. Foreign Minister Ibrahim Makhous said to Akher Sa'a magazine in late June 1966: "The party is the base, and the army, like all institutions, must be organized in a partisan manner, as it is a popular sector that participates in elections and is therefore subject to political leadership. Which is why bourgeois officers were discharged and popular descent became a condition for enrolment in the Military Academy."[191] Salim Hatum, who played an executive role in the coup against Amin al-Hafez, found himself and officers of his bloc and sect, including civilians and soldiers, not only without promotion, but also facing discharges and purges. Hatum launched a failed coup against Salah Jadid, the result of which was the purge of two hundred Druze officers from the Syrian Army. Fahd Al-Sha'ir and Hatum were arrested and sentenced to death. Hatum died under torture.

Patrick Seale describes the situation after these purges as follows, "Assad, as Defence Minister, agreed to dismiss some

400 officers in the largest cleansing campaign in the history of the Syrian Army. He and Jadid were determined to put an end to sectarianism once and for all. If these are added to the many Nasserists and secessionists who were discharged or arrested since 1963, it becomes clear that Syria had tumbled in the June War without an officer corps, or at least with a corps that was greatly depleted."[192] The American Time magazine also published an article in January 1967 containing a description of the state of the Syrian Army. It stated: "The Syrian forces are shamefully deficient because more than half their officers have been targeted by the purge. The brigadiers of today were captains no more than three years ago. More so, a third of the Syrian Army is stationed in Damascus to support and protect the regime."[193]

Between July 1963 and February 1966, the conflict between the military wing and the civilian wing of the Ba'ath Party expanded factionalism along regional, personal and sectarian lines.[194] The conflict within the Ba'ath Party after 1963 was not a mere struggle between the right and the left, where the left proved victorious. According to Ghassan Salamé, it was instead a struggle between the utopian unionists for whom secession was a source of guilt, and a new pragmatic group that accepted the existing borders between Arab countries and whose organization relied on local-sectarian affiliations and a modern army. Hence, the defeat of Aflaq and al-Bitar in 1966 constituted a victory for the countryside over the city, for the minority over a fragile alliance between the majority and minorities, for the military over civilians, for pragmatism over utopia, and for the army over the party, the latter of which then became a tool in the hands of the army for propaganda, mobilization and cementing legitimacy.[195]

The only members of the Military Committee left standing were Salah Jadid and Abdul Karim al-Jundi on one side, and Hafez al-Assad and his brother Rifaat al-Assad on the other. The latter established the Defence Companies (unit 569) that Hafez al-Assad subsequently used to confront Salah Jadid, seize power and destroy the influence of Abdul Karim al-Jundi. Starting in the mid-1960s, the military elite pursued a policy of building an 'ideological army', which blurred the divisions between Salah Jadid's bloc, Muhammad Umran's bloc, and Hafez al-Assad's bloc. The army became a central pillar of the regime, which in turn took the form of a "party-army intermarriage or coexistence" rather than pure military rule.[196] Eventually, al-Assad managed to purge his rivals and seize power in what he called the 'Corrective Movement' on November 16, 1970.

Launching a military coup would not be an easy feat after 1970. Military spending rose to 13.7% of GDP,[197] while the regime exerted oversight and increased surveillance to prevent any coups. It strengthened the Ba'athist politicised armed forces and tightened its grip over security and intelligence apparatuses. Furthermore, promotions and discharges were issued based on the assessment of kinships and degree of loyalty to the regime. Another factor, identified by Roger Owen, was the application of Soviet concepts in organization and military tactics, which strengthened the regime's control over the officer corps and significantly limited the real power of division commanders.[198] The military elite also sought to integrate itself with the technocrats, state bourgeoisie and commercial bourgeoisie. This made it difficult for these groups to rebel against the status quo.

Following the Corrective Movement in 1970, the military was subjected to two parallel policies. The first aimed at improving its combat capabilities, which proved effective in the 1973 War, and the second aimed at preventing this combat capability from crossing over the predefined political line. This was guaranteed by reserving key and sensitive positions for relatives, friends and fellow sect members, and marginalizing traditional Alawite leaderships in favour of new Alawite senior officers.[199] Moreover, parallel paramilitary forces, such as the Republican Guard and the Defence Companies, were formed.[200] The affinity between the ruling sect, the army and the state grew stronger in the 1970s. This was evident in the new tasks that were assigned to the army, other than fighting Israel, the most prominent of which was the intervention in Lebanon in 1976, 1982, and 1983, and quelling the insurgency of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria in 1978-1982. It is noteworthy that these new tasks did not result in any insurgencies or mass desertions within the Syrian Army, which remained firm and resolute.[201]

The military institution and the Syrian state were redefined following the events of the 1980s. The purge of the Muslim Brotherhood and the ensuing war for power between the al-Assad brothers was followed by civil and military discharges and purges. In 1983, Hafez al-Assad had become the one and 'eternal' leader of Syria, propagated by political literature, official speech, slogans and pictures that covered the streets and state institutions. The most prominent slogan was "Our Eternal Leader, Hafez al-Assad". The Republican Guard replaced the Defence Companies, and officers in the security apparatus were allocated positions according to their Alawite clan origins. Policies on sectarian and ethnic quotas in Parliament, party groups, local administrations and ministries were extended to include all sects and ethnicities, not only Alawites.

The dividing line disappeared between politics and the military in terms of them being two separate institutions competing for power and distinct in ideology and class, as had been the case after independence. Al-Assad succeeded in establishing a strong presidential rule. He held the reins of power by taking control of the three centers of authority in Syria: the party (as its secretary general), appointing and dissolving governments, and the leadership of the armed forces and the military which became Ba'athist.[202] This led the presidency to control the whole of society, supported by civilian-military alliances, Alawite followers and relatives in security and military command positions, as well as the urban Sunni bourgeoisie, especially in Damascus.

Conclusion

Political elites in post-independence Syria were shaped by two main factors: the struggle with colonialism, and modernity. Most political elites and parties emerged during the French mandate, and their objectives and agendas revolved around resisting foreign occupation and striving for national independence. After independence, the struggle against the 'foreign other' remained the source of legitimacy for these elites, especially with regard to the Palestinian Cause, ongoing regional threats and colonial projects in the region, such as the Baghdad Pact. Internally, however, these elites entered into a political struggle over modernity and the social, economic and constitutional issues of the newly independent state.

The traditional elite that took power after independence constituted a class of landowners, notables, merchants and industrialists that fought in the struggle for independence, that is, the upper class that held political, economic and social influence. It was distinguished by its ethnic and religious diversity, with a clear Sunni Muslim majority, which united under the banner of an Arab identity and a national-liberal project. Its political orientations geared towards democracy and liberalism, and centred around the parliamentary system, constitution and individual freedoms. It was inspired by the Western European democratic political system. However, unlike its Western European counterparts, it failed to form a political class in the absence of a real class struggle. Economic growth during the mandate period and post-independence was not strong enough to bring about a modern economy led by an economic bourgeoisie which supported the emergence of a political bourgeoisie. Instead, the economic and political bourgeoisie in Syria merged to form the ruling class.

The traditional ruling elite did not follow a clear ideology and political agenda and did not break with traditional society. On the contrary, it invested in local loyalties and leaderships in an effort to build alliances and strengthen its influence, especially during elections. It failed to gain the confidence of the masses, which paved the way for the military to enter politics as representatives of the masses and the interests of the middle and poor classes. On the other hand, emerging ideological parties also failed to rally the vast majority of the masses. Independence, therefore, remained fragile as the intelligentsia and petty bourgeoisie concerned themselves with issues of national and political struggles while the masses were ignored. The masses were left without radical working or peasant class leaderships, as Yassin al-Hafez puts it,[203] and the Nasser leadership simply filled this vacuum. This situation also expanded military influence.

On the other hand, the conflict between the Arab axes over expanding influence in Syria, the Cold War, the 1948 defeat in the Palestine War, and the internal struggle over economic and social modernization projects contributed to the fragmentation and division of the traditional ruling elite. This made way for the emergence of a new elite that adopted multiple ideologies including Arab nationalism, Syrian nationalism, Marxism, and Islamism. The emerging ideological elite included members of the middle class and the upper middle class. It acquired legitimacy through its ideologies that opposed the ruling class, colonialism and imperialism alike. This made it symbolically powerful and appealing to the military, with whom it would form alliances. Furthermore, it possessed strong intellectual capital, as its members had attended Western universities and were influenced by European modernity.

The ruling elite failed to keep up with economic and social developments that accelerated post-independence and failed to deal with the mounting threat of the emerging ideological elite who exerted pressure through protests and demonstrations. This forced it to reorganize its priorities and revise its plans for democracy that began under the French mandate. The mandate had hindered the establishment of a solid foundation for a democratic parliamentary system, which remained fragile and a weak version of the Western parliamentary system. This allowed for successive military interventions and coups that obstructed the political constitution.

The first generation of military elites that engineered successive coups between 1949 and 1954 was formed within the French mandate's Special Troops. It descended from the middle and poor classes of ethnic and religious minorities who rebelled against urban civilian rule. This generation received a modest French secondary education, and thereby enjoyed limited intellectual capital. In the second half of the 1950s, a second generation of military elites emerged, which was moulded within national education and military institutions. It was therefore more politicized and radical, dividing the army into factions that mirrored the diversity in politics. Members of this generation mostly came from rural families of non-landowning farmers, with a few descendants of rural notables and civil servants.

Despite their modest education and origins, they were influenced by nationalist and socialist ideologies, and sought to improve their social and political status, which they achieved in 1963.

Disagreements between political and military institutions from independence until 1963 revolved around the following set of points: the position on military armament and the military's role in politics; unitary projects between Syria and countries in the region, and associated impacts on the republican system; the social question, class struggle, the peasant issue and the socialist system; the legitimacy of the ruling elites; the position on continuous foreign interferences and conflict of regional axes; military intervention in politics; political deployment of the military in political conflicts; mutual accusations of corruption; and issues surrounding notions of progressivism, reactionism, patriotism, reform and revolution.

In light of social divisions over notions of 'identity' and 'the national state', the diversity of sectarian and regional ties and loyalties, and foreign interferences, the military found itself the most organized, qualified and representative national institution. It believed it had the right to participate in politics since it was the protector of national security and unity against external and internal enemies alike. Its ability to launch a series of coups is attributed to the failure of civilian political authority to contain the military establishment, to neutralize it from interfering with politics, and to approach it as a state institution subject to the existing political system. The coups were launched under the pretence of defending the republican system and implementing progressive economic and social reforms. It took advantage of political instability caused by external regional factors and internal political factionalism.

It can also be inferred that in the absence of an institutionally dominant political elite, that is, a hegemonic bourgeoisie, armed forces will tend to seize power and dominate society. This process of appropriation is carried out in the name of ‘development’, by adopting radical social and economic reforms or “revolutions from above” as described by Gramsci and Trimberger,[204] and later by Raymond Hinnebush in his study *Syria the Revolution from Above*.[205] In Syria, the goal was to strengthen military rule and limit the power and influence of the traditional ruling elite, made up of notables and landowners, especially since the majority of military officers came from poor rural backgrounds and would stand to benefit from agrarian reform and nationalisation policies. In Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Algeria and Sudan, the military adopted socialist and left-wing political programs in their struggle against the traditional elite. These political systems emulated those of Turkey’s Ataturk and Egypt’s Abdel Nasser, thereby earning the name “populist nationalism”.[206] However, these new regimes, which built their discourses on equality and integration of the lower and middle classes in the struggle against the old hegemonic elite, were not 'populist' in terms of representing the people's interests. Rather, their intrinsic contradiction lies in their quest to mobilize the masses and control them at the same time.[207]

It can therefore be reasoned that since the military's conflict with the traditional ruling elite was on a class and ideological basis, then its conflict with other ideological elites, with similar social backgrounds and left-wing socialist orientations, was primarily over strategies and methods of social, political and economic change. And second, it was a struggle for power. This explains the suppression of other ideological groups and the struggle to monopolize power.

On the other hand, the failure to establish a truly democratic civilian state, from independence until the present day, has prevented the establishment of a truly independent military institution. Moreover, the failure of politicians to establish a functioning state apparatus, and the military's mistrust of politicians due to the latter's partisan and power struggles that disregard public interest, prompted the army to repeatedly intervene in politics, under the pretext of protecting the country's independence and unity. As a result, however, these interventions impeded the consolidation of the emerging national state and overthrew its nascent semi-democratic system, which could have been the beginning of a pluralist democratic system and a developed constitution.

The French mandate established an army that was fragmented along sectarian, tribal and ethnic divisions. In the period between independence and the early 1960s, the most politically pluralist phase in Syrian history, the army was politicized and divided between blocs and factions. Ideological affiliation was predominant, and politics was an integral part of public life. Competition between political and military elites was primarily on a political and ideological basis that was, at times, guided by local affiliations. The structure of the ruling elite radically changed in the 1960s, as previously marginalised social groups came to power. The semi-democratic system post-independence allowed them to enter schools and military academies and join radical parties. Consequently, political parties that rose to power followed a national socialist discourse and adopted policies of nationalisation and agrarian reform, thus shifting the centre of power and influence from the city to the countryside under the slogan of socialism. In addition, the army was subject to 'Ba'athification' under the guise of creating an "ideological army," with factionalism taking on an implicit sectarian and regional form. Under al-Asad, the military blended with the state and the ruling sect, as the regime tightened its control over society, the state and its institutions. Although Parliament was nominally representational of Syrian society, representatives could not be channels of communication between the people and the state, as their allocation was governed by their degree of loyalty to the regime. The same applies to other positions within political and military institutions.

Throughout these different stages of Syria's contemporary history, consistent processes of exclusion and purges between and within the military and politics continued to exhaust both institutions. This led to an abandonment of the semi-democratic system, pluralism, and individual and press freedoms. In return, the military paid the price for internal and external political conflicts with its officers and soldiers, when it integrated itself into political processes and became one of the competing interest groups, instead of abiding by its duties to repel external aggression and protect state sovereignty.

Today, a hundred years after the establishment of modern Syria, multiple regimes, and decades of overlap and conflict between the military and politics, where each side adopted a discourse that gave itself legitimacy under slogans of patriotism and protecting the interests of the people and the country, everyone seems to have lost. Political and military factionalism has expanded, with politics entering the realm of armament and military practices, and the military being plagued with politicization and sectarianism. Today more than ever before, Syria is an arena for regional and international conflict and foreign intervention. There has been no consensus on an inclusive national identity, and no constitutional government subject to separation of powers has been established. By assessing the histories of both political and military institutions in Syria, this study has sought to contribute to a future that learns from the mistakes of the past and its disastrous consequences for present-day Syria.

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[2] In 1860, an outbreak of violence rocked Damascus for a period of eight days. The main target was the ancient Christian quarter of Bab Tuma. The sociopolitical uprising that had erupted in Mount Lebanon two years prior in 1858 had spilled over into Damascus. This event had resounding effects on political developments in Damascus for generations to come. See, Philip S. Khoury, *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism: The Politics of Damascus 1860-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 8; K. S. Salibi, "The 1860 Upheaval in Damascus as Seen by al-Sayyid Muhammad Abu'l Su'ud al-Hasibi, Notable and Later Naqib al-Ashraf of the City," in W.R. Polk and R.L. Chambers, eds., *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: The Nineteenth Century,* (Chicago: 1968), 197; Fritz Steppat, "Some Arabic Manuscript Sources on Syrian Crisis of 1860," in *Les Arabes par leurs archives*, ed. J. Berque and D. Chevallier (Paris, 1976), 189.

[3] Factions of the Ottoman Army mounted a coup against Sultan Abdul Hamid II in Istanbul, after the Committee of Union and Progress infiltrated the ranks of the Third Ottoman Army in Thessaloniki. The coup forced Sultan Abdul Hamid II to restore the constitution and reinstate the General Assembly.

[4] The Ottoman countercoup of 1909 was engineered by the First Army Corps, loyal to Sultan Abdul Hamid II and was supported by religious elements in Istanbul. It is known as *al-fitnah al-irtija'iya*. News of the coup was celebrated by the movement of religious scholars and its followers in the Damascus neighborhood of Al-Midan who set out to kill local unionists. After the coup, the General Assembly met on April 27, 1909. They deposed Sultan Abdul Hamid II, and installed his brother, Muhammad Rashad V. See, Khoury, *Urban notables and Arab nationalism*, 57.

[5] King Faisal's government in Syria lasted from October 1918 until June 1920.

[6] Dhuqan Qarqut, *Tatawor al-haraka al-wataniya fi Suriyya 1920-1939* [Evolution of the Syrian Nationalist Movement 1920-1939] (Beirut: Dar al-Tale'a, 1975), 11-12.

[7] Burhan Ghalioun, *Fi al-nukhba wal sha'ab: Hiwar ajrah ma' Louay al-Hussein* [On the Elite and the People: A Conversation with Louay al-Hussein] (Damascus: Dar Petra, 2010), 30.

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[8] Seven political figures formed the nucleus of the National Bloc: Ihsan al-Sharif (Damascus); Ibrahim Hananu and Abd al-Rahman al-Kayyali (Aleppo); Najib al-Barazi and Abdul Qader al-Keilani (Hama); Mazhar Arslan and Hashim al-Atassi (Homs). See, Philip S. Khoury, *Suriyya wal intidab al Faransi: siyasat al-qawmiya al-Arabiya* [Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism 1920-1945], trans. Arab Research Institute (Beirut: Arab Research Institute Publishing, 1997), 297.

[9] France granted amnesty to Syrian revolutionary leaders in March 1928. Those who thereafter joined the National Bloc include Fawzi al-Ghazi, Lutfi al-Haffar and Faris al-Khoury (Damascus); Husni al-Barazi (Hama); Saadallah al-Jabiri (Aleppo). A second conference was held in Damascus in March to announce the participation of this coalition in the constituent assembly elections. Political activists that joined the ranks of the National Bloc include: Fakhri al-Baroudi, Zaki al-Khatib, Ahmad al-Laham, Afif el-Solh, Fayez al-Khoury, Mohammad al-Nahhas and Jamil Mardam Bey (Damascus); Tawfiq al-Shishakli (Hama); Ahmad al-Rifai, Abd al-Qader al-Sarmini, Hasan Fouad, Ibrahim Pasha and Jamal Ibrahim Pasha (Aleppo). Ibid.

[10] The treaty of 1936 was known as the Franco-Syrian Treaty of Independence. It was a result of negotiations between the National Bloc and the mandate authority in Damascus following the sixty-day nationwide strike in February 1936. The treaty provided for Syrian independence, emancipation from the French Mandate, as well as friendly relations and an alliance between the two countries. Negotiations took place in Paris between March and September 1936. Hashim al-Atassi headed the National Bloc delegation which included Jamil Mardam Bey, Saadallah al-Jabiri, Faris al-Khoury, Mustafa al-Shihabi and Edmond Homsi. Accompanying the delegation were lawyers Edmond Rabbat and Naim Antaki, political advisors, and Khalid Bakdash, head of the Syrian Communist Party. The treaty was ratified by the Syrian parliament in December 1936. The French parliament, however, failed to ratify the treaty as World War II broke out.

[11] Qarqut, *The Evolution of the Syrian Nationalist Movement*, 102-103.

[12] Mohamad Harb Farzat, *al-Hayat al-hizbia fi Suriyya-Dirasa tarikhia linushu' al-ahzab al-siyasia wa tatawuriha 1908-1955* [Political Parties in Syria: A Historic Study on the Establishment and Expansion of Political Parties 1908-1955], 2nd ed. (Beirut: Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies, 2019), 206.

[13] Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 298.

[14] *L'Orient-Le Jour*, August 7, 1948.

[15] Farzat, *Political Parties in Syria,* 211.

[16] According to Jamal Barout, members of the People's Party established a joint stock company, Al-Shahba Cement and Building Materials, in 1948. They established a second company in 1954, the National Cement

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Company, during a period of industrial, commercial and agricultural growth, taking advantage of customs policies and the nationalization of foreign capital to promote company growth. See, Jamal Barout, "*Halab fi al-tarikh: Wilaya Othmania istaqtabat al-hayat al-siyasia wal iqtisadia*" [Aleppo in History: An Ottoman Province that Drew in Political and Economic Prosperity, *Alhayat,* April 30, 2000.

[17] Farzat, *Political Parties in Syria*, 212.

[18] Khouloud Al Zghayare, "*Les élites politiques syriennes (1946-1963) Discours et pratiques*" [Syrian Political Elites 1946-1963: Discourse and Practice], PhD diss., (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris, 2017).

[19] Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 691.

[20] Unemployment in areas under the French Mandate affected 150,000 people, around 15 percent of the work force. See, Z. Y. Hershlag, *Introduction to the Modern Economic History of the Middle East* (Leiden, 1964), 231.

[21] Sa'id B. Himadeh, *The Monetary and Banking System in Syria* (Beirut, 1935), 219. On the economic crisis in Syria, see Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 447-450.

[22] For a list of attendees, see Akram Zaiter, "Itifaq al-Arab alaa wade Lubnan al-khas" [Arab Agreement on Lebanon's Special Status], *al-Hawadith,* no.978 (1975): 66.

[23] Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 451.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Lawyers in the League included Sabri al-Asali, Abd al-Razzaq al-Dandashi, Jamil al-Jabi, Fahmi al-Mahayri, Ahmad al-Shihabi, Shafiq Sulayman, Farid Zeineddiene, Ghaleb al-Azm, Muhsin al-Barazi, Mustafa Hourani, and Adnan, Makram and Helmi al-Atassi. Ibid.

[26] Hanna Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,1999), 133.

[27] Saqr Abu Fakhr, *Suriyyaa wa hutam al-marakib al-mubaethara* [Syria and the Wreckage of Scattered Ships] (Beirut: Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, 2005), 97.

[28] Sami al-Jundi, *AL-Ba'ath* (Beirut: Dar an-Nahar, 1969), 38.

[29] Wahib al-Ghanim, *Al-Monadel Magazine,* no.90-97 October/December 1976*;* al-Ghanim, *Al-Monadel Magazine,* January/May 1977.

[30] Abu Fakhr, *Syria and the Wreckage of Scattered Ships,* 110.

[31] Patrick Seale, *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 28.

[32] Abdullah Hanna, *Al'ahzab al-siyasia fi Suriyya al-qarn al-ishrin wa'ajwa'iha al-ijtima'ia* [20th Century Political Parties in Syria and their Social Environments], (London: Dar Qotb, 2011), Chapter 3.

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[33] Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry,* 29. See also, Akram al-Hourani, *mothakarat akram al-hourani* [The Diaries of Akram al-Hourani]. Vol.2 (Cairo: Madbouly Bookshop, 2000), 1737.

[34] Johnathan P. Owen, "Akram al-Hourani: A Study of Syrian Politics 1943-1954," PhD diss., (John Hopkins University, 1992).

[35] Antoun Saadeh was from a Lebanese Christian Orthodox family. He pursued a secondary education, moving between Lebanon and Cairo. After World War I, he left for the United States in 1919. He had to leave college in order to provide for his family, and worked as a railway inspector. In 1921, he moved to Brazil where he helped his father, Dr. Khalil Saadeh, edit *al-Majalla* and *al-Jarida* newspapers. Despite never completing his education, Saadeh mastered several languages. He read books on history, philosophy, social sciences and literature in their original languages. He returned to Lebanon in July 1930, then moved to Damascus in 1931 where he edited the Damascus newspaper *al-Ayyam.* In 1932, he returned to Beirut to secretly establish the Syrian Social Nationalist Party under the pseudonym 'The Syrian People's Party'. Party activities initially took place among students at the American University of Beirut, where Saadeh taught German. His discourse spread, prompting hundreds of people to join his party. In 1935, the party was exposed by mandate authorities. Saadeh and a number of followers were arrested and issued with various sentences, the maximum being a six-month imprisonment for Saadeh. He was repeatedly arrested between 1935 and 1937. He decided to leave the country in 1938, first to Brazil and then to Argentina where he remained until 1947. He returned to Lebanon following the country's independence from France, and founded *al-Jil al-Jadid* newspaper. He was accused of organising an armed insurrection in June 1949, and was persecuted by the Lebanese authorities. Saadeh moved to Damascus where, on July 4, 1949, he declared the first nationalist social revolution against the rule of tyranny, corruption, and fraud in Lebanon. He was subsequently handed over by Husni al-Za'im to the Lebanese authorities on July 7, 1949. He was given a quick trial and sentenced to death within 24 hours. Saadeh's execution took place at dawn on July 8, 1949. See, "*Hayat al-Za'im Antoun Saadeh*" [Life of the Leader Antoun Saadeh], Bashir Mousalli, The Syrian Social Nationalist Party website, accessed March 11, 2009; Khair al-Din al-Zirikli, *Al-Aalam* [Notables], Vol.2 (Beirut: Dar al-Malayeen, 1980), 27-28; Saleh Zuhair al-Din, *Mawsu'at Rijalat min Bilad al-Arab* [Encyclopaedia of Prominent Men from the Arab World] (Beirut: Arab Institute for Research and Documentation, 2001), 102-109; Abd al-Wahhab al-Kayyali, *Al-Mawsu'a al-Siyasia* [The Political Encyclopaedia], Vol.1 (Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, 1979), 364-365.

[36] Kamal Deeb, T*arikh Suriyya al-Mu'asir* [Modern History of Syria] (Beirut: Dar an-Nahar, 2011), 83-86.

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[37] Abdullah Hanna, *Al-Haraka al-Umalia fi Suriyya wa Lubnan 1900-1945* [The Workers' Movement in Syria and Lebanon] (Damascus: Dar Dimashq, 1973).

[38] Maktab Anbar was known under the Ottomans as the Royal Preparatory School. It is said that the house was originally the property of Mahmoud Pasha al-Quwatli, who handed it over to his Jewish accountant, Youssef Anbar, due to debt issues. Other sources claim that it was the property of a wealthy Jew named Youssef Anbar. It was seized by the Ottoman government due to debt issues, who proceeded to turn it into a preparatory school in 1887. From the end of the 19th century until the beginning of World War II, Maktab Anbar was home to the educated people of Syria, as it was the only official high school in the country. It included the most prominent educators and provided a secondary education to students from all over. In 1936, classes were moved to al-Tajheez School (Jawdat al-Hashimi), and Maktab Anbar was made into a girls' school and renamed al-Tajheez Institute for Women's Arts. In 1985, Maktab Anbar became a hub for cultural activities and became known as the Palace of Culture. See, Colette Khoury, A*wraq Faris al-Khoury – al-Kitab al-Awal 1877-1918 Nash'at al-Faris wa al-Thawra al-Arabia al-Kubra* [Faris al-Khoury Papers: Book One 1877-1918, Faris' Upbringing and the Great Arab Revolt], 2nd ed. (Damascus: Ministry of Culture, 2017), 78-80; Muhammad Kurd Ali, *Khutat al-Sham* [Damascus Plans], Vol.6 (Damascus: al-Nouri Bookstore, 1983), 102.

[39] Ezz el Din Malla, 137.

[40] MWT, *Registre des jugements du Tribunal de 1ere Instance Correctionnelle 1931 et 1932* [Register of Judgements of the Correctional Court of Tribunal of First Instance 1931 and 1932], 210-211.

[41] Imad Naddaf, *Khalid Bakdash yatahaddath* [Khalid Bakdash Talks] (Damascus: Ministry of Culture, 1993), 26-27.

[42] Ibid.

[43] See, Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-War Arab Politics 1945-1958* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1987), 42; Abu Fakhr, *Syria and the Wreckage*, 131; al-Hourani, *Diaries*, 788

[44] Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 671.

[45] Associations in Damascus include al-Gharraa Charity Association (1924), al-Tamaddon Islamic Association (1932), al-Hidaya al-Islamiya Association (1936) and al-Ulema Association (1938). Associations in Homs include Shabab Muhammad (1934), founded by Abu al-Suoud Abd al-Salam. Associations in Aleppo include Dar al-Arqam (1936), founded by Bahaa al-Din al-Amiri. It later became Dar al-Shuban al-Muslimeen. See, Adnan Saad al-Din, *Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin fi Suriya Dhikrayat wa Mudhkarat: Ma Qabl al-Ta'sis wa hata 'am 1954* [The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria

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Memories and Diaries: Pre-Establishment until 1954] (Cairo: Madbouly Bookshop, 2010) 55-63.

[46] Mustafa al-Siba'i grew up in a religious family in Homs, where his father, Husni al-Siba'i, was imam of the Great Mosque of al-Nuri. He founded charitable associations and was a supporter of the National Movement. He completed his secondary education in Homs and moved to Cairo in 1933 to study Islamic law at al-Azhar University, earning a doctorate from the Faculty of Shari'a and Law in 1949. Al-Siba'i had been involved in political activities early on, establishing secret societies that antagonized missionary schools and French and British colonialism. He was repeatedly arrested between 1931 and 1943 in Syria, Egypt, and Palestine. When he was released from prison in 1943, he had developed a chronic illness due to years of torture and hard labour. While his health deteriorated, he continued his work in teaching, writing, and editing. He led the Muslim Brotherhood and participated in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. He was a member of the Constitutional Assembly that was elected in 1949, and which later became the Syrian Parliament in 1950. See, Gustave von Grunebaum, *Hadarat al-Islam* [The Civilization of Islam] trans. Abd al-Aziz Jawid and Abd al-Hamid al-Abadi (Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization, 1994), 483; Johannes Reissner, *Al-Harakat al-Islamiah fi Suriya: min al-Arba'inat wa hata 'Ahd al-Shishakli* [Islamic Movements in Syria: From the 1940s to Shishakli's Rule], trans. Mohammad Ibrahim al-Atassi (Beirut: Riyad El-Rayyes Books, 2005), 150.

[47] Reissner, *Islamic Movements in Syria*, 137.

[48] Ibid, 138.

[49] Al- Zghayare, "Syrian Political Elites.".

[50] The handover process was not smooth. While many officers abandoned the French army and immediately joined nationalist forces, others rejected the handover, rebelled and caused chaos upon being notified of their dismissal from the army, especially those belonging to the 'additional troops'. As for Syrian soldiers who remained with the French upon their withdrawal to the Bekaa Valley, they were given two options. They could either continue to serve under the French Army until retirement, or they could return to Syria and serve under the national government. The latter were rewarded with promotions and compensations. See, Suheil al-Ashi, *Fajr al-Istiqlal fi Suriya* [Dawn of Syrian Independence] (Beirut: Dar Al Nafaes for Publications, 1999), 57; Bashir Zayn al-Abidin, *al-Jaysh wa al-Siyasah fi Suriya 1918-2000: Dirasah Naqdiyyah* [The Military and Politics in Syria 1918-2000: A Critical Study] (London: Dar Al Jabiya, 2008), 119-120.

[51] Gordon H. Torrey, *al-Siyasah al-Suriyyah wa al-'Askariyyun* 1945-1958 [Syrian Politics and the Military 1945-1958], trans. Mahmoud Fallaha (Dar Al Jamaheer, 1969), 52.

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[52] N.E. Bounacklie, “Les Troupe Specialles. Religious and Ethnic Recruitment, 1916-1946*”, International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25 (1993): 656; Batatu, *Syria’s Peasantry,* 304.
[53] Deeb, *Modern History of Syria*, 54-55; ibid., 100-102.
[54] Mohammad Maarouf, *Ayyam ‘Ishtuha 1949-1969 al-Inqilabat al-Askariyyah wa Asraruha fi Suriya* [Days I witnessed 1949-1969: Military Coups and their Secrets in Syria] (Beirut: Riyad El-Rayyes Books, 2003), 31-32.
[55] Al- Zghayare, “Syrian Political Elites.”
[56] Graduating officers from the Military Academy in Homs after independence were prominent in politics of the 1950s. These include Adnan al-Maliki, Suheil al-Ashi, Taleb al-Daghistani, and Faisal al-Atassi.
[57] Torrey, *Syrian Politics and the Military*, 157.
[58] Mounir Moussa, *Etude sociologique des Alaouites ou Nosaïris* [Sociological study of the Alaouites and Nosaïris] (Paris: R. Aron, 1958), 924-926; Eliezer Be’eri, *Army Officers in Arab Politics and Society* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1970), 336-337.
[59] Hanna Batatu, “Some Observations on the Social Roots of Syria’s Ruling Military Group and the cause for its dominance”, *The Middle East Journal* 35, (1981): 340-341
[60] Nikolaos van Dam, *al-Sira’ ala al-sulta fi Suriyya: al-Ta’ifiya wal anshita al-asha’iria fi al-siyasa* [Struggle for Power in Syria: Sectarianism and Clan Activities in Politics] (Cairo: Madbouly Bookshop, 1995), 54.
[61] “Article 1 of Decree No. 746 issued on October 24, 1953, by Syria's Ministry of National Defense”, *Al-Jarida al-Rasmiyyah li al-Jumhuriyyah al-Suriyyah* [The Official Gazette of the Syrian Republic], November 12, 1953, 5326.
[62] Batatu, *Some Observations*, 342
[63] Azmi Bishara, Suriyya: *Darb al-Alam nahw al-Huriyyah. Muhawalah fi al-Tarikh al-Rahin Azar 2011-Azar 2013* [Syria: Painful Path Towards Freedom. An Attempt at Contemporary History March 2011-March 2013] (Beirut: Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies, 2013), 281.
[64] D. Pipes, “The Alawi Capture of Power in Syria”, *Middle Eastern Studies* 25, (1989): 429-450.
[65] Itamar Rabinovich, *Syria Under the Ba'th, 1963-66: The Army Party Symbiosis* (Transaction Publishers, 1972).
[66] Raymond Hinnebush, *Syria the Revolution from above*, trans. Hazim Nahar (Beirut: Riad El-Rayyes Books, 2011), 112.
[67] Al- Zghayare, “Syrian Political Elites.”
[68] Al-Hourani, *Memoirs*, 1:336-340; ibid., 1:357-363.
[69] Khalid al-Azm, mothakarat khalid al-azm [The Memoirs of Khalid al-Azm] (Beirut: al-Dar al-Motaheda lil-Nasher, 2003), 1:284-287.

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[70] Regarding the agrarian issue and land ownership statistics in Syria before and after independence, see Ziad Keilany, "Socialism and Economic Change in Syria", *Middle Eastern Studies* 9, no.1 (January 1973): 61-72; Sayed Aziz al-Ahsan, "Economic Policy and Class Structure in Syria, 1958-1980", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16 (1984); Eva Garzouzi, "Land Reform in Syria", *Middle East Journal* 17, no. 1-2 (Winter-Spring 1963); Tabitha Petran, *Syria* (London: E. Benn, New York: Praeger, 1972).

[71] Ghassan Salamé, *al-Mojtama' wal dawla fi al-Mashreq al-Arabi* [State and Society in the Arab Levant] (Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 1987), 185.

[72] Ibid., 186; Al-Hourani, *Memoirs*, 3:2266-2272.

[73] Salamé, *State and Society in the Arab Levant*, 187.

[74] Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 686.

[75] In September 1948, the Arab Ba'ath Party issued a statement saying, "The Palestine War was a trigger for the emergence of several conspiracies of which the army was the first victim." Michel Aflaq was consequently arrested. Al-Hourani, *Memoirs*, 1:808.

[76] Al-Sharabati resigned on May 24, 1948. A parliamentary committee formed in March 1949 and published a report following an investigation into the Ministry of Defence and the Syrian Army. Ibid., 2:889-915.

[77] On defective weapons and rotten army provisions see, al-Azm, *Memoirs*, 2:181-184.

[78] For the contents of the letter see, ibid., 2:186-188.

[79] Ibid., 2:270.

[80] Gordon H. Torrey, *Syrian politics and the military 1945-1958* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1964), 162.

[81] Muhammad Umran, Tajrobati fi al-thawra [My Experience in the Revolution] (Beirut: Dar al-Jeel, 1970), 8.

[82] Ibid., 10.

[83] Mattheiu Rey, "Qiyam al-anzima al'askariya fi al-Sharq al-Awsat: I'adat qira'a fi 'zaman al-thawrat': moqabala ma' Henry laurens" [The Birth of Military Regimes in the Middle East: Reinterpreting the 'Age of Revolutions': Interview with Henry Laurens], trans. Khouloud Al Zghayare, *Al-Jumhuriya*, August 18, 2018, https://www.aljumhuriya.net/ar

[84] These included Abd al-Ghani Ayyash and Bashir Sadiq. Batatu, *Some Observations*, 146-149.

[85] Bishara, Painful Path Towards Freedom, 297.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Batatu, *Some Observations,* 301.

[88] The election law in Syria went through four stages between the mandate period and 1958. First was the Mandate Law, which remained in effect from the mandate until 1947 and followed the two-round electoral system

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(ballotage). The second stage comprised the 1947 Election Law, according to which the election became direct. Third was the election law that was drawn up in 1949 after Hosni Al-Za'im was deposed, in which the voting age was reduced from 21 to 18, and women were given the right to vote. The fourth stage began in 1954 when an amendment was made to the 1949 law. Parliament approved voting booths in election centers to ensure privacy and freedom of choice. This amendment freed peasants from the control of feudal lords and the pressure they imposed on them during elections. See, Owen, "Akram al-Hourani", 40-41.

[89] Torrey, *Syrian Politics and the Military*, 61.

[90] Ibid., 62.

[91] Ibid., 64.

[92] Tabitha Petran, *Syria* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1972), 87.

[93] Torrey, *Syrian Politics and the Military*, 88.

[94] The parliamentary committee's investigative report on the Ministry of Defense and the Syrian army after the 1948 war includes details and testimonies of a group of officers on the military's involvement in rigging the 1947 elections based on al-Sharabati's directives. See, al-Hourani, *Memoirs*, 2:914-915.

[95] The al-Atrash family had representation in the military establishment leadership through Mohammad, Hamad and Zaid al-Atrash; and in the Ba'ath Party leadership through Mansour, son of Sultan al-Atrash.

[96] The Jadid family held influence in the Syrian Social Nationalist Party leadership through Ghassan and Fouad Jadid. Whereas their brother, Salah Jadid, and their relative, Azzat Jadid, were pillars of the military group in the Ba'ath Party.

[97] Bahij al-Kallas took part in the military coups and then became Deputy Chief of Staff of the Syrian Army. His brother, Khalil al-Kallas, was a member of parliament representing the Ba'ath Party, and then became Economy Minister.

[98] Sayyid Abdel Aal, *Al-Inqilabat al-askariya fi Suriyya 1949-1954* [Military Coup d'états in Syria 1949-1954] (Cairo: Madbouly Bookshop, 2007), 29.

[99] The weak representation of Damascene officers in the Syrian Army leadership that was formed after April 2, 1962 was widely acknowledged. There was only one Damascene officer out of the eight members. See, Abdul Karim Zahreddine, *Mothakarati 'an fatrat al-infisal fi Suriyya ma bayn 28 Ayloul 1961 wa 8 Athar 1963* [My Memoirs of the Secessionist Period in Syria between September 28, 1961 and March 8, 1963] (Beirut: Dar al-Ittihad, 1968), 66; ibid., 221.

[100] Ibid., 215-216. See also, Itamar Rabinovich, *Syria Under the Ba'th, 1963-66: The Army Party Symbiosis* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1972), 32-33.

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[101] After al-Nahlawi's return to Syria along with his officers' who were exiled following the Homs Conference, insurgencies were reported in the Qatana, Qaboun and Kiswah military camps in support of al-Nahlawi. This prompted Colonel Ziad al-Hariri to move his forces on the front to Damascus, which was about to become a battleground for rivalling factions to take the capital. The insurgency ended the next day, with the insurgents' arrest and the expulsion of al-Nahlawi and his officers on the same day. See, Zahreddine, *My Memoirs*, 360-370.
[102] Ibid., 372.
[103] Bishara, *Painful Path Towards Freedom*, 283.
[104] Azmi Bishara clarifies that the term *'ukhwat al-dawra'* is reminiscent of the league of Memluk soldiers that Ibn Iyas talked about in his historical works. It is the allegiance between professional, craftsmen and principality groups. It is a band of brothers rather than a sectarian doctrinal group. Ibid., 283.
[105] In the context of internal Ba'athist conflict, officers and civilians loyal to the National Command of the Ba'ath Party accused the Military Committee of sectarian practices in mobilizing supporters that undermine the legitimacy of the party. The Committee was also experiencing internal conflict after some of its members initiated sectarian military organization under the pretext of loyalty homogeneity. This led to the expulsion of Major General Muhammad Umran in 1964. Ibid., 284.
[106] Be'eri, *Army Officers in Arab Politics and Society*, 336; J. C. Hurewitz, *Middle East Politics: The Military Dimension,* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969), 153.
[107] Munif al-Razzaz, *Al-A'mal al-fikriya wal siyasiyya: Al-tajruba al-murra* [Intellectual and Political Works: The Bitter Experience] (Amman: Munif al-Razzaz Institute for National Studies, 1986), 158-159.
[108] Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party, Syria Regional Branch, Regional Command, *Azmat al-harb wa harakat 23 Shubat wa in'iqad al-mo'tamar al-qutri al-akhir* [Crisis of War, the Movement of 23 February, and the Last Regional Congress], Damascus, 1966, 20.
[109] Al-Azm, *Memoirs*, 3:88; Zayn al-Abidin, *Military and Politics in Syria*, 153.
[110] See, al-Hourani, *Memoirs*, 2:954-956.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.
[114] *The Times-London*, August 26, 1949.
[115] Akram al-Hourani (Arab Socialist Party), Abdel Wahab Homed (The People's Party), Mustafa al-Siba'i (The Muslim Brotherhood), Jalal al-Sayyid (Arab Ba'ath Party) and others objected to the fact that the constitutional oath did not explicitly stipulate maintaining the republican

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system as a condition for Arab unity. See, Kouloud Al Zghayare, *Suriyya al-dawla wal hawiyya: Qira'a hawla mafaheem al-umma wal qawmiya wal dawla al-wataniah fi al-wa'i al-siyasi al-Suri 1946-1963* [Syria, the State and Identity: A Reading in the Concepts of Nation, Nationalism, and National State in Syrian Political Consciousness 1946-1963] (Doha: Arab Center for Research and Public Policy, 2020), 62.

[116] Ibid., 63-64.

[117] The Baghdad Pact Documents, Files 3 & 4*, People's Court Books*, Iraqi Ministry of Defence, 1681; ibid., 1124-1127; See, al-Hourani, *Memoirs*, 2:1605.

[118] Ibid., 2364.

[119] Henry Laurens, *al-Lo'ba al-kubra: al-mashreq al-Arabi wal atma' al-duwaliya* [The Big Game: The Arab Orient and International Rivalries], trans. Abd al-Hakim al-Arbid and Rajab Budabous, 2nd ed. (Libya: Ad-dar Al-Jamahiriya for Publishing, 1993), 229.

[120] Seale, *The Struggle for Syria*, 307.

[121] On November 24, 1956, a military spokesman announced that the government had uncovered a plot by the Baghdad Pact to overthrow the regime in Syria during the tripartite aggression against Egypt. The conspiracy was exposed following the arrival of a shipment of weapons to Jabal Al-Arab that was sent to Hassan Al-Atrash and Hayel Sorour from Iraq. The shipment lost its way and was confiscated by the Hajjana forces. Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Said was accused of financing the plot, and a number of Syrian politicians were accused of being involved, including members of the People's Party, the Constitutional Bloc, and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party. Dozens were prosecuted including Faydi al-Atassi, Munir al-Ajlani, Mikhail Ilyan, Hasan al-Atrash, al-Shishkali, Sami Kabbara and Ghassan Jadid. This led to the resignation of Sabri Al-Asali's government in December and the formation of a coalition government that did not include ministers from the People's Party or the Constitutional Bloc.

[122] On August 12, 1957, an announcement was made in Damascus that a plot to overthrow the regime, planned by the American embassy in Damascus, had been uncovered. As a result, three American diplomats were notified that they were no longer welcome. They are Military Attaché Robert Molloy, Second Secretary of the US Embassy Howard Stone and Deputy Consul Francis Jeton. The US government responded by expelling the Syrian ambassador, Farid Zayn al-Din, and one of his embassy employees. See, Seale, *The Struggle for Syria*, 383.

[123] Bonnie Saunders, *The United States and Arab Nationalism, the Syrian case, 1953-1960* (Westport: Praeger Publisher, 1996), 29-31; David W Lesch, *Syria and the United States, Eisenhower's Cold War in the Middle East* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1992)

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[124] The Syrian government signed an agreement with Czechoslovakia to purchase weapons. At the same time, a contract was signed with the Soviet Union worth 800 million Syrian Pounds payable over long-term installments, to supply the Syrian Army with advanced weapons such as submarines, aircraft and artillery. See, al-Hourani, *Memoirs*, 3:2363-2364.
[125] See, Zayn al-Abidin, *Military and Politics in Syria*, 251; Seale, *The Struggle for Syria*, 301-310.
[126] According to Mustafa Hamdoun, the Command Council was formed in secret in late 1956. Sessions were held in members' homes until Tawfiq Nizam al-Din was replaced with Afif al-Bizra as Chief-of-Staff. After that, sessions were publicly held in the Chief of Staff offices. See, al-Hourani, *Memoirs*, 3:2490.
[127] Al-Razzaz, *Intellectual and Political Works*, 87; Zahreddine, *My Memoirs*, 19-21.
[128] Bishara, *Painful Path Towards Freedom*, 282.
[129] The Steel Shirts paramilitary group first appeared in Damascus on March 8, 1936. On the composition and activities of the group, see, Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 526-531.
[130] On the Nationalist Youth, the Umayyad Troop and other scout and youth groups, see, ibid., 457-465.
[131] Khalid al-Azm, Memoirs, 3:32-33.
[132] Markaz al-wathâ'îq al-wataniyya [National Centre for Documentation], Damascus, no. 13.
[133] Michael H. Van Dusen, *Intra- and inter-generational conflict in the Syrian Army* (Johns Hopkins University, 1971), 335.
[134] Owen, "Akram al-Hourani", 42.
[135] One of the most important educators at the Military Academy in Homs was Nakhle Kallas, who taught mathematics. He had accompanied al-Hourani to Iraq and participated in the Rashid Ali al-Kilani revolt. His brothers, Bahij and Khalil Kallas, were friends with al-Hourani. They all grew up in the city of Hama.
[136] In his memoirs, al-Hourani provides an extensive defence of his non-involvement in military coups. Furthermore, through his research and interviews with al-Hourani, Jonathan Owen also asserts the inaccuracy of these accusations, but does not deny al-Hourani's strong relationship with the military.
[137] Ahmad Abdulla, "Namouthaj al-tahawol mn nizam 'askari ila nizam madani fi amrika al-latiniya" [The Transformation Model of Latin America from Military to Civilian Rule], *Siyassa Dawlia Magazine*, no.67 (1986): 87.
[138] Jaber Sayed Awad, "al-'askar wal siyasa fi amrika al-janoubiya" [Military and Politics in South America], *Siyassa Dawlia Magazine*, no.67 (1982): 42.

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[139] Fouad Isaac el-Khoury, *Military and Rule in Arab Countries* (London: Dar al-Saqi, 1990), 53.

[140] Sydney Fisher, *Social forces in the Middle East*, (New York: Cornell university press, 1955), 173-174.

[141] See Statement No.1 of Husni al-Za'im's coup in: Documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Embassy of Egypt in Damascus, Portfolio 218, file 3, vol.6, Report no.6, March 30, 1949; Nazir Fansa, *Ayyam Husni al-Za'im* [The Husni al-Za'im Days] (Beirut: Dar al-Afaq al-Jadida, 1982), 8; Hani al-Khair, *Adib al-Shishakli al-bidaya wal nihaya* [Adib al-Shishakli: The Beginning and the End] (Damascus: al-Inshaa' Publishers, 1994), 40-41; M.A.E.F.(L.F. a Damas) series Y., file 2A., vol 36, p. 284-285, R.No. 297, D. 2-4-1949.

[142] Zayb al-Abidin, *Military and Politics in Syria,* 149-150; al-Hourani, *Memoirs,* 2:929-930.

[143] Amin Abu Assaf, *My Memoirs* (Damascus, 1996), 299.

[144] Ibid., 281.

[145] Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Embassy of Egypt in Damascus, Portfolio 244, file 10, vol.4, report no.2, January 2, 1952.

[146] Ahmad Ibrahim Kheder, *'Ilm al-ijtimaa' al-askari* [Military Sociology] (Cairo: Dar al-Maaref, 1980), 291-292.

[147] The gendarmerie was in charge of maintaining security in the countryside, while the police force was in charge of maintaining security in cities. This system was put in place by the French. Husni al-Za'im merged these two forces and attached them to the Ministry of Defence, after they had been subject to the Ministry of Interior. Owen, *Akram al-Hourani,* 209.

[148] Torrey, *Syrian Politics and the Military* ,247.

[149] La documentation française, Bulletin Quotidien, R. No. 2053. D. 11-12-1951, P. 5; *Al-Ahram Newspaper,* November 11, 1951; *Akher Sa'a Magasine*, December 2, 1951.

[150] *Al-Ahram Newspaper,* November 11, 1951.

[151] Petran, *Syria*, 102.

[152] Abdel Aal, *Military Coup d'états in Syria*, 128.

[153]*Al-Ahram Newspaper,* December 2, 1951.

[154] After the Supreme Military Council tightened its grip on the country, all telegrams sent from Syria were monitored by the military, and people were not allowed to leave the country without special approval. There were orders to search people exiting at the borders. Members of Parliament were not allowed to leave. Newspapers affiliated with the People's Party were suspended, and all documents in their party offices were examined. President al-Atassi was warned against making any statement regarding the circumstances of his resignation or his dispute with the army. Al-Shishakli monitored a number of officers he had previously transferred away from the capital before the coup and asked them not to return to Damascus without

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permission from the General Staff. He sent military forces to Aleppo, Hama, and northern cities, and deployed troops in border areas. Moreover, 300 soldiers were sent to President al-Atassi's residence in Homs. See, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Embassy of Egypt in Damascus, Portfolio 244, file 10, vol.3, report no.208, December 5, 1952; *Al-Ahram Newspaper,* December 6, 1951.

[155] The Communist Party issued a statement on June 25, 1949 urging the people to boycott the referendum called by Husni al-Za'im. See, Yousef al-Faisal, *Thikrayat wa mawaqef* [Memoirs and Stands] (Damascus: Dar Noun, 2011), 84-85.

[156] Al-Hourani, *Memoirs*, 2:984.

[157] Al-Azm, *Memoirs*, 3:213.

[158] Ibid., 3:276-277.

[159] Ibid., 2:274.

[160] Ibid., 2:9.

[161] Ibid., 3:37.

[162] Al-Khair, *Adib al-Shishakli*, 39.

[163] Fansa, *The Husni al-Za'im Days*, 44.

[164] Abu Assaf, *My Memoirs*, 291.

[165] Patrick Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 84.

[166] Ibid., 86-87.

[167] For the full decree, see, Publications of al-Hassakah Chamber of Agriculture in al-Jazeera, *Legislative Decree No. 87, March 28, 1953, on the basic monetary system and establishing the Central Bank of Syria* (Aleppo: Al-Dad Publishers, 1953).

[168] Rey, "Interview with Henry Laurens".

[169] Shahbandar was assassinated in his clinic in Damascus in late June 1940 by Ahmad Assasa and three others who claimed that his assassination was for political and religious reasons. They accused Shahbandar of being a British agent and an enemy of Islam. Accusations of complicity and incitement were brought against many people including members of the National Bloc such as Jamil Mardam, Lutfi al-Haffar and Saadallah al-Jabiri. They were able to escape and fled to Iraq. There were other possible conspirators including French and British intelligence agents, and Mufti of Palestine, Amin al-Husseini. The assassination paralyzed the People's Party which had revolved around Shahbandar. Moreover, the National Bloc regained its prominence under the new leadership of al-Quwatli, after those accused of the assassination fled the country. To this day, the inciting conspirators are not known.

[170] During Husni al-Za'im's rule after the first coup (March 30, 1949 – December 14, 1949), during Adib al-Shishakli's rule after the third coup (November 29, 1949 – February 25, 1954), during unity with Egypt

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(February 21, 1958 – September 28, 1961), and during Ba'athist rule (March 8, 1963 – present).

[171] Fadlallah Abu Mansour, *A'asir Dimashq* [Hurricanes of Damascus] (Beirut: Mothakarat, 1959), 37.

[172] Bashir Fansa, *Al-nakbat wal moghamarat: Tarikh ma ahmalaho al-tarikh mn asrar al-inqilabat al-'askariya al-Suriyya 1949-1958* [Cataclysm and Adventures: The Neglected Historical Secrets of Syrian Military Coups 1949-1958] (Damascus: Dar Yarob Publishers for Research and Distribution, 1996), 91.

[173] Decree No.47 dated January 9, 1952 prohibited employees from to join political parties; Decree No. 100 dated January 31, 1952 prohibited students from joining political parties and groups; Decree No. 188 dated April 1, 1952 prohibited all types of advertisement for parties, associations, organisations and political bodies.

[174] Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East,* 116.

[175] Safouh al-Akhrass, *Revolutionary change and modernization in the Arab World: A case from Syria* (Broché, 1971), 131.

[176] Al-Hourani, *Memoirs*, 2:1244.

[177] Ibid., 1552-1564.

[178] Hashim Othman, *al-Ahzab al-siyasiya fi Suriyya: al-sirriya wal mo'lana* [Secret and Disclosed Political Parties in Syria] (Beirut: Dar Riyad al-Rayyis, 2001), 41-42.

[179] Al-Azm, *Memoirs*, 2:272.

[180] The attempted coup was known as the 'Iraqi Conspiracy'. The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) called it 'Operation Straggle'.

[181] Zayn al-Abidin, *Military and Politics in Syria*, 272.

[182] Laurens, *The Big Game*, 234.

[183] Al-Hourani, *Memoirs,* 3:2368-2380.

[184] Zahreddine, *My Memoirs*, 302-303.

[185] Cities in Rural Damascus.

[186] The failed Nasserist coup, led by Jasim Alwan, against the Ba'ath caused hundreds of deaths and injuries. Within hours, 27 officers were executed by a court-martial.

[187] Al-Hourani, *Memoirs,* 4:3188.

[188] Al-Hayat Special Delegate, "104 Dubbat Suriyeen ohilo ila al-taqa'od" [104 Syrian Officers Discharged], *Al-Hayat Newspaper,* March 15, 1963.

[189] Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East*, 138.

[190] Al-Hourani, *Memoirs,* 4:3245.

[191] Ibid., 3387.

[192] Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East*, 187.

[193] Al-Hourani, *Memoirs,* 4:3430.

[194] In 1965, sectarian discourse rose within the military institution, evident in the conflict between Sunni Amin al-Hafiz and Alawite Salah Jadid.

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[195] Salamé, *State and Society in the Arab Levant*, 164.

[196] Raymond Hinnebush, *Syria the Revolution from above*, trans. Hazim Nahar (Beirut: Riad El-Rayyes Books, 2011), 38.

[197] Nazih N. M. Ayubi, *Tadkhim al-dawla al-Arabiya: al-siyasa wal mojtama' fi al-sharq al-awsat* [Over-Stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East] trans. Amjad Hussein and Faleh Abdul Jabbar and Arab Organization for Translation (Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 2010), 518.

[198] Roger Owen, "The Role of the Army in Middle Eastern Politics", *Review of Middle East Studies*, no. 5 (1978).

[199] Al-Hadadin, al-Haydariyin and al-Khaytin clans were marginalized in an effort to bring in loyalists from al-Nmelatiya branch of the al-Mtawra fighting clan and the al-Kalbiyya clan which President Hafez al-Assad was descended from. See, Bishara, *Painful Path Towards Freedom*, 289.

[200] Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State*, 533-534; Salamé, *State and Society in the Arab Levant*, 166.

[201] Ibid., 166-167.

[202] Hinnebush, *Syria the Revolution from above*, 144-145.

[203] See, Yasin al-Hafiz, *Al-Hazimah wal ideologia al mahzoumah* [The Defeat and the Defeated Ideology] (Damascus, Dar al-Hasad, 1997): 188; Yasin al-Hafez, *Al-Aamal al-kamilah* [The Full Works] (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2005): 858.

[204] Ellen Kay Trimberger, *Revolution from Above: Military Bureaucrats and Development in Japan, Turkey, Egypt, and Peru* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1978).

[205] Hinnebush, *Syria Revolution from above*.

[206] Raymond Hinnebush, *Authoritarian Power and State Formation in Ba'thist Syria: Army, Party and Peasant* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1990), 1-3; Nazih N. M. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (New York, I. B. Tauris, 1995), 196-223; Hinnebush, *Syria the Revolution from above*, 39-40.

[207] Ibid., 40.

3

The Images of Syrian Refugees in the Mainstream Narrative:

A Case Study of Lebanon

AHMAD BARAKAT

Abstract

This paper re-examines the images that were associated with the Syrian refugee crisis between 2015-2018 through a case study investigating depictions in the mainstream narrative. The main contribution of the paper is to establish a link between the mainstream narrative and the negative images of Syrian refugees, and to draw parallels between the media and political discourse surrounding this subject. The main argument is that the mainstream narrative has significantly contributed to communicating a negative image of Syrian refugees in host societies through a stereotyped categorization. It aggravated the negative image of Syrian refugees through overreaction, panic, and by placing focus on the most controversial and sensitive problems in the host communities, such as demography, unemployment, and security.

Introduction

The tension and prolonged duration of the Syrian crisis aggravated the negative images of refugees regionally and internationally. The importance of this paper stems from the fact that it tackles a crisis unprecedented since the Second World War (1939-1945). 13 million have been displaced since the conflict erupted in 2011, accounting for about 60% of the population before the war, mainly distributed in neighbouring counties, North Africa, Europe and North America.[1] More than five million have sought refuge in neighbouring countries: Turkey (3.4 million), Lebanon (1 million), Jordan (660,000) and Iraq (250,000). More than 150,000 live in North African counties such as Egypt (130,000) and Libya. About one million refugees or asylum seekers live in Europe: Germany (530,000 representing the fifth largest refugee population in the world), Sweden (110,000) and Austria (50,000). There are approximately 100,000 refugees in North America, representing less than 1% of the total number of Syrian refugees worldwide.[2]

The aim of this paper is to analyse the negative images that were associated with Syrian refugees since the eruption of the civil war in 2011 through a case study of the mainstream narrative in Lebanon. The main argument is that the mainstream narrative has significantly contributed to communicating a negative image of Syrian refugees through overreaction and panic. The paper argues that the mainstream narrative constructed a stereotyped image of Syrian refugees as dangerous and undisciplined. They pose a risk to the safety of the host societies, its political and economic well-being, and are incompatible with its culture. It claimed that they are primarily male and highlighted the absence of women and children. It communicated an image of women as victims of domestic or community violence, victims of human trafficking or victims of a prevailing masculine mentality.

The methodology section discusses the social research method used in the paper to obtain and analyse data. The social and political context section provides a broad overview of the social and political context in Lebanon, the relations between Syria and Lebanon and the eruption of civil war in Syria in 2011. The literature review section analyses the secondary sources and academic authors’ arguments concerning the research question. The theoretical framework section positions the theory within the broad framework of social constructivism. The section on the mainstream narrative provides images of Syrian refugees in the Lebanese mainstream media, ranging from being pitiful victims to being ISIS affiliates. The subsequent section on parallels between the media discourse and the political discourse analyses the correlation between the media outlets on the one hand and the political powers and wealthy families on the other. The conclusion restates the main finding on the dominance of one mainstream narrative communicating a negative image of Syrian refugees, and the absence of a counter narrative.

Methodology

The main contribution of the paper is to establish a link between the mainstream narrative and the negative images of Syrian refugees. The main question concerns how the mainstream narrative contributed to communicating a negative image of Syrian refugees between 2015-2018. The paper uses case studies, which involves an up-close, in-depth, and detailed examination of the subject of study in relation to the contextual conditions.[3] The paper adopts social constructivism as a theoretical framework, which maintains that human development is socially situated and knowledge is constructed through interaction with others.[4] The research analyses mainstream narratives, which are defined as the majority cultural practices of a society. These can be used to describe the lens through which history is told from the perspective of the dominant culture. This term has been described as an invisible hand that guides reality and perceived reality. Since the narrative can be true or imaginary, these two terms together create the notion of ‘dominant narrative’, which refers to those who occupy the dominant group in different aspects of life, such as media and activism,[5] whose stories are told, and therefore heard.[6] The paper uses narrative analysis[7] to facilitate its examination of the news, media and interviews as the units of analysis to research and understand the way people create meaning in their lives. It centres on the organisation of human knowledge more than the collection and processing of data. This technique captures the minute portrayed, infused with the unrevealed meaning communicated by the teller.[8]

Twenty anonymous semi-structured interviews were conducted with Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Five more semi-structured quality interviews were conducted with Syrian officials from the Foreign Office, and five more with officials from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Damascus. Five additional semi-structured quality interviews were conducted with Lebanese nationals. The interviews focused on the personal experiences of the interviewees vis-à-vis the research question and the images of Syrian refugees in the mainstream narratives in Lebanon. The interviews were particularly important within the larger methodology in explaining, understanding and exploring the research question, while open-ended questions provided in-depth insightful information. Interviews were conducted via Skype in Arabic. Primary data were also obtained from the news, media and interviews by the Lebanese news agencies and television. My previous career in the Syrian Foreign Office, and the UNHCR office in Damascus facilitated access to the interviewees with a broader understanding of the narrative.

To avoid bias and to explore different narratives fairly, the major Lebanese media outlets between 2015-2018 were reviewed with no selectivity, exclusion or consideration as to political orientation or religion. These were: Noursat TV, Aljadeed TV, Almanar TV, MTV, Future TV, LBC TV, National News Agency, Tele Liban TV, Jabal Lebnan FM, Nostalgie FM, Radio Liban Libre, Radio Voix du Liban, Albinaa Newspaper, Cedar News, Arabweek Magazine, Femme Magazine, Ediori Magazine, Almughtareb Magazine, Almassira Magazine, Almarkazia News Agency, Daily Star Newspaper, Lorient Lejour Newspaper, Aldyar Newspaper, Almustaqbal Newspaper, Alhayat Newspaper, Alanwar Newspaper, Alsafir Newspaper, Alnaher Newspaper, Aljoumhouria Newspaper, Alakhbar Newspaper, Aliktissad Magazine.[9] These represent the major political actors in Lebanon, including: Gebran Bassil, Nabih Berri, Hassan Nasrallah, Saad Hariri, Samir Geagea and Walid Jumblatt.

The focus of the paper was news and entertainment programs. Data collected from interviews, notes, video and audio recordings, images, and text documents were gathered and examined as a whole. Notes were made on first impressions. The collected data were then revised again, one by one and read line by line. Sections relevant to the research question were labelled, then more precise relevant words, phrases, sentences, or sections about actions, activities, concepts, differences, opinions, or processes were labelled. The data were categorised and compared on a more general, abstract, and conceptual level. The most relevant categories were labelled and their connections to each other examined.[10]

Social and political context

Lebanon is characterised as culturally Arab, permeated with Western influences, French in particular. For a long time, it was the only country with a Christian majority in the Arab world, but the Christian majority has declined in comparison to the Muslims population, which caused the country to undergo significant political change.[11] A civil war between 1975-1990 had its origin in the conflicts and political compromises of Lebanon's post-Ottoman period and was exacerbated by the nation's changing demographic trends, inter-religious strife, and proximity to Syria, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Israel. It began as a conflict between Christians on the one hand, and the Palestinians and the national movement on the other. The conflict was complicated and changed the demography, which encouraged Muslims to demand greater participation in the government.[12]

On the 6th of June 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon and occupied Beirut in an attempt to stop Palestinian forces from attacking its territories. The invasion ended with the departure of the Palestinian and Syrian forces from Lebanon, and the signing of an agreement on the 17th of May 1983. Both allies and enemies resumed fighting, which justified the return of the Syrian forces in 1983 for the deterrence of further violence and the restoration of peace and stability. The war ended on the 30th of September 1989 with the Taif Agreement, which emphasised the special relations between Lebanon and Syria, and affirmed Lebanon's independence and Arab identity. It stipulated a set of political reforms, most importantly the distribution of seats in the House of Representatives equally between Muslims and Christians, and detracted the powers of the President of the Republic in favour of the Council of Ministers.[13]

In 2000, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak announced a full withdrawal from Lebanon. After the extension of the term of the President of the Republic Emile Lahoud, the UN issued resolution 1559/2004 which demanded the withdrawal of foreign forces and the disbanding and disarming of all Lebanese militia. On the 14th of February 2005, President Rafic Hariri was assassinated. Demonstrations demanded the withdrawal of Syrian forces and the establishment of an international tribunal to investigate and punish the killers. Syria's allies rallied a huge demonstration on the 8th of March in Lebanon, saluting the Syrian army. Lebanese anti-Syrian presence groups held a huge counter demonstration on the 14th of March. Since then, the Lebanese split into two camps, the '8th of March' and the '14th of March'. In July 2006, Lebanon was the site of a 34-day military conflict between Hezbollah and Israel, which erupted in response to Hezbollah's capture of Israeli soldiers. It severely damaged the Lebanese civil infrastructure and displaced approximately one million Lebanese.[14]

In March 2011, a civil war erupted in Syria and caused a major refugee crisis and influx of millions of refugees. The war was fought by several factions such as the Syrian government's armed forces and its international allies, an alliance of majority Sunni opposition rebel groups, including the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and Salafi jihadist groups, Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). A number of counties in the region and beyond were involved either directly or indirectly and provided support to one faction or another. The fighting spilled over to Lebanon between 2011-2017 as opponents and supporters of the Syrian government travelled to Lebanon to fight and attack each other on Lebanese soil. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, given the complexity of the Syrian conflict, bias in media reporting remains a fundamental challenge that misinforms researchers and misguides policy makers regarding the actual events.[15]

The social and political context aggravated the images of Syrian refugees in the mainstream narratives which were projected against a background of Lebanon's exposure to a series of serious socio-economic and political crises, which were a result of interaction among internal and external dynamics since the civil war in Lebanon, long before the Syrian refugee crisis. The increased expenditure failed to satisfy the public services and meet the rising demands amid a sharp decline in trade, tourism and investment. Lebanon suffered from a shortage of water supplies, which led to a decline in sanitation, electricity and employability. Standards of living declined, and many Lebanese have reached a level of poverty and struggle to meet their basic needs and expenses.[16]

Literature review

A study by the ABAAD Resource Centre for Gender Equality,[17] in partnership with the International Women's Association for Peace and Freedom, reviewed 504 articles published in three Lebanese newspapers: Alsafir, Alnahar and Alakhbar, over a period of 13 months between 2015-2016, in addition to 142 news reports by the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation, MTV and Aljadeed TV. The qualitative analysis of the content showed that the overall press reports depicted Syrian refugee women as victims of domestic or community violence, victims of human trafficking or victims of a prevailing masculine mentality. The study referred to the perpetuation of the stereotyped image of Syrian women as guilty through images and videos that were published in the material. The material was associated with human trafficking and accompanied by images of sex trade or photos of women living in refugee camps, stereotyping and mainstreaming the Syrian refugee status in Lebanon.[18] The study concluded that the surveys showed a prevailing logic of generalisation and/or marginalisation in the Lebanese media dealing with Syrian refugees in line with the media system of the Lebanese political authorities. It communicated an image of Syrian refugee women as victims that have no political, social or economic role.[19]

A study by the Maharat Foundation[20], the Media Monitoring Unit in Lebanon and Jordan, and the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information concluded that the Lebanese media coverage had been politicised and weighed against the national interest of Lebanon and aid from donors.[21] The literature on Syrian refugees, however, did not establish a link between the mainstream narrative and the negative images of Syrian refugees, and parallel between the media discourse and the political discourse, a gap which this paper attempts to fill.

Theoretical framework

This section positions the theory within the broad framework of social constructivism in connection with the main argument to unpack the meanings of mainstream narratives of Syrian refugees. The influence and importance of the media in daily life continues to grow phenomenally. It has the ability to disseminate information and to encourage the citizens-customers to accept it without critical or conscious interpretations or informed understanding. An important factor in the development of media is the technological advances that contributed to the rapid spread of media and gave more power to the presentation of reality and the state of society as it corresponds to the creators and constructors of that reality. Media has become part of everyday life by constantly issuing updated information, or constantly repeating other information so that it makes this information inevitable, creating an illusion in modern individuals that s/he is a member of the ‘global society’. The highlight of this illusion is the created ‘image of reality’ in which the life of the modern human is unthinkable without the mass media. Media not only affects the individual, but also the entire society as a collective, as a space in which individuals meet their individual needs, achieves interests and realizes or loses their potential, talents or ideas.[22]

Ideally, media mediates between people, groups, communities, institutions and other social actors, to be the means of mass communication in society. However, media, through the explanation and interpretation of the information, ‘constructs’ the social reality in the sense that it adds to the information some elements that the original information did not have, that it forms information according to the requirements or the expectations of the centres of power, or some other interest groups. Mass media includes news and information, entertainment, powerful educational tools and more. It is the instrument of social control by special interest groups, individuals, institutions and countries. The entire set of social entities affects the creating of the illusion of the existence of a specific, autonomous, necessary and ‘desirable’ culture.[23]

With rapidly evolving media and technological tools, social constructivism holds that meaning-making is created through active engagement with knowledge and social interaction. In the age of cable TV, internet and cell phones, media shapes how people make meaning of and construct knowledge in the world. It creates new and larger communities reaching a broader spectrum.[24] The cognitive equilibration process of assimilation and accommodation of new experiences to one’s knowing system, or the sociocultural appropriation of new skills, evolves through opportunities to interact in social networks online or mediated through computer or mobile technologies. Knowledge occurs through shared activity, through community engagement, dialogue, and communication in a community of shared activity.[25]

The Mainstream Narrative

The mainstream narrative has arguably communicated a negative image of Syrian refugees. Fake refugee images, photos and memes have been used to demonise them and distort public opinion. Many of these photos were edited or taken out of context in an effort to support a myth or argument, such as that ISIS jihadists are using Syrian refugees to infiltrate Europe, or that refugees are healthy, rich and do not need help. Several photos have surfaced online claiming to show Syrian refugees who came to Lebanon comparing them with more recent images of ISIS militants. However, even in cases where the photos appear to be of the same person, identification between photos has not been proven. Following an assertion by the Lebanese Minster of Education, Elias Bou Saab, to the UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, in 2015 that one in 50 Syrians entering Europe could be an ISIS member,[26] a spokesperson for the UNHCR noted that there is no legitimate way of proving such figures, and that this kind of statement is extremely unhelpful.[27]

In 2015, Aljadeed TV broadcast randomised interviews with Lebanese nationals expressing stereotyped views. It communicated an image of refugees as scared homeless beggars spreading in the streets all around Lebanon. They eat the food of the Lebanese and deprive them of job opportunities through providing cheap labour. Some interviewees identified Syrian refugees as suspicious or ISIS affiliates. Others were racist and expressed contempt towards them as uncivilised dark-skinned invaders. Others interestingly noted that Syrian refugees do not deserve any sympathy because they put themselves in this situation when they revolted, while at the same time they themselves re-elected president Bashar al-Assad in the Syrian embassy in Beirut in 2014.[28]

Demography is understandably a sensitive issue in Lebanon that shaped its attitude towards Arabism and broader pan-nationalistic causes.[29] The fact that Lebanon is comprised of different religious and ethnic groups and minorities explains the fear of a demographic imbalance resulting from the flow of large numbers of Muslim refugees. However, this has been arguably exaggerated and propagandised to panic. A journalist in Alnahar, Hussein Hazouri, claimed that Syrian refugees have changed the identity, culture and demography of Lebanon as they constituted two million versus the Lebanese who were four million.[30] His claim however, conflicts with the statements by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres, and UN statistics stating that there were 1,172,753 Syrian refugees in Lebanon in 2015[31] and a Lebanese population of 5.851 million.[32]

In a report in 2015, France 24 described the labour of Syrian refugee adolescents in farming, car repair or food delivery as a daily fact. Arguably however, it did not explain the phenomenon against the decision of Minister of Labour, Sajaan Qazzi, who confined the Syrian labour to cleaning, farming or building,[33] and who were consequently not expected to practice prestigious jobs. Its attitude towards the challenges facing Syrian children in Lebanese schools was arguably not on educational and pedagogic grounds. It depicted them as untalented and uncompetitive in comparison with their Lebanese peers, who are taught in either French or English. "During the class of French, the pupils repeat mechanically after the teacher, '*Jad mange du pain avec un verre de lait'*[34] two times, then the teacher asks them what Jad ate in the morning? Silent, the teacher finds himself obliged to re-explain in Arabic. When they pray, they do not understand a word, they do not even know the alphabet". France 24 claimed that in each of the schools they visited, there were children who never had never been to school before, and children in adolescence who did not know how to read or write.[35] Such a claim is, however, debatable because in 2015, the first wave of refugees had been only settled in Lebanon for four years. They arrived in May from Talkalakh in Homs, where education, reading and writing is free and strictly mandatory in accordance with law 35/1981, and law 32/2002.[36]

In an article published by Alnahar in October 2016, an academic professor Mona Fayyad warned that Syrian refugees have launched an armed conflict among themselves and against the Lebanese forces, and could consequently be viewed as a time-bomb that would eventually undermine security and stability. She condemned racism in general, but maintained that theorising was one thing, and practice was another. The repercussions of the Syrian refugee crisis was unprecedented and required a different description that goes beyond the racist cliché. The increase in the number of refugees, she claimed, led to an increase in the number and quality of crimes that were not previously known, such as slaughtering and beheading. Syrian refugees serve as a tool in the hand of some parties that exploit their desperate conditions and destitution in return for aid.[37]

Fayyad explained the attitude of Syrian refugees from a physical perspective that also takes into account other factors such as genetics and biology, psychology and frustration. To support her argument, she explained that interactions in an empty container of air are different from those that occur in a full container. A vital space is required to allow a good and balanced life for living organisms. Losing this space resulting from extreme overcrowding disrupts these balances and produces a full extent of new, threatened, uncoordinated and aggressive behaviours. Ethology explains this phenomenon hypothesising that what regulates population waves in mammals is physiological mechanism as a response to density. The claim is proven in caged animals responding to density with stress and releasing lethal or fatal steroid secretions.[38]

A report published in 2016 by Alnahar entitled ‘The deterioration of air quality after Syrian asylum’, blamed air pollution on Syrian refugees, through linking increased fire accidents and the increasing number of Syrian refugees.[39] Another report published in 2017 by MTV, entitled ‘The heads of Lebanese hairdressers are exposed to scourge by Syrian scissors’, talks about a Syrian invasion of the profession, claiming that Syrian workers were taking over the jobs of the Lebanese.[40] Another report by Aldiyar published in May 2017 claimed that 300,000 Syrian refugee women were to give birth in 2017, while the birth rates between 2011-2017 were less than 100,000.[41]

On the 20th of April 2018, Aljadeed TV presented a sarcastic song of Syrian refugees, performed by Layal Daou in an entertainment programme. It handles the working class with scorn and contempt, mocks the Syrian dialect and expresses resentment of the frequent birth of children, which made the Lebanese a minority. In an interview with the editor and director, Charbel Khalil argued that the song is an expression of the social conditions in caricature, and denied charges of racism and calls against Syrian refugees. Another sketch by Charbel Khalil on LBC suggested that the Syrian women appealed to the Lebanese men because they are cheaper. A Lebanese lover abandoned his Lebanese beloved because their relationship is costly. He noted that he could engage with two Syrian women for the same cost.[42]

Fadi Dahouk, a journalist, claimed that the song was a form of provocative abuse and a threat to the lives of vulnerable refugees. It is consistent with the Lebanese mainstream narrative attitude presenting Syrian refugees as human mass desiring to occupy Lebanon and control its wealth.[43] Layal Haddad, head of the media department in Alaraby Aljadeed, noted that the song is not separated from a stereotypical portrayal of Syrian refugees in the Lebanese mainstream narrative; women work in human trafficking, and men steal, loot and rape. They have no talents, and they seek asylum to live on subsidies. They are primitive people, who have many children and work in popular professions, such as taxis drivers or wardens.[44] Hussein Berro, a dramatist from Istanbul, maintained that the influence of the song goes beyond its lyrics because of its targeting a sweeping majority of popular audiences. Entertainment episodes are the most watched and can convey messages which the target audience would accept subconsciously. The song has psychological and heritage connotations because of its techniques. Its beautiful tune carries history, culture and heritage of the Levant. Its folkloric melody is vivid and similar to love and wedding songs, which makes it easy to remember and echo.[45]

In September 2018, MTV published a special report that linked Syrian refugees to the increase of cancer rates in Lebanon, which the Lebanese Ministry of Health documented as 5.6 percent in 2018. In an interview, a medical specialist, Fadi Nasr, attributed the increase to two reasons: pollution and Syrian refugees. He explained that "the increasing infections caused by the spread of Syrian refugees in Lebanon are directly causing cancer. Because of the poor conditions they have suffered from, they come with dangerous bacteria that can create diseases in humans."[46] Mr. Nasr and MTV, however, did not refer to any evidence or studies that led to these findings.

In 2018 in an entertainment episode on LBCI, *Take Me Out*, the candidate responded to a question of whether he can speak Syrian dialect with "I am very racist! I prefer the devil to Syrians."[47] While this could arguably be seen as an individual attitude, the reaction and applause of the audience suggest that it might not be, and that the program has changed the Syrian catastrophe into material for an entertainment episode. It is also in line with a separate survey by Insider Monkey that Lebanon is number one in figures for racism regionally, and number two globally.[48] A Lebanese journalist, Rana Najar noted that the attitude towards Syrian refugees is based on their social class. Rich businessmen are not exposed to racism or aggression because of their contribution to the economic welfare of Lebanon, the mainstream narrative avoids telling such stories that may conflict with the dominant stereotyped narrative, and suggests the existence of a counter narrative or images of Syrian refugees investing or hiring Lebanese labour.[49]

Parallel between media discourse and political discourse

This section provides paradigmatic examples of widespread narratives that have been consistent across different media and remained the same between 2015-2018. The dominance of one mainstream narrative and absence of a counter narrative in Lebanon introduces a parallel between the media discourse and the political discourse. Minister of Information Melhem Riachi acknowledged a deficiency in the mainstream narrative and media. In a joint workshop with the UNHCR on 3 August 2017, he noted: "We need to market positive media in Lebanon, and when we say positive media, we do not mean to hide facts or objectivity, but not to market a Syrian refugee who is a killer as if all refugees are killers. Such claim is racist, untrue and inhuman. The refugees are protected by law, which is above all. You are professional journalists and there is a great responsibility on all of you until Syrian refugees come back home safely. Your narrative should be positive, sensible, logical and courageous. It is only love that would eradicate tension between the guest and the host."[50] The statement, which could be seen by different standards as balanced, was however criticised by Lebanese journalists who viewed it as an attempt to silence and tame them.[51]

Arguably, a parallel can be observed between the media discourse and political discourse. There are two explanations for this pattern. The first is the fact that most of the local media is owned or directed by the political powers which determine the overall course of the media discourse.[52] Contrary to many other Arab countries, the Lebanese government does not control media outlets. However, political parties have the power to influence and direct the majority of Lebanese media institutions, which reflect the country's sectarian politics and serve as a mouthpiece for political propaganda. With the media being entangled in national politics and international influence peddling, journalists are arguably required to act like political activists. Since media outlets do not rely on readership, but rather on investors and political or sectarian affiliations, there is little interest in producing quality media. Bribing journalists to publish a certain piece of information, or to avoid any further analysis on specific matters has become common practice.[53]

In her work 'The Lebanese media: Anatomy of a system in perpetual crisis',[54] Sarha El-Richani's adaptation of Hallin and Mancini's media typology to the Lebanese system functions as a scholarly springboard that moves the typology beyond the western world. As such, her critical assessment of the Lebanese system through Hallin and Mancini's four dimensions leads to an amended model that takes into consideration the unique elements that render the Lebanese system a variation of the Polarized Pluralist Model. Analysing the major tenets of Hallin and Mancini's framework, including a focus on the nation-state as a unit of analysis, as well as its goal of identifying patterns across various media systems, the key components of the Lebanese political system and the nature of governance, El-Richani labels Lebanon as a 'weak state', which comes as a result of the critical role of the Lebanese populist political patrons in deteriorating the country's political and media systems.[55]

Examination of ownership patterns of media, the high level of staff and audience partisanship, as well as patterns in guest appearances on broadcast shows characterise a high level of political parallelism. This is evident in the direct relationship between the media and political groupings,[56] which explains the bias in communicating the images of Syrian refugees. Key indicators, such as the poor organization of the profession, the use of journalists as instruments of the powerful, and low ethical standards, which are mainly a result of low salaries and bribery, suggest that the Lebanese media system has low levels of professionalism. El-Richani's assessment of the media market indicates that, given the political and sectarian frames of the Lebanese media, combined with the inability of the Lebanese press to generate sustainable income through advertising and a fragmented regional market that has so far only had room for entertainment programming at the expense of Lebanese political show, Lebanese media parallel with political grouping.[57]

A joint report by Reports Without Borders and the Centre for the Defence of Media and Cultural Freedoms in 2018, on the ownership of media institutions, based on the analysis of 37 major Lebanese media outlets, revealed that Lebanon's media is tightly aligned with domestic and foreign powers vying for control. Key political groups but also wealthy family clans benefit from a weak or dysfunctional legal framework that reflects an overall laissez-faire attitude. They have managed to maintain and extend their grip on pockets of public opinion throughout the dramatic events that have unfolded in and around the country in the last decades. Media in Lebanon is dominated by concentration, politicization and polarization. The Lebanese media record 79.3% dependency on the government, political parties or personnel. The report concluded that media legislations do not guarantee the transparency of media ownership, nor do they provide the necessary mechanisms to prevent conflict of interests.[58]

The study showed that there are 37 media outlets with the highest followings, concentrated in the hands of eight families and three political parties, which arguably explains the dominance of one mainstream narrative and absence of a counter narrative. The first four television companies are LBCI, Aljadeed, MTV and OTV. They are followed by 8 out of 10 viewers, which makes up 78.1% of viewership. They are respectively owned by the Khayat, Daher-Saad, Aoun, and Gabriel Murr families. A similar concentration is also evident in the first four newspapers, Aljumhuriya, Alnahar, Alakhbar and Aldyar, which makes up 77.9% of readership. Their respective main shareholders are the Michel Elias Murr, Hariri, and Tueni families, Ibrahim Al-Amine, and Charles Ayoub. Radio channels appear to be a little less focused. The first four companies are Modern Media Company, Lebanon Free Productions and Broadcasting Company, Almada Group and The New Audio and Visual Media Company, which accounts for 72% of listeners. The top four respective shareholders are the Khazen family, the Lebanese Forces, Elias Bou Saab, and the Phalange Party.[59] Media outlets are owned by the state, current or former MPs, ministers or political parties, which led to a media coverage of specific political orientations.

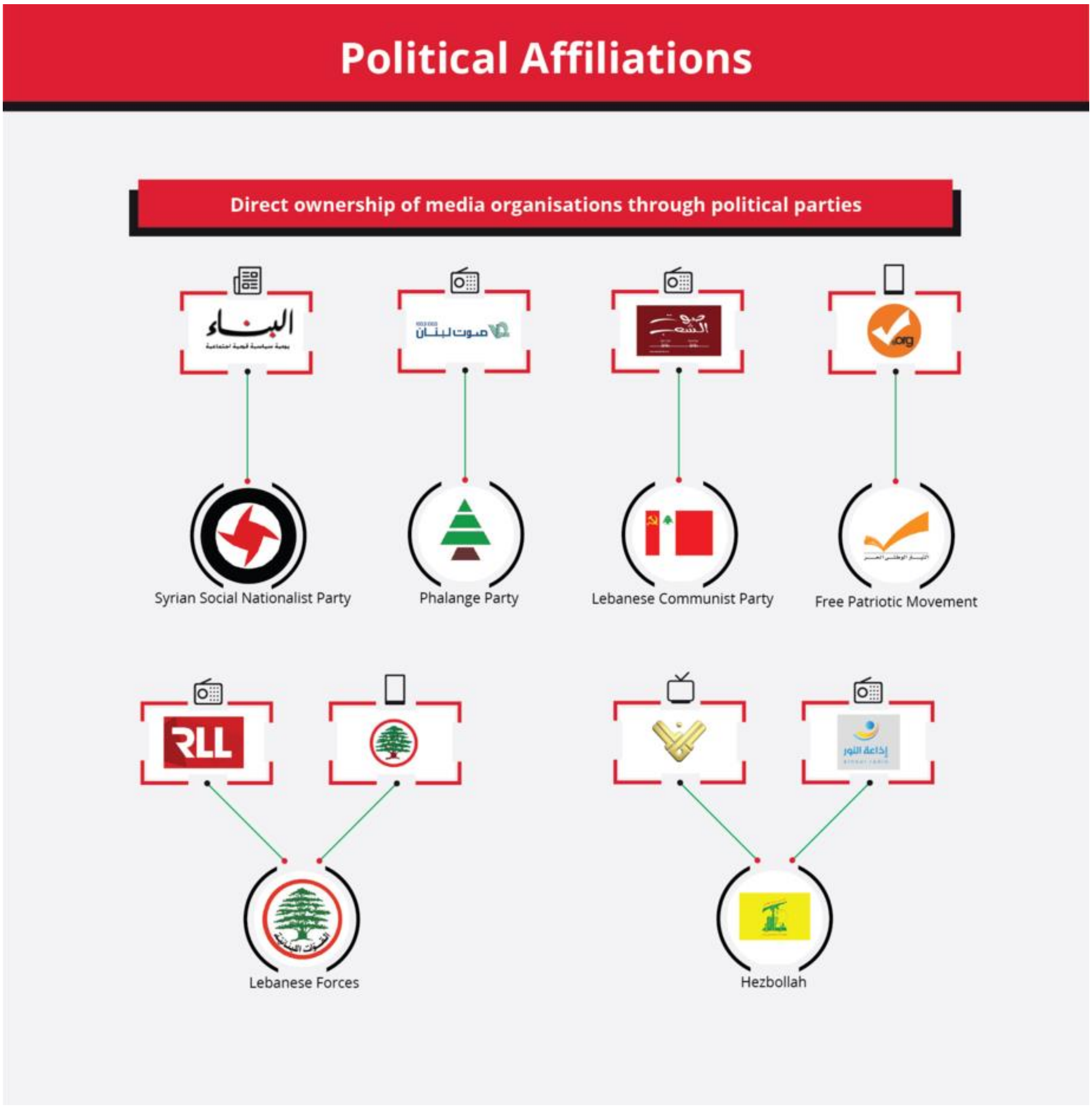
Political Affiliations
Direct ownership of media organisations through political parties
البناء
RLL
Syrian Social Nationalist Party
Phalange Party
Lebanese Communist Party
Free Patriotic Movement
Lebanese Forces
Hezbollah

Figure 1: Direct ownership of media organizations through political parties.[60]

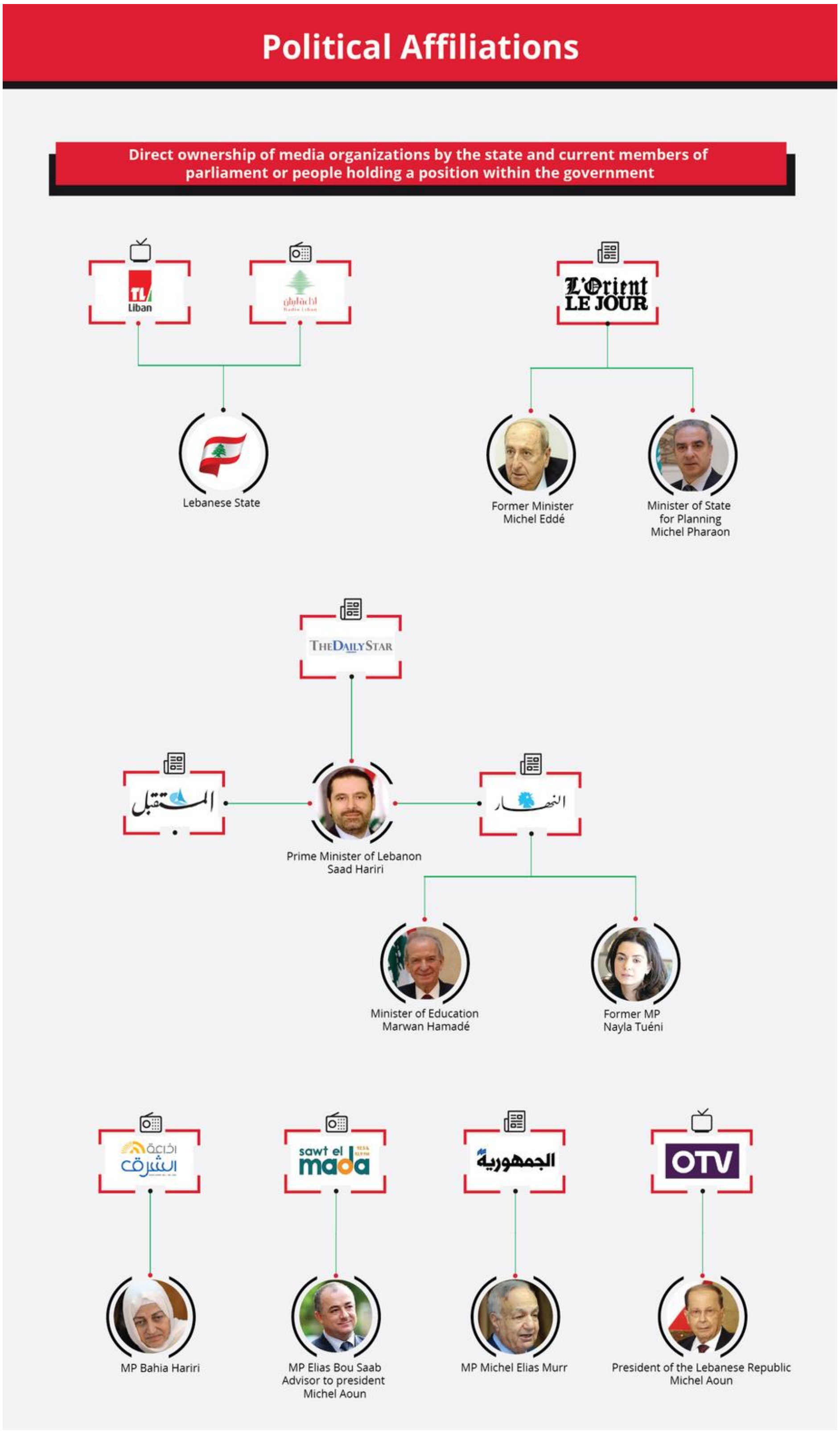
Political Affiliations
Direct ownership of media organizations by the state and current members of parliament or people holding a position within the government
Lebanese State
Former Minister Michel Eddé
Minister of State for Planning Michel Pharaon
Prime Minister of Lebanon Saad Hariri
Minister of Education Marwan Hamadé
Former MP Nayla Tuéni
MP Bahia Hariri
MP Elias Bou Saab Advisor to president Michel Aoun
MP Michel Elias Murr
President of the Lebanese Republic Michel Aoun

Figure 2: Direct ownership of media organizations by the state and current members of parliament or people holding positions within the government.[61]

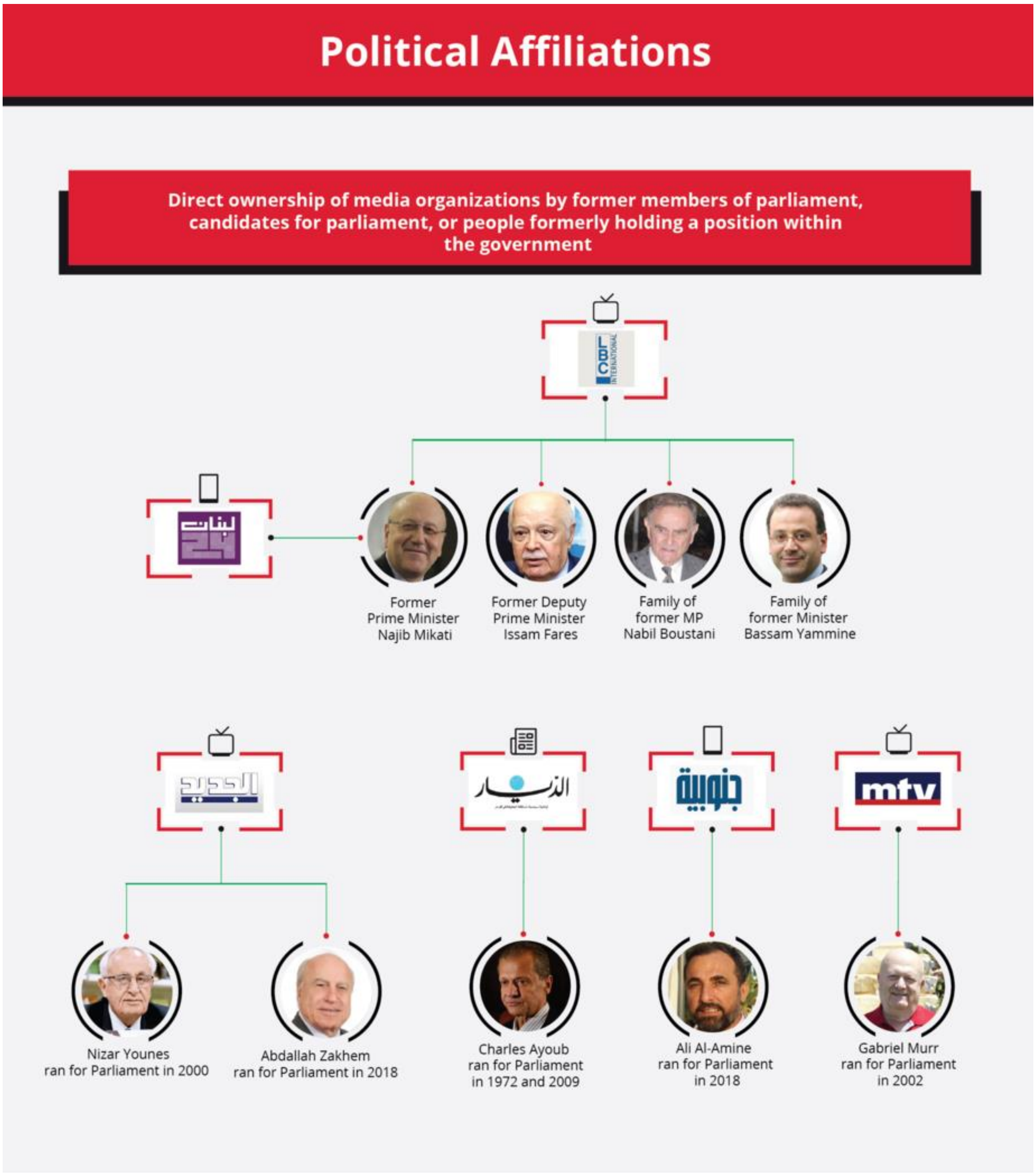
Political Affiliations
Direct ownership of media organizations by former members of parliament, candidates for parliament, or people formerly holding a position within the government
LBC INTERNATIONAL
لبنان 24
Former Prime Minister Najib Mikati
Former Deputy Prime Minister Issam Fares
Family of former MP Nabil Boustani
Family of former Minister Bassam Yammine
الجديد
الديار
جنوبية
mtv
Nizar Younes ran for Parliament in 2000
Abdallah Zakhem ran for Parliament in 2018
Charles Ayoub ran for Parliament in 1972 and 2009
Ali Al-Amine ran for Parliament in 2018
Gabriel Murr ran for Parliament in 2002

Figure 3: Direct ownership of media organizations by former members of parliament, candidates for parliament, or people formerly holding positions within the government.[62]

The second explanation is the complexity of the Syrian-Lebanese relations and tension since independence because of the conflicting attitudes towards the identification of Lebanese nationalism and dis/union with Syria. The attitude of the Lebanese towards the Syrian military intervention in the civil war in Lebanon between 1975-1990 shaped the Lebanese attitude towards the Syrian population, whether they are refugees, students or employees, even after the withdrawal of the Syrian forces in 2005 in accordance with the UNSCR 1559. For example, Gebran Bassil in his tenure as a Minister of Energy and Water in 2013 noted, "We do not want Syrian refugees to take our place. Their very existence in Lebanon replaces the Lebanese. Lebanon is not a loose land!"[63] In October 2017, he tweeted "Every alien who is on our land without our will is an occupier."[64] Other ministers have linked Syrian refugees and the economic crisis and unemployment in Lebanon. Former Minister of Labour Sajaan Qazzi, who confined the Syrian labour to cleaning, farming or building in 2014,[65] told the International Labour Conference in Geneva in 2014 that unemployment rates among Lebanese have increased 21% since the Syrian crisis, and that statistics by the Prime Ministership show that 34% of crimes are committed by Syrian refugees.[66]

More recently, in his speech to the Arab-European ministerial meeting in Feb 2019, Gebran Bassil in his tenure as a Foreign Minister, claimed that 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon deprived Lebanon of 40% of its national output. He warned Europeans that he would not allow Syrian refugees to stay in Lebanon, and that the idea of integrating them was completely rejected because they pose a great threat to security and stability.[67] These figures however, are inconsistent with the official statistics of the UNHCR which state that the total number of registered Syrian refugees on 31 December 2018 was 948,849.[68] Bassil's notes are also inconsistent with the notes of the Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP). Speaking in front of the committee at the UK's parliament, David Beasley noted that Lebanon's economy could have imploded without cash-based assistance schemes from Syrian refugees. He argued that one third of cash spent by Syrians is used to buy products grown locally; one third is processed locally; and the other comes from the international market in the Lebanese economy. Beasley argued that Syrian refugees have the urge to return home. They do not want to be in London, Paris or Berlin. They will stay home if given any reason of hope.[69]

There are two explanations for the mainstream media tendency use the term “displaced” rather than “refugees”. The first is that non-recognition as refugees is used as a technique to deny their merits and rights in accordance with international conventions, to which Lebanon is a signatory.[70] Arguably, however, while the UN definition of refugees as people who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country, applies to Syrian refugees, their status in Lebanon arguably conflicts with the 1951 convention. Article 3 of the convention provides that the contracting states shall apply provisions without discrimination as to race, religion, or country of origin. Article 17 provides that the contracting states shall accord to refugees the most favourable treatment accorded to nationals of a foreign country to engage in wage-earning employment. Article 21 states that the contracting states shall accord to refugees treatment as favourable as possible to access housing. Article 22 provides that the contracting states shall accord to refugees the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to elementary education.[71] The second is that the political powers do not wish to allow their difficult experiences with the Palestinian refugees since 1948 to reoccur with the Syrians, fearing a repeat of the Arab-Israeli conflict during which the number of refugees and their descendants continued to increase as the war became more insoluble.[72] As of 1 January 2019, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) counted 475,075 Palestinian refugees in its twelve refugee camps in Lebanon.[73]

Conclusion

The mainstream narrative has significantly contributed to communicating a negative image of Syrian refugees in host societies following the 2011 civil war through a stereotyped categorization. One dominant mainstream narrative aggravated the negative image of Syrian refugees through overreaction, panic, and focus on the most controversial and sensitive problems in the host communities, such as demography, unemployment, and security. It communicated an image of Syrian refugees ranging between being pitiful and being ISIS affiliates, claiming they pose a risk to the safety, political and economic well-being, and are overall incompatible with the culture of the host societies. Therefore, the need to expand the image of Syrian refugees in media beyond the dominant stereotype may be increasingly necessary for understanding the evolving Syrian refugee crisis in host societies. Especially amid the current resurgence of anti-refugee sentiments and rising nationalism,[74] it is important to recognise that no one chooses to be a refugee. Every minute, eight people leave everything behind to escape war, persecution, or terror.[75] For many refugees, the choice is between the horrific or something worse.

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[52] Revise figure1, figure2, and figure3.

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